# FUTURE FICTION

APRIL

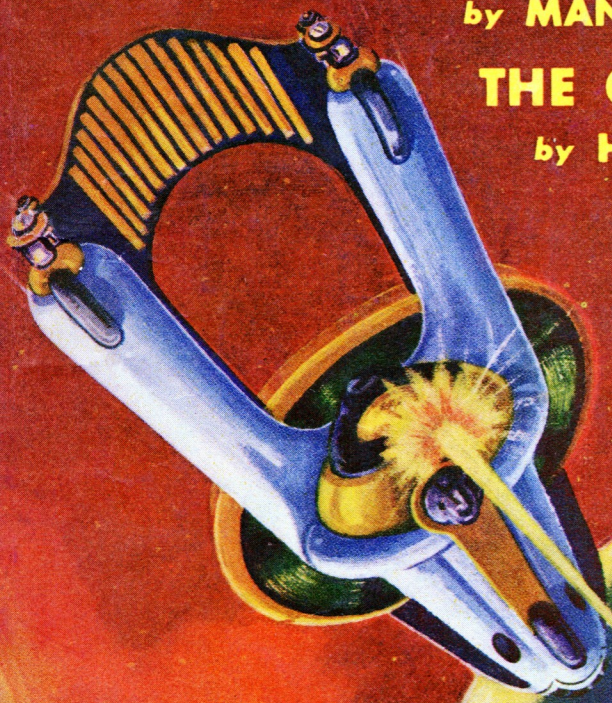
15c

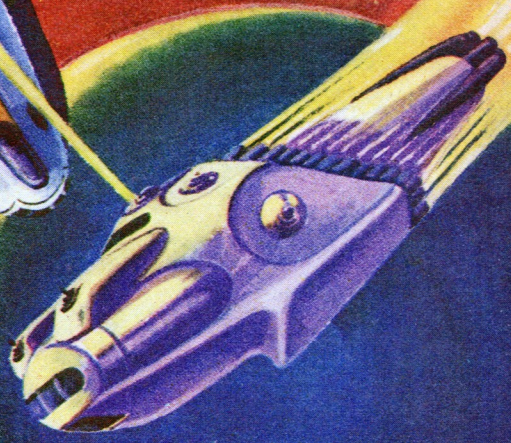
## 30th CENTURY DUEL
by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

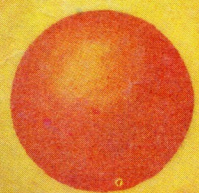
## THE GENIUS BUREAU
by HELEN WEINBAUM

also—

BELL-GROSSER
WINTERBOTHAM
LAVOND *and others*







PAUL

WHY LOOK LIKE THIS → When

# You Can Appear Slimmer . . . Look Younger and Feel Better THIS AMAZING NEW EASY WAY!

Yes, almost instantly you, too, can once more begin to feel . . . ALIVE . . . ON TOP OF THE WORLD by joining the Parade of Men who have taken on a new lease on better living with the COMMANDER, the amazing new Men's abdominal supporter.

**COMMAND ATTENTION INSTANTLY WITH A HAPPY STREAMLINED COMMANDER APPEARANCE.** The COMMANDER with the exclusively designed "INTERLOCKING HANDS" principle for extra double support where you need it most really flattens the burdensome "corporation" and restores to the body the zestful invigorating feeling that comes with firm, sure "bay window" control.

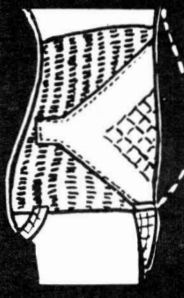
## BREATHE EASIER . . . TAKE THE WEIGHT OFF TIRED FEET

The helpful uplifting EXTRA SUPPORTING power of the COMMANDER firmly supports the heavy drooping abdominal sag. Notice how the instant you pull on the belt a weight is lifted from you. . . . You breathe easier . . . your wind is longer, you feel good all over.

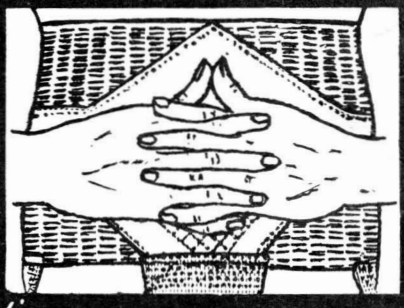
## YOUR BACK IS BRACED . . . YOUR CLOTHES FIT BETTER

The COMMANDER automatically braces your figure, your posture becomes erect . . . you look and feel slimmer . . . your clothes fit you better and generally you radiate a better to look at slenderized happiness. Your friends will notice the improvement immediately.

# The COMMANDER



*the amazing New Men's ABDOMINAL SUPPORTER with the built in "INTERLOCKING HANDS"*



*Flattens that Sagging Corporation*

## THE SECRET OF THE "INTERLOCKING HANDS"

Only the COMMANDER contains the principle of the "Interlocking Hands," the newest, most amazing designing achievement in supporter history. **THERE IS NOTHING LIKE IT.** Here is the secret: A special non-stretch material is built into the two-way stretch body of the COMMANDER . . . STRETCHES 11 to 14 INCHES HIGH . . . in the general outline of two interlocking hands to give you EXTRA DOUBLE SUPPORT where it is most needed. The minute you step into your COMMANDER the "interlocking hands" firmly hold and lift the abdominal sag . . . then like magic, you look down and that dragging down "corporation" is no more.

**MAKE THE TEST WITH YOUR OWN HANDS AND SEE WHAT WE MEAN**

COMMANDER is New and Modern . . . No old fashioned contrivances . . . NO METAL SLABS or RIBS to gouge you . . . NO DANGLING BUCKLES, LEATHER STRAPS or LACES to bother you. The COMMANDER is designed to give you joy in every way . . . SITTING . . . WALKING . . . AT WORK . . . AT PLAY. The COMMANDER has a real man's jock type of pouch . . . completely detachable . . . back and front. The pouch is made of softest, porous, non-chafing yarn and is a pleasure to wear. IT GIVES GENUINE MALE PROTECTION. Try this amazing new belt with full confidence . . . and at our risk. SEND FOR IT NOW!

## 10-DAY FREE TRIAL—SEND NO MONEY

Wear the COMMANDER ten days FREE. If it fails to give you the satisfaction we say it will, send it back and the purchase price will be promptly refunded.

**ONLY $2.98**

Sizes 28 to 52

*and Makes You LOOK LIKE ← THIS*

## INTRODUCTORY TEN DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

**WARD GREEN CO., DEPT. 22**
**507 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y.**

Send me the "COMMANDER" for ten days Free Trial. I will pay postman the special price of $2.98 plus postage. If not satisfied after wearing it ten days, I may return it and the purchase price will be promptly refunded.

My waist measures.....My height is.....
(Send string the size of waist if measuring tape is not available.)

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

If you enclose $2.98 with this order, we will pay postage charges. The same refund offer holds. ☐ Check here.

# Plan Your Future

## Choose Your Field NOW For Success

Will you master fate or will fate master you? That's a question deserving your honest answer...right now! Actually it is largely up to you. You can do with Life almost what you will. LaSalle will help you establish yourself for real success by providing you with the comprehensive, specialized training for which it is so famous. Choose your field . . . now! Check the coupon below for the free booklet you want us to send you. It can be your first step toward assured success.

## Opportunities in Traffic Management

The field of Traffic Management offers real opportunity only to the man who knows. Spare time study and the will to succeed have pushed scores of Traffic employees up the ladder to nancial success. Many LaSalle-trained traffic managers—in the railroad, truck and industrial field—now command salaries of $3,000.00 to $5,000.00 a year—and better. Investigate. Find out how you can qualify for these higher positions through LaSalle home-study and guidance.

## Law for Business Success

And it isn't necessary to practice law to get this Success. In fact probably most of the men who study law today have no idea of taking the bar examination or becoming lawyers—they want law training to help them master men and situations in business. You know that—

(1) the man with legal training is a leader—not a follower.

(2) legal training keens your mind—clears away the problems that stump the ordinary fellow and makes you master instead of man.

(3) knowledge of law simplifies the complications of executive work.

(4) Many top executive places are filled by men who have studied law.

No matter whether you are in a big corporation or a small business—in a city or a little town—a practical knowledge of law can hardly fail to be of real and vital help to you in making a more successful career.

In every state in the union you'll find law-trained men who came up through LaSalle. What others have done, you can do.

And LaSalle offers either a full law course leading to LL. B. or a shorter business law training—whichever you prefer. All text material, including valuable 14-volume Law Library. Training comprises the most effective features of modern law instruction.

## Executive Training

Executives who are efficient managers command responsible positions and good incomes. And the need for trained executives is growing rapidly. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for every type of executive work—teach you the principles and practices used by our most successful business leaders and help you develop your management capacity—by a training built with the aid of outstanding executives.

## Become an Expert Accountant

### The Profession That Pays

The demand for skilled accountants—men who really know their business—is increasing rapidly. New state and federal legislation requires much more, and more efficient accounting from business—big and small. Corporations are in constant need of expert counsel in matters relating to Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove their qualifications in this important branch of business are rapidly promoted to responsible executive positions—given an opportunity to earn real salaries. The range is from $2,000.00 to $10,000.00 a year—even to higher income figures.

Under the LaSalle Problem Method you can at home acquire a thoro understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of these principles—this without losing an hour of work or a dollar of pay.

Your training will be under the direct supervision of a staff of legal, organization and management specialists, business efficiency engineers and Certified Public Accountants.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is u necessary. We train you from the ground up, or from where you now are, according to your individual needs.

## Mr. Salesman: *What's Wrong?*

Why aren't you making more sales—more money? Is it you—or your proposition? Check up first on yourself. Other men—no better than you—have found their earnings jump and stay up when they trained with LaSalle. Literally thousands of men—many of them years at the game—have increased their sales volume and earnings through home study with LaSalle guidance. Sound—practical—usable—right from field experience. Train for top-notch production with LaSalle.

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY** A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Dept. 472-R, Chicago

I would like to have your special booklet—without any cost or obligation to me—about my opportunities and your success training in the business field I have checked.

- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ Stenotypy


Name.....Age.....

Position..... Address.....

# FUTURE FICTION

*Vol. 1, No. 5* *APRIL, 1941*

## TWO COMPLETE NOVELS



## THREE COMPLETE NOVELETS



## AN UNUSUAL SHORT STORY



## SPECIAL FEATURES



***COVER BY PAUL***

FUTURE FICTION, published every other month by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 60 Hudson St., New York, N. Y. Application for second class matter pending at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass.  Yearly subscription 75c. Printed in the U. S. A.

STRANGE MYSTERIES!
TALISMANIC POWER!

# Now it can be Told!

MYSTIC RITES!
INCREDIBLE FEATS!

## AMAZING REVELATIONS of FORBIDDEN MYSTERIES!

## Now These "Secrets of Power" CAN BE YOURS!

Do not confuse "Your Key to Power" with any other book of similar name or title! This sensational book is *new* from cover to cover! Just off the Press—with additional daring revelations which until now no one has had the courage to put into public print! Here is information that you will want to read! In it Igo says: "When I was right at the bottom—when I was without money, power, health, without even a little Luck to tide me over—I DISCOVERED SEVEN WORDS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE!" Igo *gives you* these words as well as his "Master Formula of Mind Magic."

Perhaps YOU have never thought it possible to have GOOD FORTUNE and GOOD LUCK come your way! Perhaps you have given up hope in WINNING WHAT YOU WANT FROM LIFE! If so—you need the Guidance which this Book will give; the reassurance that "Whatsoever ye ask for when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and YE SHALL HAVE THEM!"

### New Facts! New Knowledge!

This Book shows the way! Never before have so many strange, exotic and mystic practices been exposed in one book. Never before have these hitherto unknown facts been made available for every one's benefit. Igo, student of the Occult, Interpreter of Mystic Phenomena, Seeker after Truth, reveals how the secret power of the ancients still lives on TODAY! Perhaps YOU are one of the very persons described in this baffling book! Perhaps YOU too, have sought MONEY, LOVE, POWER, HAPPINESS!

### You Can Conquer Now!

This is *not* a book about religion but it tells little known facts about FAITH and explains the Miracle of Prayer. It tells how you can uncover YOUR HIDDEN POWER — how you can get out of life exactly what you desire—Here truly is a book which will inspire you to a solution of ALL YOUR PROBLEMS. You must read it and digest it to fully appreciate it. Some of the things in this spectacular book will OPEN YOUR EYES!


## THE BOOK PURPORTS TO TELL

- How Talismans are worn to attract good Luck, Power, Money, Success.
- How Sea Captains, Jockeys, and travellers wear a certain Talisman to warn off evil.
- How Napoleon was saved by a Talisman.
- How 20 million people wear a certain charm for protection.
- About the Frankincense success Ritual.
- How the Serpent brought Mastery over all things to the Ancients.
- How a horseshoe protected a 65 million dollar investment!
- How a certain amulet WON over odds of 500,000 to 1!
- How Voodoo Priests prescribe rites for Winning Games, Drawings, etc.
- How girls can win the one they love.
- How to bring Happiness to Broken Lives.
- How Myrrh can give Success to everything that the hands touch.

Plus pages and pages on Mind Magic, the Power of Thought, The Miracle of Prayer and many other amazing and seldom told customary, strange, exotic and mysterious cultures.

## GUARANTEED TO SATISFY

Your Desire for strange, mystic and little known facts or your money refunded. FREE for a limited time only—your choice of a "lucky" Rabbit Foot, 3 Talismanic Seals, or a Real, Live Lodestone with each copy of "YOUR KEY TO POWER" at only $1.00. RUSH your order now—today.

**FREE** CHOICE OF ONE GIFT

**TALISMANIC SEALS**
3 Seals said to have been taken from the 6th and 7th Books of Moses. Used by thousands!

**"LUCKY" RABBIT FOOT**
A universal 'good Luck' token with gold plated cap. A fine watch chain or key chain charm.

REAL LIVE

**LODESTONE**
The genuine article! Guaranteed to draw! Usually sells for 50c to $1.00.

MARVELO PRODUCTS, Dept. DA-4
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Rush my copy of "YOUR KEY TO POWER!" I enclose $1.00 in full payment. Please send postpaid together with the one FREE TALISMAN I have checked below.

*Check One Only*

- ☐ REAL LIVE LODESTONE
- ☐ 'LUCKY' RABBIT FOOT
- ☐ 3 TALISMANIC SEALS

Name.....

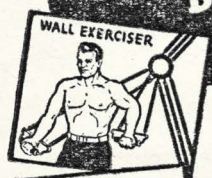
Address.....

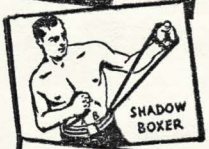
City.....State.....

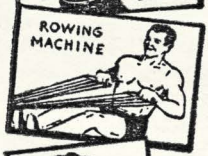
NOTE: If you prefer we will ship C.O.D. $1.00 but we will add postal charges. Send remittance and save the difference!

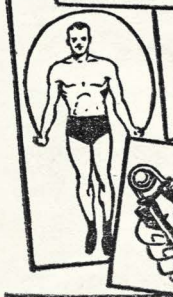
# NOW! GET BIG HUSKY MUSCLES WITH NEW 37 FEATURE BODY BUILDER


*Posed by Professional Model*




## HERE'S WHAT YOU GET

### *Send No Money Now*

With the complete **HERCULES MUSCLE BUILDING TRAINING COURSE** you get everything needed to whip yourself into superb shape and at the same time learn the inside tricks of physical culture. You get a big, husky **TEN CABLE EXERCISER** adjustable to 200 pounds resistance. These **adjustable cables** allow graduated and regulated muscle development. You can start with but 4 or 5 cables and gradually add on more as you feel yourself getting stronger.

In addition, you get real durable **TEN CABLE HANDLES**... actually built for ten cables and not two five-cable exercises. All cables are woven in tough **extra heavy strands** to give long life.

The **WALL EXERCISER** equipment is an ideal builder of big biceps, strong backs, stomach muscles . . . great for reducing waistline.

If you like boxing you will find the **SHADOW BOXER** just the thing you need. A regulation **SKIP ROPE** is also supplied. **ROWING MACHINE ATTACHMENTS** for back and shoulder muscles. **HEAD HARNESS** and **FOOT HARNESS** (adjustable) for strong neck and ankles. Heavy-duty **HAND GRIP** like boxers use. **Food Facts** for vitality. **How to develop chest expansion.** What to do for **strong legs.** Special feature **for men only.** Comprehensive **illustrated charts. How to get strong. Muscle gauge** to test your own strength. **Special 30-day training program.** What to do each day. **Jiu Jitsu** and **wrestling holds.** Popularity. Success. Here is everything you could possibly need to give you that strong healthy body you have always wanted.

## Can You Qualify as PHYSICAL DIRECTOR?

Are you physically equipped to teach and train physical development exercises and conduct mass calisthenics? America will need thousands of qualified physical directors as part of the vast new National Defense and Health Program. Right now, many large industrial organizations are planning **regulated physical training** for employees. The call is already going out for qualified and competent instructors...men who know how to lead others in building strong, healthy, rugged bodies. **ARE YOU READY?**

You can't hope to be eligible for one of these good-pay jobs if you are thin, weak and puny. Nor can you make the grade if you are big, soft and flabby! Why not whip yourself into shape now. **GET YOUR HERCULES OUTFIT TODAY.**

You get all this for only $3.49. Think of it. Practically a complete gymnasium right in your own home. **Send no money now.** Just fill out the coupon below with your name and address and we will ship everything out by return mail. When package arrives, pay postman only $3.49, plus postal charges. Outside U. S. cash with orders. **Institute for Physical Development. 49 E. 21st St., Dept. D-84, New York, N. Y.**

**$3.49 SEND NO MONEY**

**MAIL COUPON TODAY**

**Institute for Physical Development**
**49 E. 21st St. (Dept. D-84)**
**New York, N. Y.**

Please rush me the complete Hercules Muscle Building Training Outfit by return mail. I will pay postman $3.49, plus postal charges when package arrives.

**Name**.....

**Street** .....

**City**..... **State**.....

# PREPARE NOW FOR A BETTER JOB IN ELECTRICITY

## By 12 Weeks Training in the Big Coyne Shops

Get into a real live, **money-making field** where thousands of men **make $30, $40, $50 and up a week** in the fascinating field of **Electricity.** Prepare today for your place in a field that is full of opportunities for the trained man.

### Learn by Doing — in 12 Weeks

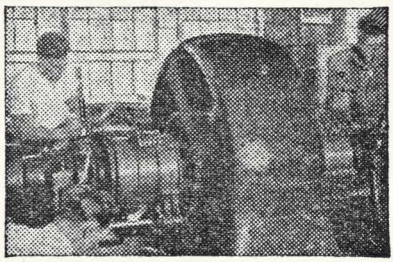
on real motors, generators, engines, etc. The remarkable "Learn by Doing" method used in the great Coyne Shops trains you in Electricity and its many branches **in 12 weeks.** Actual shop work—**not a correspondence course**—you don't have to recite. Instead you are trained by actual work in wonderful, modern daylight shops on the finest kind of Electrical equipment, under personal supervision of expert instructors. That's why you can prepare in so short a time for the wonderful opportunities in Electricity when you train the Coyne way.

### You Don't Need Previous Experience or Advanced Education

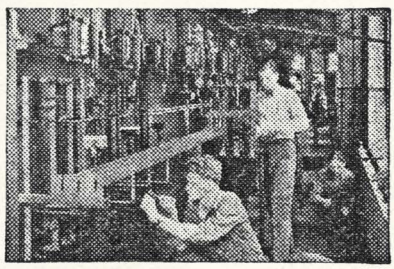
Coyne is **practical** "Learn By Doing" training — that's why you don't need previous experience or advanced education.

### On Jobs Like These—No Correspondence

**Real Work on Modern Electrical Equipment**



**Working on Real Electrical Equipment at Coyne**



**A Real Switchboard in the Coyne Shops**

## Astounding Offer! PAY COST OF TRAINING AFTER YOU GRADUATE

### Over a Year to Pay in Small Monthly Payments

Get your training **first**—then pay tuition in easy monthly payments starting 5 months from the date you start school, or 2 months after the required training period is over. And you'll have **12 months** to complete your payments. Mail the coupon **now** and I will send you, without obligation, full details of this astounding offer!

### EARN WHILE LEARNING!

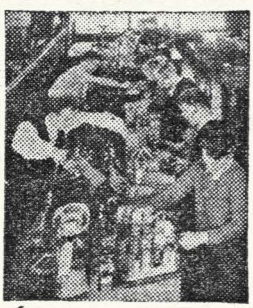
Many of my students do part-time work to help out with living expenses while training for **big opportunities** in Electricity. If you need a part-time job, my Employment Manager will help you get it.

### EMPLOYMENT Help For You After Graduation

My Graduate Employment Service will give you employment help after graduation. You are also entitled, as a graduate, to free consultation service any time you need it.

### RADIO COURSE INCLUDED

Mail Coupon Today and I'll tell you about this additional training I am including without extra cost. This fast-growing branch offers many opportunities for a better job and a real future. Here at COYNE you will get training to prepare you to fill a job in many branches of the Electrical Industry . . . You will do actual work on equipment by the famous COYNE "Learn by Doing" method which quickly and easily gives you the PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE you will need for a job or a business of your own in this gigantic branch of Electricity. This additional training is included at no extra cost.



### GET THIS FREE BOOK

Get the new "Coyne Opportunity Book," giving all facts about Coyne Training. Photographs of Shops showing students at work on modern electric equipment under the personal supervision of Coyne Expert Instructors. Also details of my Spare Time Employment Offer, Pay After Graduation Plan and Graduate Employment Service. Yours without cost. Simply Mail the coupon.


**MAIL Coupon NOW!**

**H. C. Lewis, President**
**Coyne Electrical School, Dept. 41-26**
**500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.**

Send me your big FREE Book about Coyne Training and give me all details regarding your "Spare Time Employment Offer," "Pay After Graduation Plan" of easy, monthly payments, and the Radio course you are including.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

**H. C. LEWIS, Pres.** **Founded 1899**

## COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

**500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 41-26, Chicago, Ill.**

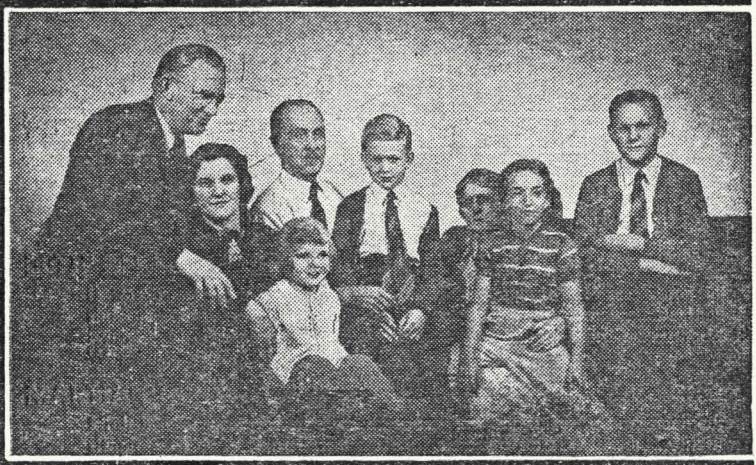
# INSURE ENTIRE FAMILY ON ONE UNION LIFE POLICY !

*Only*

$1

*a month*

PROTECTS CHILDREN PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS (up to 10 persons) FROM THE AGES OF 1 DAY TO 75 YEARS!



## LOW COST *GENUINE LIFE INSURANCE*

***Under State Supervision***

**NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION**

**NO COLLECTORS — PAY BY MAIL**

***Free 10 Day Inspection***

Take 10 days to convince yourself that the Union Life Double and Triple Indemnity Family Group Life Insurance Policy provides real protection for you and yours. It costs you nothing to learn about its marvelous benefits! Act today! Mail the coupon right now!

**LIBERAL BENEFITS SHOWN IN TABLE BELOW**

The amount of insurance payable upon the death of any of the persons insured hereunder shall be the amount set out in the following table for the attained age nearest birthday at death of such person divided by the number of persons insured hereunder immediately preceding such death.

**Table of amount of insurance purchased by a monthly payment of one dollar.**

| Attained Age at Death | Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount | Auto Accidental Death Amount | Travel Accidental Death Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-40 | $1000.00 | $2000.00 | $3000.00 |
| 41-50 | 750.00 | 1500.00 | 2250.00 |
| 51-56 | 500.00 | 1000.00 | 1500.00 |
| 57-62 | 300.00 | 600.00 | 900.00 |
| 63-68 | 200.00 | 400.00 | 600.00 |
| 69-75 | 100.00 | 200.00 | 300.00 |

**PAYS UP TO**

**$1000.00** for natural or ordinary death

**$2000.00** for auto accidental death

**$3000.00** for travel accidental death

**MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY**

**NO AGENTS WILL CALL**

**SEND NO MONEY!**

**UNION LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY** Dept. D2
155 N. CLARK STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Gentlemen: Please send me the Union Life Family Group Policy for free inspection, without any obligation to me.

NAME .....

STREET AND NO. ..... R. F. D. .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

# FALSE TEETH

# $6.85 to $35.00

## —BY MAIL—

# SEND NO MONEY

Posed by a Professional Model

THE TESTIMONIAL LETTERS WE PUBLISH are communications that customers have sent to us without solicitation and without pay. We have large numbers of such missives. We never print anyone's letter without previous consent. We believe that each of our customers who has written to us enthusiastically indorsing our dental plates is sincere. We do not, however, intimate or represent that you will receive the same results in an instance that those customers describe. What is important to you is that when you pay for our teeth, WE GUARANTEE IF YOU ARE NOT 100% SATISFIED IN EVERY RESPECT WITH THE TEETH WE WILL MAKE FOR YOU, AFTER YOU HAVE WORN THEM AS LONG AS 60 DAYS, WE WILL GLADLY REFUND TO YOU EVERY CENT YOU HAVE PAID US FOR THEM.

**BEFORE** **AFTER**

**Mrs. Elsie Boland of Norton, Kansas, writes:**

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. I have not had mine out since the day I got them, except to clean them."

**Harry Willoughby, Adairville, Kentucky, writes:**

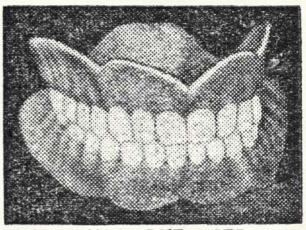
"I have received my teeth and am PROUD OF THEM."

**Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:**

"I received my set of teeth. I wear them day and night. I have good reason to be well pleased with them. Thank you very much."

### MADE - TO - MEASURE DENTAL PLATES DIRECT FROM OUR LABORATORY TO YOU

We make to measure for you **individually** — BY MAIL — Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken by you at your home. We have **thousands of customers** all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.



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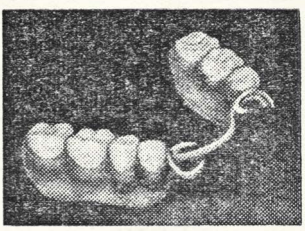

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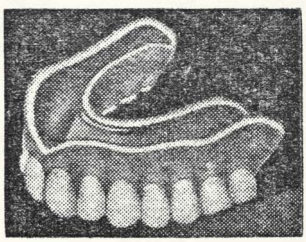

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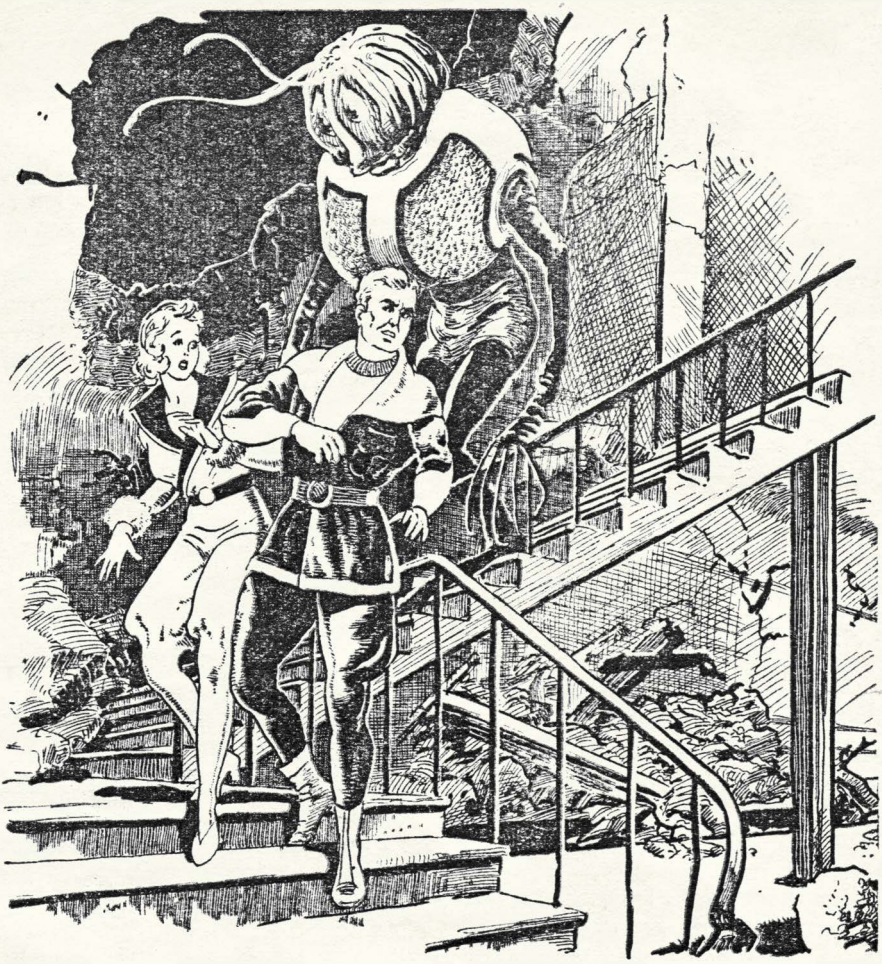


*"I'm here to settle accounts, Doctor."*

# 30th CENTURY DUEL

## by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

(Author of "Worlds of Tomorrow," "Rocket of Metal Men," etc.)

**Jonce Womack knew that somewhere along the interplanetary trail his deadly rival, the young old man known as Lamar Dundin, was awaiting him. For this was approved mortal combat, 30th Century style, and the only ones who knew Dundin's plans were his Martian companion, and Jonce's official second, the lovely Rhoda Palmer. But she was pledged to secrecy. . . .**

. . . wherefore, to bring to a quick and decisive settlement such grave personal differences as may develop through others taking part, into interplanetary misunderstandings, and so endanger peace and goodwill in the League, it is hereby enacted that any two persons who can show just cause for mortal arbitrament, shall be allowed to proceed with a formal duel, under the specific supervision of the committee hereinafter to be designated at the Interplanetary Duelling Committee . . .

(From the records of the first general meeting of the delegates to the Solar League, as formed and approved in the year 2892 (Earth Time) by the government of Mars, Earth, Venus and the Jovian Federation.)

THE Committee Chief — he was Martian, and very suave for all the metallic slur in his artificial voice-box—turned his petal-thatched head from right to left. "I warrn you both," he said, "that if you begin to fight herre, whateverr the prrovocation, we of the committee will sshoot you down."

The two men at opposite ends of the long table—the committee met in its scarlet-and-silver office atop the Solar League skyscraper in St. Louis —settled into their chairs, glaring. "That iss betterr," said the Chief, relaxing his own bladder-body and tentacle-limbs. "Any morrtal combat musst be accorrding to Ssolar League rrule."

The other three committee members, one from each government of the habitable worlds, included a Terrestrial-descended young woman from the Jovian satellite Callisto; an Earthman with slant Mongoloid eyes and thick black hair; and a froggy Venusian with pop eyes, and sleek, moist skin. The two parties to the duel itself were both Terrestrial males.

"Ssince both contesstantss arre frrom the ssame worrld," burbled on the Martian, "it iss my duty to point out that the rreason forr the Duelling Act — that of keeping quarrrellss frrom caussing interrworrld bad feeling—would not apply; I urrge them to forrego thiss combat."

Neither principal spoke; the plea was mere formality, anyway. The Chief nodded his flowery head at the slant-eyed Earthman, who read the general rules to which duellists must conform. They summed up thus:

When a request for a duel-permit was granted each principal was assigned a committeeman as official companion. The two pairs were then moved to what would be, on a fixed date, the farthest divided points of the habitable Solar System. Thence they would seek each other out, with a month's time in which to meet and fight unmolested; but injury to a third person would merit severe punishment. Neither could make public the fact of the duel, lest others become involved. Each combatant would wear a "finder," or radioactive bracelet, so as to know roughly the direction and distance of his enemy. Should either man act in flagrant bad faith, his companion would have orders, and weapons, to kill him at once.

As the reader made an end, the Chief spoke again: "Once morre, I call for rreconciliation. What do you ssay, Captain Womack?"

The captain, a tall, lath-lean youngster with fierce gray eyes, shook his red head. His clipped moustache bristled defiance.

"Doctorr Dundin?"

The other principal also signed refusal. He was as tall as Captain Womack, but heavier. His fresh complexion and blond mane were youthful, but his eyes held the wisdom of experienced age.

"Verry well. As companion to Captain Womack, I assign Misss Palmer. For Doctorr Dundin—I mysself sshall sserrve."

And the meeting broke up. Womack strolled forth upon a balcony. This, he felt, was a bore—he wanted action, a quick and complete settlement with Dr. Dundin. Fists, ray-throwers, electro-automatics, anything—

"Captain!" someone called. "We'd best be starting. Do you go by rocket liner, or—"

"My own cruiser," he replied, turning. The companion assigned him was not more than a fraction over five feet, and looked like a doll beside his own six-two. Her glossy black hair was plaited and coiled; she wore sensible traveling clothes. If her face was not so intelligent, it would be beautiful; but he considered no beauty save that of one woman.

"I am Rhoda Palmer," the girl was saying. "We may as well be friends," she smiled. "Your starting point's Ganymede—zero hour in nine days, Earth Time. Mars will be at the other extreme of the planet arrangement—Dundin will start from there."

"Let's go," he replied, and they went together by elevator to the city's Main Level, separated to fetch luggage, and met again at St. Louis Rocket Port.

RHODA PALMER was goodish company. She admired his ship intelligently, seemed to understand his ingenious improvements in control and combustion mechanism, and within an hour after blastoff he was telling her all his side of the squabble. It dovetailed with his own life story, that of an ambitious and full-blooded young man who hoped to build up an independent space-freighting business and to marry the girl of his heart.

"And now this snake Dundin has to bob up. He's rich—powerful—charming. Florida was going to marry me, but now she's not sure.

He'll have to be eliminated, or I will." He paused, fingering the controls and marking a course on the star-map. "We can skim through the thin part of the Asteroid belt, and be at Ganymede inside of two hundred hours. . . . I wonder if Dr. Dundin is any relation to old Lamar Dundin, who did all that rejuvenation research."

"He's the same man," said Rhoda Palmer. "Didn't you know?"

The spaceman stared, almost muffed his controls. "What? You mean that—but his process of renewed youth—"

"You're going to say that the process was only half demonstrated on those volunteers year before last, eh? But from that experiment, Dundin perfected his formulae. He is now his own successful exhibit."

Womack studied his board of gauges, as though to read there advice and comfort; he found neither.

The idea of eternal youth, though pronounced feasible by science, was still new and revolutionary in the latter part of the thirtieth century. Dr. Lamar Dundin's lifework of research, experiment and innovation was the only real advance in that bracket of biochemistry for half a millenium. And now Dundin had succeeded, thought Womack — the brilliant old veteran of so much thought and success, his trained, experienced brain in a young body, was his rival in love and battle!

"Downhearted?" asked Rhoda Palmer.

At that he set his jaw, moustache bristling anew. "Not me. I fought through the Venusian war—maybe I know a couple of tricks Dundin can't find in his textbooks. Even if he crosses me out, he'll know he's been in a scrap."

"Good man—keep your chin up," applauded the girl. "You're much better company that way.

"Let's turn the television on and see if there's a show, Captain Womack."

"Good," he agreed, and began to tune in a blurred station, clarifying it into a peal of music and a flutter of dancing girls. "But look—we're traveling companions. Why call me 'Captain,' when my first name's Jonce."

"Very well. My name's Rhoda."

The show relaxed Womack's baffled mind.

GANYMEDE, in those days, had only a few scattered settlements and one decent sky-harbor — Fort Bromburg—all on the equator. Womack set his cruiser down on the great metal disk of Fort Bromburg's rocket field just as the sun, tiny in that quarter of space but quite bright and warm, was setting on one horizon. Well above the other rose the immense banded luminosity of Jupiter, attended with the smaller bright coins of other moons.

A port attendant checked them in at the hangar, helped secure a surface car to take them into town.

"Two hundred and twelve hours," said Womack to Rhoda Palmer. "Not bad wrangling, eh?"

"But zero hour won't be until the full nine days are up," she reminded. "Six hours more. Are you tired, Jonce? Bored?"

"I'm neither. Let's find a place to stay, and then celebrate."

"Celebrate what?" she smiled, then agreed before he could think of an answer.

She stopped at the home of an uncle in the government service, and he found an old space-mate in the barracks who offered to put him up. Changing from his rough work

clothes to a fresh tunic and breeches, with boots and belt of high-polished leather, and his string of decorations from the old war days. Determinedly he brushed his red hair flat, twisted the ends of his moustache into gay points. Then he went to meet Rhoda at Ganymede's best hotel.

She appeared in the little lobby. Womack as well as other loiterers opened their eyes at sight of her. Rhoda Palmer wore a sheath-tight gown of blue metallic silk, with jeweled bands clasping her round bare arms at the wrists and above the elbows. Her hair was no longer braided, but fluffed out into gleaming dark clouds above an embroidered fillet. Womack greeted her with a grin of admiration.

"You look about as little like a Solar League committee member—" he was beginning, when she halted him with a lifted palm.

"This is disguise, Jonce. The duel isn't supposed to be known generally, remember? Well, where now? They serve a fair dinner here, and there's music and dancing and so on."

They sought the big dining room of the hotel.

It wasn't bad at that, considering that Ganymede was still pretty frontiersy—the place was tastefully decorated, the food good, the company of traders, mining and farming executives, and government folk seemed well-bred. Music from a tele-radio that got Mars quite clearly, and several entertainers in the flesh. A Martian mystic, propelling his puffy body on six tentacles, slunk from table to table, telling fortunes.

The Martian fortune teller prophesied successful romance for Rhoda Palmer, and for Womack a long journey with an exciting climax. They finished eating, and Womack spoke to Rhoda:

"Dance?" he suggested. But she gazed across the floor to another table, at which sat three people.

"Somebody's watching you, Jonce," she said breathlessly. "Look — that stunning, dangerous-eyed woman! She looks as if she'd kill you if she could. Do you suppose that Dr. Dundin broke the rules and sent some agent—"

Womack was gazing, too, but not in alarm. "Excuse me, Rhoda." He quickly strode to where the three sat —a rosy blonde beauty, with two prosperous-looking men.

"Florida!" he cried.

Her angry eyes froze the welcome out of his speech.

"Evidently you, at least, didn't count on crossing my trail," came Florida Rynne's deep sulky voice. "Doing very nicely for yourself in the way of new friends, Jonce." She scowled over toward Rhoda Palmer.

Womack remembered that Rhoda was, after all, both handsome and personable. Florida naturally would misunderstand — but how could he explain without telling of the duel. "Why—it—it's business," he managed lamely.

"Very good business, at that," sneered one of the men—Florida's cousin, Stuart Rynne. Womack had never liked him, but now he was almost grateful for someone to whom he could speak sharply.

"Don't call me a liar," rasped Womack. "What you need, Stuart, is a good punch in the—"

"Take it easy, young fellow," growled the other man, an older and more solid-seeming individual whom Womack did not know. "These happen to be my guests—I'm governor here at Fort Bromburg, and I don't allow hot-headed space wranglers to go around picking fights."

Womack held his temper as best

he could. "I'm picking no fight, sir; I resent—"

"Don't argue with me. What's your name? . . . Business? . . . Transient here, eh? Well, maybe you'd better move along from Ganymede to some place where they'll let you brawl!"

"Amen to that," added Florida Rynne coldly.

"I'll leave, so help me — right away!" Womack turned and strode to his table again. In the center of his broad back he felt a burning sensation, as though Florida's eyes were lenses, concentrating a hostile gleam upon him.

"You didn't do so well, Jonce," observed Rhoda Palmer.

"No, I didn't. How long must we stay on Ganymede?"

"Not an instant. The time's up. Here, let me have your right wrist."

She clamped upon it a silver band, made in two hinged pieces, with a lock. Set like jewels around its circumference were tiny mechanisms, almost microscopically fine but cunningly arranged for power and accuracy. When Womack lifted the bracelet close to his ear, he heard the hum of Lilliputian motors.

MEANWHILE, within his flesh under the ring, rose an immediate faint tingling, strongest at the base of his thumb. That point of his wrist was to sunward—toward the place where his enemy, Dr. Dundin must be donning his own finder-bracelet.

"Ready to go?" asked Rhoda.

"A moment," said Womack, and from his pocket drew a fountain pen. On the back of a menu he wrote quickly:

Dear Florida:

I could not explain, because I am sworn to secrecy. But I can say that I am now in the midst of important activity by which I hope to make you happy, and that your mistrust and insinuation at this time are unfounded.

I love you, and am sorry to grieve or embarrass you. Within a very few days, the entire truth will come out, and you will know that I have not been disloyal—quite the contrary.

Love from
Jonce Womack

He paid the bill, gave the note to a waiter to take to Florida, and escorted Rhoda Palmer from the place. Within the hour they were in his cruiser again, sailing sunward.

Eros was not much to see, even close at hand—a piece of jagged rock shaped roughly like a long cucumber, twenty miles in length and six in diameter. Though airless and waterless, somersaulting languidly in space, it was one of the five large asteroids equipped with a rocket port, sealed buildings and a supply depot, to provide way-stations at all points between the orbits of the inner planets and that of the Jovian system.

"I'm afraid," said Womack as they neared the little world, "that we'll have to stick here for an hour or so. There's a sour vibration in the fuel-feed, but nothing serious."

"Is there?" said Rhoda, rather breathlessly.

"There is. And—funny thing—I haven't had a vibration out of this finder-bracelet since four hours out of Ganymede."

"Haven't you?" She spoke more breathlessly than ever; Womack glanced curiously at her.

Rhoda Palmer was sitting at his elbow, tense as wire and pale as the full moon. Her eyes were wide and shifty; her hands rubbed slowly together.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost, Rhoda. Are you spacesick?"

"M-maybe . . . "

"Cheer up, we're setting her down now. And we'll wait here until you feel better."

He flattened out, settled on the metal of the landing field, cutting his blast while two men in space-overalls charged out, with nozzle-like power blasts. With these they shunted his cruiser upon a groove-like track—on Eros even the biggest ships weighed little—then drove it along into a hangar and clanged a panel shut behind them. Womack opened his own hatch, escorted Rhoda out upon the floor of the building, filled with air and wired for artificial gravity.

"Take a look at my fuel-feed," he bade an attendant; then his eye caught a ship lodged beside his own, a rakish silver craft a shade smaller than ordinary cruisers, and streamlined as for racing. "Hello, what kind of scow is that?"

"New job—Martian made. Got here just before you," said the attendant. "They say it's the speediest thing ever conceived, short of light itself."

"Then it must be that experimental gravity-power craft," replied Womack. "Any dub ought to be a wrangler in that ship, eh, Rhoda?"

Rhoda barely nodded agreement. She looked even paler. Womack was concerned, led her to a door that opened on a small refreshment chamber.

"Go in and have a drink of something," he coaxed her. "Maybe you'd like to lie down." She bowed her head, as though in misery. "I wish I had time to help," he went on, "but I've got to help service my ship."

"Please," she said wretchedly, "I'll be all right. Go ahead, and—good luck."

He thought it strangely said, but returned to the hangar. One of the mechanics had opened the red-hot rocket hold. "Spring latch gone bad," the other pointed out at once. "See? Almost burned in two." With a pair of tongs he drew out the defective part, a flexible bar of special processed steel the size and shape of a yardstick, used to govern the rhythmic motion of a valve. "Fortunately we've got a spare over there on the workbench."

"Is it standard size?" asked Womack. "Then it'll have to be filed down a line or so, to fit this particular valve—I know how to fix it." He went to the bench, snapped on a light, and found the spring piece. One of the mechanics brought him a file, and he began calculatingly to shape an end of the metal rod.

"Hello, Captain Womack," spoke a voice he knew.

Womack whirled, the spring rod still in his hand. Yes, it was Dr. Lamar Dundin, old eyes gleaming with mockery in his young face—Dr. Dundin, a scant arm's length away, levelling a weapon.

Womack studied that weapon narrowly. It was ordinary enough, a handsized MS-ray thrower, on a pistol grip. The very mate to it lay in Womack's luggage in his cruiser—too far away. How had Dundin come all this way, so far and so quickly?

"I tell you hello, Captain Womack, so that I may tell you goodbye," the doctor was saying.

"DON'T be too sure, Doctor," replied Womack steadily enough, and fronted the weapon his enemy trained upon him. The lens at the tip of the tube looked as big as a porthole. Womack stood on wide-planted feet, the spring rod held in his two hands, one grasping either end. It was bowed in his grip, like the

blade of a splendid sword. If he should move, he knew — if he even flexed himself—Dundin's ray thrower would gush fire into his midriff. His abdomen would turn into a coal of white fire, his blood would fluff away in ill-smelling steam, he would die in a wink-long moment of exquisite agony.

"Don't be too sure," he said again, "but I must congratulate you on making such a quick trip."

Everybody was watching — Dundin's Martian committee-companion, the mechanics, and Rhoda — all grouped behind the doctor. Rhoda quivered in terror; this was what had been on her mind—her special radio communication had told her what Dundin was up to. The rules had kept her from telling Womack, but she had been sorry for him.

Dundin jerked his blond head in the direction of the new Martian racer. "That's the answer, Captain. I bought that experimental ship just after leaving the Committee office. Gravity currents, not rockets—travels three times as fast and far. I knew you'd be here."

Dundin was delaying execution, hoping that Womack would move suddenly, and make the killing less cold-blooded. The captain knew he must not betray himself by any sudden move. . . . The spring bowed, unobtrusively but powerfully, between Womack's hands.

"After this," Dundin was chuckling, "I'll go to Ganymede to meet Florida."

"Are you sure?" inquired Womack, the germ of a plan forming in his mind.

"Quite. It's odd, Captain, that she should be so important to both of us. You're young at heart—in love. But I," and Dundin smiled tightly, "have years enough to count other values than romantic ones. Florida has money. As her husband, I could pay for scientific research, make history . . . you see, it's important to civilization as well as to myself that I win."

"And that I lose?" prompted the captain.

"Of course. You've lost already," said Dundin. He was trying to goad Womack into action, and Womack smiled, as at a secret ace he held.

"Most interesting," he said — and let go one end of the spring.

It straightened with an instantaneous humming flick, hard against Dundin's right hand, the hand that held the ray-thrower. Dundin howled with the paralyzing sting of the impact, touched the trigger-switch, but his weapon was knocked out of line. Its lean streak of flame gushed past Womack, plowing a rusty furrow in the metal floor-plates. Then Womack's left hand caught Dundin's wrist, wrung it until the ray weapon clanked down between them. Dropping the spring rod, Womack thrust his enemy back and began to rain blows upon head and face.

"Bravo!" yelled somebody—Rhoda, endangering her official position by cheering. Dundin, crouching away from those buffets, grappled Womack around the waist. They fell, struggling, and Womack, lighter but tougher, came up on top. His hands found Dundin's throat.

"I'll break your neck," he promised. But Dundin, feeling death close at hand, threw up his legs, clasped them around Womack's shoulders and dragged him clear. Womack found the fallen ray thrower under his hand, seized it and rose, ready to launch a fatal flame. But Dundin had also sprung up—and to shelter. He seized Rhoda Palmer, held her in front of him.

"You can't kill me without killing her," he gurgled. "Remember, Womack—the rules—"

"Where's that committee chief?" yelled Womack, without taking eye or weapon out of line. "Look here, isn't this man out of law now? Isn't his life forfeit?"

"I—cannot ssay—" stuttered the Martian's metallic voice.

"He's endangering Rhoda's life!" exploded Womack. "Breaking rules!"

"Not I," said Dundin, as quickly and cleverly as a lawyer. "I've no weapon, I make no threat—only you, Womack, can hurt her. I appeal now for a ruling on the point!" Arguing, he kept Rhoda like a shield between himself and the weapon.

"I cannot ssay," the Martian repeated. "Therre iss no rrule goverrning the usse of a committee memberr as parrt of attack orr defense—"

"You make me sick!" growled Womack. "I wish you were there instead of Rhoda. Well, Dundin, it's stalemate. What's your proposition?"

"Let me get into my ship," replied Dundin. "Give me five minutes start, twenty-four hours' truce after that—enough leeway for the fight to begin over again, with no advantage."

"Agreed," said Womack, "there's too much in this duelling business for an honest man to keep track of." He thrust the ray thrower into his hip pocket. "One thing, though—the governor on Ganymede told me to stay away."

"Then follow me to the inner planets," said Dundin. He let go of Rhoda, headed swiftly for his ship and entered, followed by the flustered Martian committeeman. The attendants coaxed the racer into the open, then returned stolidly to work on Womack's cruiser.

Rhoda Palmer faced Womack. "Thanks," she said. "If you hadn't kept your head, you might have rayed me."

"I'll not give him another chance," replied Womack. "I hate this rule business, anyhow—like anything that has too many rules, this duel goes flaky when it gets a hairline off the groove. Don't you think—"

"I think you'd better stop grumbling and begin watching," replied the girl sharply, as though to chide his criticism of the committee. "He almost did for you—" She broke off. "But what am I saying? I'm not supposed to advise or help, I'm only a neutral official."

PEOPLE said in those days that the city of New York, on Earth, had been razed or wrecked or otherwise devastated by storm and war a total of fifty-six times. That may have been exaggeration, but it was a fact that the thirtieth-century city stood on a toplofty mountain, which mountain was a great rubble of stone, crumbled concrete, and fragments of ancient metal. Far beneath it ran forgotten corridors, and the cavernlike beds into which ran rivers, the same that once divided the site of New York into islands. Scientists sometimes bored down into the depths, searching for the buried relics of the city of a thousand years ago.

Thither, Womack learned at the St. Louis rocket port, Dr. Dundin had gone. The Martian racer, with its gravity-power, advertised him like a brass band. Womack thanked the attendant who had informed him, and turned to Rhoda.

"We leave the cruiser here," he said. "He might spot it coming in, and jump me up before I was ready. Cross-country subway's the ticket—the other passengers will protect us from bombing or ambushing."

The underground ride to New York

was a scant three hours, the train darting along its vacuum tube at a headlong clip.

"Where now?" she asked Womack as they checked their hand-luggage at the station.

He paused for a moment, giving attention to the finder. Then: "Uptown. I judge that Dundin is there, not more than six or eight miles away. It's my turn to drop in on him." He patted his waistband, into which he had slid a ray thrower and an electro-automatic pistol. "Come on."

They hired a helio-taxi, and flew north.

"Fly till I say stop," Womack bade the pilot. He sat beside Rhoda, his booted legs crossed and his braceleted wrist cocked upon the uppermost knee. She watched him with something of anxiety, but did not speak or otherwise intrude upon his concentration. His moustache bristled with grim alertness, and his gray eyes gave off raw, hard lights. "Slow," he ordered at last, then: "Drop down here." The flying car cut power, sinking earthward as if lowered on a string.

They landed on the flat roof-promenade of a tall midtown building, dismounted and paid off the pilot. Womack stood still, concentrating again.

"Dundin's immediately beneath us," he announced. "I'm going to comb this building right down to the cellar. Better keep a little away from me, Rhoda—shooting may start any second."

"I'm right with you," she said. So definite was her manner that Womack argued no further, but led the way in silence.

Descending to the floor beneath, Womack paused yet again to observe. The tingle of his bracelet still indicated a position beneath him. He stepped into an elevator, followed by Rhoda. It was a self-service car; he started it slowly downward.

Floor after floor he lowered them, stopping again and again to check. He slowly sank them below the level of the pavement, to the first basement floor—the second—the third.

They emerged into a great dim-lighted compartment that whirred and whispered with the mass of machinery that ventilated, heated, lighted and empowered the lofty building above.

"This is as far as we go," said Womack slowly, "but he's still beneath—directly beneath — I wonder!" Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "I have it! The ruins, those ancient subways and cellars of the old town!" He drew Rhoda back into the elevator.

"Where to?" she asked breathlessly.

"To the underworld," was his crisp rejoinder. "I'll call Civic Information, find the quickest way down to the point beneath this building. And then tie your hair down, Rhoda my girl—what you'll see will make it stand up like a field of sugar cane!"

HE FOUND out quickly enough where a shaft led downward, not two basements away. Coming to the place, he found a tight metal hatchway in the stone-flagged floor; as he stooped above it a heavyset uniformed guard tramped forward.

"You can't go down there, friend," rumbled the guard officially. "Only archaeologists and such are allowed even to open the trap."

Womack, who could never pass for an archaeologist, felt like swearing in vexation, but it was Rhoda who made answer. From under her belted surcoat she brought a folded paper.

"Special commission from the General Secretary of the Solar League,"

she announced. "It allows us to go anywhere."

The guard studied the paper respectfully, nodded acceptance, and himself unlatched and lifted the metal hatch. A gloomy well showed itself, with light far below. Into the concrete sides were set grabirons, one below the other, forming a ladder. Womack swung quickly down, hand under hand, for many times his own height. Coming to his feet on a damp flooring, he gazed up and down a rough-made tunnel, set here and there with the dimmest of radium bulbs, but with more light showing in the distance to the left. Toward that light his tingling bracelet seemed to urge him.

"Wait for me," said Rhoda's voice from above, and a second later she had dropped down beside him. He attempted to thank her for her help, but she gestured his words away.

"Part of the Committee service to one whose duelling permit has been approved," she informed him. "Naturally, I came provided with the necessary papers. You're to have every reasonable help in your project . . . Whew! This place is messy underfoot. Probably hasn't been drained for centuries."

She drew off her long surcoat and hung it on the lowest grabiron, standing forth in the costume she had worn in space—slacks, stout boots and tunic. "I'm ready when you are," said she.

Womack loosened the weapons in his waistband. He opened and looped back his tunic so as to have a quick free chance to fill his hands. "Come on," he said, and began to move along the muddy way.

They came before long to the brighter band of light. It marked the crossing of a larger tunnel, its walls and ceiling faced with ancient cracked tiles of some sort of imitation porcelain. It was drier underfoot, too, with parallel lines of track, almost rusted away.

"This is one of the subways of the ancients," said Womack, peering along it. "And, to judge from this bracelet, our friend the doctor is straight ahead."

He found a stud on the finder device, switched off the power. Then he moved along the new corridor, Rhoda at his heels. Some hundreds of yards ahead was a brighter widening still, with platforms to right and left—one of the stations at which the subway passengers of a thousand years ago had boarded or quitted their primitive cars. Womack became stealthy, keeping to shadows, sliding from one shelter to another.

He approached the old station, paused behind a great projecting fold of rust that had once been a girder. He could hear a voice—but not the voice of Dundin. This was deep and low, female—and recognizable:

"I tell you, I'm through with Jonce. He made a scene on Ganymede, right before the governor, and tried to write a dramatic explanation that explained nothing. I should have known better than to encourage that half-bred space tramp. You, Lamar, have dignity and taste."

It was Florida Rynne; and then he heard the reply of Dr. Dundin:

"You've chosen me? You make me happier than you can guess, Florida. And now—I'll give up the rather uncivilized thing I was going to do."

The scientist was going to withdraw meekly from the duel—after going this far into it! Womack listened in mingled disgust and amazement, as Dundin continued:

"Let's go together. I'll explain about this mystery, and about Wo-

mack's strange actions as well, when we have time."

WOMACK sprang from his siding, gained the station platform. He stood not a dozen feet from Dundin and Florida, who were in each other's arms. Further back, relaxed and apparently bored, lodged the Martian who was Dundin's committee-companion.

"I'm here to settle accounts, Doctor," said Womack harshly. "I won't take advantage, the way you did on Eros, I won't draw until you do. If you have a gun or ray or other weapon, go for it."

Dundin relaxed his embrace and stepped well away from Florida. He eyed Womack; his expression betrayed neither hate nor fear.

"I had forgotten you — even the warning of my finder-bracelet," he said. "I was telling Florida that I wanted no quarrel with you. She and I—"

"I heard you," broke in Womack, "but it takes two to stop a fight. If she chooses you, she's choosing a funeral piece. Go on, start something!"

Florida understood.

"Oh, you two are having one of those idiotic duels!" she burst out. "That's why you were mysterious on Ganymede, Jonce—and you, Lamar, prattled about a meeting here being 'safer.' This is what you spoke of as being uncivilized — and you were right!" She stamped a shapely foot. "I won't have it! Stop it—both of you!"

"Florida," replied Womack, keeping his eyes on Dundin, "you've chosen this fellow. You haven't any right to give me orders or ask favors. Stand out of the way. Whenever he screws up his courage to a fight, I'll accommodate him. And something tells me that I'm down in the book to win." Again he addressed Dundin. "What's the matter, Doctor? Lost your instinct of self-preservation?"

Dundin shook his head. He still did not look afraid, but he made no hostile move. "I won't fight you. There is no need."

Womack stepped close to him, and slapped his jaw so that it rang along the old subway tunnel like a pistol shot. "Won't that change your mind?" he demanded, and struck again, harder.

Florida called Womack a name that no lady should know, but he only laughed in reply. "You sound like twice the man that the Doctor is," he taunted her, and lifted his hand to slap Dundin yet again.

"Don't, Jonce!" called the voice of Rhoda Palmer from behind him. The encounter had lasted so far but a few seconds; she had been hurrying to scramble upon the platform and catch up. She came to Womack's side, seizing his elbow. He threw her loose with a quick jerk.

"Don't fight," pleaded Rhoda Palmer. "Dr. Dundin is right, the only valid reason for the duel has been eliminated—"

"I don't admit that," said Womack coldly. "And if he won't fight, I'm within my rights to—"

His hand flew to the electro-automatic pistol at his waist. Florida screamed; Dundin sprang backward. And then Womack heard a hiss as of escaping steam, felt a racking gush of pain through all his nerves, and froze into a statue, his gun half-drawn.

Somebody had given him a paralysis raying.

"Sorry, Jonce," said Rhoda Palmer, "but I had to do it. Dr. Dundin, you'd better leave."

She turned the ray off, and Womack felt volition return to his limbs, but not strength.

"Sir! Sir!" he jabbered at the Martian, who he remembered was Chief of the Duelling Committee. "I appeal to you. This committeewoman interfered with me. I ask that she be disciplined."

The Martian's petalled head shook. "Rrefussed," he announced. "You arre within yourr rrights to continue the fight—but I dissapprrove. The orriginal rreasson iss vanisshed. I go—with Doctorr Dundin and thiss lady."

The three left. Womack rubbed his sore limbs, and scowled at Rhoda.

"I suppose you're angry," she said.

"More than angry. I'm disgusted. Why—"

"You couldn't have known, of course, but my portable radio—see, it fits under this coiled braid, next my ear—kept me informed. Dundin had run across the lady by accident, as she returned to New York. He wanted to throw up the duel idea after they had talked, and came here into hiding, hoping to avoid you. He was sincere, too—he'd even forgotten to turn off his finder. And when I saw that you would kill him in cold blood—"

"I'm getting out of here after him," snapped Womack. "He wants to quit—of course, he's ahead in the game—but I won't let him. He'll never live to marry Florida."

She followed him as he tramped along the corridor toward the shaft. "Stay away from me," he ordered her.

"I mustn't," she panted as she ran. "I'm assigned to stay with you—if this duel still goes on, I can't leave you."

"All right then, come along. But don't bother to speak; I won't answer you."

REGAINING the surface again, he checked the rocket port and found that Dundin's speedster had been ordered for immediate departure, that Dundin was taking one companion with him.

"One companion," muttered Womack savagely. "That's Florida. Well, let's hustle back to St. Louis, and follow them."

Three hours on the way to St. Louis, with no word spoken by Womack or Rhoda. They swished away in his cruiser.

Toward Venus they sped, for in that direction Dundin had flown. After pushing his craft into its highest bracket of progression, Womack turned on and set the television. "Hmmmmm," he grunted, "there he is—no mistaking that ship's lines." He studied the rakish silver silhouette on his screen. "And he's not gaining on us—he's limping. Look, Rhoda!"

She glanced that way, but said nothing.

"He's having trouble with his newfangled gravity power. What'll you bet I overhaul him this side of Venus? . . . Why don't you answer?"

"You—you told me not to speak to you."

"Forget it," he begged. "I was all nerves. You did me a favor by stopping me with that paralysis ray. I want to rub Dundin out, but not in cold blood. If I say I'm sorry—"

"All right, Jonce," she smiled. "But why not give up this duel?"

The stubborn look came back to his eyes. "No. I'm seeing it through."

She thought a moment. "If he's dead, will your girl come back to you?"

"Don't call her my girl. I'm through with her."

"Why fight, then?" she insisted, but he refused to argue further.

They swept after the crippled racer. Despite his three-hour lead, Dr. Dundin could not forge ahead; Womack clicked his tongue exultantly.

"I've heard a bit about those engines," he said. "Dundin may know devil and all about rejuvenation, but mechanics is my line. There's Venus up ahead, and he's shooting straight for her."

"And he's gathering speed," pointed out Rhoda. Her black-braided head was close to Womack's rufous one as they studied the television together.

"That's because the pull of Venus is bringing him in. He must be badly crocked." Womack began to manipulate the signal-buttons beneath the screen. "Hello, Dundin!" he called into the transmitter. "Hello, Dr. Lamar Dundin — Womack speaking, right on your tail and closing distance. Come in and answer me."

A buzz in reply, and the vision screen suddenly reflected a head and shoulders — Dr. Dundin. He looked worried. "Well?" prompted his voice.

"Your gravity setup seems to be troubling you. See if you can thin out the insulator-impulse — maybe your power-field is fuzzy. I don't know how your controls are wired, but fiddle a bit. And hurry, or you'll go out of hand."

Dundin nodded quick comprehension, and his head-image stooped almost out of sight, as though he tinkered with something. Then he showed his face again. "It helps a little, Womack. Enough so that I may be able to land safely. Thanks."

Womack laughed, not cheerfully. "Don't thank me—it's just that I'm saving you for another kind of finish."

He tuned out Dundin's face and voice, and caught Rhoda's intent, reproachful stare.

"You look murderous right now," she informed him.

"Then I look the way I feel," he replied.

HE GOT Dundin's racer on the vision again; they watched its progress toward and against the looming cloud-faced orb of Venus.

And then Venus was not a planet any more, but a landscape, with horizons and mist-clogged features. Somewhere, far to the west, would be firm ground, partially cleared and fairly well settled. Toward that quarter Dundin should be heading; but he slid straight down, toward the heart of the misty area.

"He'll crash," groaned Womack, glaring at the screen. "Kill himself, and splinter his ship—"

"Don't forget that your friend Florida Rynne is with him," reminded Rhoda, somewhat slyly.

Womack appeared not to hear. He was tuning Dundin in once more. "Doctor!" he harangued the transmitter. "You'd better pancake, or you'll be driven into the ground like a nail—"

"I can't," came back Dundin's voice. "Generators bad—plugs burnt out—no reverse to combat the pull of Venus—"

"I'll dive under you," gritted Womack, and did so, with all his rockets. Cutting his television, he stared from his forward ports, saw the crippled craft grow larger, then crawl slowly back over his shoulder. Pushing beneath he touched off some slant-rear rockets, very gently. They seared the silver sheathing of Dundin's racer, must have heightened the temperature of the inside, but they slowed up that headlong tumble.

Down went Womack, and down. His rockets, playing upward against Dundin, wafted the gravity-craft

away from its fall as a fountain supports a glass bubble. He cut the blast for a while to let Dundin cool off, broke his fall again, and then they were both above the mist. Not many thousand feet beneath, there would be Venusian jungle and mud.

"Dundin!" he said into the transmitter once more, "you've got a little power, just a little? . . . Good. Use it and flatten out here. And I'll be with you in a minute."

He lifted the cruiser in a humming upward climb, put it into a slow horizontal curve, then watched Dundin drop into the mist. It was not quite a dead tumble, would not mean destruction and death on impact. "Rhoda," he said, "take over here."

"Right," and she did so. "What are you going to do?"

"Bail out." He quickly dragged a parachute from a locker. "I'll finish Dundin on the ground."

He was into the harness, jumping from a slid-back panelway before she could reply.

HE COUNTED three, slowly, and jerked the ripcord. His umbrella opened, and he floated downward. A funnel-like hole opened in the mist below—that would be where Dundin had plunged through it. He pulled on the cords to one side, angled himself into the funnel, and could see the dim ground below. Not a jungle, after all—a plain. There was Dundin's racer, too, or half of it. Where was the other half?

Then he knew.

It wasn't a plain, either, but a marsh—a Venusian marsh, where even the froglike natives never lived. Not liquid; not solid, but a blubbery paste that from the morning of time had been vast and bottomless, unwalkable and unswimmable. And Dundin was sinking into it!

Another twitch of the parachute cords, and Womack dropped himself upon the tip-tilted stern of the silver ship. He worked his way to where a panel still showed above the muck. He kicked it with his boot-heels.

"Come out!" he bawled.

No response. He lugged out his MS-ray, the same that he had taken from Dundin on Eros. With savage slashes of its narrow beam, he disintegrated the lock then pried back the panel. "Come out!" he yelled through the hatchway.

A moan was the only reply. Womack cast off his parachute, letting it spread languidly upon the bubbly surface of the swamp. He wriggled into the cabin.

The lights were out, he could see only dimly. Almost at his feet lay Dundin, slumped against the gravity controls. The fall had stunned him. At Womack's touch, the doctor moaned again and looked up.

"Go on and kill me," he invited, closing his eyes.

Womack dragged him to his feet. "I'll kill you, all right," he promised grimly, "as soon as I get Florida out to safety."

Dundin leaned against the bulkhead. "Florida?" he echoed. "She's with you?"

"She's here—and don't lie!" exploded Womack. "I knew you took along a companion from New York—"

"Of courrsse, Captain," came a slurring metallic rejoinder, and the Martian Chief of the Duelling Committee came scrambling up on his six tentacles. "I wass hiss companion—accorrding to rrules. Misss Rrynne did not come along."

Womack gaped, turned to Dundin. The Doctor, stronger by now, smiled sadly.

"She changed her mind again, I'm

afraid. To her my refusal to fight suddenly smacked of unromantic pacifism—even though she urged us both to give up the duel. And so she said goodbye to me. Her present interest is in someone she met in the Jovian system, the governor, I think, of Ganymede." Dundin laughed. "Sorry you didn't understand. Now, more than ever, there's nothing to fight about."

Womack scratched his cheek with the handle of the ray thrower.

"No, I guess not," he agreed. "Women have a right to change their minds—always have. But don't you think that Florida's too much of a quick-change artist?"

"She should be a quick-change," nodded Dr. Dundin. "Look at all the practice she's had."

The Martian was climbing out of the hatchway. "Ssplendid!" he suddenly applauded something outside. The others hurried to peer.

Close above them hovered Womack's ship. Its stern sloped toward them, and scant yards away the rocket-blast flowed against the surface of the swamp. As they watched, the blast moved gingerly toward them, then in a close curve. In its wake appeared a dry, flaky patch—the heat solidified the swamp's surface.

"Misss Palmerr hass my approval," the Martian was saying. "Sshe underrsstandss ourr prredicament—sshe iss keeping uss frrom ssinking."

And the blast circled them entirely, drying more of the surface to support the half-swallowed ship. Finally the cruiser lowered itself upon the earthy raft of its own construction. Rhoda Palmer emerged.

"Well?" she said at once to the three of them. "The duel—"

"I'm afraid," replied Womack, "that we've had the trip for nothing."

WHEN Womack had brought spare electrical equipment from his cruiser, had tinkered and coaxed the gravity engines into response, he turned to the watching Dundin. He spread his hands in token of mystified helplessness.

"The fight's over, and I confess I never figured you out," he said. "First your absolute savagery—that effort to kill me on Eros without giving me a gnat's chance for life. Then, almost at once, your effort to withdraw from the duel as though there wasn't an ounce of ill-feeling between us. I thought of you as heartless and honorless — now you speak like a kind and understanding man—"

He broke off, for Dundin was smiling; the smile was a thousand years older and mellower than the youthful face.

"You keep forgetting that my heart did not shed age along with my body. I told you once that my interest in Florida Rynne was financial — I bade goodbye to romantic love before she was born, or you either. To get her money, and the chance for scientific work it meant, I was ready to kill you; but you were only an impersonal obstacle to me. Why should I feel anger, shame, or such things. Emotions only slow up an old scientist whose one interest is in experimentation."

He broke off, and the smile faded. "But we've both lost her now. It's just as well. She'd have broken your heart; she'd have been a nuisance even to a philosopher like me. Even though I'm left poor, with all my money invested in this gravity ship—"

"Dr. Dundin," said Womack ear-

nestly, "let a dumb young mechanic advise a brilliant old inventor. There's more money in the system than Florida Rynne owns. This gravity ship has possibilities, if it can be fixed. And I can do that."

Dundin looked at the craft. "You're the one man I've met who has any real feeling for that type of propulsion mechanism."

"Mechanics is my line," replied Womack, starting to wipe the grease from his hands, "just as yours is abstract science."

"Exactly," nodded Dundin. "But I have bought the gravity-power principle as well as the ship. Now I might go into the thing commercially." He paused. "Stop me if I speak too soon after our armistice, but if you'd like to come in with me, as supervising specialist for a freight line of gravity ships—"

Womack's filthy fingers clasped and stained those of the doctor. "Would I!" he cried. "I've already thought of improvements — we can outrun the big-line freighters—in a year or so, even try to get to Saturn!"

"Saturn?" repeated Dundin. "Would you like to go to Saturn?"

"Who wouldn't, with any adventure-sense?" asked Rhoda Palmer, who had been listening. "I'd love to go myself."

"Oh, you would?" said Womack, and laid a hand on her arm. It smeared grease on her sleeve, but neither noticed. "Rhoda, would you like to go in a good gravity ship—with me?"

"I think so." And she smiled.

For the first time, Womack knew how warming was the smile of Rhoda Palmer, and what it had been doing to his heart ever since he had first met her.

# STATION X

## *The Ayes and Noes of Fandom*

(You are invited to send your letters of comment upon FUTURE FICTION, and science fiction in general, for publication in this department, to FUTURE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City.)

Dear Readers:

Before we get into the fray, may we enquire graciously if you have seen the latest copy of our sister magazine? If not, and if you have enoyed this issue of FUTURE FICTION, then now is the time to run, do not walk, to your local newsstand and ask in clear, reasonably loud tones for a copy of SCIENCE FICTION. The reason for asking in aforementioned forthright accents is so that hangers-around at said newsstand will hear the magic words "science fiction," and, mayhap, observe a copy of the magazine. Which may be just the introduction needed, and you'll have some new fan-friends soon.

And, if your appetite for first-class, imaginative literature is still unsatisfied, there is a third title to seek out: SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY. FUTURE FICTION and SCIENCE FICTION appear alternately, while the third title is just what the name implies. The QUARTERLY, this issue, features a novel of yesteryear which made such a hit with the readers of 1930 that there has been a steady demand for its re-publication ever since. And it is as new and as vivid as it was then. You will also find a number of new, short stories, rounding out the issue.

Now is the time to put in the plug for Station X itself before we cut loose. After reading this issue, and this broadcast, the place to send YOUR scripts, with their bombs, bouquets, and general ideas, is to

**ROBERT W. LOWNDES**

Editor, FUTURE FICTION
60 Hudson Street,
New York City

To start the program in proper style, there's nothing quite like a letter which takes down one's hair. Thus, we present

### GRAHAM CONWAY

*Being one of those fanatical fans who collect every issue of everything remotely resembling science-fiction, I have been compelled against my better judgement to buy your magazine issue after stinking issue and groan in silence as I looked through them, and, driven by my crazy hobby, had to read them. In the past I have always reassured myself that this issue must be the bottom and that future issues would have to be better; they couldn't be worse. But I give up. The November issue of FUTURE FICTION has fooled me; it succeeded in hitting a new low for bad fiction.*

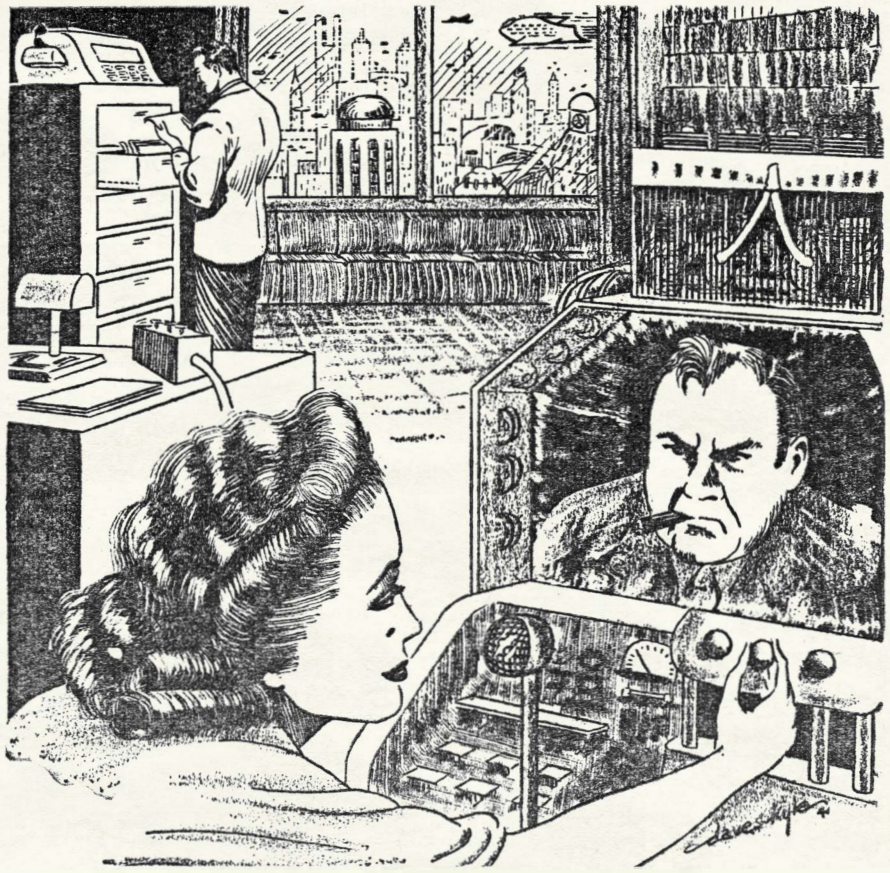
*But what prompted me out of my silence is the crowning blow of all—"How to Write Science Fiction" by Derwin Lesser! Oh Great Gasping Void! That is surely the last straw. Now you're trying to prove that you KNOW what a good story should be like even if you don't make use of your knowledge. Who is this guy "Derwin Lesser" to be so all-fired pedantic about writing science fiction? What are the classics of science-fiction that have come from his pen? I don't know, and I'll bet nobody else does. Then who is he to say how science-fiction should be written? But, besides that, what a fine text-book you present! After reading his short course in fantasy writing, read the appended examples of science-fiction in the rest of the magazine and then try to write as badly as that. When you succeed, you will have the satisfaction of collecting the greatest set of rejections ever seen.*

*Take the outstanding stinker in the issue, "The Onslaught from Below." That was an onslaught all right, a mess of really bad writing. The plot was old and creaky, the story very poorly put together, and somewhat incoherent; and it dragged, even for a short story. The end was exceedingly bad; as if the author, getting tired, batted out a sketchy and hastily-contrived finish and ran away from the noxious manuscript.*

*"The Flat Folk of Vulcan" read very implausibly, failed to make good picturizations, and was quite uninspired. Nothing original. "Our Robot Maid" was stuff having no story value at all. The idea has been done better in some one-sentence cartoons in humor magazines. "The Power and the People" was slightly better written, but not much to talk about. The plot is worn; the situations stock, and the end pitiful. "World of Illusion" made me ill, "Universe in Darkness" was a very ancient type of story dating back to vintage 1929. Aging improves some beverages and sours others. This was soured.*

*Which leaves "Wedding of the Forces" and "Ship of Cold Death." I give them credit; they were at least readable. "Wed-*

**(Continued On Page 111)**



*"Let me speak to someone in authority, Miss—quickly!"*

# THE GENIUS BUREAU

## by HELEN WEINBAUM

(Author of "Double Destiny," "The Radium Bugs," etc.)

They were experts on the solution of menaces, but all the conceivable disasters had been foreseen and solutions worked out. So the geniuses became bored, thus creating the greatest menace of all!

"WHAT is it, Larry? Quick, tell me. What's the decision?" Mary Lord pulled at Blake's sleeve as he came out of the genius' chambers.

"They'll accept the Government ruling," he smiled ruefully, "—for the present."

"For the present?" Mary's eyes grew dark with fear. "Why, that means—"

"I know. It's damnable." He dropped his long body into a chair

and swung his feet to a desk top. "As soon as they get bored again they'll demand another toy to play with. They have no respect for us. Absolutely no respect. And we created them."

From the other room came the sound of voices raised in argument. The girl turned and walked listlessly away. "They've probably regretted accepting already," she said.

Larry Blake nodded. "Probably. The Government agent had the dickens of a time for awhile. Kyra Wood wouldn't give an inch."

"That woman!" Mary said. "Did they have to breed female geniuses? Wouldn't men have been bad enough?"

There was a depressed silence. For some time the world had been a rather carefree, easy-going place. People weren't used to worry. Blake leaned his head back and looked around the file-filled room. For four generations now the Genius Bureau had been in operation. From stations all over the earth everything out of the ordinary was reported here to be turned over to the geniuses for analysis. There were solutions and methods for combatting every known menace (as well as hundreds which might occur, but had not as yet) filed away in the high-ceilinged room. It was Blake's job to keep the files up to date.

"How many formulae are there now, Mary?" he asked idly. She was the librarian.

She went to a near file and ruffled through it. "2241," she said. "They just caught up with the date of the year. Maybe next year they'll be ahead of it."

"If they aren't, there's going to be trouble." Blake rose irritably. "On both sides. The people are beginning to feel that the Genius Bureau is an unnecessary expense, and the geniuses are getting bored with their inactivity. There hasn't been a new problem brought in for months. That's why they asked for control of industry. They've absolutely nothing to do with their minds. There's no telling what they'll demand next time either."

"Then it's up to you to keep them busy," she said. "No one else seems to be bothering."

"I?" HE said. "That's not my job. I'm here to check their newest ideas, cast out old out-dated remedies and keep the files up to date. I haven't time to invent menaces. Probably that's what the last fellow who held this job was doing. I know he never cleaned out the files. It took three days to find a way to eliminate insects when they started destroying crops. That's when they fired him, incidentally. He gave them a formula evolved by the third generation of geniuses—a complicated machine which burned the insects without injuring the plants. They'd already begun to construct it when he came along with a later solution—a certain parasite which ate the destructive insects and then died. Well, it's my job to keep the files straight, not to rack my brains trying to find ways of occupying geniuses. If there isn't anything menacing the world, there isn't, and I can't make it!"

"Why not?" Mary asked.

"Why not?" Blake shouted. "Why it's obvious why not. Because they're geniuses. That's why. Any menace I might invent wouldn't take them two seconds to find a remedy for. We've bred them for four generations to be quicker and more intelligent than we. We bred them to protect us from every possible menace: from drought, from attacks—from

anything which might upset our economic system or national peace. And so far they've done a good job. But let me bring them a humbug menace —one that isn't real—and they'd see through it in a second. You can't satisfy them with pap."

Mary yawned and turned to her desk. She was used to Larry Blake's outbursts. In fact, for quite awhile now she had been engaged to Larry Blake, so it was just as well that she was used to them. Not that Larry ever seemed to remember their engagement. However, he had asked her to marry him once. In a weak moment, probably. She was pretty sure they were still engaged. She sat down and smoothed her hair complacently. She'd have to find out sometime soon. . . .

THE flash of the televisor put an end to meditation. She switched it on.

It was Chicago.

"Hello. . . . hello. . . ." The red-faced man at the other end seemed excited. "Is this the Genius Bureau?"

"Yes," Mary said.

"Let me speak to someone in authority, Miss. Quickly!"

She veiled the televisor and beckoned to Blake. "Are we engaged, Larry?" she asked.

"What makes you ask?" He sauntered over.

"Just curiosity." She gave him the screen. "Here's a person in Chicago who wants someone in authority. I suppose you're it."

He took her place at the desk unhurriedly.

"Hello. . . . hello. . . . What's the delay?" The man's voice was strident with excitement.

"No delay," Blake said. "What do you want?"

"There's something wrong here. Nine hundred cases of sunburn. Five hundred died. We want a remedy. In a hurry! People are afraid to go out. The city's verging on panic!"

Blake quickened to attention. "Sunburn? What's causing it?"

"The sun, of course. Idiot!"

Blake swallowed; then decided to disregard the epithet. "What's wrong with the sun? It's no hotter here in New York than it ever was in August."

"It's raining here, stupid," Mary said.

"Oh . . . well . . ." Blake leaned close to the televisor. "Listen, Mister. Try to concentrate. Try to be calm. Is it warm in Chicago? Unduly warm, I mean?"

"No."

"Then what's causing this unusual sunburn?"

"How do I know?" the man shouted. "You're the Bureau of Menaces. You should know! Or are you? Or don't you?"

"Yes, I am, and I don't!" Blake snapped. "Better be civil or I'll cut you off!"

"Of all the useless damn things. . ." The man's face grew redder by the minute. "Bureau of Menaces. . . . Geniuses. . . . Bah! It's a waste of taxes to support you. I'm voting at the next Congress to do away with the whole lot. If *you're* a genius, I'm Einstein."

With an effort, Blake made his voice calm. "Now listen. I'm not a genius—"

"You're telling me!" the man said.

"I'm a clerk—a person of normal intelligence. To me, you sound like a moron. I can't make out what's wrong. If you'll just try to control yourself . . ."

The man wiped the perspiration from his forehead before he trusted himself to answer. "All right. I'll

speak slowly." With a visible effort he pulled himself together. "There's an epidemic of sunburns here. In Chicago. Get it? After a few minutes of exposure to the sun, people start to turn red. Stop me if I go too fast. Well, the people don't like to get sunburned. It makes them sick. Besides four hundred and ninety-eight of them died. They don't like that either. In fact, it makes them very angry. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Well now, that's fine." The man's voice was silky. "And what we'd like you to do, if it's not too much trouble, is—send us a remedy!" The last four words rose to a shout.

"But for what?" Blake shouted back. "What's wrong with the sun. Has it spots?"

"How do I know? How . . . do . . . I know? You're the Bureau; I'm not. Or are you? The sun looks the same as it's ever looked to me. I'm not a doctor—or an astronomer—or a genius! I don't recognize spots. Put your master minds to work. Or by the holy something-or-other I'll have the whole lot of you thrown out at the next Congress."

"Stand by," Blake said. "I'll call you back."

He darkened the screen and turned to Mary. "Well, my dear. Wish and ye shall have. Here's our menace. Two of them, in fact. One's that guy in Chicago. I'd like to get the Board to work out an antidote for him."

"You're so funny," Mary said. "He'd probably like one for you."

Blake, lost in thought, did not hear her. She watched him for a moment; then gently eased him from the chair and seated herself at the desk. He rose mechanically and walked about the room.

"Sun spots," he mused. "If it is sun spots we have a remedy. But if it isn't. . . ."

He walked to the door leading to the genius' chambers and knocked on it.

"Come in." The voice sounded sleepy.

He opened the door and entered.

THE six men and one woman were engaged in a desultory game of poker.

"Who's winning?" Blake asked.

"Even," Emerson Hodges, the genius physicist answered disgustedly. "All even. We're perfectly matched, that's the trouble. We all know exactly to what degree we must compensate for luck and the fall of the cards. There's no fun in the game at all."

Anthony Wood, the chemist, nodded his head in agreement. "It was different when Kyra was young," he said sadly, "but even she has learned now."

"Of course I've learned, Father," Kyra answered. "You can't win my money anymore. Say!" She sat upright and looked at Blake. "How about letting him join us? We've never played with an average person. He might add zest to the game. His reactions wouldn't be at all accurate."

"No, thanks," Blake said dryly. "I've other and less sure ways of losing money. Besides, Chicago just called. There's something wrong there."

The group wakened slightly.

"Thank heavens," Kyra said. "I hope it's a good hard menace. We're bored to death."

"It probably won't be," Ray Lang, the young biologist put in. Rumor had him engaged to Kyra. "We've solved all the good ones."

Blake sat down and dealt out a hand of Patience. "It's sunburn," he said. "Five hundred people in Chicago died from it. They're rather anxious to find a way to avoid it."

The seven geniuses sank back in disappointment.

"I knew it," Lang said. It's easy. Sun spots, of course. They're shooting out crowds of electrons which break up the ozone layer allowing the ultra-violet rays to penetrate and burn people."

"We've already found the remedy for that," Wood said wearily. "When the electrons punch holes in the ozone layer we create new ozone."

"That wasn't the last, was it?" Blake asked.

Kyra turned to him admiringly. "You're quite smart for a non-genius. You're right. The last, simplest and most effective remedy was the erection of an electron lightning rod which concentrates and draws all the ultra-violet rays to one place. I remember that because I worked on it. I was bored that day." She yawned. "Almost as bored as today."

Blake smiled at the tall, cool-looking Amazonian blonde. Though he liked her, at times he was a little afraid of her keen mind and sharp tongue. A girl like Mary Lord was much more comfortable to be with. Still, Kyra was attractive.

"Perhaps you need another kind of amusement," he said, glancing meaningfully at Ray Lang.

"I've no doubt I do. Are you volunteering to furnish it?"

"Don't be silly, Kyra," Lang said.

"What's silly about it. I'm bored. The menace was a frost—as usual. What do we do now?" She rose and walked slowly around the table.

Remembering how vehemently she had held out for control of industry against the Government decision, Blake became uneasy. There was no telling what the next demand might be. Feeling between the genius group and normal people was becoming stronger. Due to the work of previous generations of geniuses the people felt secure against all eventualities and were starting to rebel against supporting the idle genius group. And the geniuses, with nothing to occupy their minds, got more and more bored as time passed and fewer new problems were brought them for solution. Something had to be done about it. He put down a card irritably.

"What's that you're playing?" Lang asked smoothly. "Idiot's Delight? How fitting!"

"It's Patience," Blake snapped, gathering up the cards. Yes, something must be done. If the people voiced their dissatisfaction, the board might press the demand for power.

Right now, however, he had a pressing matter to attend to. The whole world must be informed of the electron rod sunburn preventative. In the meantime, in an effort to give the Genius Board something to think about he said, "That solution for sunspots hasn't yet been proven effective. Better start thinking of something else in case it should fail. Otherwise the whole world will be burned to a crisp."

Kyra yawned. "What's the difference. A perfect world would be composed wholly of geniuses."

"Your skin is no different from theirs," Blake said. "Once this rain stops you'll burn as badly as if you were a low-grade moron."

WHEN he came out from the genius' chambers, he found Mary beseiged with calls from all over the world. Sunburn! Deaths! What shall we do? To every hys-

terical voice she gave the same answer. "Stand by. We'll send you a remedy."

Blake mounted a ladder, brought down the S-file and fingered through it. At last he found what he wanted. He walked over to the televisor and said, "Don't take any more calls now. Get me Chicago."

"It's about time you called." The same red-faced man appeared on the screen.

"Got tied up here," Blake said. "The geniuses are bored. Had to find something to amuse them."

"Bored? Bored!" The man looked as if he were going to have a stroke. "Hundreds of people dying. . . If that doesn't beat all. We support them, and they're bored! Why, at the next Congress—"

"I know," Blake interrupted. "You'll have them thrown out. But they've sent you a remedy anyway. Set up an electron rod—like an old fashioned lightning rod, you know. Make it tall—about two hundred feet—" he ruffled through the file, "and ground it deeply. Put it out in the sticks somewhere. It will draw the ultra-violet rays and concentrate them there, away from the city, until the sun spots have disappeared."

The man took hurried notes. "Is that all?" he asked. "It sounds awfully simple. Certainly didn't take a genius mind to figure that out. Are you sure it will work?"

"Of course not," Blake said. "We're experimenting on you. You're the guinea pigs."

"Pigs . . ." the man barked, "guinea pigs! I'll show you. Why at the next Con—"

Blake switched off the televisor. For another hour he sent the same information to salient points of the world. Then, finished, he sat back and stared off into space.

"This is serious, Mary," he said at last. "The people are beginning to believe the genius board a useless expense. If they try to disband it, that will mean trouble. Not only would you and I be out of jobs, but it would anger the geniuses. They might try to take control of the country or to terrify it. With all their experience in combatting menaces, they could create them like nothing at all. And we would be helpless, with our minds, to protect ourselves against any menace they brought about. . .

"Remember that game they played last time they got bored? One side invented new menaces and the other side figured out ways of overcoming them. It was horrible . . . uncanny! All eventualities were taken into consideration. One group created a new kind of bacteria which would destroy the whole world by disease within a few hours. It took the others three days to find germs to counteract it. Why, they built complete Maginot lines in space . . . designed them . . . armed them, and played out whole battles with an imaginary planetary invader. Then they surrounded the earth with an indispersible poison gas. The only way of surviving under those conditions was underground habitation. They laid out complete blueprints for the cities. Then they imagined an invasion from underground and invented a depth bomb which would be sent below to explode there. If the sun gets brighter they have invented heat absorbers; if it gets dimmer, they have heat reducers. If the moon falls and breaks into a ring because of the earth's gravity they have a disintegrator and a plan for domed cities to protect the people against the meteorites which would pepper down. If the earth stops rotating—"

"Stop," Mary said. "I've heard enough. I know they're good."

"There's not one menace you can think of that they haven't invented a way to create. But that isn't the worst," Blake added slowly. "The worst is that they have tired of that game and are bored. Pretty soon they're going to demand power . . . perhaps control of industry again, or something even more ruinous for us. If it isn't given them they'll take it by force of terror. Perhaps by actually bringing about one of their menaces and withholding the solution to it until the power they want is given them. . ."

"It looks to me as if—" Mary began.

He rose suddenly, knowing what she was about to say, struck himself by the same, unalterable truth. She stared at his paling face. He wheeled abruptly and started toward the door to the genius' chambers.

She put out her hand to stop him. "What are you going to do?"

"Tell them," he barked. "Give them the problem. It's just the kind of ironic, half-witted, insoluble situation they like. It's the one thing which will hold their interest, keep them occupied until the people's rancor against them dies down or until something else arises for them to work on. Besides, they might really solve it." He put his hand under her chin and tilted her face up. "We need a solution to this, Mary," he added softly.

"I know, but—"

Without waiting to hear her objection, he turned and entered the chambers of the geniuses.

KYRA broke off in the middle of a sentence and turned. "Oh. It's you again."

Blake walked slowly to the center of the room. "I've a real problem for you this time—a real menace."

"Hope it will take more than five seconds to solve," Lang said wearily. "Personally, I think the people are right. We've served our purpose here—all present and eventual menaces are provided for. There's absolutely nothing more for us to do. These simple, fabricated problems bore us."

Blake was taken aback. He had never dreamed the geniuses were aware of the people's mounting dissatisfaction at supporting them. "This menace won't bore you," he said.

"Well, let's have it then. What is it?"

"You."

"Me?" Lang removed his glasses and wiped them carefully. "I assure you, my dear fellow—"

"You. All of you." Blake waved to include the circle. "You geniuses. You're bored: you want something to amuse yourselves with. That's why you asked for control of industry. You didn't like it when permission was refused you, but suppose you'd been really angry and decided to take control—or to take revenge? You could overcome feeble, puny minds, like mine," he smiled, "with no trouble at all. Suppose you really got it into your heads to control the world—to kill off all average intelligences—or perhaps to use them as slaves? How could we stop you?" He paused. "You—the geniuses—are the menace I want a check for."

There was a heavy silence when he finished. For the first time in months, Kyra looked interested. Wood scratched his head. Lang carefully replaced his glasses, drew a pad from his pocket and started to figure. Hodges rose and walked slowly to the window. The others

sat down in varied positions of thought. Blake waited.

For fifteen minutes there was no sound except the scratching of Lang's pencil and Hodges' heavy breathing. Smiling to himself, Blake slipped quietly away.

In the outer room, Mary Lord was signalling Chicago. After a few seconds the same red-faced man appeared on the screen. He seemed calmer than before.

"How's your sunburn?" she asked sociably.

"Cooling off."

"Is the electron rod up? Does it work?"

"It seems to," he said.

She smiled knowingly. "You see the geniuses are of some use after all. Aren't you sorry you were so nasty?"

"No," he snapped.

The screen went dark. She turned to find Blake laughing at her.

"I-told-you-soers never get anywhere," he said, and left before she had a chance to question him about the effect of his revelation to the Genius Board.

The next morning he came early. Mary Lord was not yet there, but the geniuses were already assembled. He entered without knocking and looked around the circle of pondering, expressionless faces.

"Any decision?"

They shook their heads.

For three mornings he went through the same routine; for three mornings it was the same. No one could reach a solution. On the fourth morning, Anthony Wood roused himself from thought.

"The problem is insoluble," he said. "If we wish to seize power there is nothing—nothing either extant or creatable—which can stop us."

The six others nodded agreement.

"This is the first time you've ever failed," Blake said. "Do you think the fact that it is you yourselves who are the menace has anything to do with that failure?"

Lang rose indignantly. "That's an insult!'

"Not at all," Blake returned. "After all, you are supported by the people. It's your job to find a way to protect them—even against yourselves. If you don't, I can only assume—"

"There is no way," Wood insisted.

"There is a way," Blake said definitely. "I know what it is. And I'm sure if you concentrate you will find it." He left them staring in puzzlement at each other.

THE next morning they were still puzzled. It was apparent that they had found no solution, and just as apparent that they were tiring of thinking about what they considered a hopeless problem. Blake seated himself at the table and asked brightly, "Well, guessed yet?"

"No. Suppose you tell us," Lang said with heavy sarcasm.

"All right. I will. If you're sure you give up."

"This is not a guessing game," Lang began.

"Quiet. Let Larry talk," Kyra said.

Blake smiled at her. "There is one solution," he said. "Suppose we were to breed another group of geniuses—a check group, to keep you from seizing power?"

For a moment no one spoke.

"Why, you're right!" Wood exclaimed. "That's the answer — the only answer. Strange we couldn't think of it."

"Too simple perhaps," Blake said modestly. "However, inasmuch as

you worked on the problem for some time without reaching a solution, I suppose we may assume mine is the only one."

He felt Kyra's eyes surveying him coldly, and turned his face away.

"We might, Larry," she said softly, "but there is another. I didn't speak of it before, because. . . Well—" she looked at Lang, "—I just didn't. But there is another. Intermarriage. If you and I were to marry, for instance . . . if the whole Genius Board were to let its blood mingle with that of normal people—"

"Ridiculous," Lang interrupted. "That would eventually do away with the genius group altogether, spread the blood so thin it would be valueless."

Kyra leaned back tentatively. Blake felt her penetrating, half-smiling eyes on him. He rose hurriedly. Better get out before she said something . . . before the others gave his solution too much thought. With him out of sight they might forget to analyze, accept the fact that the creation of a check group of geniuses was a practical and efficient deterrent to their seizure of power. . . . But if Kyra spoke . . .!

He collided heavily with Mary outside the door.

"Eavesdropping?" he asked.

"Yes." She grasped his lapels firmly. "And don't try to get away. Tell me. Did they figure out anything?"

"No. They failed utterly. I gave them the solution—"

"You did!" She stared in disbelief. "What was it?"

"A check-group of geniuses, bred to keep this group from seizing power."

"Why Larry. That's marvelous!"

He looked into her admiring eyes and smiled softly. "Mary, I'll let you in on a secret," he whispered. "It would never work. It's no solution at all, really. And Kyra knows it. She's the only one—so far."

"No solution? Why not? It sounds perfect."

He shook his head. "It's a vicious circle. What's to keep the check-group from eventually seizing power? And then if we create a group to check them, what's to prevent that group—and so on. Wood was right. There is no solution!"

"Oh." She turned away disconsolately. A moment later her face lighted. "Well, as long as they don't know it . . . Larry!" She turned again to face him. "I've been meaning to ask you. Are we engaged?"

"At the moment," he said absently, "I suppose we are. But if the genius group ever sees through that phony solution of mine. . . You see, I forgot to tell you, Kyra thought of another answer to the menace. And I might have to marry her to save your pretty skin."

"Oh, Larry," Mary said. "Do you really think it's pretty?"

# FUTURIAN TIMES

## DENVER . . . JULY 4TH

### DENVER, JULY 4TH!

By an overwhelming majority, the fans, science-fiction authors, and interested visitors at the Second World Science Fiction Convention, held in Chicago, Ill., over the Labor Day weekend, 1940, voted Denver, Colorado, as the locale of the 1941 Convention. Olon F. Wiggins, a nationally-known, old-time fan, put in the winning bid, and was acclaimed thunderously as head of the convention committee to be.

Since September, considerable progress has been made. A Colorado Fantasy Society has been formed, its purpose being the sponsorship and mapping out of the Convention. It is a national organization, and, as with the case of the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers, last year, it will not be confined in membership to any one state or section.

Officers of the society are: Olon F. Wiggins, Director; Lew Martin, Secretary - Treasurer and Official Editor, and Roy Hunt, Official Artist and Assistant Editor. Various sectional representatives of the Denvention are: Mid - West, Bob Tucker; West Coast, Paul Freehafer; Rocky Mountain, Charles Ford Hansen; English, J. Michael Rosenblum; Australian, Vol Molesworth; East Coast (USA), Doc Lowndes. While it is not expected, as last year, that any fans will be able to attend from overseas, these contacts will be most desirable to the progress of the affair.

The date for this year's convention has been set, according to the results of a post-card poll among fans, for the 4th, 5th, and 6th of July. The guest of honor will be Robert A. Heinlein, a prominent and popular science-fiction author.

Fans and readers of science-fiction interested in the Denver Convention can keep in touch with its progress and development by joining the Colorado Fantasy Society. This membership entitles one to a free copy of each issue of the official organ of the Denvention, the CFS Review. It is published monthly.

Membership fee is fifty cents. All communications, questions, or applications for membership should be sent to Lew Martin, 1258 Race Street, Denver, Colorado.

### ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD IN PHILADELPHIA

The annual conference for eastern fans sponsored by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, was held on Sunday, November 10th. Attendance this year was a little lower than usual, partly due to confusion as to the date of the conference, but the customary discussion of fan topics was none the less vigorous.

Among the fans present were Milton A. Rothman and Elmer Perdue of Washington, Gereaux de la Ree, of the Solaroid Club, and Robert A. Madle of the PSFS. Chairman for the meeting was Alexander M. Phillips, science writer of many years' standing.

The main topic of discussion this year was the various aspects of the coming Denvention, and the role that eastern fans can play in its support.

### VOICE OF THE IMAGI-NATION

Thanx for the opportunity to call our fanmag, Voice of the Imagi-Nation, to the attn. of readers of Future Fiction. We sorta feel we "got somethin' there" with our uniq pub: Who wouldn't like to get a whole lot of letters (all about science fiction) & not have to answ? Newsy, viewsy letters not limited in discussion to any one mag, but covering them all, as the writers feel inclined. They — — & U if U wish — — get off the mind what's thot of any particular mag or man, compare editorial policies, discuss fantasy bks, movies, movements, be humorous; heck, just use your imagination. This is a large-size mag legibly mimeod in colord ink with lithoed covers & numerous novelty. Reproducing signatures of the letter-senders, & their exact spelling, punctuation, etc.! Editorials & staff-written reply are presented in the "novacious" Simplifyd Spelling style so suggestive of the future. Now in its 4th yr, from the better part of 100 fanmags, "The Voice" has been voted (by the most active fans) as among the top 10! Co-edited by a fan who has been connected with fanmags over a period of 10 yrs, since their inception, in fact — — & the world's leading lady fan. "The Voice" has featured letters from not only the best-known names in fandom, but from other countrys — — England, Australia, Canada, France, and Germany. It's the Vox Pop of fandom! (RT: A letter from the co-editors of Vom, as "The Voice" is popularly referred to, appears in Station X, this issue. Ackerman & Morojo are the team responsible. Sample copy can be obtained from either for the nominal sum of 10c. Ed.)

### FUTURIAN SOCIETY OF NEW YORK ELECTS NEW DIRECTOR

John B. Michel, fan of many years' standing, was elected Director of the Futurian Society of New York, the outstanding Cosmopolitan Science-Fiction club, at a recent meeting. Former director, Doc Lowndes, stepped down, due to his professional obligations, which would have interfered with directional functions. Members of this famous club include Frederik Pohl, Donald A. Wollheim, S. D. Gottesman, Hannes Bok, Leslie Perri, and Isaac Asimov.

### THE LOS ANGELES SCIENCE FANTASY SOCIETY

Regarded by many as the most active "future fiction" group in the world is the LASFS. Foremost fans Forrest J. Ackerman, Morojo; Paul Freehafer, Walt Daugherty, Bruce Yerke, Pogo, Ray Bradbury, form the nucleus of this society, which approaches its 200th meeting at the rate of one a week. Each Thursday evening, starting about 7 o'clock, the "imagi-natives" of Los Angeles meet in the Brown Room of Clifton's Cafeteria, 648 S. Broadway, to discuss science fiction, exchange correspondence and news items, examine fanmags, meet celebrities, and conduct the affairs of their club. Dues are reasonable and guests are always welcome. Many a famous personage of the science fiction field has been a Guest of Honor at the LASFS: Jack Williamson, Edmond Hamilton, David H. Keller, Ed Earl Repp, J. Harvey Haggard, Eando Binder, Robert A. Heinlein, Hannes Bok, and others too numerous to mention. Difficult to believe? Ralph Milne Farley, Robert Bloch, L. Taylor Hanson, Bob Olsen, Chas. D. Hornig, Henry Kuttner, etc.! "Skylark" Smith, the great Grey Lensman himself, was present several months ago at a meeting that shattered all attendance records, with a high of 39 persons present! A masquerade party was held recently with fans and authors attending as people of the future and other planes of existence. Several art exhibits have been held, with original illustrations on display from the pens, paint-brushes, and pastels of such favorites as Paul, Finlay, Bok, Brundage, Dold, Wesso, Krupa, Morey, Brown, Cartier, etc. The Club owns its own mimeograph, and fanmag publishing is encouraged, members producing from 8 to 10 individual periodicals. An immense lending library is maintained. Here in the heart of "Shangri-La" (the science fiction fans' paradise) was previewed "Monsters of the Moon," the scientifilm whose premiere showing was a feature of the Science Fiction Convention of 1940. A large delegation plans to attend the Denvention. For further information about the LASFS, write Director Daugherty at 1039 W. 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif.; or local parties telephone RE 0837; or — — just drop in at a meeting, whoever U are, wherever U're from . . . no invitation necessary.

### BANDERSNATCH CLUB FORMED

Something really new in fantasy-clubs is the Loyal and Benevolent Order of Bandersnatch, more loosely referred to as the Bandersnatch Club. This exclusive society, open only to fans who can correctly divine the true nature of the fraternity and thus comply with its application requirements, exists for the sole, and somewhat unique, purpose of fostering a science - fantasy fiction amateur, professional, and fan legendry. Outstanding members of the LBOB are Wilfred Owen Morley, Banderchief: Paul Dennis Lavond, Cecil Corwin, Martin Pearson, Hugh Raymond and Antony Selkirk.

# THE RADIANT AVENGER

## by E. A. GROSSER

(Author of "Habits Via Radio," "Blue Boy," etc.)

**Gilbert Archer knew he wasn't breathing. He clasped his wrist and felt his pulse; there was none. He should be dead, yet he had never felt more alive, and his body glowed with an uncanny radiance!**


GILBERT ARCHER smiled and edged the car to the side of University Road when another car demanded raucously the right to pass.

"All right, Gil; laugh if you want to," growled Pug Wilson, sliding down in his seat. "But I'm telling you, you got Carmody over the barrel with that evidence, sure. If you think he'll stay there without a fight, you're crazy. Carry a gun, at least!"

The two men were in direct contrast to each other: Wilson short and burly, with the hands and jaw of a prizefighter; Archer, lean, close

to six feet tall with a good-humored mouth that was now rather grim.

"We'll see what old Dean Hoskins has to say," he replied. "Maybe Carmody is through bossing Springfield. In that case I won't need a gun." He turned in his seat with a frown of irritation as the car behind honked again. He drew over farther to the side of the road and the car started to pass.

"But until then—" Pug started, then shouted, "Look out!"

The passing car swung in on them. Its rear wheel smashed into the front wheel of Archer's car. His car rocked with the crash, then went through the guard rail. For a long second the front of the car seemed to hang motionless in the air, then it dropped and they started the long fall to the foot of the bluff.

The car struck once on the way down, bounded outward, and struck on its side. Archer smashed into Wilson. He felt his right arm crack like a brittle twig. The pain was red fire that ate up his arm to his shoulder. But he didn't lose consciousness.

He forced the door open and tossed the briefcase with the evidence out onto the ground. Then he started to drag Pug out of the wrecked car, but the looseness of his friend's body made him halt. He felt for the pulse. There was none.

"Pug! Pug!"

He shook his friend, as though that would revive him. Then he stared at the boneless wobbling of Pug's head. His hand slipped from his friend's shoulder and Pug folded over lifelessly.

Jaw set woodenly he dragged himself out of the car and picked up the briefcase. Now there was another reason to get Carmody. A bullet smacked the earth beside him. He looked up at the road.

The other car had halted and three men were standing at the edge. One had a gun in his hand. He raised it again and another bullet thudded close to Archer. The precious briefcase in his left hand and his right hanging uselessly at his side, Archer shambled toward the trees that would shelter him.

The men above shouted. Archer glanced up and saw that they were coming down. He tried to run, nearly fell. In the late afternoon sunlight he saw the three men hurrying after him. They halted and more lead whined past him, then he was in the safety of the trees. He waded the small stream and started up the hill. The campus should be on the other side of the hill, and there Carmody's men wouldn't dare pursue him.

HE halted suddenly at a level place that had been gashed into the side of the hill. In front of him was a heavy gate. Then he understood. This was the shaft entrance to the underground chamber where the university had constructed its cyclotron. Down there would be help!

He staggered to the gate. It was open. He went in, and tried to lock it after him but couldn't. He leaned against the wall, weak and dizzy. Then he stumbled down the crooked passage to the heart of the hill.

He stood in the entrance of the cyclotron room and his heart sank. He could see no one. There was a giant electro-magnet, the huge cyclotron chamber, some electrical equipment. But no men—no help!

There was a hum of power. His heart lifted. He staggered into the

room. The operators must be on the other side of the equipment.

He started past the chamber. Tiny fingers seemed to be plucking at his nerves, trying to pull them from his flesh. The pain increased. He fell against the chamber. A metal shutter fell away under his shoulder and a stream of violet light swept over his body. He writhed with sudden agony. Then blackness poured into his mind.

ARCHER knew that he was dead. He was roasting with the heat, and all around him was black. He tried to open his eyes and couldn't. Then he heard one devil say to another:

"Gee! Look at him shine!"

"Yeah," agreed the other. "It's giving me the jitters."

"Me too," said the first. "I thought I was getting used to the stiffs but that don't go for this one. Leave it to some goofy professors to spring a new one on us."

Archer succeeded in opening his eyes. He found himself staring at a ceiling. It wasn't very interesting so he tried to sit up. He felt queer. That heat seemed to come from inside his body, but it wasn't unpleasant. He got his arm up and pushed himself to a sitting position.

"Jeeze, Joey! Lookut!"

Archer turned toward the voice, but he caught only a glimpse of two backs as they went through the door almost simultaneously.

He looked after them curiously for a moment then glanced around him. He was sitting on a stone table. And all around him were other tables, but a number of them were covered with sheets. And beneath the sheets must be human bodies — at least that's what the outlines looked like.

Then Archer's eyes narrowed and he slid to the floor. He knew now where he was. This was a morgue!

He stood with one hand on the table, looking around. They must have thought he was dead. It was true—he did feel plenty queer. But dead?—He'd never felt stronger in his life. And his senses were unnaturally keen. He could hear those two dev—men talking to someone, pleading with someone to come "and take a look." And his sight was clearer. His sense of touch was so delicate that he could feel the roughness of the polished stone table-top.

He wasn't dead, he exulted. He'd never been more alive in his life. And he would make Carmody pay for Pug's death. The joke was on Carmody and the doctors who had thought that cyclotron had killed him.

He was nude but he tossed his sheet over his shoulder and started toward the door, as an elderly man entered. The old man stopped short and behind his glasses his eyes widened. In back of him Archer caught a glimpse of two other men, younger and a lot more afraid than the first.

"Wh-what are you doing?" the old man asked.

"Leaving. I want some clothes."

"Bu-b-but—" the old man started, then halted. It seemed kind of silly to tell a man he was dead. Slowly his bewilderment left him and his eyes began to glow. "Come in here, will you?" he said eagerly.

He escorted Archer to an office and started a thorough examination.

"Where's the briefcase I had with me?" asked Archer, when one of the two frightened helpers came with his clothes.

"What briefcase?" the doctor mumbled, tapping his chest with a

middle finger. "This is all you had." He nodded toward the clothes.

Archer's hopes sank. It was easy to guess what had happened. Those thugs had found him, probably after the cyclotron had been turned off and before the physicists had come. They had assumed he was dead, and had taken the briefcase. And with those papers had gone any hope of convicting Carmody.

Suddenly Archer remembered that he had had a broken arm. He lifted his right arm and clenched his hand. It certainly wasn't broken now. Then he stared at his hand. It glowed with a dull violet light.

The doctor raised his head from Archer's chest and looked at him with a frown.

"You're the deadest man I ever saw," he stated flatly.

Archer had to grin. "Nonsense!"

"It's true," insisted the doctor. "Your heart isn't beating. You aren't breathing. You are dead!"

ARCHER tensed. It was true! He wasn't breathing. He clasped his own wrist and felt for his pulse. There was none.

He stared down at his hands again. They glowed eerily with the violet light. But they were alive. He pinched his hand to make sure that he could feel. A piece of his own flesh came away between his fingers.

He looked at it. The bit of flesh was mashed to a pulp. He looked at the place from which it had come, to make sure that it was his own flesh. It hadn't hurt much and he couldn't be that strong. He had only tweaked himself. Then he watched the tiny wound with ever more bewilderment. It was healing right in front of his eyes!

And it wasn't scar tissue! The new flesh was exactly like the old. He couldn't tell where the wound had been.

He heard the doctor speak to one of the others.

"Did you phone Dixon?" The other nodded mutely.

"Dixon is in charge of that laboratory up there," the doctor informed Archer. "I knew he'd be interested, so I sent for him. Maybe he can explain it—I can't."

Dixon proved to be a rather young man for the post he held—he wasn't more than forty at the most and handsome in spite of graying hair. But neither he nor those who came with him could account for the change in Archer.

"I can't understand it," he admitted freely, glancing at his companions. They nodded their agreement, but one spoke up.

"It must be temporary," he said.

"You mean I'm dying?" asked Archer.

The other nodded solemnly. Archer reached for a heavy metal ashtray on the doctor's desk. He grasped it in both hands and twisted. With a groan the metal yielded. He passed it to the physicist with a brief smile.

"Pretty good for a dying man, don't you think?"

"Th-that was steel!" the doctor gasped.

"It still is," Archer said. Then turned at a disturbance in the doorway. Joey, the doctor's helper, was there, playing Horatius at the bridge with a bunch of clamoring men.

"Reporters!" snorted Dixon. "There are more 'correspondents' at the university than students. They are as bad as a Fifth Column. Harkins, you handle them. But soften it a lot; you know how they are."

Harkins went out and he and Joey managed to get the door shut again.

Archer turned again to the one who had said he was a dying man.

"You think that as soon as the activation of my body-cells wears off, I'll die. Is that true?" The fellow nodded agreement. "Then how do you account for this?" Archer asked, pinching a good-sized chunk out of the fleshy part of his arm.

Dixon started to object, then they all stood transfixed watching the wound fill with new flesh. There was practically a concert of sighs when the healing was complete. But the doctor was the first to understand.

"Totipotency!" he gasped. The others looked at him for an explanation.

"It's the ability some of the lower animals have of growing new parts or members when mutilated," he said, still staring at the bit of flesh in Archer's hand. "But it isn't exactly the same, or that piece of your arm would grow a new man." He shook his head dazedly, as though it was too much for him. "Anyway, it proves that Archer isn't a dying man —that is, any more than we all are. In some way his body is running on radioactivity and until that wears down . . ."

"But that may be centuries!" Dixon objected.

"Then he'll live for centuries," the doctor stated. "And he needn't fear sickness, for no germ could live in him; and he doesn't have to worry about accidents because . . ." The doctor sat down abruptly as though stunned by his reasoning.

Archer smiled grimly. Now he knew how he was going to get Carmody. He was merely going to walk in and take possession of that evidence again. And no person, gun, or knife could stop him. Not even gas could halt him, for he didn't breathe. Nothing could stop him! He pulled his sleeve down again and slipped on his coat.

"Well, thank you, gentlemen," he said, still smiling.

"Wait!" called Dixon.

Archer halted and looked at the physicist.

"Where are you going?" Dixon asked.

"I . . . have some unfinished business to attend to."

"Can't it wait? Won't you come with us to the University where we have the instruments to take proper observations? Man, you must! Think of what it might mean to humanity!"

Archer hesitated. He like Dixon, and the physicist had a genuine interest. And Carmody could wait for a time. He, Gil Archer, had plenty of that---centuries of it!

"Okay, let's go!" he agreed.

ARCHER saw more instruments in the next two hours than he had ever seen before. Dixon and his fellows observed, measured, and recorded, until Archer felt that even his strange condition didn't warrant such painstaking care.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked when Dixon halted for a brief moment.

"Dr. Haines must be right," Dixon admitted. "At least all the evidence points that way, and none disproves his assumption."

"How much longer will you take?" Archer asked.

"As long as you'll stay," Dixon said with youthful grin. "In fact you can have bed and board here for as long as you want—even if you don't need it. I wonder if you'll need sleep?"

"How would it be if I attended to my . . . business, then came back," Archer suggested.

Dixon looked disappointed. "It's up

to you, of course," he agreed. "But—"

The door burst open and a girl came in, struggling with the secretary. Her dark hair was in disarray, her blue eyes shining with eagerness and anger.

"Let me go!" she cried, trying to brush aside the secretary. "I must see them. I'm a friend of Mr. Archer's."

"Jeanne!" Archer cried, starting forward.

The secretary stepped aside and the girl ran to his arms. "Oh, Gil!" she choked. "I just saw the papers. I can hardly b-believe—"

Archer tried to comfort her. She had said that she was his friend, but that was stating it very mildly. Jeanne Wilson was the girl he had intended to marry. He blamed himself for not going to her immediately. As Pug's sister, and his fiancee, he owed her something. The poor kid had lost the only relative she had. And though she didn't know it, he himself might as well have remained dead. They could never marry. He knew radioactivity well enough to know that even now the rays from his body were burning through her. Prolonged exposure would mean death for her. Almost fearfully he pushed her away from him.

She looked at him with hurt eyes and caught her lip between her teeth. Archer started to explain, but she turned to Dixon.

"I—I want you to do the same thing to my brother," she said. "I want him back. It isn't right for him to be d-dead. He's young! Strong! You've got to help me!"

Dixon's eyes glowed immediately at the possibility. He turned to his secretary. "Get Haines on the phone," he ordered.

The secretary went out and Dixon paced eagerly to his desk. A few moments later he was talking to the doctor.

"Listen, Haines. I want you to bring Wilson up here. . . . The Wilson who was killed in the accident, of course. We're going to try to revive him. . . . Of course, we've got permission. Wait a minute." He turned to Jeanne. "Are you his closest relative?"

She nodded. "His only one," she almost whispered. She was trying not to look at Archer. The hurt in her eyes was hard for him to bear.

Dixon returned his attention to the phone and Archer faced Jeanne, though he didn't approach her.

"Jeanne, you don't understand. I know it looks—well, you know how it looks. But I still love you. Only I can't let you stay near me. It would kill you."

She didn't seem to understand and he tried to explain, but Dixon cradled the phone and announced, "He's coming."

ARCHER, and Dr. Haines stood near Dixon in the control room when he closed the switches. Dixon had insisted that Jeanne go home, had refused to go on with the experiment unless she did. And the doctor had backed him up in the decision.

She had wanted to stay, but when Archer added his voice to theirs, she went. And Archer was glad, for he knew that it would be a gruesome business they had to do. And now Pug, stiff and cold with death, was strapped in position so the beam of subatomic particles from the cyclotron would strike him as it had Archer. From memory, he knew what was happening in the cyclotron chamber — or what he hoped was happening. The seconds passed with sticky slowness.

Dixon cut the power and his eyes

met theirs. Wordlessly, they left the cadmium-shielded control room and hurried to the cyclotron chamber.

Pug's body was braced in front of the chamber. The doctor hastened to examine him. They waited tensely until the doctor looked up, then they knew their answer before he spoke.

"No," the doctor said briefly.

"Same settings — I can't understand it," said Dixon. "Let's try again."

They started back to the control room, but one of the assistants came to them.

"Man outside to see Mr. Archer," he reported.

"Reporter?" Dixon asked suspiciously.

"No, a policeman," said the assistant.

They hesitated. "I'll go with you," said Dixon, and Archer knew that he had found a friend. The three of them went up to the surface.

The plainclothes man looked at them and hesitated. "Gilbert Archer?" he asked.

"That's my name," said Archer.

"Warrant for your arrest for the death of John Wilson."

"You're mad!" snapped the doctor. "That was an accident."

"Warrant says it was manslaughter," the man informed. "Are you coming peaceable?"

Archer shrugged and went with the man to his car.

GIL ARCHER sat in his cell, watching the play of the violet light over his arms. It was a rank frame-up, he knew. But there wasn't any sense in fighting the whole police force. It was better to bring the charge to a trial as quickly as was possible, and get it over with. No jury on earth would hold him guilty.

He raised his head when the jailer came to his cell door.

"Miss Wilson to see you," the jailer announced. "How about it?"

"Yes!" Archer agreed eagerly. He had only been in jail for one day, but he hadn't found it very exciting. He was puzzled too. Why hadn't his father come? He could have understood it, if Jeanne hadn't come to see him. He'd been pretty clumsy in trying to explain why he didn't want her close to him.

Then she was at the cell door and the jailer was opening the lock. She came into the cell and ran toward him.

"Not too close," he warned and tried to smile. Life, even centuries of this wonderful new life that he possessed, didn't look o bright without her. And they were separated by a barrier that was more terrible than distance.

She halted uncertainly, twisting her handkerchief nervously in her hands. "I—I got a lawyer," she announced.

"You got a lawyer!" he burst out. "Where's Dad?"

She didn't answer.

"Where's Dad?" he insisted.

"There . . . there was fire at . . ." Her voice trailed into silence.

Archer waited, afraid to think ahead of her words. He dreaded to hear what she would say; and yet, he had to hear.

"Well?" he prompted, his voice an ominous monotone.

"There was a fire at your house the same afternoon of the wreck," Jeanne said quietly. "Your father was home, and he . . ."

"Died!" Archer shouted. "Burned to death! Isn't that it?"

She nodded slowly. "I thought you knew, Gil. Or I would have told you before. I thought you didn't want to talk about it. I—I felt that way about . . . about . . ." She lowered her face to her hands.

Archer wanted more than anything else to go to her, and comfort her. But he didn't dare. If he did that, he would be killing the last thing on this earth that he cared for. Dad was gone—horribly. Pug was gone. He was condemned to a long life—centuries—of utter separation from his fellows and most of all, Jeanne. His anger formed like a diamond-hard lump within him, and his thought was for her.

"They failed?" he asked quietly.

She nodded, crying silently. Archer watched her without speaking, but his last hope died within him. He was not to have a companion. Those centuries of life would have been at least bearable if Pug could be with him. He remembered that freckled face, the pug-nose, bitterly keen wit. But Pug was gone!

The hard anger within him swelled. Carmody had done that. He had burned their house to burn the evidence. He had found out that Archer was on his way to the dean for advice and had sent his thugs after them. Pug had died. They had tried to kill him also, but had unintentionally condemned him to something worse than death.

"Get in the back of the cell," he said quietly to Jeanne.

She looked up at him quickly, frightened by the tone of his voice. She stared at his glowing face with apprehension.

"What are you going to do?"

He didn't answer her question. Instead, he repeated, "Get back."

She obeyed slowly, unwillingly, her eyes clinging to his. "Gil, what are you going to do?"

He didn't answer, but watched carefully to see that she didn't approach too close. Fear came into her face.

"Gil!" she cried. "Don't do anything! You'll only be killed. You're all I got left. Oh, God! Gil! Don't!"

But his hands were on the bars. The door was locked, but that made no difference. He gripped them tightly, pulled. And slowly they bent out of shape.

The cell door pulled away from its frame, and the lock snapped. It swung back and he was free. He went into the corridor and started toward the front of the jail. A sudden hush had descended over the prisoners. It seemed that even noises from the street were suddenly quiet. All seemed to watch as he strode toward freedom.

THEN someone shouted hoarsely. The cry was echoed farther on, and there was the sound of running feet.

"Halt! Halt, or I'll shoot!" The policeman crouched in the doorway, pistol leveled at Archer's chest. But Archer strode closer. There was a tight grin on his lips. Now, was the moment. Within the minute he would discover whether he was almost immortal, or not. He watched the policeman's finger tighten. The knuckle whitened.

"Halt!" he cried, and there was a pleading note in his voice. "You fool! Stop or I'll shoot."

"Gil!" Jeanne screamed shrilly and ran after him. She caught his arm, tried to make him stop and go back to the cell.

Gil Archer pushed her aside and forgot his new strength. She crashed into the cell bars and slipped to the floor. But he didn't notice. The policeman pulled the trigger.

The impact of the bullet rocked him back on his heels. Pain stabbed through his chest. His sight faded and he thought he was dying. So Dr. Haines had been wrong!

Then his sight cleared. There was only a dull ache in his chest where the bullet had torn. Then even that was gone. He smiled triumphantly.

The policeman stared, unable to believe his eyes. His face was pale when he shot again. And Archer felt that one too. Then he struck the policeman on the jaw and the fellow dropped to the floor.

Archer went through the door. A half a dozen men were running toward him. Several raised pistols to shoot. The room rang with the explosions. Archer rocked to their force, then lowering his head, drove through them like a battering ram.

He was out on the street. The officers were running after him, but they didn't shoot. They were afraid of hitting the crowd.

Archer found a taxi, pulled the driver from the seat and got in. The car shot into the traffic and toward Carmody's palatial home.

The same grim smile twisted Archer's lips. His eyes burned with a mad fire. Only one thought was in his mind, but that drummed over and over. It was an insistent refrain: "Get Carmody . . . Get Carmody . . . Get Carmody!"

He felt that Dad and Pug were at his side, urging him on. He could feel their invisible presences. "Nothing to live for . . . Get Carmody . . . You've nothing to live for . . . Get Carmody!"

Sirens shrieked behind him. He held the gas to the floorboard. The taxi rocketed through town, skidding around turns with screaming tires. But he held the wheel firm. Not all the police in the state could keep him from Carmody.

ARCHER pulled the taxi into Carmody's drive by main force. The car skidded half around, but he straightened it out and sped toward the white house that showed through the trees.

Then he saw a large automobile speeding down the drive toward him. He tried to pull aside, to go around it. But the drive was narrow. The gravel slipped under the wheels of the taxi. The big automobile struck the side of the taxi with a jangling crash. The rear end lifted into the air. A figure erupted through the metal top and sailed through the air like a doll, to land heavily in the soft earth of the garden.

The automobile balanced on its nose, then fell back on its side. The taxi was a twisted mass of wreckage. The radiator of the big car had driven directly into the driver's seat.

Pain was a red flood that swept in ever higher tides over Archer. He lay in the wreckage, unseeing, unhearing. He could only feel.

His shoulder was twisted awry and a great hole torn in his chest. The air burned like fire in his vitals. His right hand clawed at his chest as though to tear away the pain.

Then slowly the pain ebbed away. He ceased to writhe and lay still. It was as though he was waiting. He knew he was. He knew that he would either die, or recover. And he didn't care which it was.

He opened his eyes and could see. He looked down at his chest. It was healing rapidly. He caught a glimpse of the chauffeur's frightened face. The man's eyes were riveted on Archer's chest.

"How's your passenger?" Archer asked.

"I-I don't know," the fellow admitted. "Mr. Carmody—"

"Carmody!" Archer pushed himself up and crawled out the broken window. "Was that him?"

The chauffeur nodded. Archer got to his feet, straightened slowly, then went to the still body in the garden. It was Carmody all right. He looked at the flabby jowls. They were pasty now, almost like white clay.

The lowering wail of sirens was in his ears when he knelt at the side of the body. He lifted the body off the ground, shook it. And when the police came up to him he was laughing uncontrollably.

He saw them, and shook Carmody for their benefit. The head wobbled freely. "See!" he said. "See! Just like Pug. Someone phoned Carmody I was coming and he grabbed all those securities that I had for evidence and started to run away from me. And now he's just like Pug!"

One of the policemen followed Archer's pointing finger and saw the briefcase. It had burst open and the finely engraved bonds and securities were spilled over the garden.

"Jerusalem!" he gasped and he and another started to gather them while others took Archer back to town. He went with them willingly, almost gladly. Perhaps they could kill him.

JEANNE came to see him every day. She pleaded with him to make a defense, but he only shook his head with a grin.

"You didn't kill Carmody," she cried.

"Technicality," he answered quietly. "I intended to, and did accidentally."

"But they'll send you to the electric chair."

"That's where I want to go."

"But Gil, you have no right—"

"We can never belong to one another," he said quietly. "You will die if you stay near me; and I die when my body ceases to radiate so that you can."

"But maybe Dixon can—"

Archer shook his head. "My life-force is different now. It can't be changed back."

"But maybe I can be like you!"

"No!" he said gruffly. "Remember, we couldn't help Pug."

"But put up a defense anyway," she pleaded. "If you try at all, they won't convict you. I've hired lawyers. I've done all I could—all I can! It depends on you now. Don't you realize that they are going to kill you?"

"But, Jeanne, I want to die."

She left him then. And he was alone. It was best that he should die. He knew that with a dreadful certainty. Living, he would be always alone—for centuries. Or he would kill those with whom he came in contact.

When the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, he smiled. And the same smile was on his lips when the judge sentenced him to the electric chair. He went to the state penitentiary with that smile. He was satisfied.

Jeanne came to see him less often. He was glad, though he missed her visits. He was afraid of injuring her, even though he made her stay a good distance away. The last three days he didn't see her at all.

Early in the morning, they came for him. He got up wearily. His smile was gone. The great experience ahead stifled humor. He wondered if it would be like the last time he had . . . died. He hoped so. There had been pain of course, but not too much to endure for a short time.

He marched into the small doorway, the slit legs of his trousers flapping with each step. He won-

dered if he would ever feel anything again. Everything had a new, wonderful significance . . . the shuffling of the guard . . . the warden had a cold and he sniffed . . . his own heels tap, tap, tapped on the floor. He could feel the jar in his ankles, and he liked it. If only he could be like others, and go on living! But he knew he couldn't.

He sat down. The electrodes were cold. The hood covered his eyes and he couldn't see. He resented that. He wanted to see and feel until the end. He wanted to savor each sense impression to the fullest.

He heard a stir among the seated watchers. Then everything was still. Not a sound came to his acute ears.

Then there was a humming sound and his wrists and ankles and scalp prickled. His arms and legs jerked spasmodically, but there was no pain. He was an observer.

The prickling stopped. The doctor came and placed a stethoscope over his heart. And suddenly he wanted to laugh. Even they couldn't kill him. The State, millions of people, and they couldn't kill him. He was invulnerable!

"This man is dead," said a muffled voice.

Invulnerable! This man is dead! The words tangled in his mind and he choked with a sound that was halfway between a laugh and a sob.

There was the shuffling of many feet. A shout! Then someone ripped away the hood. Archer looked up to meet Dixon's eyes. The physicist was looking down at him with a queer smile.

"We couldn't get a pardon, Archer. I'm sorry." Then he bent forward. "Play dead," he whispered. "Jeanne is waiting. I know how—" He was jerked away and a guard forced him out of the room.

The doctor applied his stethoscope again. There was a puzzled frown on his forehead. He was muttering to himself. But Archer's mind echoed and re-echoed to the words, "Jeanne is waiting. I know how—" *"I know how—"*

Suddenly Gil Archer wanted very much to live. And they were preparing to send another current at thousands of volts through his body. It might kill him!

He struggled as they replaced the hood. But before he could break loose, the current was prickling at him again. He was already dead in the ordinary sense of the word, so it couldn't kill him. Suddenly he was positive that it couldn't. But they wouldn't let him go. Would they keep trying to kill him—sending jolt after jolt through his body? No! They would commute his sentence to life imprisonment. And life to him meant centuries! Centuries behind bars! Behind stone walls! Caged like an animal while generations were born, grew up and died in the outside world.

*"Play dead!"* The words flashed back into his mind suddenly. He sank back into the chair. He lay motionless. He must appear dead, for Jeanne was waiting for him.

The prickling ceased at last. The doctor came and applied every test. He was still muttering. He couldn't understand. The man should have been dead the first time.

Archer lay absolutely still. The doctor tested thoroughly, but he was testing for normal reflexes. Archer knew that his weren't normal.

At last the doctor straightened and Archer's spirits soared when he heard: "This man *is* dead."

He lay still while the observers filed out. And he didn't move when he was lifted out of the chair and taken to the small building near the hospital. Nor did he move when hours later he was lifted again and put into an automobile. The automobile lurched, then drove him away.

A VOICE said: "All right, you can wake up now."

The automobile had stopped. Archer opened his eyes and met Dixon's. "Here's a visitor for you. I don't like her company up front," Dixon grinned and helped Jeanne into the back of the truck.

Archer rolled off his stretcher and stared at her. She smiled at him, and waited. Still Archer could do or say nothing. Her lovely, oval face was glowing with a dull violet light.

"What . . . How . . ."

"She sneaked into the cyclotron room when we weren't looking. Of course she was a damn fool, but she guessed right. She's like you, now."

Dixon watched them, then snorted with disgust. "I thought I was backward, but I could give you lessons!"

Archer woke up and drew Jeanne to him. He looked over her shoulder at Dixon. "Beat it," he invited.

Dixon chuckled and slammed the door shut. A moment later the engine started again and the car rocked on the way. Archer met Jeanne's eyes and saw a promise of a longer lifetime of happiness than any man or woman had ever known. He lowered his lips to hers.

The spy-hole in the front opened suddenly and it framed Dixon's face. He laughed.

"And remember, Archer, you're dead. The university acquired your body legally and I'm going to study you. Then if you're very good, someday you can go away."

"One place is as good to hide as another," Archer grumbled. "But what about Jeanne?"

"If we take you, she'll follow," Dixon laughed. "Okay, I won't bother you any more." He closed the spy-hole.

Archer looked at Jeanne. "Do you mind living there?"

"Not with you," she replied.

His lips were close to hers when the small door in front opened again. And Dixon's face showed again. He looked at them for a moment. "All right. I just wanted to tell you I wouldn't bother any more."

# MARTIAN GUNS

## by STANLEY D. BELL

**By popular request we are reprinting this famous tale of the dangerous days when our world suffered an endless bombardment from the moon.**

*"A barrage of beams criss-crossed about them."*

THE thunderous roar from the crowd was suddenly silenced as Halliday closed the ports of the space ship, effectively sealing the crew of the Flame from the outer world. Jeers, epithets of ridicule, and great rousing cheers that had been flung through the port were alike shut out from metal walls of this human prison, as the first space ship prepared to ascend into the great void.

Halliday, lean, serious-faced, but of a commanding presence, turned to face the anxious little group of passengers who were to share this great adventure. Parker, Benedict, Perkins, Clayton, Morse, Landay; he counted them off. Then suddenly he looked about . . .

"Where's Vincent?" he asked quickly.

"Gone to the pump room to look over the apparatus," Morse, the little ship's cook, replied timidly.

"Very well, take your posts."

At Halliday's words, the six men silently strapped themselves into the deep-cushioned hammocks that lined the walls of the control room. Halliday, his face puckered into a frown, tested the gauges of the massive control board, glancing nervously at the electro-chronometer above his head.

"Eight minutes more," he grunted. Moving nervously to the porthole, and removing one of the quartz windows, he peered into the dusk across the great field, to where massed thousands stood waiting for the Flame to go roaring heavenward.

The labor, the turmoil, the anxiety of the building and testing of the ship was over, only to have the great gamble with cosmic forces begin. The chances were dead against them. Even though they survived the terrors of space and landed on the moon, there was the moon menace to face . . . but he preferred not to think about that now.

He wondered what those hordes of people were thinking about him and his crew. The world had poured enough ridicule onto the expedition to fill an ocean. Fools, they would laugh! They would have laughed harder had they known why the eight men of the Flame were risking death or worse in this stupendous journey. It was for their sake, the sake of the laughing fools, that all this had come about. . . .

Impatiently he closed the port to shut out the vision of the sea of human forms. Screwing the port tight, he turned again to face the members of the crew who were watching him intently from their hammocks.

Their lives were in his hands now. Once the journey started, the least twitch of a lever, a momentary inattention, his failure to retard the ship's plunge through space, any one of a dozen things, might mean the end of them all.

Turning away from their penetrating looks, he consulted his charts for the last time, and then took up a phone near his unoccupied hammock. Plugging in, he heard an answering muffled voice.

"Vincent speaking."

"Halliday, Vincent. Aren't you coming back here, man? We've got to get started."

"Start then," came Vincent's laconic answer. "I'll use the emergency bunk here and see you when we get into space."

Halliday mumbled a reply, and

opening the straps of his hammock, slid himself into its cushioned depths. Tightening the straps, he tested his position and the freedom of his arms to reach the gleaming brassy dials and levers at his side.

Adjusting the vision of the periscope before him that was to give him view of the earth, Halliday drew a deep breath and settled back.

The moment of the start was at hand, the labor of years was poised on this instant, as he narrowly watched the chronometer. And precisely as its single hand registered the hour of eight-thirty, Halliday unhesitatingly drew back the starting lever to the first notch.

As though catapulted from a great gun, he felt himself, his fellow passengers, his whole ship blown upward into emptiness. With an unseen weight pressing on his chest, he threw the lever into the second notch . . . then the third . . . the fourth . . . relentlessly shooting into the giant rocket tubes at the ship's tail, the gases of combustion that were severing the earth's grip on them.

Hardly breathing now, from the unbearable weight on his body, conscious of the muffled groans and sobs of his crew, Halliday grimly pulled the lever to the final notch, throwing into the gamble with the earth's pull, the maximum of his available power. The dials above his head that registered the velocity of escape from the earth, still fell short of the thin red mark that meant success. Either the red mark must be covered, or slowly, surely the earth's pull would draw them back . . . back until they crashed, a lifeless wreck on the earth's surface. With a painful effort, summoning every ounce of his strength, he thrust the lever home, until the arrow of the dial crept doggedly to the red line and hung there.

Exhausted, bathed in a cold sweat, Halliday sank back into the hammock. Spots danced before his eyes —red, and vividly green; the cabin swirled and gyrated; crazy figures filled his brain, and at last with a grim smile of satisfaction he drifted off into a deep cool oblivion.

AS HALLIDAY, and his comrades, lay wrapped in unconsciousness, exhausted by the rigors of this battle with a brutal nature, some inquiring interplanetary creature might have wondered at the curious forces that had brought these diverse men together on a hazardous journey into the unknown.

There they lay, white-faced, lifeless — still, clutching with frenzied fingers the sides of their hammocks. Six men, from every walk of life, united in an adventure that had excited the ridicule and the grudging admiration of the world.

There was Halliday himself, resting in the space ship that was the result of the dream of his father and himself. The work on which the elder Halliday had spent his life—sheets of blueprints embodying a genius of inspiration for the building of an interplanetary vehicle — had been taken up by the youth and vigor of his son David, when the old man passed on. David, like his father, had met sneers and incredulous faces in his years of search for the wealth that would translate a confusion of lines and symbols into a metal monster of giant power. And only the strange accident of fate that had brought Halliday the secret of the moon menace, had made the ship possible.

It was Halsey Benedict, lying with

closed eyes and mouth agape at Halliday's right, who had staked his fortune on this strange adventure. Benedict, man of the world, captor of feminine hearts, the sportsman who had stated publicly that "the earth had no more thrills for him," now lay helpless, in the lap of an adventure beyond anything he had ever dreamed.

Except for Floyd Parker, former assistant astronomer at the Kingsley Observatory, the rest of the crew were a strange assortment of men, drawn together from the accidents of life, by the magnetism of a great undertaking. These men were Halliday's choice—of the thousands who had come to him—whom he believed he could depend upon in the crises they were certain to face.

There was Perkins, who had admitted having served a jail sentence for robbery, but who was a genius at mechanics; big Rob Clayton, crack aviator, with his hunted look of some crime he was trying to expiate; little Morse, ship's cook, who had protested to Halliday that he would rather face the dangers of space than the wife from whom he had three times run away fruitlessly; Ken Landay, former interne, who looked as though the world had gone sour on him; and Vincent who had demanded and been paid his own price as the compensation for risking his life, "on this fool thing."

Except for Vincent, hidden away now in the depths of the ship, the six men struggled to release themselves from the pit of unconsciousness into which they had fallen. And enclosing them like a steel coffin, the Flame, three thousand miles from the earth, sped in utter silence through the mystery and infinity of interstellar space.

CLAYTON was the first to awaken. He groaned softly, strained against the creaking straps and opened startled eyes. Stretching his great arms, he looked about him, and then realizing suddenly the meaning of the silence in the metal-walled cabin, he unbuckled the straps. With precision he put on the metal shoes, and testing cautiously the floor to make sure that it had been magnetized, he walked unsteadily to the still motionless form of Halliday. Gently he rubbed Halliday's white temples until a flicker of life showed itself in the unconscious man's eyes.

All over the cabin, men were drifting back to awareness. Halliday sat up and gazed at Clayton gratefully. The latter nodded silently and went back to his own bunk. Halliday squinted at the velocity dial thoughtfully for a moment, then satisfied, he turned to the others.

"Everyone all right?"

"Righto."

"You bet."

"We're all here. . . ."

Halliday grinned, then turned to the periscope. Like a mottled vaporous-rimmed ball, he saw the earth floating in a sea of ink. "Come here, you explorers," he called to the others, "and see your former home."

As the men crowded about, Halliday suddenly bethought himself of the absent Vincent.

"Look after things, Clayton," he called to the former aviator. "I'm going to take a look around."

Clayton nodded as Halliday, already at the door, opened it and strode down the narrow metal aisle to the apparatus room. He thrust open another door and emerged into a room with great swollen veins of pipes ridging the ceiling. Near the instrument board that filled one wall,

he saw the still unconscious form of Vincent on the emergency hammock.

But even before he reached the man, he stopped startled. This was not Vincent. . . . He rushed to the side of the hammock, and stood there thunder struck. . . . With peaceful face, eyes closed, and full lips dry and cracked, lay the girl who had so aroused his enmity through the preliminary stages of the expedition, Nina Wingate!

He thrust open the door, and called down the aisle. "Parker, Parker!" It was Parker's job, this, to attend to her. The effeminate-looking Parker was the one who had always been mooning about her, fighting for her favors. Now let Parker have the distinction of reviving her, he thought grimly.

Halliday was angry at this final trick of Nina's, so angry that when Parker rushed into the room, he pointed to the lifeless form carelessly. "You might take care of her, Parker," he said to the astonished astronomer. Then he strode from the room.

Halliday drew Benedict aside on returning to the control room. The latter once more at his composure—aristocratic, distant, aware of his handsome, distinguished features, looked at Halliday quizzically.

"Miss Wingate is our passenger," Halliday whispered.

Benedict mastered his surprise admirably. Then he permitted himself a low chuckle. "Eight men and a woman," he said significantly.

"Seven men," Halliday grunted. He saw the explanation now. Vincent had sold himself out. That must have been the meaning of the little whispered conversation that he had interrupted on coming upon Vincent and Nina one day in the great construction shed.

"See what you can do, will you?" Halliday said softly to Benedict. "But don't interrupt any love scenes."

Benedict gazed intently at Halliday for a moment, then nodded, going toward the door.

Halliday turned his attention to the dials. So far, the ship had passed the eight-thousand-mile mark on its 240,000 mile journey to the moon. Through the periscope he saw the earth shrinking like a gently deflated balloon.

Morse had already disappeared into the galley to prepare the first meal in space. Landay and Clayton, who had struck up a close friendship, were peering together from the single port that gave view into the great spaces.

"Anything I can do, sir?" Perkins asked.

Halliday shook his head. He had a deep affection for the little runt, this ex-jailbird whose ingenuity had helped him over many tight places in the building of the ship. He patted the man's shoulder.

"Get some rest, Perk," he said. "The hard work is coming soon enough." And taking up his mass of diagrams that were to be the guiding curves of the flight through space, Halliday buried himself in plans for the next step in their battle to reach the moon.

Two hours had passed, the earth retreating ten thousand miles into its background of velvet, before Nina appeared from her seclusion.

The crew had meanwhile settled down to its routine. Perkins was busy inspecting the apparatus in the place of the missing Vincent; big Clayton was navigating the ship according to the charts Halliday had checked. Landay was writing the ship's log.

Benedict had easily accustomed himself to the confinement of the

ship and its lack of luxury. For the past hour he had been regaling the open-mouthed Morse with some of the more juicy of his stories of conquests of women and tigers.

Parker was busy at the little telescope, watching for signals from the earth, that might indicate that they had been sighted, when Nina walked into the room and strode up to Halliday.

"Well, I'm here, captain," she said graciously.

Halliday, who had expected that she would present herself shamefacedly, was nonplussed for a moment. Then his indignation found expression.

"You've nearly ruined our plans!"

Nina smiled captivatingly. "Oh no I haven't. You know, I told you before we left that I could do anything that your men could. But you simply wouldn't let me come . . . and I came."

Halliday was forced to admit that Nina was right in her statement that she could do a man's work. She was both an astronomer and a mechanic. But she should not have been here, and he told her so flatly.

But while the men looked on this little scene with surprise and then amusement, Halliday suddenly dismissed the incident from his mind. After all, there were more important things to be considered.

He looked about at the men. With the exception of Benedict and Parker—and now Nina, none of them knew the reason for this journey. All believed, as the world did, that it was a space expedition—simply an attempt of a band of brave and foolish men to reach our dead satellite.

"Men," Halliday said sharply. They looked at him.

"I've got a little story to tell you," he continued. He turned to the former aviator. "Will you stay at the controls, Clayton; you can listen just as well that way." Clayton nodded as questioning looks flashed from man to man. Had something gone wrong? Were they turning back?

"This trip is no mere space expedition. It has behind it a more important purpose, a rather sinister purpose I might say."

## CHAPTER II

## AN UNBELIEVABLE STORY

HE PAUSED a moment as startled expressions passed over the faces of his listeners. Only Nina, gazing at Halliday with softened eyes, and Parker and Benedict, wore understanding looks. But in Parker's face there was also derision and scorn, that Halliday did not fail to notice.

"I know you don't believe in this, Parker," Halliday answered his look. "But we'll soon find out what the truth is. Men," he said suddenly, "we are going to the moon to discover if there is not there a colony of Martians determined on wiping our race from the earth."

Clayton at the controls sucked in his breath audibly, glancing meanwhile at the white-faced Landay. Morse tittered nervously, while Perkins gazed open-mouthed at his chief.

"Don't look at me that way," Halliday went on, "I'm not mad. There is certain evidence that the astronomer of Kingsley Observatory, Miss Wingate's father, has collected that has convinced him and nearly convinced me, that there is a colony of Martians on the moon, and that they have already begun a bombardment of the earth."

And while the little group of men, and a single woman listened in their

little metal prison to this most amazing of stories, the ship cut its way through the nothingness that separated earth from its satellite, drawing nearer and nearer to the half-illuminated Lunar face.

Quietly now, Halliday recounted the series of incidents that had led to the building of the Flame.

He told how his father's friend, John Wingate, elderly astronomer of the great Kingsley Observatory had invited him one day to view an early autumn full moon through the marvellous new lens that Wingate's genius had devised. And when Halliday had gazed his full of the jagged, pitted lunar surface, Wingate had taken him aside and told him the amazing story that was the reason for this expedition.

It had bowled Halliday over. Even his own plans for a space ship, that he believed would be the first successful ship to conquer the interstellar void, were thrown into insignificance by this astounding news of a threat to earth by an alien force.

Patiently Wingate had explained how four years ago at the last opposition of earth with Mars, when the planets were closest, he had seen near the lunar rim flashes of light, that might have come from the reflection of the sun on metal surfaces. Observing the moon two days later, Wingate had perceived minute changes on the moon, near the center of the crater of Archimedes. The changes could be interpreted only as some strange lunar activity. Then abruptly all activity had ceased. It was only after observing the moon fruitlessly for two years, in fact until the next opposition of Mars, that Wingate had had an opportunity to test a theory of his that was so startling as to make him question his own sanity.

To his astonishment, almost to his incredulity, he had observed one night, as Mars and earth swung closer together again, a new series of light flashes near the moon. But whereas before there had been a half dozen, now Wingate had distinguished almost a hundred. And following this there had come renewed evidence of some more changes in the crater of Archimedes.

This was the first part of the story that Wingate had told to an astonished Halliday two years ago. And Halliday, despite his eagerness to find support for the building of the space ship, and despite his own open mindedness, had not dared to ask the old astronomer his conclusions. But Wingate had himself advanced them. He had brought out of a drawer a two-inch sliver of a bluish metal and placed it before Halliday.

"This," Wingate had said, "was what I found when I investigated the site of the meteor that fell in Kansas last week."

The meteor had excited considerable attention when it fell flaming through the heavens to settle, incandescent in a lonely Kansas plain. Astronomers had hastened there, and among the first to reach the spot had been Wingate. The meteor, almost twenty cubic feet in volume, had plowed its way deep into the earth. And while astronomers planned to rescue it for our museums, Wingate, excited by something strange in the wanderer, had searched about in the neighborhood for something he believed would be found. And this piece of blue metal was his reward.

Several weeks of feverish calculations followed for the old astronomer. When at last he had finished, he announced to Halliday and Parker his belief that the meteor was a shell thrown at the earth by a gigantic gun

on the moon; and that the assailants were from the planet Mars.

Despite Parker's disbelief and Halliday's half-hearted support, Wingate had used his reputation to persuade the President of the United States to send a committee to investigate what he said was a "serious occurrence."

But the committee had gone away jeering, open contempt for Wingate's sanity written on their faces. The belief in another form of life traversing the distance from Mars to the moon, building a gigantic cannon there and bombarding the earth, escaped their entire range of ideas. It was not long afterwards that an attempt had been made to force Wingate out of his post as director of the Observatory; and only Wingate's promise to remain silent about the affair caused the release of pressure against him.

So the matter had rested until Nina, Halliday admitted grudgingly, had brought it to the attention of the enormously wealthy Benedict. And Benedict, carelessly handing over half of his fortune for the possibility of a new thrill, had made the building of Halliday's ship possible.

"So that is the story," Halliday finished. "Our journey is an attempt to discover the meaning of Wingate's phenomena. If he is right, and there are creatures on the moon that can bombard the earth, then it's goodbye human race. If not . . ." he finished expressively, "we will have had a pleasant journey."

THE absolute incredulity in the faces of Halliday's listeners had been changing, as he went on, with the story, to looks of suspicion. When he finished, the men exchanged uneasy glances, as though to determine what could be done, on this speeding island in space, controlled by an apparent madman. Even little Perkins showed his wavering loyalty.

Nina, sensing the hostile reception Halliday's story had met, broke the silence. "It's all quite true what Mr. Halliday has told you. My father believes that there are Martians on the moon; and I believe it too," she finished defiantly.

"Your beliefs are not important to this expedition, Miss Wingate," Halliday said sternly.

"I say . . ." Parker began in protest.

"No need to, Parker," Halliday interrupted. "I am in command of this ship." He turned to the men. "Perhaps I have done you an injustice by taking you on a journey whose purpose you did not know. But secrecy was absolutely essential, and this is the first chance I've had to tell you the story. If any of you don't care to be exposed to the dangers we will meet, just speak up, and I'll provide safety for you."

There was silence in the cabin. Then Benedict spoke with his easy assurance. "You know we're with you to the end, Halliday."

"Me too," said Perkins, blushing.

"I'm in," growled Clayton.

"Don't leave me out, sir," chimed in Morse.

"Count me in," Landay said quietly.

All eyes were turned toward Parker, who had been silent.

"Of course I want to do my share," he stammered. "But I think the whole thing is a wild dream," he added, glaring at Halliday.

"Floyd," Nina said soothingly, "we're in this thing to stay now. Let Mr. Halliday work it out his own way. Of course," she addressed Halliday, "I want you to consider me as one of the men."

Halliday ignored her. He glanced

at the dials that registered the distance from the earth and moon.

"Now, men," he said quietly, "there's nothing to be concerned about until our landing on the moon in fourteen hours. By that time I will have plans already made for the next step."

The men dispersed to their hammocks, and to their several duties. Halliday went back to his charts.

So the next hours passed by, the absolute silence of space unbroken. In a motionless universe the Flame seemed afloat in emptiness, no sense of her speed conveyed to those within her walls. Only the gradually expanding ball of the moon far ahead and to the right, gave evidence that they were slowly approaching their goal.

There was however about the men, a new nervous tension, a waiting for the approaching test with some monstrous force. Several times Perkins hesitatingly approached Halliday to question him more in detail about the supposed bombardment.

The hypothesis of a gun bombarding the earth from the moon fascinated him most.

"A gun to shoot 240,000 miles, golly," he moistened his lips. "It can't be."

Halliday smiled. "It's not so hard to understand, Perkins. You see the moon had only one sixth the gravitational pull of the earth. And whereas it would take a muzzle speed of some 7 miles a second to fire a projectile from the earth to escape to the moon, to hit the earth from the moon you need a little over a mile a second. The guns used for bombardment of the English channel ports in 1940 could almost have done the trick."

"But how can they aim to hit the earth?" Perkins protested. "It ain't a big target for a 240,000 mile shot."

Halliday frowned suddenly. "As a matter of fact, Park, they couldn't miss us. If the shell comes at all within the gravitational field of the earth and its speed is less than 7 miles a second, it will be pulled to the earth. A hit every time."

Perkins turned away, and Halliday noticed that for the remainder of the journey, the little mechanic was deeply absorbed in thought.

IT was during the twentieth hour of the flight that the first interruption of the progress to the moon threw the crew of the Flame into a panic. It was becoming evident as the hours passed that the sense of confinement in the vessel was reacting upon the men's nerves, Parker's especially. Walking nervously up and down the little control room, occasionally mumbling to himself, he served to increase the sense of an impending tragedy.

Benedict, finally exasperated, asked the man point blank. "What's eating you, Parker?"

"Eating me," he flashed back. "This whole idiotic journey. Here we are, nine crazy fools in this prison, at the mercy of every force in the universe. If there's nothing on the moon, we might crash there and die miserably. If there are some creatures, what's to stop them from spotting us in space and using their gun on us?"

This possibility had not occurred to the men. It seemed to strike them forcibly.

Finally Perkins sneered. It had become evident that no love existed between him and Parker, who had referred to him as the "jailbird."

"So you're getting to believe in the Martians, Mr. Parker?"

Halliday quieted the man sternly, and gradually the incident was for-

gotten. But the effect upon the men's minds was clearly evident in the haggard lines of their faces. As Benedict put it, "it reminded me of the fellows chasing through a sub zone, in the days of our fathers, waiting to be torpedoed at any minute."

To men expecting that anything might happen, an event occurring less than an hour later threatened to throw them into a virtual panic.

The cabin was abnormally quiet at the moment. Halliday was at the controls; Parker at the telescope; Nina was gazing longingly through the periscope at the receding earth, while Benedict, Morse, and Perkins in one corner and Clayton and Landay in another were holding quiet conversations.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a shriek from Parker.

"My God!" he screamed, "here comes a shell!"

The men jumped up in alarm, as Parker rushed wildly upon Halliday and jerked his arm. "Turn the ship, get out of the way," he beat upon Halliday hysterically, "it's coming, a shell, a shell!"

Halliday had no chance to shake off the fear-crazed man when there came a sudden terrific clang, as though the mighty hammer of a Titan had beaten upon the ship's metal hull. The ship careened violently, the men being thrown to the floor. There they lay stunned, hardly breathing, as the terrific vibrations of sound set up by the concussion pounded deafeningly on their ears.

Parker was the first to recover. He jumped up and dashed toward the controls. "I'll turn the ship. We're lost," he screamed.

Halliday sprang toward the man, and yanked him backward, sent him flying to the floor where he lay still.

It looked as though the crew had been turned mad by this episode. Only Nina lay unmoving, still on the floor where she had fallen.

Halliday swung upon them. "Keep your senses, you fools," he shouted. "That was only a meteor."

The men looked at him glowering.

"It was only a meteor, I tell you," he repeated. "If that had been a shell, we'd all be dead now."

"They'll get us next time," Morse snarled, panic-stricken. "Let's turn about."

"We can't turn," Halliday took a threatening step toward him. "If we're going to be killed, we'll get it sooner turning around. We've got to keep on."

Clayton came to his rescue. "He's right; we've got to keep on."

Benedict had bent over the unconscious form of Nina and was lifting her to a cot. The sight of the girl quieted the men temporarily. Halliday, with sudden determination, turned toward the room where the ship's stores were kept.

Benedict looked up from his ministrations of the awakening girl.

"Where are you going, Halliday?"

"I'm going outside the ship to investigate," Halliday returned.

Nina suddenly became alive. She tried to elude Benedict, to leave the hammock. "Don't go," she turned pleadingly to Halliday, "you'll be killed."

Halliday turned on her in amazement. "Nonsense," he laughed harshly, "I'm taking a space suit. Watch the controls, Clayton. Landay, let's have some of your medical ability in bringing Parker around. Perkins, you prepare the airlock."

He disappeared, while the men hastened to fill his orders. In five minutes he returned, a bulging, grotesque figure of metal. Only the glass plate of the eyes gave evidence that

it was a human being and not some monstrous planetary creature. He waved heavily a thick metal arm to the men, as Benedict restrained the struggling Nina to prevent her from rushing to Halliday.

Perkins, working at the controls of the inner airlock, had already swung open the door, exposing a small metal compartment, barely large enough for a metal-cased man to stand. Halliday stepped in unhesitatingly and Perkins closed the door behind him. In a moment there came a flash of light from a bulb at the airlock control board, signifying that Halliday was ready to be released into space.

Pulling back a lever, Perkins shouted, "There he goes!"

HALLIDAY'S first sensation as the outer door of the lock opened, was an overwhelming giddiness. He looked out into an unfathomable black abyss, where, an uncountable distance away, dead stars shone unblinking. For a moment this depth seemed like a bottomless well into which he would fall to certain destruction should he take a step forward.

Giving a little laugh of defiance in his metal helmet, he gently placed a foot into the void, and then swinging his body on an axis turned abruptly so that he faced the ship. Then flashing the searchlight integral with the space suit on the ship's metal hull, he found the row of rungs that was to guide him over the ship's exterior.

The sound of the collision had come apparently from the ship's nose. Gripping each rung carefully, he moved through the blackness, playing the light ahead of him, exploring each inch of the smooth, metal expanse.

Above the hull and to the right, he caught a glimpse of brightness. Raising his head cautiously he perceived with wonder the half-lighted ball of the moon, its seas and craters etched sharply in the sun's pitiless light.

For a moment he stood there, alone in the infinite, looking down upon that globe that held the menace of extinction to his race. Then shaking off his mingled feeling of wonder, awe, and fear, he continued forward.

With a sudden exclamation, he played his light ten feet ahead, where the smooth surface was dented. Crawling forward hastily, he examined the eight-inch depression and discovered that the metal of the exterior hull had been crushed as if by a smashing blow.

The interior hull, separated from the exterior by a vacuum, was still undamaged. Halliday chuckled to himself. There was no doubt in his mind that it had been a meteor, perhaps six inches in diameter, that Parker had perceived bearing down upon them. Because of the sun's glare on it, Parker's fear-mad mind must have enlarged the vision to that of a gigantic shell, bearing death to them.

Giving a final look around, and satisfied that the hull remained otherwise intact, Halliday started the painful return. He had been out four minutes now. But an eight minute's supply of oxygen remained in the temporary container he had snatched up in his haste.

Halliday never knew exactly how the accident happened. Perhaps it was a growing sense of giddiness, or maybe a slight exhaustion, or perhaps a too rich oxygen mixture in his helmet, that caused him to lose his grip on the rungs. But he knew that a sudden dizziness came over him, and to ward off an impending faint he raised his body from the crawling position. In doing so he may

have released his hold upon the rungs, and involuntarily kicked his leg against the ship. For suddenly he saw the ship swiftly move away, and found himself floating in emptiness.

Moving at an angle to the ship, he saw it quickly retreat into the void, growing smaller perceptibly before his eyes. It had happened with such suddenness that Halliday was stunned. Then panic filled him. He kicked his legs violently, shouted into the disc phone, that he knew was not connected with the ship, paddled with his arms against the empty void. Smaller and smaller was the speeding Flame, as the minutes passed. Waves of despair passed through the doomed man as he sensed the thinning supply of his oxygen, and the unaccustomed heat of the sun began to penetrate his metal casing.

His pulse beat like pounding hammers; it seemed in his feverish brain that Martian devils were pounding upon his suit with red hot hammers, tearing away his protective armor. He found himself immersed in a vat of boiling iron, which hissed and ate at his defenseless body . . . he fainted . . .

He came back to slow awakening still struggling to find blurred faces about him that he recognized as his comrades. The mist cleared, and drawing painful breaths of air, Halliday looked about. In the next hammock, sobbing he saw the slender form of Nina Wingate, and above her Parker, trying vainly to soothe her.

Halliday relaxed. "So I'm alive."

"Miss Wingate's work, you know," Benedict, looming above him, put in.

Halliday struggled to sit up. "Miss Wingate?"

Landay eased Halliday back into the hammock. "Better lie quietly for awhile. Yes, Miss Wingate, watching at the port, saw you drift away from the ship, and when we turned about to get you, insisted on going out after you. She slipped on a space suit, grabbed a reaction pistol, found you floating unconscious, and brought you back. Plucky girl!"

"Right," boomed Clayton. "The rest of us were scared stiff."

Halliday laughed weakly. "Rescued by a girl." He dropped off to a restful sleep.

## CHAPTER III

## HOSTILITIES

AS THE moon swam closer and closer, its bulk swelling in the heavens, the excitement of the little group in the Flame mounted proportionately. The new and unaccustomed sights of the heavens threw into the background temporarily the terrific secret that the moon might hold. For hours the eight explorers would take turns in gazing at the receding ball of the earth through the periscope, and then through Parker's telescope at the onrushing moon.

Then the possible menace of the moon, and the memory of the narrow escape of their commander, would rush down upon them, and they would fall into moods of depression.

Halliday, as he prepared for the time of landing, looked upon Nina with a new wonder. Determined, since he was a boy, upon the one mission of his life, he had rigidly excluded women from his thoughts. They were, he believed, simply a weakening influence upon a man who had something important to accomplish. And Nina, despite her penetrating intelligence, had been to him simply a member of her sex.

Now he was forced to look upon her in a new light, as the saviour of the expedition. To his thanks, Nina had hardly replied, and in the hours since the accident she had avoided him for Parker's and Benedict's company.

As the time came when the ship, plunging moonward, had escaped to the moon's gravitational influence, Halliday had completed plans which he announced to the men.

They were to land in a part of the crater of Archimedes sixty miles to the west of where the Martian encampment was believed to exist, where a range of mountains would hide them from view. They would then divide into two search parties to reconnoiter the land. Benedict was to lead one party, with Perkins and Morse; he himself would take the other with Clayton and Landay. Parker and Nina would remain with the ship.

Parker could not conceal his relief, but Nina made protest at once.

"I object," she said disdainfully. "I insist upon accompanying one party."

"But Nina," Parker broke in . . .

"I insist, I say," she silenced him. "If you don't allow me to go with you," she said to Halliday, "I shall go out alone."

Halliday bit his lip. She was openly defying him . . . but after all he owed her his life . . .

"Very well," he agreed. "You may come with me. Landay, will you remain with Parker?"

"I would rather remain with Clayton," Landay said slowly.

Nina looked squarely at Parker. "Don't you want to come with us, Floyd?"

Parker looked at her, guiltily, and then lowered his head. "Yes, of course." So it was agreed.

At ten thousand miles from the moon, intent observation of Archimedes was begun. Although Parker declared that he could see nothing in the small-powered 'scope to give signs of activity there, Halliday declared that he himself had visioned a faint checkerboard series of squares that almost filled the crater. The others who took turns at the telescope were divided in their views. It was agreed that they were still too far away to see distinctly.

Five thousand miles away, the moon swelled to fill the heavens and the ship's course was turned toward an angle with her path. The ship, minute in its comparison to the Juggernaut satellite, swung through the void. Its rocket tubes beat furiously their silent song of power, as its course was delicately adjusted by the intent Halliday for a safe landing.

With Parker observing their position through the telescope, and Perkins calling the readings of speed and power from the dials, Halliday worked furiously, sending the power into this rocket tube and then that as the ship swung perilously close to the onrushing world.

There was no time now for observing the lunar craters. All of the crew's energy was turned into the battle to stave off a precipitous collision with the pitted lunar surface. Closer and closer came the two flying bodies, more and more the ship swung erratically this way and that as the moon swung by beneath them.

Parker, dizzied by the rush of the moon's surface beneath them, had yielded his place at the telescope to Benedict, who coolly called off their lunar positions. Helpless, with fear-whitened faces, the others clung to their hammocks, watching this gamble with life or death.

Now they were barely a mile above the surface; a huge mountain tow-

ered into the heavens miles before them; Benedict shouted the warning. Halliday, sweating, gripped the lever that sent the ship careening out of harm's way.

At last Halliday shouted, "Hold on everyone; here we come!" A plateau loomed before them. The ship dropped swiftly, its path inclining to the onrushing flat surface. At once there was a violently crashing jar; the room turned upside down. There were momentary screams of terror, then silence.

THE plateau on which they had landed, they discovered, when they had sufficiently recovered to gaze from the portholes, was really the northwestern rim of Archimedes. Far in the distance, they saw on every side great walls leaping upward to the depthless, black skies.

Bruised, weary, exhausted, they gathered about the portholes. They exclaimed in wonder at this world of monstrous mountain masses that had seemingly been torn from the land and thrown upward with the careless hand of a giant.

Clayton was for putting on space suits and exploring the lunar surface at once, but Halliday restrained him.

"The moon is no picnic ground," he warned, pointing to the irregular patches of shadows thrown by cliffs upraised against the sun. "If you don't watch out, you either freeze or roast out there. The sunny side of the moon is at a boiling temperature and the dark side close to absolute zero. So wait until we can get the lay of our land."

While Morse served the last meal in the disordered control room to the hungry adventurers, Halliday focused his attention upon the details of the lunar surface. He saw quickly that the lunar day was about forty-eight earth hours old upon the part of the moon where they rested. There was no immediate danger, therefore, of being suddenly caught in the horrible cold of the two-week night.

Consulting his map, he traced in his eye the details of the scenery about them. The place upon which they had landed was nearly fifty miles southwest from the part of Archimedes where the menace was believed to exist. Thus far they were safe here, by the protecting walls about them, from the prying eyes of any creatures who might inhabit the other part of the crater. Here they could become accustomed to the conditions on the moon, and prepare gradually for the final test of the moon menace.

For the next twenty-four hours, encased in space suits, the little band cruised over the lunar surface in their neighborhood testing their newly won power over gravity. They learned to jump high into the air and land safely; to float majestically over the space ship. They learned to walk when need be, close to the surface, and take advantage of all the shade offered by outjutting rocks.

It was evident that none of them could remain exposed to the sunlight for more than a few minutes at a time; and Morse, who had defied Halliday's warning, was already ill from a minor sunstroke. The space suits had been built carefully with this contingency in mind, but nothing could withstand for long the merciless floods of solar heat that poured down upon the unprotected lunar surface.

They had been on the moon for some twenty hours when Halliday called them together. He could see in their faces a worn look, indicating clearly that they all suffered from the unaccustomed brutality of stark

nature on this dead world. But their faces were resolute, too, as they waited patiently for him to speak.

"The earth is depending on us now, folks," he said soberly. "Our picnic is over; the dirty work starts. Over there to the southeast is our goal. If we find it dead and empty like this," he waved his hands expressively about him, "no one will be more glad than I. But if we don't, then there's going to be hell to pay."

He turned to the white-faced Morse who lay in his hammock listening. "Are you well enough to join us, Morse?"

The little man sprang from his bunk. "You can't leave me behind," he threw out his fist aggressively.

Halliday gave a little laugh. "Then our parties are as before. Benedict, you take the easterly path to the crater. Your job is to get there as soon as possible, keeping under cover at all times. Get as close as you can to the crater, and when you have seen what's there, or what isn't there, come back here. We will do the same. But in any case we must meet here again in 18 hours."

Perkins whistled. "Sixty miles there and back through this heat in 18 hours? Have a heart, boss."

Halliday smiled. "Remember we're on the moon, Perk. You go six times as fast."

He turned to a box set into one wall, and drew out a dozen revolvers and rifles.

"For defensive action only," he warned. "Have you enough water and food for eighteen hours?" Each man nodded. "Enough oxygen?" Again came the affirmative. "Then let's start."

In the bustle of preparation to encase themselves in space suits, Halliday turned to Clayton and Landay, who looked on grimly.

"I haven't any idea that you boys have a cinch here," he gripped their hands. "I know you'll do your jobs, and you'll hold the ship for us, no matter what happens. If we lose the ship we may be stranded here for life."

They nodded understandingly, and moved to the airlocks, to usher into the great adventure the rest of their comrades. One by one, as the six stepped into the airlock, the two who were to remain waved an affectionate goodbye.

Once upon the surface, the two parties faced each other. Encased in their suits, clumsily gripping their weapons, they could only salute each other, before setting off upon their separate paths.

Clayton and Landay watching eagerly through their ports, restraining inexplicable tears, saw the parties move quickly away. Like two sets of metal monsters, the parties separated more and more, with the sun glinting fiercely from their polished sides. They bobbed up and down as they ascended little hills and disappeared into craters. Swiftly their sizes dwindled as they moved away until finally all that could be seen of them were two spots of light, shining, then lost to view, shining again, and finally disappearing.

TO BENEDICT and his two companions moving over the eastern route to the crater of unknown terrors, the silence of the moon was terribly oppressive.

Setting their first goal for a huge peak that loomed slightly to the south, they moved swiftly across the broken table-land. They pursued an erratic and circuitous course as they dodged from hole to hole, taking advantage of all possible shade.

Their sense of isolation on this

world of sharply jagged peaks, sun-baked plains where not a single thing grew, and the ominousness of the black sky overhead, kept them silent for a long time. Only the crescent of the earth, hanging low in the west, gave them the courage to plod on mile after mile through the smothering heat.

Several times, as if by agreement, they stopped to gaze longingly at the hanging ball that was their home; and to trace out continents that meant safety and security. But the realization that the place of life and love might be turned into a house of terror were the moon menace to exist, drove them on, even when they would have stopped.

They had gone on for about five hours, and long since had lost sight of the ship and Halliday's party, when Perkins stopped suddenly at the crest of a little ridge and emitted a shrill warning into the disc phone.

"My God!" he shouted, "look!"

He had scrambled back into the security of the little hole from which they were emerging and pointed out toward another eminence directly to the west.

Hugging the hot ground the others peered out from their shelter. They saw, moving across their vision, a band of creatures that verified their worst fears. There were more than a dozen of them, two-footed, two-armed things, towering nearly seven feet tall, that stalked, sharply etched by the sun across the lunar skyline.

They were about a half mile away, yet even at that distance, in the airless void, the three earthmen could see that they were some form of man, encased in fur-like suits. The suits were cylindrical, bulging enormously at the chest, elongated at the head, like a stovepipe, giving them a curiously absurd appearance. But the long purposeful stride of the group, as they deviated neither to the left nor to the right in the pursuit of some unseen goal, gave them a dogged and sinister air.

The men had been stunned to silence by this vision. At once they plugged into their phones.

"What are they?" Morse cried.

"Our friends, the Martians," Benedict answered from his phone. Although he tried to keep his voice unconcerned, it quivered with intensity. The man who welcomed unknown dangers scented a new and exciting hunt.

"What'll we do?" Morse asked. He gripped his rifle.

"I say, let's get closer," Perkins whispered, as though he might be overheard. "We can cut across," he pointed to a gully that shot off to the west, "and then see where they're going. Maybe they're moving toward the ship."

"Good idea," Benedict commended. "Let's go."

Cautiously the three moved along the bottom of the thirty-foot gully, climbing cautiously to its top every hundred feet to observe the Martian group. For they already accepted the strangers as Martians and realized that here were the vandals of the earth that John Wingate had pictured.

They had advanced about a half mile, when Perkins suddenly plugged in with an exclamation.

"They're going to meet Halliday's party!"

Benedict swore. "They will, at that."

"We've got to do something," Perkins whispered. "Let's go at them."

Benedict looked through his visor in admiration at the little man.

"Right you are, Perk. Are you with us, Morse?"

"Ye—es," Morse stammered. "Count me in."

Benedict peered again from the crest where they were observing the Martian group. He saw that in another ten minutes they certainly would pass close to where Halliday and his party would be innocently moving westward. The Martians lay, in fact, almost directly between the two earth parties. Their sole chance was to hurry along the gully, which seemed to be endless, and to cut in between Halliday's party and the Martians.

Quickly explaining this to his comrades, Benedict moved forward, forgetting now the sun's blistering heat, and their growing weariness. Perkins, who seemed intent only on saving Halliday from an ambush, was in the lead when he suddenly stopped and spoke huskily into the phone.

"I think they've sighted Halliday."

The others gazed ahead and saw that the Martian group had halted. They were clustered together peering toward the south, conversing among themselves. Although they evidently had sighted something, they betrayed no excitement. There was something curiously cold and passionless in their attitudes.

Perkins had already raised his rifle. "Let's let them have it," he shouted into his phone. Sprawling to the ground, he took careful aim and squeezed the trigger twice. A shot seemed to take effect for one of the Martians whirled suddenly, threw up his great arms and sank to the ground.

Benedict and Morse had also taken cover and had dropped two more of the Martians before the latter seemed to realize that they had death-dealing enemies to confront. Then slowly they took what shelter their exposed position afforded, while a hail of shots poured into their ranks. Another Martian rolled over, as the others seemed to whip from bag-like coverings long pistol-like contrivances of dull metal. Whipping them about across the lunar surface they caused the stone to heat instantly into lava where the unseen beams had touched.

"What's that they've got?" whispered Morse, as the barrage of heat beams came closer and closer.

"God knows," Benedict answered desperately. "They seem to be able to melt the whole moon."

By some queer sense of direction, the Martians were gradually focusing their rays toward the earthlings' shelter. It seemed but a few minutes before the whole hillside where the three men lay would be heated instantly into an unbearable molten fluid that would force them into the open.

One beam just grazed the top of the hill. There was a sputtering flame across the men's vision and with a shrill cry of pain, Benedict rolled to the bottom of the gully. One arm of his space suit had been fused two inches above the wrist.

With exclamations of horror his companions scrambled down after him, saw that the metal of his arm had melted into a mass effectively sealing the stump of the wounded man's arm. He lay motionless.

"You look after him," Perkins shouted. He scrambled back to the top of the hill and peered cautiously toward the Martian group. There was a movement at his side, and he found Morse beside him. The cook was blubbering into his phone.

"I think Mr. Benedict's dead," he sobbed.

Perkins shook him violently; "Keep up, fellow." He pointed off toward the Martians who had now risen, satisfied that their enemies had been

exterminated. They were preparing to move westward again.

Perkins threw down his rifle and removed the steel shoes that provided a measure of stability on the moon.

His voice was uncertain in the disc phone as he picked up a pistol. "I'm going to warn Halliday," he said. "And if I don't get there, tell Halliday that he was a good guy. You look after Benedict and get him back to the ship."

Morse was about to remonstrate, when Perkins suddenly emerged from his hiding place and, putting all his strength into a leap, went flying southward toward where he believed Halliday could be found.

Morse watched with horror and admiration as the ex-convict fearlessly leaped across the lunar landscape. The Martians had already seen him; and after recovering from what must have been their unutterable astonishment, they had turned their beams on his flying figure.

He had gone a quarter, then a half mile as the futile heat beams played about him. And always, when they struck the surface, he seemed already to have moved on.

Slowly the Martians were narrowing their range. Closer and closer came the deadly spurts of molten rock as Perkins moved upward toward a high slope a quarter-mile away.

Once he went down as a beam came within inches of him. But he was up again, legs and arms flying madly. Inexorably the beams circled him, walling him in. With deadly precision the Martians were seeking to stop the man's flight—rather than kill him. But he did not stop. With a last leap he gained the peak of a slope, and fired his pistol at some unseen target beyond.

And at that moment the circle of beams closed in. Morse, groaning in despair, saw him suddenly throw up his hands and collapse.

## CHAPTER IV

## PANIC ON EARTH

WHEN John Wingate had watched the Flame roar into the night and ascend like a meteor into the heavens, he had turned away with an intense loneliness. Only his age, and the necessity that he remain at his telescope while the ship plunged to the moon, had prevented his accompanying the expedition.

But as he returned to the observatory his thoughts turned in anger to the "cowardly fools" in Washington. It was their refusal to heed his warnings that had probably sent these brave men to their death.

Only the threat that he would lose his post should he publish his conclusions on the Martian menace had sealed his lips. What this rugged old man would have liked, would have been to denounce the government in every newspaper. But what then? He would be ousted from his post; some dull fool would succeed him, and the world would live in blissful ignorance until the day of the Martian invasion began.

For John Wingate had no doubt that it would come. His logical mind did not question what creatures could exist on Mars and what their power might be. As an astronomer he had seen the evidence on the moon. He had seen the remains of a giant shell that had been fired from the moon. True, it had been partly fused in its passage through the atmosphere. But even such a great mass of metal striking a populous town would do incalculable damage.

No, he had best remain silent now, and wait until Halliday could discover what lay in the mysterious crater. Then would come the time to act. Halliday had left in his care a complete set of prints for his space ship. Benedict had turned over what remained of his huge fortune. If need be, Wingate resolved, he himself would build another ship and gather a crew to follow Halliday on his perilous adventure.

But a blow awaited the old man on his return. Upon his study desk lay a neatly folded note. It was addressed to "Dear Daddy."

"Forgive me, daddy," it read. "I could not let David Halliday go on this alone. I belong beside him. He will take care of me. Nina."

Wingate groaned softly. He dropped into his chair. His indignation was gone now. The only person who was close to his life and work, his daughter Nina, had left him. And he, really, was the cause for it. For once, for a moment, Wingate wished deeply that he had never spoken of the Martian menace. He wished even that his precious telescope might be destroyed if only his girl were returned.

But then as he wandered into the spacious room where the giant tube focused its searching eye upon the living half moon, the old man's will stiffened. His place now was at his eyepiece. Now he could not leave it. Any hour and moment some signal from space might determine the life and death of the expedition. Focusing the great lens, he grimly set the automatic control to keep the eye continually on the moon, and began his search of the void for the Flame.

Twenty-four hours passed before Wingate caught his first sight of the ship. Close to the lunar rim, he saw it flash with the sun's light, and then disappear behind into the moon's hidden half. Fruitlessly, hour after hour, he watched intently for its reappearance. He realized that only chance had afforded him the view of such a small object as the terrestrial ship, and unless the right combination of circumstances occurred, he should not see it again.

Wingate had employed another assistant, Freud, a young German, who had been gradually initiated into the secret. When Wingate's eyes could no longer stand the strain of scrutiny of the waxing moon, Freud would mount the high stool beneath the eyepiece and take his master's place.

Two weeks went by. Not a sight of the Flame had been found since it disappeared into the moon's shadow. And to the newspaper reporters who thronged the Kingsley Observatory day after day, Wingate could only give the sad news, "Nothing new."

Day by day, the number of reporters who had appeared before him dwindled. And gradually the story of the "Disappearance of the Flame" that had screamed in newspaper headlines, began to shorten, and it was finally consigned to obscure mention on the inner pages of the great journals.

It was early in the evening, sixteen days after the Flame had rushed away from the earth, when Freud at the eyepiece excitedly called for his master. Wingate, resting in his room from the strain of a hard day, dashed half dressed to the telescope room.

"Mr. Wingate," breathed the German, "I see something approaching. It looks like a ship. Only not so big."

Pale-faced, Wingate seated himself on the stool and gazed into the bright, waning face of the moon. Yes, there it was, just off to the left of the center. Hardly moving. But it

stood out distinctly from its background. It seemed to be two-thirds of the way from the moon to the earth; and it was perhaps thirty feet long. Could it be the returning Flame?

For hours, motionless, frozen at the eyepiece, Wingate watched the steady approach of the space ship. And when his eye, blurring, could no longer see it, Freud helped him down gently and took his master's place.

Four more hours passed before Wingate could again return to the telescope. And now, what the frightened, stammering German told him, set the astronomer's face in grim lines.

SETTING the focus for the approach of the ship, Wingate saw to his horror that the object was but ten thousand miles from earth. And instead of being a ship, it was a torpedo-like shell, nearly a hundred feet long, of a dull blue luster, plunging mercilessly upon the earth!

But slowly the messenger of death was escaping from the range of Wingate's telescope, until at last with the slow rotation of the earth he had lost it altogether.

Swiftly he descended from the stool.

"Quick," he said to his assistant, "Send this telegram to the Tokyo, Peiping, and Madras, India Observatories. 'Watch for projectile-like object approaching earth from the eastern edge moon's rim. Two hours from earth—Wingate, Kingston Observatory.'"

As Freud rushed to one telephone, Wingate was already speaking into the other, connected directly with the hotel in which the remainder of the newspaper group now lived.

"I have an important story for the reporters," he said briefly and hung up.

And while the telegraph wires to the far east sang with the message of approaching horror, Wingate, surrounded by a half dozen incredulous men of the press, gave his story.

"In one hour and thirty minutes," he said abruptly, "a shell from a gun on the moon will strike the earth. It will probably land in the Pacific Ocean close to Hawaii. This is but the beginning of a systematic bombardment of the earth—an attempt to wipe out the race."

"And who is doing all this?" asked one reporter grinning.

"Creatures from the planet Mars."

A chorus of nervous laughs came from the press men.

"How long have you known this, professor?" asked one with increasing levity.

"For two years," Wingate snapped. "And your government has known it for that long, too." His nervous tension snapped. "Good evening, gentlemen. I see you belong to the class of fools."

But if the reporters were incredulous, the editors were cautious. Wiring the observatories in the east, they ascertained that the shell was swiftly nearing the earth. By unanimous agreement, all stories were withheld until the fall of the mysterious shell was completed.

To those who observed it, it came like a dazzling white sword of vengeance across the eastern skies. With a thunderous roar heard for hundreds of miles around, it crashed through the atmosphere flaming to incandescence and lighting up the sea for miles. Then it plunged recklessly into the sea.

On a little island frightened natives dropped to their knees gibbering vain pleas to their gods, as wave

after wave of heated air swept over them like thunder.

Widely varying accounts of what Wingate had prophesied and what had been seen over the Pacific, appeared in every newspaper. Breathless multitudes filled the streets in every city, watching with apprehension the half moon floating calmly overhead.

Only four hours had passed since the fall of the shell when word was flashed around the world that another was on its way, and this would doubtlessly fall close to the Chinese coast. Arching through the sky it landed in the bay off Hongkong, crushing to nothingness and setting afire hundreds of vessels anchored in the bay.

And with the precision of a clock came a third shell crashing through the skies to land upon the Siberian steppes.

Then abruptly the shells ceased, and a world on the verge of panic breathed easier.

But as the world recovered from its first shock, and the press of the earth filled its sheets with the full descriptions of the Martian menace, there centered about Wingate a controversy that a single man had never endured. Denunciation and counter denunciation, denial and blame, criticism and praise for each of the characters involved in the drama, filled the press—to keep the world aroused to an intense pitch of excitement. As two days passed and no more shells fell, the horror of the earth turned into a savage search for scapegoat in this episode.

Wingate was both lauded as a racial hero and denounced as a public menace. Throngs crowded the little mountain town upon which his laboratory stood, to render him homage. But when he appeared on the steps to acknowledge this tribute, a shot rang out from the crowd, barely missing the astronomer's head.

The attempted assassination served but to increase the violence of public opinion, and half a dozen nations tottered on the brink of revolution.

But it needed the incident of the third day, the calamitous 18th of April, 1947, to bring upon a blood-mad world the icy hand of sanity.

Early in the evening a shell was seen approaching the earth, to land with extreme violence two hours later in the midst of the beautiful Chilean city of Valparaiso. Hundreds were killed in the ensuing explosion, and a fire that rapidly swept through the city killed hundreds more.

Barely had the news appeared upon the streets, when a strict censorship of newspapers was declared in a dozen nations. This served but to throw into great terror the hundreds of thousands that crowded the streets in every civilized city. But they saw, those who were fortunate, a succession of shells shooting four hours apart upon a defenseless earth. For twenty hours, the bombardment continued, ringing the earth from Chile to the shores of Australia. Five fine dents puncturing the skin of the earth.

But the people of the earth had spoken. They stormed every public building, crying aloud John Wingate's name, demanding in the name of suffering humanity some action to ward off this hail of metal that threatened to destroy them all.

And one day in a room in the White House in Washington appeared fifteen grave, frightened men. Among them all one man stood straight and unafraid. Of these delegates of the great powers, John Wingate asked an immediate appropriation for the building of three dozen Halliday

space cruisers, equipped with armament to fight the mightiest foe the earth had encountered.

And the delegates, listening to the thunder of a mighty crowd pressing against the White House doors shouting the name of John Wingate, agreed unhesitatingly to his terms. Fifteen nations were to build this mighty fleet, and under the command of Ferdinand Cross, premier air fighter of Great Britain, they were to ascend to the moon in defense of their race. A second fleet was to be constructed as fast as the first was completed, and a third fleet and as many as the factories of the earth could turn out until the Martian menace had been swept from the heavens.

Through weary weeks the construction progressed. And to the ringing of giant hammers, the boring of guns, the fitting of plate to plate, there came at intervals of three days, a twenty-hour bombardment from the moon. Detroit lay a mass of ruins. New York had been grazed; Bordeaux counted a thousand dead, and Manila was set aflame before the first fleet was finished and Cross was ready to take to the air.

And with John Wingate, reconciled to the death of the brave crew of the Flame there stood on a great mountain top a hundred thousand people, as they waved goodbye. The fleet rose with the roar of a thousand cannons, flashing into the skies to disappear swiftly into the night.

## CHAPTER V

## CAPTIVES

HALLIDAY turned away from the wall, and wearily returned his watch to his pocket. He looked down to where Nina and Parker slumped on the floor.

"What do you make of it, David?" Nina asked softly.

"Just two months," Halliday shrugged. "I don't know whether we're lucky or not to have my watch to keep track of our imprisonment."

He looked with despair at the rough mud-like walls of the little one-room hut of their confinement. Today was the sixtieth day since the group of furred monstrosities had rushed down upon them walling them in by a ring of heat beams. Caught by that barrage of death, they could do nothing but submit to capture. They were hustled for miles across the scorching lunar desert, to where a strange barrel-shaped vehicle carried them through the void to this great encampment of their enemies.

Of that day, two months ago, the three captives had but a single stark memory—of a figure in a space suit firing his pistol toward them to attract their attention. It must have been that, for he had gone down a moment before the Martians came, fused in his shapeless metal suit. Who he was none of them knew. Of the other members of the Flame, they knew nothing. Doubtless they were dead, the ship in ruins.

In their crude attempts to question their Martian captors by sign and pictures, they had obtained no answer as to the fate of their companions. The Martians, large, barrel-chested, great-headed monstrosities in human form, stared with their green-skinned, emotionless features making no reply.

Once a day the captives were taken before what appeared to be one of the Martian learned men, and a process of education in the Martian tongue was going on. English as a language had been given up by their teacher as hopeless.

Except for their brief exit from

their flat hut, accompanied by a guard, to the hut of their teacher, they were confined rigidly to their quarters.

But Nina, sharp-eyed, had learned much of the nature of the great encampment, near whose center they were. It was she who had seen, two miles away, beyond an eternity of other mud-walled, flat-roofed houses, the titanic mass of the great gun.

In their prison, after their next lesson, she had breathlessly told Halliday about it, while Parker listened sullenly.

"I'm sure it's the gun they're going to use against the earth," she ended. "We must do something about it!"

That had been before the bombardment began. Then, one day, as they measured the days in their prison, there had come a terrific tremor along the ground, so great that even the stout walls trembled. Four hours later had come another, as the three groaned in their impotence. They gradually learned the rhythm of the shots and waited in terror for each succeeding missile of death, picturing in anguish the growing devastation of the earth.

For they had learned already, by sign and picture from the big-headed stolid Martian teacher, that it was the intention of his army to terrorize the earth to the point of subjection before the conquest of the earth began. They knew, the Martian explained, without feeling, that no race could withstand a ceaseless bombardment. Their scientists who had examined the three captives knew the exact breaking point of the human race. When the bombardment had brought earth's people to the proper state of terror, five hundred ships would rise from the moon to sweep down upon the earth. And of the earth's people who survived the invasion, only those who could serve their captors would be saved.

To Halliday's question of why this must be so, the green-skinned Martian teacher had replied simply. Mars was a desert, its people dying. Their telescopes had shown that the earth was inhabitable; the first expedition to the moon four years ago had verified it. Their telescopes had shown also that the earth had ships, cities, and other marks of a respectable civilization.

Millenniums of struggle for preservation on a dying world had stamped from the Martians all desires except that of survival. To survive they needed the earth, and they would take it.

"Then why do you keep us?" Nina had asked one day in torment.

"Because," answered the old Martian, "we need you to teach us the earth ways, to acquaint us in detail with its peculiarities and to help us avoid senseless mistakes when we conquer it."

This in the halting language of Mars that the captives knew, reinforced by signs and gestures, was the reason given to the three earthlings why they were still alive.

Many times as the three passed endless hours in their bare room, waiting for the next great shell to go plunging toward the earth, Parker vowed he would end his life.

"What's the use of going on?" he cried. "We are lost now, slaves of these green-skinned beasts. We might as well be dead."

Halliday and Nina saw that the man was fast losing his senses.

Halliday had come to love Nina, in the intimacy of this confinement, and it was difficult for the two to hide their love. As they exchanged soft words, Parker would look on bitterly

or get up to pace feverishly about. It was the loss of Nina, and the necessity of facing continually the growing affection of his two companions that was drawing from Parker the last reserves of his sanity.

If it were not that Halliday and Nina believed that they had found each other so magically, they would have agreed with Parker and ended their lives. For they saw with despair the invincibility of the Martian encampment. For miles it extended about them, tens of thousands of the green-skinned men, encamped in these air-tight, mud-walled houses, that Martian genius had constructed from the lunar rocks. Ceaselessly, detachments of the emotionless men moved with precision and efficiency across the great encampment, moving machinery here and there, engaged in maneuvers, arranging supplies.

Earth and Mars had already separated in their orbital paths and two years must elapse before physical communication with their home planets could be resumed. This expedition then must decide finally whether the Martian plan of centuries—the conquest of the earth—would succeed or fail. And about the Martian activities, the captives could sense now a growing organization, the preparing for a master stroke that was not far off.

It was the Martian gun, rather than the hundreds of blue-nosed space ships, or the Martian personalities, or their efficient organization, that fascinated the earthlings the most.

Since Nina had pointed it out to them, they could see it each day, as they passed in their space suits along the narrow street to the place of their daily lesson.

The great gun lay alone in a half mile open space in the center of the vast encampment. Hundreds of feet high, the monster of metal rose above the crater floor, making the Martians who operated its machinery appear like midgets. The cyclopean snout of the monster was five hundred feet long and twice as the captives were on their way to their tutor, there charged into the sky soundless, flashing meteors of destruction, earthbound.

So it was in desperation that Halliday had counted off upon the mud wall the sixty marks that registered the earth days of their incarceration.

Upon a stone bench lay the pot of gritty gruel that served them as food. This stuff that had retched their stomachs numberless times before they could accept it, had been their sole diet for two months. Twenty paces away was the door that led to the main aisleway of their hut, and to the outside.

Plan after plan had been discussed by the prisoners for their escape but the futility of them had cut short all discussion.

They needed their space suits, which the guard brought with him each day, in order to venture outside the hut onto the airless moon. But even if they could escape from their guard while in their space suits, they would still be near the center of the Martian encampment, surrounded by ten thousand Martians ready to turn on them their deadly heat rays. And as day after day passed, they saw in the Martian activities the growing readiness for the earth invasion.

Halliday slumped beside his companions. He groaned softly. "It's the food, the awful food, that makes it unbearable," he sighed comically. "Think, the rest of our life on this gruel."

Nina laughed. "If that's all you're worrying about."

"It's hopeless," Parker echoed hollowly.

"If there only was a way," Halliday cried, now desperately serious. "No matter how remote, I would chance it."

He looked up to the flat roof of the hut, twelve feet above their heads. Then he suddenly sprang to his feet. A sudden light of inspiration blazed in his eyes.

"Nina! Parker!" he exclaimed. "How far is it from one building to another?"

"Thirty feet," Parker answered dully. "What good does that do us?"

"Thirty feet." Halliday pondered a moment, and then made vague gestures of measurements with his hands. He looked up at the ceiling speculatively, walking back and forth excitedly. He suddenly clapped his hands together.

"It's worth it, it's worth it!" he exclaimed, as the others looked on in amazement.

Nina ran to him. "Tell us, David, what is it?"

Halliday came to a stop, his jaw fixed determinedly. "We can escape!" he said shortly.

Parker gazed at him anxiously. "How?"

"By outthinking the Martians," Halliday replied. He squatted on the floor. "Look," he said.

And, as the others gathered about him, he drew diagram after diagram of the Martian camp, their position in it, and of the rugged cliffs that loomed to the north, beyond which lay the wreck of the Flame and their hopes.

Nina's eyes danced as Halliday explained his plan. "It will work, David; it must." She hugged him enthusiastically. Then, remembering Parker, she went to him. "Are you with us, Floyd?" she said tenderly. "We can escape, go back to the Flame."

Parker's eyes flared. "Anything, anything to get out of here."

For the next two days the captives gazed eagerly about them as their guard led them through the streets for their daily lesson. Secure in the captivity of the earthlings, the Martians were taking what they believed to be sufficient precautions against escape.

The endless extent of buildings between their own hut and the mountain range to the north interested the earthlings the most. A full mile separated them from the apparent security of the mountain. If they could only somehow accomplish that mile!

Two days passed before they were ready.

It came at the hour when the guard brought their three space suits. As he entered as usual, closing the stone door behind him, before him on the floor lay the "earth girl" and pointing to her with evident horror were the two earth men.

"Dead," they said horror struck, in the Martian tongue. "Dead."

Dropping the suits, the Martian approached curiously, and carefully bent over to examine the girl. Then the earth men struck. Down on the Martian's head came the heavy stone plate. And as he crashed soundlessly to the floor, Parker had snatched from his belt the heat gun, his sole weapon.

ACTING quickly, for in two minutes they would be expected by the guards outside to appear in the doorway, the earthlings worked into their suits, snapping on the oxygen containers. At a nod from Parker and Nina that they were ready, Halliday flashed the heat tube upward

against the roof of the hut. Crackling and splintering, the lava fused away from the playing beam. And as the air rushed whirling out, a gaping hole appeared in the roof, exposing the black starry skies. Around and around Halliday played the beam until an eight-foot hole yawned twelve feet above them. Then he looked at the others. They were ready for the great gamble.

All was silent in the room. With gesture of assurance, gauging carefully his position beneath the jagged roof, Halliday leaped gently upward, soaring just beyond the hole, landing easily at the roof's edge. Dropping flat upon the roof he motioned to Nina. She leaped upward and was soon beside him. Parker, more clumsy and too eager, caught at the roof's edge as he sailed past it, and only Halliday's outstretched hands saved him from falling back.

Lying prone upon the flat roof, they took stock of their position. A mile away lay safety. Once beyond the Martian camp they could rapidly ascend the mountain walls, and, taking refuge in the innumerable crevices and caves, escape detection for a time. Only the blasting of the entire mountain could bring them out.

Around them they saw only the vast grey checkerboard of roofs. Between were filled with Martians. The three could remain unseen so long as they remained in the center of the roofs. But when they had to leap across thirty-foot streets, would come the certainty of detection. And then it would be a race between their agility and the deadly accuracy of the Martian beams.

At a signal from Halliday they rose, and as his arm went down suddenly they leaped forward and with an easy jump crossed the first street, landing upon the next row in safety. Not hesitating, they leaped on and on, from roof to roof, under the hot starlit sky. Like winged creatures, they soared over street after street above the heads of the stolid Martians, too surprised to catch sight of the shadowed apparitions above them.

Nearer and nearer loomed the mountains, higher the cliff swept above the panting trio, as they plunged on breathlessly toward safety.

A half mile from their goal and Halliday saw that their escape had been perceived. From a street intersection, as he flew across, he saw a detachment of Martians deploying to cut them off at the next street. Allowing his companions to go on, he hesitated in his wild flight, and brought into play the frightful beam of the heat ray. As the intense ray flashed death among the startled group, he rushed on, slowly catching up with Nina and Parker.

But a quarter of a mile to go. They were now in the shadows of the mountain. They were becoming winded; Parker faltered, then Nina stumbled and Halliday caught her up. A beam flashed close to them, then another, and Halliday saw that from two sides his pursuers were closing in.

Another street was crossed and then another, and to their unutterable relief they saw beyond them a long low flat roof, the last before safety. But as they rushed breathless across it, there appeared on the ground just beyond three furred figures levelling rays.

"Down," screamed Halliday uselessly, pulling down Nina who was at his side. But Parker, who had gone on unheeding, suddenly slumped to the roof. Blazing with anger, Halliday rose and, leaping recklessly forward,

played his beam, dealing death upon the furred group.

Then lifting the motionless Parker, he urged Nina on.

Gently they leaped from the east roof, Halliday bearing the burden of the unconscious man. Stepping over the charred heap of Martians, they began their slow but laborious climb of the mountain. And not too soon, for behind them streaked a sizzling path of the heat rays as the pursuers vainly attempted to lengthen their range.

To the captives, the race for freedom through the endless chasms, caves and gullies of the mountain range was an unending nightmare. Without water or food, burdened with the limp form of Parker, never resting for fear of instant death, Halliday and Nina went on and on, upward and upward, farther and farther from the place of their captivity.

Once they emerged to see far below the grey checkerboard of their camp, and at the edge of the camp a swarm of furred figures beginning the ascent.

URGED on by Halliday when she could go no further, Nina wandered on as in a dream, legs and arms moving mechanically when the will would no longer control the body.

A narrow chasm cutting across the peaks proved their salvation. They came upon it unexpectedly from a cave in which they had taken a few minutes of urgently needed rest. Ten feet above the cave was a rocky shelf, and jumping up, Halliday perceived leading northward, a widening gully through the mountain.

It required all of his strength to jump upward with the unconscious Parker in his arms and land safely upon the gully floor. But once there and with Nina at his side, they moved more slowly, more certain of their escape.

But as they moved on, the telltale warning of the dwindling oxygen supply in their helmets aroused a new spectre of death. They were still miles from the landing place of the Flame. A burning desert lay between, and only a half hour of oxygen remained before suffocation.

Moving in a dream of approaching death, the three reached the northern walls of the mountain. Beyond stretched farther illimitable deserts. Nina sank to the rocks exhausted, and not even Halliday's violent shaking could arouse the figure in the space suit to further effort.

Desperate, as he sensed the last moments coming on, Halliday tried to arouse Nina from her stupor.

Wild visions of the earth, of peace and security, flew before his disordered brain. With a laugh of despair he lifted the ray tube and, pointing it to the plain just beneath them, pulled the catch, sending the full power of its rays upon the parched lunar surface, fusing the rock beneath. Until the power of the tube was exhausted, he held the catch back, laughing as he watched the rocks leap and crack and fuse under the furnace of heat he had created. This was his last gesture of defiance against this dead world of despair. He sank down close to the metal armor that enclosed Nina and vainly tried to circle it with his arms . . .

## CHAPTER VI

## MARTIAN GUNS

TO MEN accustomed to a world of silence, the usual noises of life strike them with a sudden deafening blow. This was true of

David Halliday as he emerged from a drugged stupor. Instinctively he put his hands to his aching ears, even before he opened his eyes. Then at a touch on his sleeve, he suddenly recoiled and looked upward.

A trim looking young man in a strange brown uniform looked down upon him sympathetically. "All right now, sir?"

Halliday struggled to sit up, but the firm hand held him to the soft bed on which he lay. For a moment he listened to the sounds of voices—voices of human beings — English, French, German — voices of young men, eager and unafraid. This after the two months among those dried, mummified Martians.

"Where am I?" he asked weakly.

"On the Halliday rocket ship Condor," the young man said smiling. Then he turned at another's approach. "Mr. Halliday's conscious now," he said to the newcomer.

The man who now looked down upon Halliday seemed to his blurred senses to be vaguely familiar.

"You are . . ."

"Ferdinand Cross, in command of the Lunar expedition," he said genially.

Halliday stiffened. "We are still on the moon?"

Cross nodded, his eyes twinkling.

Halliday's hopes rose. "And the Martians?"

Cross frowned. "We haven't met them yet."

Memories surged back into Halliday's mind. "Miss Wingate and Parker," he exclaimed, "where are they?"

"Resting comfortably, in other rooms."

"Then you picked us up?" Halliday breathed gratefully.

Cross nodded, and then at Halliday's insistence, he told the story of the bombardment of the earth, the building of the first fleet and their landing on the moon. Their finding Halliday, in the crags of the mountain range that surrounded the crater, was the merest accident. A ship sent out to reconnoiter the Martian position had seen the seething ground, fused as Halliday, in his last gesture, had turned the heat rays upon it.

They had descended, picked up him and his companions in time to avoid an encounter with a Martian detachment, and had brought him back to the encampment of the earth group.

Halliday, listening in wonder to the tale of his miraculous escape, noticed with sorrow that no mention of the Flame had been made. Then it was lost, its brave crew dead. . . . He questioned Cross hesitantly.

"This man could tell you best." Cross motioned to someone behind him, and stepping aside he revealed to Halliday the thin, emaciated face of—Morse!

HE STRETCHED out eager hands to the little ship's cook. "Morse! I'm glad to see you."

The little man's eyes were wet. "And me you, Mr. Halliday. We had given you up for lost."

"What of the others?" Halliday asked brusquely. His fears were becoming stronger.

Morse hung his head. "They're all dead, sir." And as Halliday listened he told the other half of the story of the fate of the Flame. He told how Benedict had been seriously wounded in the first encounter, and how Perkins had given his life to warn Halliday of the Martian approach.

"Then it was Perkins," breathed Halliday.

Then, Morse went on, somehow he had managed to help Benedict back

to the Flame. Through endless hours, with burning bodies and parched throats, the two men stumbled somehow through the inferno of the lunar furnace. And when they reached the ship, completely exhausted, they had found—a shambles.

The ship had been almost entirely wrecked; dead Martians were everywhere, and, among them, faces grimly set in death, were the bodies of Clayton and Landay. The meaning of the scene had been only too evident. The men had defended the ship until they had been simply crushed by a vastly superior force.

There was silence in the cabin as Morse, in his halting way, told this story of the heroism of two unknown men.

"But Benedict," Halliday asked desperately after a time, "surely he . . ."

Morse tried to turn away. "He died after two days, sir. We had managed to fix up two of the rooms in the ship that hadn't been damaged. And with what little water and air and food we had, we kept alive. But Mr. Benedict was feverish most of the time and suffering awfully. It was a good thing for him, when his suffering was over."

Halliday roused himself from his stupor. If he ever returned to the earth, he would devote his life to seeing that these brave men were remembered, by every nation, by every man, woman and child. But now there was work to be done. The Martian bombardment . . .

And, as if to emphasize his thoughts, there came a tremor through the ship, a strong steady vibration that on earth might presage an earthquake.

Cross nodded at Halliday's unspoken questions. "They've been at it continually." The man's face tightened. "We've simply got to put them out of business."

At the orders of the young doctor, Halliday was left alone, to muse over his own bitter memories. And every four hours came the signaling tremor that the armies of Mars were still confident and triumphant. The day of their attack on the earth could not be far away.

It took but another day for Halliday and his two companions to recover from the effects of their terrible experience. Nina rushed to embrace Halliday, clinging to him, sobbing quietly in his arms. Parker, his face sober and wistful, limped to Halliday to shake his hand.

"I know you saved my life," he said falteringly. "I won't forget it." He turned away from the two lovers and limped into another room.

"Then Parker wasn't injured badly," Halliday questioned the doctor, who hovered about.

"A bad burn on his leg," the medico answered. "Part of the muscle tissue eaten away. He'll limp for the rest of his life."

"Poor Floyd," Nina said softly. "He is eating his heart out. His ego won't stand this crippling of his body."

LATER that day, Halliday, Nina and Parker were invited to a war conference of the earth expedition's officers. It warmed Halliday's heart to see the strong, young, eager faces of these men of earth, ready to do battle for the preservation of their race.

"We've held off any offensive action until you could join with us," Cross opened the meeting, addressing Halliday. "From your experience in the Martian camp, you can probably advise us how to proceed."

Halliday pondered a moment.

"You must strike quickly," he said

thoughtfully, "but you must strike surely. That big gun must be destroyed. Anything else you do will be hopeless."

"I favor a direct frontal attack," one young officer exclaimed.

"I, too," said another. There were affirmative nods around the council table.

Halliday shook his head wearily, as he looked around at these impetuous youngsters upon whom the earth reposed all of its hopes.

"That's suicide," he said. "The Martians have long-range heat guns that will destroy every ship that gets over the camp. What have you got to fight them with?"

"Three-inch, quickfiring guns," Cross answered soberly. "Bombs, machine guns."

"And three dozen ships," Halliday smiled. "No," he shook his head decisively. "Only strategy will work."

"What do you propose?" one officer answered impatiently.

Halliday shook his head. "Nothing as yet. I must think about it."

"Think, think!" the officer returned exasperated. "That's all we've been doing since we landed on this Godforsaken hole. And every day the earth is being torn up by these monsters. Who knows but while we're here thinking, our homes may be destroyed."

There were affirmative nods around the table, as Halliday, Nina and Parker exchanged hopeless glances. It was clear that these youngsters wanted simply to fight heroically, conquer their enemy, and return to the soft, green earth. But they did not know what their enemies were like. It took two months of incarceration in one of their prisons for one to appreciate Martian thoroughness.

"It's suicide," Halliday returned stubbornly.

"I call for a vote," said the impatient officer. "Do we fight or wait for strategy?"

Cross nodded. "All in favor of a frontal attack rise!"

Two-thirds of the officers jumped to their feet.

"The frontal attack wins." He addressed the officers formally.

"Prepare for an attack;" he looked at his watch. "In four hours."

With sinking hearts, the three weary explorers watched, hours later, as eighteen ships rose from the ground to shoot their streams of fire soundlessly into the clear, airless void, and speed swiftly toward the Martian encampment.

"The Martians are too clever for us," Halliday told his companions bitterly. "They know that we're here, but they've let us strictly alone. So they prefer to allow us to attack and to dash ourselves against the power of their awful heat guns."

And so it turned out. Surrounded by the group of reserve officers in the camp of the earth forces, Halliday and his two companions watched groaning as the earth ships, now little midgets miles away, swarmed impotently over the Martian camp.

Flashes of smoke and fire showed the gallant attack the enormously overwhelmed earth ships were making. They swarmed over the camp, loosing stream after stream of high velocity penetrating shells, sending hut after hut crumbling into ruins. Circling the camp they directed their fire inward toward the great mass of the Martian gun.

Charge after charge of bombs was dropped as they swiftly flashed across the Martian camp, sending hundreds of Martians staggering, without suits, out from their huts into the airless void, to perish there. There was no

doubt but that great damage was done.

But then the Martians spoke. From every part of the camp there came flashing toward the encircling earth fleet, the inferno of the heat guns.

One ship caught in the full blast of a ray shone glistening for a moment and spun wildly to the ground below —a metal coffin for fifty men. Then another one barely escaped the ray only to speed into a sister ship. Both danced wildly from the impact for a moment before they dropped heavily to the lunar ground.

With desperate courage the earth ships increased their bombardment, but one by one, they were caught in the pitiless blast of the Martian heat guns.

A dozen ships had been lost, and the earthlings had made no impression upon the Martian gun emplacement; the retreat was sounded.

Battered, scarred, the remnants of a gallant battle, the earth rockets streamed back over the dividing mountains, back to where their despairing companions awaited them.

Another conference of war was called the next day. Eagerness and impatience were gone now, and about the eyes of those youngsters who had survived there was the hardened light of veterans who had seen sudden death and faced it.

At this conference, all eyes were turned toward Halliday.

"You were right," Cross said respectfully. "We have accomplished nothing. The Martians are impregnable."

HALLIDAY spoke slowly in answer. "The Martians are a curious people," he smiled. "They are emotionless, but like all emotionless peoples, they have their weaknesses. They have placed their whole reliance for this campaign upon their big gun. Destroy that and you will crush them. Their present belief that they are sure to win will then change to as strong a belief that they cannot win. And once they believe in defeat, they will simply lay down their arms."

There was silence in the little room. The significance of these words sank in. Then Nina spoke up. "We must act quickly. The bombardment is becoming faster and faster now. It is almost ceaseless. Shells were thrown every four hours; now they are sent every two hours, and soon it will be every hour. Think of what must be happening."

"Well, what do you propose?" Cross asked exasperated. The sense of impending defeat was beginning to soften the earthling's morale. Halliday sensed this.

He realized that with defeat fresh in their minds, if the earthlings remained inactive too long, with the ceaseless Martian bombardment of the earth continuing, the men would recklessly plunge themselves against the Martians in a second futile attack and be wiped out.

The situation was desperate.

"Give me two hours," he said to Cross, "and I will give you a plan."

Cross nodded curtly, and the men rose and filed out. Halliday was left alone with Nina and Parker.

The latter's face was flushed and feverish. "If I could do anything," he muttered. "Anything."

Halliday put his arm about him. "Easy, old fellow. We'll find a way out."

They walked through the aisles of the ship with Nina to her room. Halliday grasped her hand as she looked eagerly into his eyes. "We'll leave you here, dearest," he said softly. "Floyd and I will talk this over with Cross."

Nina's eyes flashed in sudden suspicion for a moment, and then squeezing Halliday's hand, entered her room.

Immediately Halliday grasped Parker's arm and pulled him toward their own quarters.

Helping Parker into a chair, Halliday faced him.

"Parker," he said eagerly. "You love Nina, don't you?"

Parker half rose, angrily.

"What are you trying . . . ?"

Halliday put up his hand. "Wait until I finish. This war with the Martians is going on to an end. If anything happens to me, I want to know that you'll take care of Nina."

Parker bit his lip. "Of course," he mumbled. Then he looked up. "But what have you in mind?"

Halliday paced the room. "A desperate gamble," he said, half to himself. "The Martians, in order to shoot their shells every two hours, must have a great number of them massed in their underground tunnels close to the gun. If we could reach those shells and start them off . . ." His voice trailed off. Then he came to a sudden decision. His face paled.

"I'm going to speak to Cross, Parker. I think we can beat them," and, with Parker staring at him, Halliday went out of the room, down the aisles of the Condor to the room where a nervous commander strode up and down.

He looked up at Halliday brusquely.

"I have a plan," Halliday said simply.

Then as Cross listened open-mouthed, Halliday related slowly his idea for the crushing of the Martian menace. Cross' lips tightened as Halliday spoke calmly and the significance of the strange plan became apparent.

"It seems possible of success," he said slowly, as Halliday finished. "But who is to do it?"

"I am," Halliday answered simply.

Cross looked at him in astonishment. "But that's suicide, man," he said gently. "We can't allow you to do that."

"I'm the only man who can," Halliday returned quickly. "I am the only one who knows enough about the Martian camp to carry it through."

Cross was about to mention Parker's name, but thought better of it.

But he still shook his head. "We'll try it. But I'll get someone else."

Halliday's eyes flashed. "You can't," he stormed. "Listen, Cross. This thing is bigger than individuals. While we wait here, every hour another shell is helping to wipe our race from the globe. We must act now, man, act! I demand the right to do this."

Cross put up his hands hopelessly. "Very well. When will you start?"

"As soon as you are ready. How soon can it be?"

"It will take six hours to make the change-overs in the ships," Cross pondered. "Let us say seven hours." He gripped Halliday's hand. "My blessing goes with you, sir; you are one man in a million."

Despite the secrecy with which the plan was begun, it was not long before the earth camp was aflame with the news that a desperate sortie against the Martian gun was to be made. Groups gathered everywhere in the ships, and Nina, listening to their hopeful chatter, rushed to Halliday.

"What is going to happen, David?" she asked him fearfully.

"A man is going to take a ship against the Martian gun and explode it."

"But how?" Nina asked incredulously.

"The ship will be cleared of everything but the control equipment, and filled to the breaking point with our *hydroxine* rocket fuel. The ship will be driven directly against the Martian gun, and by the explosion of the tremendously powerful fuel on impact, not only the gun will be wrecked, but we hope the shells waiting to be sent into its chamber will be exploded, too. If that can be done, a series of explosions will pass from shell to shell to rock the whole Martian camp."

NINA shuddered. "But that means death to the man who does it."

Halliday shrugged with an attempt at easiness. "If it isn't done, dear, we shall all die soon. What is one life against millions?"

"But who is to do it?" Parker, who had been listening, asked darkly.

"One of the young officers has volunteered." Halliday looked Parker directly in the eye.

Nina grasped Halliday's arm. "Take me to him, dear."

Halliday shook his head. "Impossible. He is very busy, preparing for this. Perhaps you will see him for a moment before he goes."

Slowly the hours passed, until the appointed moment when the "suicide jump" was to begin.

In the ships, squads of men moved quickly and purposefully about, tearing out pieces of equipment, installing others, moving carefully the great containers of the super-powerful *hydroxine*. During all these hours Halliday remained with Nina.

They talked and laughed a lot. Halliday was especially buoyant telling of what they would do when they again returned to an earth freed from the menace of the moon. To this Nina responded, but her thoughts seemed for the moment to be elsewhere. And to Halliday's questioning, she answered frankly that she was thinking of the young officer who was to give up his life for the race.

Halliday half turned away to control his mounting emotions, but then he grasped her hands.

"Come," he said, "we mustn't think about it; we must be happy." And under the spell of his unaccustomed eagerness, Nina was gradually drawn into his spirit.

The hour came, and in the deep hollow where the remains of the earth fleet lay, dozens of metal encased figures gathered for the last act of this cosmic drama. Apart from the other ships lay the *Kingsley* that was to attempt the conquest of the Martian giant, alone. To the southwest the mountain range lay clear in the void.

Halliday stood with Nina, both in their space suits. With disc phones on, they waited for the moment when the *Kingsley* should rise against the enemy.

Halliday was nervous. His last moment with her had come. This girl he had learned to love he was now to lose. He held Nina's metal-clad hand in his, trying to touch her flesh by the mere strength of his pressure.

Finally he looked through the glass plate into her eyes. "I must go over to see what's delaying the start," he said nervously. Dropping her hand abruptly, he turned away and strode toward the *Kingsley*.

But as he neared it, he saw a commotion among the metal-clad figures that surrounded it. For a moment it subsided and then the figures quickly backed away from the ship

until it stood alone on a little plateau.

His heart beating in strange excitement, Halliday broke into a leaping run, dashing toward the ship. He had reached the group of retreating figures and pulled at the metal arm of one, speaking quickly into his disc phone.

"What's the matter here?" he asked quickly.

"The *Kingsley's* ready to start," an officer answered.

"Ready?" Halliday started toward the ship, and suddenly a preliminary flash of flame burst from the ship's tail. The officer grabbed Halliday.

"Where are you going?"

"Who's in the ship?" Halliday asked fiercely.

"I don't know," the officer answered. And then came another burst of flame. From the quarters of the *Condor* a group of figures came running. They seemed intent on reaching the *Kingsley* before it ascended for the last time above the moon.

But in the confusion, the *Kingsley* had suddenly risen; it flashed into the air, rising higher and higher; and with the swiftness of thought it sped on and on, its size dwindling as it neared the Martian camp.

Halliday found himself face to face with Cross. Through the glass plates he saw that Cross' face was twisted in anger and surprise.

"He tricked us," Cross shouted to Halliday through the disc phone.

"Who?" Halliday asked.

"Parker," came Cross' reply, pointing far off to the south where the gleam of light that was the *Kingsley* shot its flame into the vacuum of space.

"He told me he had talked it over with you, and you had agreed to let him go," Cross said savagely.

Halliday brought his metal hands toward the glass plate that shielded his face, in a sudden overwhelming emotion.

"Parker, Parker," he cried softly. "You've redeemed yourself, now."

Exclamations from the officers' phones brought their attention back to the shining speck of the *Kingsley*.

"Look!" shouted one. "He's circling."

With glasses they now observed breathlessly as the little ship, alone in the void, circled high above the Martian camp. Then suddenly it seemed to poise motionless and with all rockets flaming furiously, it drove headlong down, down toward where the Martian hosts waited.

For a moment, after the ship had disappeared beyond the mountain, there was an agonized silence. But then, with a convulsion that seemed like the disruption of worlds, the ground beneath them shook and groaned. A tremendous roar seemed to flow like a mighty current along the ground, throwing them violently from their feet. Then came another roar, another and another, until the universe seemed ready to blast into nothingness.

With a violence unknown on earth the ground trembled and vibrated. But gradually the violence decreased, until finally it ceased altogether.

It was a long time before the stunned metal-encased figures could lift themselves from the ground. In the disc phones were heard sobbing and weak calls for help among those unable to rise.

Nina, who had reached Halliday somehow, pointed off to the southwest.

"Look," she cried.

All eyes were turned. Above the mountain range they saw a vast confusion of spots rising swiftly above

the moon, rising, ever rising, then to drop slowly down upon the lunar surface.

An understanding of the meaning of this swept over the little group.

"Parker succeeded!" one cried hoarsely into his phone.

"We've won," shouted another.

"The earth is free," they all cried in unison, dancing madly about in their clumsy metal attire.

And so it turned out to be. When a scouting ship was sent out hours afterward, following a long silence when no shells boomed from the gun, the ship found a dead city. As though an upheaval of cosmic proportions had occurred, the Martian camp was one vast hole, in which lay mounds of metal, a desolation of mud and scraps of flesh.

Not a single being in the crater had survived that vast cataclysm.

IN THE earthling camp a solemn group assembled in the room of Ferdinand Cross.

"Our devotion to Floyd Parker," he said softly. Heads were bowed for a moment. Halliday grasped Nina's hand tightly.

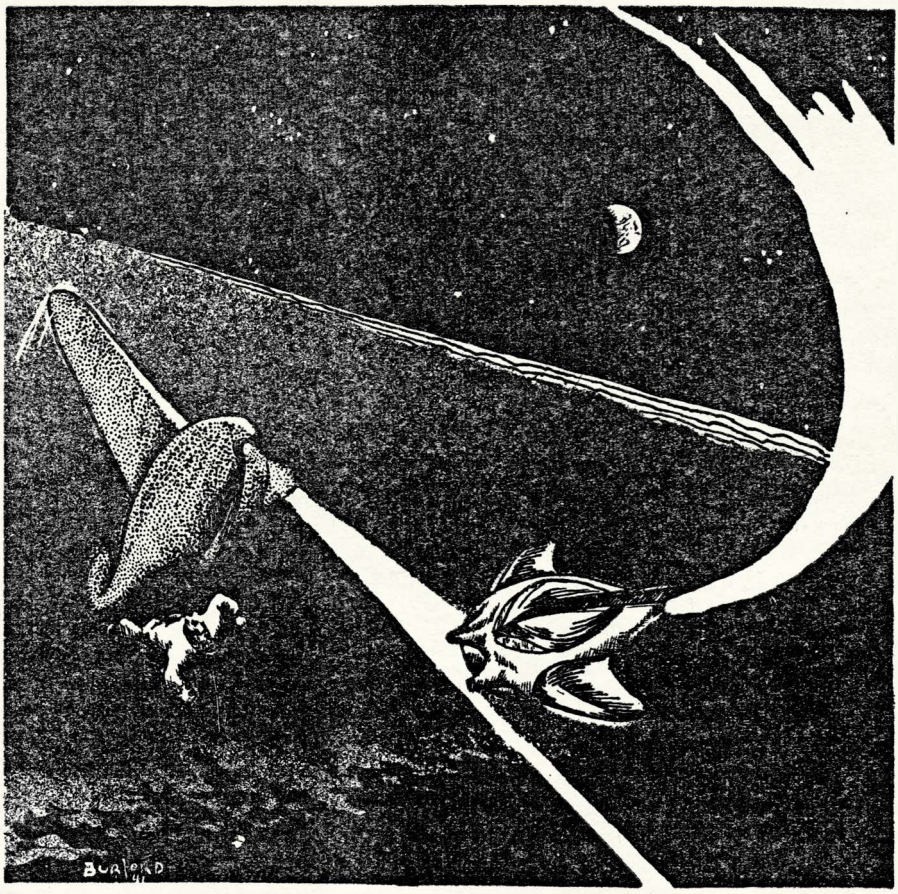
Then Cross pressed a button on his desk. And with the unison of a single thought, the earth ships rose gracefully from the moon. Wheeling across the dead lunar surface, passing swiftly over the grave of Martian hopes, they turned into space where, high in the sky, lay the globe of earth, promising to its returning children a full measure of love and life.

# A PRINCE OF PLUTO

## by PAUL DENNIS LAVOND

(Author of "Lurani," "Exiles of Newplanet," etc.)

**The daft little man's gratitude knew no bounds. He would get Vernon Etsel that job—even if it landed them both in jail for life!**



*The victim struck a wing and clung there to the braces.*

"BUT Mister Etsel," gasped the mussed-up young man, "I haven't tasted food in a week!"

"Your own fault," replied Vernon Etsel coolly. "Why don't you apply for the dole?"

The young man squared his shoulders. "That," he said, "is a thing no gentleman would do."

Etsel glanced at the application blank on the desk, then skimmed it back across the polished mahogany surface into the young man's fingers.

"I shall be pleased to offer you a word of advice, Andreson," he stated in measured tones.

"And that is?"

"First, I assure you that you are either a fool or—no, I can't think of any alternative: you are a fool. What you have to learn is that you must fit yourself to our requirements; Intercontinental Rocketransit Corporation does not desire to fit itself to yours. I am but a salaried minion—officially Second Assistant Manager—and yet I speak for the corporation when I assure you that we are not impressed by a studiously haggard expression, belladonna or something equally silly in the eyes, cheeks wan with a week's conscientious fasting—and all the rest of your elaborate outfit. We will not be blackmailed—morally, of course—into accepting an inferior employee."

The young man folded the application card between twitching fingers. Etsel looked at the next card and said, without raising his eyes, "Leave through the blue door, please."

When he had heard the door close, and saw the tiny flasher on his desk indicate that the young man was on his way out of the building, he spoke into a little mike. "Send in the next man—" looking at the card—"a Mr. Van Buren."

He rattled his fingernails against the wood of the desk, and finally Mr. Van Buren entered—a pale, shrunken young man, wearing contact lenses so heavy that his eyes bulged as if with a record case of exophthalmia. He had a brief case under his arm and glanced at Etsel's name-plate. "Good morning, Mr. Etsel," he said agreeably, with a touch of self-confidence.

Etsel waved him to a chair. "How's your finger dexterity, Mr. Van Buren?" he asked.

"Very high indeed," said the young man proudly. "I practiced for a week before I took your test."

"Indeed?" Etsel raised his eyebrows. "Do you think that was strictly ethical?"

"Why not? Some of the others were sure to have done it," replied the aged youth with a touch of surprise.

"So you think two wrongs make a right?"

"That is current opinion. And besides I want the job for personal reasons."

Etsel was shocked at the thought of this creature having a private life. Momentarily he pictured a Mrs. Van Buren, goggle-eyed as the candidate, and thousands of children, all bulging-browed and scrawny, crawling up and down the walls of a flat like roaches. He rubbed his eyes and stared fiercely at the five-thousand-year calendar on his desk. "All this was unnecessary, you know," he said absently. "We decided long ago that you were to get the job." He studied the young man, looking for signs of elation; there were none, except for a shifting in the chair and a prissy smile of righteousness. Etsel went on: "You've won this job over about two hundred other applicants, not because of finger dexterity, but because our psychologists have decided that you represent the type — the ideal type—of minor employee. It is their determination to replace all other minor employees with men and women of your type as fast as they can be found—or bred. I thought you might be interested in knowing. Go out the pink door, please."

When the light flashed, he turned to his mike. "Anne," he said to his secretary, "how many more are there?"

"Thirty-seven," came her voice back over the wire.

"Will you please dismiss them for me? I feel sick."

"About that last one?" Her voice, he noticed, was several points off the liquid tones she usually struck. "He made my stomach turn, too."

She switched out. He rose. Now, by the Sacred Supercharger, he was going to march right smack in to Mr. Badabar Baily's office and ask for that promotion. He'd been doing dirty work like this around this dump, euphemistically known as Central Offices, for six years; it was time he moved up. Yes, by the Deluvial Dipper, he would! Straightening his tie and radiating magnetism, he walked through the purple door where waited Mr. Badabar Baily.

ABOUT three hours later he walked out again, with the smile on his face turning into a sour leer the moment he was through the door. Mr. Baily had been kind; Mr. Baily had been polite, but Mr. Baily had been negative as well—as thoroughly negative as any human being could be. It seemed that Etsel didn't have the contacts necessary for the post of First Assistant Manager. You needed friends and influence to throw trade the way of Intercontinental Rocketransit or you stayed Second Assistant to the end of your days.

"And, furthermore," Mr. Baily had said, in a kindly voice, "you are not a gentleman. And that, sir, must conclude our discussion."

Etsel was boiling. He should have told Mr. Badabar Baily off and made it stick—told him that he knew the business backward and with a feather in its cap, and that he didn't want a diplomatic post but a job as an efficient manager for a big concern. Well—the flasher flashed. It was three o'clock already—the end of the working day for the office staff. Glumly Etsel closed the glass top of his desk, stepped into a private elevator. Once out in the open garage he took his private rocket as high as it would go—and that was plenty high.

Staring down through the glass floor-plate he studied the crawling specks that were trucks and cars on the main highways. Vernon Etsel took a flask from a private compartment, and drank long and deep. He shuddered and spat out crumbs of tongue and lips — Venerian hoopoe juice did that to a man.

With a new determination in his eyes he swung the rocket's nose south—to Coney Island, the nearest recreation center.

In practically the twinkling of an eye he was over the Island Landing Station and easing his craft down on the super-pneumatic table which protruded from the maze of ships and cars. He accepted a check from an attendant and walked away from the rocket—then hastily dove back into its recesses and retrieved the flask. He was going to make a night of it.

Strolling glumly down Surf Avenue, he ignored the barkers whooping out over mikes and PA systems the virtues of their wares—consisting of strange and wonderful games of chance with enormous prizes, "Life Shows" hinting delicately of strangely constructed but delectable extraterrestrials to be found inside, and fourth-dimensional rides that would twist you out of the continuum and back in three seconds flat—all risk assumed by the patron.

Etsel ignored them all, breezing past the most lurid and tempting signflashes. Ahead he saw a delectable sort of creature strolling arm-in-arm with a short, pudgy male. Licking his lips, quickening his pace, he drew even with them. The girl was

a perfect blonde—the kind he fell for with practically no effort—and her escort—if it came to a scrap, he could knock the guy galley-west seven different ways. The fat little man was wearing some kind of naval uniform; Etsel wondered what navy would accept anyone in as rotten condition as this person obviously was. A clerk of some kind, he thought, who would melt away as soon as Etsel made his wishes known.

He tapped the little man on the shoulder. "Mind if I cut in?" he asked with a genial smile. The blonde looked at him appraisingly and smiled back. The little man stared fishily, then peeled off his coat. Etsel blinked in horror at the bulging muscles that were exposed. It was a Jovian!

ETSEL picked himself out of the gutter and looked at the blonde and the little man vanishing in the distance. He winced and worked his jaw. Convincing himself that he could still drink, he dragged himself to a bar nearby.

"Beer," he mumbled through a split lip. And when his throat had been sufficiently lubricated by the brew, he settled down to serious drinking. Disdaining the tabu against mixing drinks, he ordered in rapid succession peanut brandy, tobacco wine, Venerian-Dutch Teufelnwasser, and, for a chaser, a pint of Bourbon. Then everything went black.

Along about that time Iuppeter Nutente had forged a cloud into a hammer strangely inscribed "Moxon" and was beating him violently about the head with it, explaining carefully the point of a joke dealing with King Caracatus and a lobster, but somebody shook Etsel by the shoulder and woke him up. He looked over the rim of the table. "Stevie," he said in a voice choked with emotion, "good old Stevie."

"Yeah!" said the bartender. "But it's pretty late, Mr. Etsel. You'd better go home and sleep it off."

Etsel looked at his watch and agreed, indicating as much with a determined nod which nearly wrenched his head from its moorings. "Right," he said, staggering to his feet.

Somehow he found his way to the parking field where he had left his rocket, presented his token. He shot the rocket high and opened a small port, reveling in the clean air which filled his lungs. Then his ship was slammed from beneath. He looked up, saw an example of that twenty-seventh century unmanageable miracle, the Beam Car.

This device is operated by a ray of uni-directional force. The beam has no recoil, but is directed down against the ground; it bounces back, through some engineering wizardry, always at the right angle, and strikes the bottom of the car, thus sustaining it in its flight.

What Etsel had done was to break the beam which struck his rocket's bottom, thus bashing said beam up and cutting support from under the car, sending it tumbling down. He swerved the rocket violently, had the satisfaction of seeing the Beam Car turn over and disgorge its occupant. Etsel grinned as the man floundered and fell free through space, then stared in horror. The man didn't have a parachute!

Etsel looped violently under the falling man, felt his rocket shiver as the victim struck a wing and clung there to the braces. "Hold on!" Etsel yelled through a port. But the man didn't hold; with suicidal bravery he inched his way along the wing, forced open the outer door to the fuselage. In another second he had tumbled into the rocket, grinning broadly.

(Continued On Page 90)

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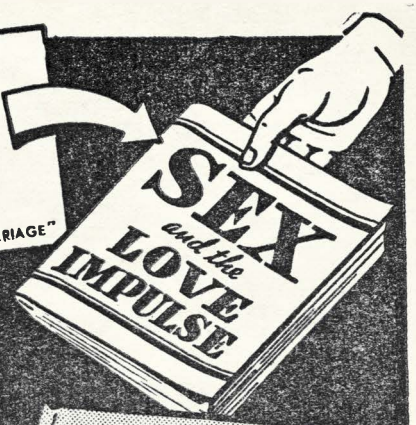


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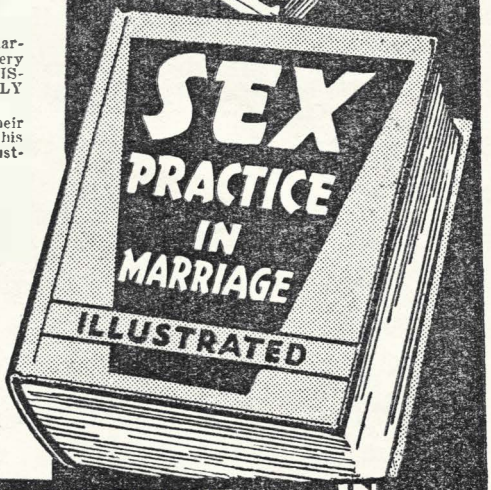


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(Continued From Page 88)

HE WAS a small man. Etsel groaned as he noted this; he had had a bellyful of small men. But this one was slender and weedy, with a curiously luminous complexion and a daft air about him that carried a certain charm. In an unfamiliar accent he addressed Etsel, "You will pardon my intrusion?"

"Certainly," said Etsel, appalled at the callousness with which the man took his near-tragedy. "After all, I was responsible for the accident."

"All for the best," replied the little man, lighting a cigarette. "I was afraid to land the thing anyway—it was the first time I've ever been in a Beam Car."

Etsel brought down the rocket in a suburban landing field.

"That was very well done," commented the little man reflectively. "Very well done, indeed. You are an admirable pilot—I owe my life to that. Is there not something I can do for you in return?"

"You can buy me a drink," said Etsel grinning.

"No—nothing so trivial. My people are marked for their sense of gratitude. Anything for you within my power I will gladly do—otherwise I should break with tradition, and that would be an evil accomplishment."

Etsel couldn't place him as a being from any planet he knew, yet didn't consider it polite to ask. Instead, he began to tell the little man about his troubles; not that he thought it would do either of them any good, but to clarify his own ideas and get them off his chest.

"You may be able to buy me a drink," he said, "but I don't think you can do anything else to help me. For my problem is a complicated one. To begin with, I am second assistant manager to the central branch of Intercontinental Rocketransit Incorporated."

"Ah—sso!" hissed the little man with a show of interest. "Continue from these very interesting facts. Already I see clear the way."

Etsel looked at him curiously. "My immediate superior," he went on, "Mr. Badaber Baily, is a—well, you probably wouldn't grasp the symbology of the idiom I was about to use. Suffice it to say that he is an objectionable individual. And, which is most important of all, he stands foursquare in the way of my promotion to First Assistant Manager, which is about the culmination of my ambitions."

The little man whipped out a notebook and pen. "This objectionable individual's name is Baily, you say?" He jotted something down. "Please continue."

"That's about all," said Etsel. "Except that the reason Mr. Baily presents for keeping me down is that I'm no gentleman."

"Gentleman—explain, please."

"By definition," said Etsel goodhumoredly, "a gentleman is an individual who lives off the work of others. This definition is extended to include those who have influential friends, and who will be able to play on those friendships so as to throw business in a desired way. Thus, even though I earn my own living, had I influential contacts which would result in more business coming through to Intercontinental Rocketransit, then I would be accredited as a gentleman, and, as such, entitled to promotion. Mere ability is of secondary importance—were my index of gentlemanness high enough, it would make no difference whether I knew anything about the position at all—in such a case, they would hire efficient secretaries and sub-assistants

to do the work required, yet maintain me on a munificent salary.

"I, unfortunately, being a self-made man, am not only entirely capable of holding down such a post without more than nominal secretarial assistance, but have no influential contacts whatsoever. And that is the tragedy of Vernon Etsel."

The little man grinned broadly. "Could be," he said amiably, "that tragedy will degenerate into screwball farce. We shall see. Now I go to subway station. Have no fear, my friend; the gratitude of a Plutonian knows no bounds. For you I will lie, cheat, and steal if necessary. I go now; goodnight." He climbed from the plane and popped into a nearby terminal. Etsel watched the slender man disappear from sight, then locked his rocket and called a taxi.

ETSEL sneaked into the office, and was about to ease himself into his chair when Mr. Baily popped through the purple door.

"So!" snorted the General Manager. "Not only late to work but in a disgraceful condition!"

"You mean the mouse?" asked Etsel, caressing a black eye. "I bumped into a door. And I'm sorry I'm late—went to a doctor for treatment and had to wait for him to get rid of an emergency case—"

"Enough," said Baily coldly. "What was the doctor's name?"

Etsel was silent. "As I suspected," remarked Baily. "You've been brawling in some low dive. Right?"

"In a way," replied Etsel dispiritedly.

"And you, a nobody, want to be assistant manager." The man's smile was half contemptuous. "I'll forgive your lateness—I'll have to credit you with the fact that, despite your low pleasures you rarely come in late or perform your duties the poorer for them—but we'll have no more talk about promotions, I think. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Etsel wearily.

The man's tones relaxed, became more friendly. "Be particularly on guard today—I'm expecting an exceedingly important visitor." He hesitated a moment.

"Perhaps, if you make the effort, you can make a halfway decent impression. I'm always ready to be convinced, Etsel, if you change your ways."

Soft soap, thought Etsel. "Who may this important visitor be?" he asked.

Baily pursed his lips and took a deep breath. "A prince," he said. "The Prince Gapatak Heig Itziz Heig Mamarat Heig Heig Heig Nenlyok Heig Itz-Killikut of Pluto."

The flasher on Etsel's desk flared green. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Here comes the prince now. It's been three years since I got green, and it was a Martian dictator then. Good luck."

The prince swept into the office. "Etsel, my dear boy," he cried effusively. Etsel blinked and looked again at the prince. It was the same man—the same weedy little excrescence whom he had first nearly killed, then rescued, last night.

"Hello," he said faintly, then cast a look from the corner of his eyes to see how Baily was taking it. Bravely, certainly, for he was straightening his pin-striped morning-coat and presenting his hand. "I am the Manager, Mr. Baily," said Badabar, introducing himself.

The prince looked puzzled. "I thought," he said, "that my old friend Mr. Etsel was the manager of this company. Otherwise I should

never have considered investing my father's fortune so heavily."

Baily's face wrinkled with the unaccustomed agony of quick thinking. "Mr. Etsel is our *First Assistant* Manager, your Highness," he mendaciously explained. "Though not for long."

"No?" asked Mamarat, lighting a cigarette.

"No," replied Baily. "We are about to promote him to the position which I now — ah — dignify" he chuckled, and the prince was obliging enough to laugh gently in appreciation.

"Then," replied Mamarat, "let us proceed to the business matters which are the subject of my visit."

"No," exclaimed Baily benevolently. "I wouldn't wish to hurry you into as important and—ah—brilliant a decision as you are contemplating. Despite the short notice which your call this morning has given us, I have arranged for a banquet in your honor. I trust your Highness will be able to attend."

His Highness looked doubtful. "Vernon and I had planned to make a night of it," he said thoughtfully. Then, turning to Etsel, "But you don't mind if we postpone it, do you?"

"Certainly not," said Etsel dazedly, "not at all."

"And, of course, Etsel, you'll sit at the right hand of our honored guest," broke in Baily, almost playfully.

"Of course," replied Etsel. "Nothing would afford me greater pleasure." He felt sick, positively. This thing was getting beyond the confines of a harmless joke prompted by the gratitude of the nondescript Plutonian he had rescued. He felt an impulse to explain it all to Baily as a friendly hoax, avoid the more unpleasant consequences which would follow a full discovery later. But he admired the principle of the little man; the nameless Plutonian had sworn to help Etsel out, and here he was, keeping his promise with a vengeance.

"Then I'll see you tonight, Vernon?" asked "Prince Mamarat."

"I'll be there," he grinned. He wouldn't fail the little man—and it would be such a colossal rib. The thought came to him that, unless a public exposure were made, Baily would gladly accept apologies and forget the matter, rather than risk his discomfiture attaining widespread knowledge. Yes, if he played his cards rightly, it was almost a sure win.

As Baily and the Plutonian left the office, Etsel dove hastily into the recess of his mahogany desk and fished out a flask and a cup. He needed reinforcement if he were going to see this gorgeous farce through. And see it through he would, come what may!

THE banquet was as elaborate as any Etsel had ever attended, from the melons that opened the repast to the ices that closed it. The liquors were of the finest; matters were running smoothly, but Etsel, sipping his brandy, was almost trembling with fear. The fine elation of the afternoon had worn off; he was nearly ready to account for the outrage that was being perpetrated on Intercontinental Rocketransit in the name of the Royal Family of Pluto.

Throughout the course of the feast he had spoken hardly a word to the honored guest at his left, rather staring frozenly at the nightmarish expanse of faces that stretched into the far recesses of the dining hall, appropriately decorated with the

planetary bunting of Pluto and its Emperor.

Baily had made small talk at the prince's left, subtly insinuating the extraordinary virtues of Rocketransit's common and preferred stock; Etsel had confined himself to occasional assents and refusals in the right place. Finally Baily excused himself and bustled off, without finishing his liquors, on some errand or other, and Etsel turned full on his guest.

"This is a pretty spot," he began mildly.

"Indeed," agreed the "prince" blandly. "Reminds me quite of an imperial banquet on my dear native planet."

"Yeah," said Etsel bitterly. "You can cut out that junk for my benefit. I admire your sense of gratitude—"

"It is one of our Plutonian proverbs," interrupted the little man sententiously, "that even a slarp is less than a slarp has it not gratitude. A slarp, I might explain, is something like a rye-bread on wheels, and is considered the lowest form of Plutonian animal life."

"Very true, no doubt," replied Etsel impatiently. "But I don't like the idea. What could have prompted you to it?"

"I reasoned thus," said the little man proudly. "Behold—a Prince of Pluto comes to Earth with a pocketful of that silly stuff—gold, you call it?—to buy stock in a large corporation. Perhaps he decides to buy; perhaps he does not."

"In this case, not, I assume," replied Etsel.

"Perhaps," returned the "prince" enigmatically. "At any rate, during the course of my stay you are, to all intents, First Assistant Manager—the post to which you aspire—and if you comport yourself well and truly as First Assistant, I see no reason why the 'prince' should not leave without purchasing and without suspicion. Such is the inertia of authority that you will probably remain First Assistant as long as you so desire."

"Yes," Etsel whispered, "but aren't you taking an awful chance impersonating royalty like this?" He paused and shook his head—his last words had sounded strange. With a chill of horror he realized *what* had happened. In one ghastly moment, the mikes, lying scattered about for the after-dinner speaking, had been connected—Baily's errand—and his last words had been roared out for all the thousands present to hear!

IF disaster comes, can Baily be far behind? Etsel thought confusedly as the Manager bore down upon them. "Etsel!" he was roaring inarticulately, "I'll drink your blood for this!" Etsel snatched up a table knife; Baily had already done so. Then the General Manager thought better of it and began to bawl "Police!"

In an incredibly short time, officers had seized Etsel and the "prince." The officers, Etsel noted bitterly, were originally part of the little man's guard of honor.

"You see!" he exclaimed to his companion. "That's where your overwhelming gratitude has gotten both of us."

"Is not too late," replied the little man. "Yet may the tide of fortune turn once taken at the flood." Which was a remarkably optimistic prospect, considering that they were out in the street by then, being hustled toward a dark, utilitarian-looking rocket.

"That," replied Etsel, "is what we call the Black Maria. It's going to

cart us straight to the local court where we will be tried and convicted of fraud, arson, vagrancy and anything else they think of. Rocketransit, Inc., owns this town, as you will soon find to your sorrow."

"May be," said the little man. "Yet, note my eyes."

Etsel noted nothing in particular. "What's wrong now?"

"Behold!" exclaimed the "prince": "I now turn on juice for benefit of captors."

Etsel scratched his head as well as he could considering the restraining influences of the guard. Then he heard a weird humming sound emanating from nowhere in particular. This, however, wasn't too true of the sparkling lights which played around the six individuals about to enter, or to be forced to enter, according to their capacities, the Black Maria. The lights emanated, very clearly, from the eyes of the little man. His two guards looked into his face, then fell to the pavement very simply and weakly. Etsel's guards put up a show of protest. "Hey!" they began, looking into the eyes of the Plutonian. And that was all they said, for, an instant later, they slumped beside their companions.

Abruptly the noise came to an end and the lights died out. "Was the juice," explained the Plutonian complacently. "Like all of my species, I am full of juice which will overflow at the slightest provocation."

"Interesting," murmured Etsel, averting his eyes from the other's face. "But let's pile into the rocket while we can." Adroitly he went through the pockets of the collapsed gendarmerie and fished out the operating keys. Together they bolted the door of the rocket from inside and blasted off—heading North.

"WHAT I don't understand, chum," said Etsel confusedly, "is how you got that appointment with Baily in the first place."

"Very simple," answered the little Plutonian complacently, finishing his tin cup of black coffee. "I just telephoned him and announced that Prince Mamarat was in town incognito."

They had been travelling by rocket as long as the fuel was above the halfway mark; when it fell below that, Etsel made a hasty landing in what had proved to be the most Northern of the North Woods—an inaccessible country, rich with game and out of fashion as a resort spot. So it was almost without difficulty that Etsel and his companion claimed a deserted hunting lodge, dispossessing several families of squirrels in the process. There had been emergency rations in the rocket and staple stores in the cabin; that, with the game in which the country abounded, seemed to offer as pretty a hideout as two criminals could hope for in a possum's age.

Their method of rustling game was unusual to say the least, and, to say the most—as many sportsmen would—positively indecent. Etsel would stalk game to the best of his ability, while Mamarat—as he had tacitly agreed to call the little fakir—would rest on a cot and conserve his strange Plutonian energy. When Etsel was fairly confident that he had spotted a covey of snipe or deer, Mamarat would come close, aim in the proper direction, and let off a squirt of his hypnotic essence with flashing lights and sound-effects in order. Then together they would collect the snipe, which would be lying dazedly on the ground, and pop them into the soup-kettle. Deer and other large animals they usually let go;

they could never bring themselves to cutting the beasts' throats.

They had virtually lost trace of the days, luxuriating thusly, when, one morning, there was a creaking in the bushes far away. At once Etsel sprang to the alert. "What's that?" he snapped.

"Deer?" suggested Mamarat lazily.

"They never come this close. It may be a grizzly bear—or some other equally undesirable member of that family."

"I'll fix him," yawned Mamarat. "Wait until he comes close—I'll give him the eye."

"What if it's two bears—one after the other?"

"I can do it if I have to. Remember the cops?"

"Oh," said Etsel relievedly. Then he sat up. "But suppose," he said anxiously, "it's three bears?"

Mamarat rolled over. "In that case," he meditated, "we put papa and mama out of commission, and keep baby for a pet."

The crashing in the bushes grew closer; Mamarat aimed himself at the noises. "Hello!" yelled Etsel tremulously.

A Western Union boy popped out of the bushes. "Harya," he greeted them. "Canya wait a minute? Me bike's stuck." He tugged violently for a moment, while Etsel watched speechlessly and finally emerged trundling a muddy bicycle. "You Voinan Etsel?" he asked Mamarat.

"No," replied the Plutonian, indicating his horrified companion. "Same is yonder."

"Okay. Sign dis please," said the youth, handing over a receipt blank.

"What for?"

"Da telegram of course." He presented a yellow envelope and Etsel signed.

"May I ask you how you found us?" he inquired.

"Nuttin to it. We knew you'd gone up dis way, so da rocket flew around until we sighted a cabin wit smoke comin' outa it. We figgered dat was youse. So dey landed me down da way a bit, in one a da outposts and I made da resta it on me bike. Nuttin to it; I make trips like dis every day inda week."

Etsel stood speechless before this revelation, then, mechanically, handed the boy a quarter. "Tanks, mister," was the reply and the boy mounted his bicycle and rode off whistling. Etsel remained staring after him until the squeakings and crashings had vanished in the distance, then handed the telegram to Mamarat. "Open it, will you?" he said.

Mamarat did so. "Your name figures the blank," he said quietly. "You read."

Etsel's eyes wobbled over the yellow slip, then he sank to the cot, limply handing the telegram to Mamarat. "Do you mind reading it to me? I think my eyes have gone bad on me."

Mamarat read aloud: "Return immediately Bring Mamarat All is straightened out repeat Return. The signature is Baily."

ROARING happily through the clouds Etsel and Mamarat were not so happy in the realization that they had been hunted down with such ease. Now, thought Etsel, they were about to be brought to trial. Mamarat, however, was as cheerful as usual, recounting details of his life on Pluto as a strolling minstrel.

"Never a penny in my pockets," he explained, "but living from the corpulence of the community, as you

say it. I had a charanga—one of our musical instruments — and I would enter the city square of the various towns and begin my serenade."

"We're landing now," broke in Etsel. He looked at the ground. "Lord," he groaned, "what a collection of dignitaries and cops. Something special, I guess. If only Baily didn't have to hold himself down to ten words so as to get a special rate for his telegram!"

Viciously he skidded the rocket over the heads of those waiting for them. "I bet that'll give the constabulary some new gray heads," he gloated. Then he brought the ship down with a thud.

Through the port he could see a throng swarming over to their rocket. "That looks like the mayor," he said, baffled. "This looks like a gilt-edged arrest."

The port swung open, and the mayor stepped in. "Welcome!" that dignitary chortled. "Welcome, your Highness, to our city. I trust the cause of interplanetary amity has not been injured by your jest."

Mamarat smiled. "Has my honored father been sending threatening notes to Earth?"

"Indeed he has!" replied the Mayor, wiping sweat from his brow. "War would have been declared in two days if you had not returned."

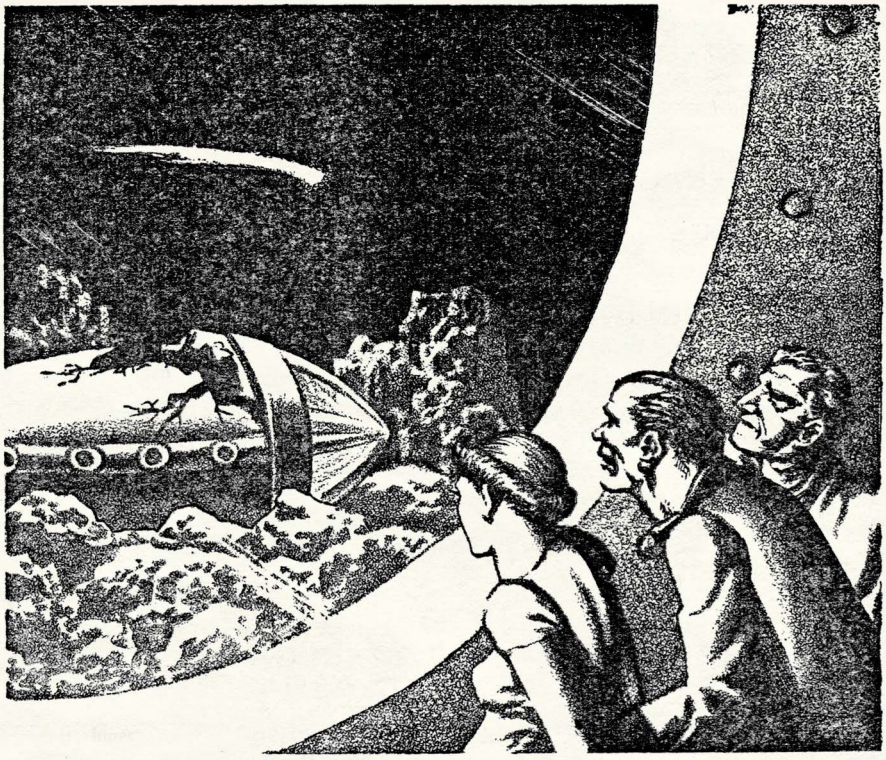
"Wait a moment," said Etsel. You aren't the prince; you're just an unprincipled little faker!"

"I never said I wasn't the prince!" snapped Mamarat. Then he smiled. "On Pluto, Etsel, it isn't considered mannerly to contradict a friend."

"Oh!" Etsel was stopped. Then Baily pushed his way through the crowd into the little cabin. "Your Highness," he puffed, "I trust our little misunderstanding has in no way affected the plans for the purchase of outstanding stock in Intercontinental Rocketransit— ?"

"Not at all," smiled Mamarat. "I never meant to get into your concern anyway. My purpose is to start a corporation of a similar nature on Pluto and have my old friend Vernon Etsel manage it from top to bottom. And the plan still goes.

"Mr. Etsel, you see, has one qualification you lack—he is a gentleman!"



# STATUS QUO

## by R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

(Author of "Atom of Death," "Message From Venus," etc.)

**Perhaps Death is a life process and cannot occur in conditions unsuitable for life. If that were true, then Dr. Pixley, stranded half a year on the moon with provisions but for three months, might still be alive!**

UNDER psychological dissection, Dr. Nils Enson would be described as a remarkable mixture of human types. One of the greatest contributors to scientific knowledge of his time, he also was as mystical as a Harlem witch doctor.

Incompatible as his mental aberrations may have been, there was no conflict. Each of his so-called personalities had its place in Dr. Enson's scheme of things. But the continual change left Dr. Enson an unknown quantity.

It had been known, prior to the year 2000 that Dr. Enson had done great things. But no one knew exactly what. He had been associated with Dr. Will Pixley in the development of stratosphere rocket planes for a number of years, but no one could ever be certain which of the two men was

responsible for the vast number of inventions which came forth in a stream from Upper Stratosphere, Inc., as their establishment was named.

There was, however, one person who seemed to know Dr. Enson, and Dr. Pixley as well. This was the pretty, 23-year-old Susanna Nobley, the daughter of a wealthy landowner, who somehow came to prefer science to the Junior League.

Often I have raised my voice in doubt as to the efficiency of woman's temperament in the field of science. True, a large number of women have been able to suppress their emotional instability long enough to make discoveries which were as great as those of men, but the woman's touch somehow always remained. In science, I regard a woman's touch as pollution to accuracy. I feel I shall be attacked for this statement and my only defense is that I am a misogynist—Jim Wentworth, the woman hater.

Susanna, however, deserves a place by herself, for both Enson and Pixley owed much to her inspiration. They were not woman haters—to the contrary, they both loved her.

Neither man was far beyond thirty and I suppose they were young enough to regard woman as something divine. I cannot say that I loved her, but I admired her deeply.

In referring to my tolerance of Susanna, Pixley said: "Jim Wentworth can worship Susanna for her intelligence, but he can never forgive her for being a woman."

Pixley, I believe, was the most human of the four of us. He was normal, fun-loving and intelligent. He was temperate of habit and friendly of manner. He loved the outside world, while Enson, Susanna and I lived in a walled city of our minds. His only quirk, if it can be so called, was that he was afraid of nothing—so far as any of us knew.

Then came what seemed to be an almost ruinous blow. In the year 2000, Dr. Pixley disappeared without a trace. Many of us will recall the furore of Pixley's disappearance, but no one realized the suspicions and insinuations directed against Dr. Enson. It was said that Pixley and Enson had quarreled over Susanna and that Enson had murdered Pixley.

In addition, there was a suspicion of kidnaping, but a thorough investigation disproved this theory. The only clue found in the official investigation was that the MD-65, one of the largest stratosphere ships ever built by the firm, had vanished along with Dr. Pixley.

Probably it would be simpler to steal a zeppelin than a modern stratosphere rocket ship, for a machine like the MD-65 had a wingspread of nearly a quarter of a mile and there were few places on the earth, outside the ocean and specially constructed landing fields, where the machine could have been brought down without damage. The MD-65, however, did not appear on any landing field and the only plausible explanation was that it had landed on the sea and had sunk.

The life and work of Dr. Pixley was relegated to history. I was brought into the firm of Upper Stratosphere, Inc., in a feeble effort to fill Dr. Pixley's shoes with someone who knew something about the business.

At first I visualized trouble with Dr. Enson, but my fears were groundless. Inside the factory he was wholly and completely a man of science. Outside he may have possessed kinship with a Hindu fakir or a Druid priest, but he lost his mysticism when he entered the laboratory door.

Never has any man so completely baffled me.

Then on New Year's Eve of 2001, the three of us, Dr. Enson, Susanna and myself, held a solemn little watch party at Susanna's home.

There under the mellowing influence of brandy, Dr. Enson became more human than I have ever seen him, even to the point of poking fun at his various eccentricities.

Suddenly, in the middle of one of my stories, Dr. Enson's face grew solemn. He interrupted.

"Jim," said Dr. Enson, "I know you do not believe this malicious gossip to the effect that I murdered Will, but can you tell me why people say such things?"

My eyes swept involuntarily toward Susanna, who sat on a footstool facing the fireplace. Her brown, curly hair looked like spray dashing against the smooth color of her cheeks. Her eyes were closed as if she were dreaming and her profile was a perfect representation of passive dignity.

"It was said that you both loved Susanna," I said frankly. "And, if that were not enough, you recall that each of you had wills endowing the other with all the holdings in Upper Stratosphere, Inc., an estate valued roughly at one hundred million."

"That is very, very foolish," laughed Dr. Enson. "True, everyone who knows Susanna loves her, but no man worthy of her would hope to win her by murdering off competition. As for Dr. Pixley's will, it has never been probated. His share of our joint earnings has been placed in trust until he returns."

Susanna stirred. She opened her eyes and gazed tenderly at Dr. Enson.

"You believe Dr. Pixley will return?" she asked. "Nils, do you know something you have not told me?"

Dr. Enson slid down in his chair. His fingers nervously tapped on the arms and his chin rested for a moment on his chest as he thought deeply.

"I know, as surely as I'm sitting here, what happened to Dr. Pixley. You may scoff and you may laugh, but, my friends, there is such a thing as ESP—extra-sensory perception. I can hear Dr. Pixley calling—calling for help—from the moon!"

WHETHER or not there is such a thing as telepathy must be argued by others than Jim Wentworth. I am inclined to disbelieve it, since future events proved that Dr. Enson did know things that neither Susanna nor I knew concerning Dr. Pixley's disappearance and perhaps Enson's imagination did the rest.

At that time, however, no one dreamed that Dr. Pixley had even planned an experimental flight to the moon. Such a thing had been discussed, I suppose, for several centuries, but it always had been considered a pipe dream. Rocket flight through the stratosphere had brought the goal of interplanetary travel closer, but it had seemed far in the future, even in the year 2001.

I am convinced that Dr. Enson had deliberately set the stage for what he revealed to Susanna and me that night. His mystical personality loved drama and, away from the scientific setting of the laboratory, his mysticism was in full control. His statement aroused the feminine curiosity in Susanna and after that—trust a woman to get the facts.

"Yes," Dr. Enson admitted after Susanna had used her wiles to extort the facts, "Will Pixley had been planning a flight to the moon. There has always been a mysterious attraction for man in that beautiful satellite. In ages past, the moon was believed in-

fluential in bringing about insanity; it also was believed to control the growth of crops and moisture. These things have been disproven, but the ancient folklore often had a basis of fact. There is on the moon an attraction for man!"

"I wish you'd forget your mysticism for a while and give us the facts!" insisted Susanna.

But Enson would take his time.

"All science is rooted in mysticism," he replied. "Alchemy, which bordered on witchcraft, gave birth to chemistry; mathematics and astronomy had their beginnings in the priestcraft of ancient civilizations; the study of anatomy arose from the auguries of the sacrificial altars. Today we substitute philosophy as the foundation for science, whereas any philosophy becomes mysticism if it progresses far enough."

"But what of Dr. Pixley?" I roared. "Tell us! What of his flight to the moon?"

"He is held there by that subtle attraction that primitive man felt here on Earth—approximately a quarter of a million miles away." Dr. Enson paused for effect, but the only effect it had was an expression of anger on Susanna's, and perhaps my own, face. He shrugged and went on.

"More than five years ago, Dr. Pixley, first confided to me that he was planning a trip to the moon," he began. "At that time he swore me to secrecy. 'If I should fail, I would be rated as a fool and I don't want that to happen,' he told me. For years he assembled data on rocket flight and air resistance and he set to work on the problem of using atomic power for fuel.

"For a hundred years, science has studied the atom and for a man to develop atomic power in the short span of five years seems incredible. But Dr. Pixley was aided by a stroke of luck. He forgot all he knew, and started from the bottom.

"He went at the problem backwards. Science had been trying to destroy the atom in order to steal its power. Dr. Pixley set about to build atoms in order to crystallize power. You have often heard the problem that if an explosion occurred in the middle of an uninhabited desert, would there be sound if no one heard it?

"The answer is that there would be no sound, for sound exists only if someone hears it. Sound is a part of our sensory perception of a movement of air molecules.

"The same holds true of energy. The universe is full of energy—light, heat, electricity, cosmic waves—but unless it is used this energy figuratively does not exist. Dr. Pixley, by utilizing this free energy in the universe to create atoms, brought power into being in such quantities that a trip to the moon could be accomplished quite simply. The atoms he created could be discarded as fast as made."

"I'm not sure I follow you," said I, my head awhirl.

"Don't try, right now, and gradually you'll grasp the idea," replied Dr. Enson. "Be content with the summarization that Dr. Pixley solved the problem of interplanetary flight. He built the MD-65 especially for the moon trip, because it possessed facilities for flight through the Earth's atmosphere, both for the takeoff and landing. On the moon the takeoff and landing could be accomplished by rockets."

"Why didn't you tell us where he had gone?" asked Susanna.

"The last thing Dr. Pixley did before he left was to reimpose an oath of secrecy for at least six months.

After that period, I should be free to discuss the subject with you two if he had not returned."

"He expected to be gone a long time?" asked Susanna nervously.

"He had expected to be gone a month," replied Dr. Enson. "But he foresaw many things that might delay him and he took supplies sufficient for a six-month voyage. These undoubtedly have been exhausted."

"Then, he's dead!" I asserted.

"I do not believe he is," replied Dr. Enson. "I am sure I have been in telepathic communication with him—tonight!"

"But how can he be alive, without air, water or food?" I asked.

"I can only say, that I shall continue to believe him to be alive until I know otherwise. He foresaw so many problems and difficulties and took precautions to avoid these when he left, that I cannot help but believe he landed safely. Something is holding him there—preventing him from returning."

"I believe you are right," whispered Susanna. "I think that I too, can feel him calling!"

As for me, I distrust woman's intuition as much as I distrust telepathy. But I felt that we should, at all costs, send an expedition to the moon to learn the facts.

WE CHOSE a smaller ship than the MD-65 for the relief expedition partly because we did not have time to build one especially for the trip and partly because the ship we selected, the MD-20, had been fitted by Dr. Pixley for test flights above the atmosphere using the atom-creating power principle.

As Dr. Enson foresaw, I gradually assimilated the underlying theory of Dr. Pixley's atomic power. It has been known for more than a century that much of the sun's energy is derived from atom building. In the sun's case, hydrogen atoms are transformed into non-hydrogen atoms with a release of energy. Dr. Pixley had gone beyond this and found that there was a much greater energy release in the construction of hydrogen atoms from the free energy of the universe.

Dr. Pixley's charts and diagrams had been carefully preserved by Dr. Enson and it was easy to fit the ship as completely as the MD-65 had been fitted. We took supplies for three persons for a period of three months, knowing that if Dr. Pixley should be found alive, our margin of safety would be decreased by twenty-five percent.

The morning of the takeoff came and we took our posts. Dr. Enson stood at the controls as the ship gracefully soared into the stratosphere and began its long period of acceleration that would eventually free us from the pull of the Earth's gravity.

While I stood over the glass windows in the bottom of the cabin, watching the Earth assume the shape of a giant saucer, I heard a step behind me. I turned and saw Susanna, her eyes red from weeping.

"Why, Susanna!" I exclaimed, clumsily self-conscious. "What is the matter?"

She extended a sheet of white paper toward me. At the bottom I saw the signature of Dr. Will Pixley and as I read it a gradual sinking feeling seemed to sweep over me. The paper consisted of Dr. Pixley's final instructions before he sailed to the moon, and it confirmed what I had felt since that New Year's Eve party at Susanna's. Dr. Enson had deliberately deserted Dr. Pixley when there had been time to rescue him alive!

The letter stated that Dr. Pixley

was embarking on a voyage to the moon with supplies sufficient for a six-month trip. He expected to be gone only a month and at the end of that period Dr. Enson was instructed to notify Susanna and myself and to decide what steps should be taken to rescue him if he had not returned!

Dr. Pixley had left the Earth in June and six months had passed before either Susanna or myself were given the slightest inkling as to the cause of his disappearance.

"You loved Dr. Pixley?" I asked.

"I was to have married him," she replied. "It was a secret between us, shared only by Dr. Enson."

Clearly this was the motive, for Dr. Enson's feelings toward the girl were apparent to everyone. Dr. Enson had been hopelessly in love with the girl and rather than lose her, he had allowed his rival to die.

"Where did you get this letter?" I inquired.

"Nils—Dr. Enson—gave it to me," she said, smothering a sob. "He confessed everything. He told me how he had spent sleepless nights trying to decide what to do—as if there were more than one solution! He confessed that he did it because he wanted me and he could not bear to rescue Will when that meant losing me."

"The devil!" was all I could say.

"He's suffered terribly!" went on Susanna, and then to my surprise she began to defend Dr. Enson. It seems that she blamed herself as the cause of Dr. Pixley's maroonment. She said that she had never understood how Dr. Enson had felt toward her and that she had caused him to fall in love with her unknowingly. Men were not entirely responsible for their actions when they are in love, said she, and I agreed with her.

"But Dr. Enson has done a terrible thing!" I insisted. "He has left a man

to die when it was within his power to save him!"

"Nils still insists that Will is not dead," replied Susanna. "If that is the case, he is doing a great thing! He is sacrificing his own happiness in order to save another man's life."

I kept silent, for I knew that no man on Earth could live without air to breathe. This was in February, nearly six months after Will Pixley had sailed for the moon with oxygen sufficient to last six months.

THERE were thrills and breath taking sights on the voyage across the gully of space that separates the Earth from its planetary attendant. But no one of us could enjoy the beautiful vista of red, blue and green stars; the massive nebulae that now were plainly visible to the naked eye; the gorgeousness of the Earth's disc which filled a fourth of the sky behind us.

A coolness had settled between Enson and me. Susanna was kind to him —far kinder than he deserved—but the old camaraderie was gone. One could see that Enson suffered: his eyes stared from deep sockets; lines appeared in his face, and he ceased smiling. Susanna's compassionate attitude seemed to pain him more than if she had shown open hatred.

The moon grew larger while the Earth shrank. Then we found ourselves slowly decelerating as Enson applied the rocket brakes for the landing on the moon. Down, down we came toward the satellite until Enson levelled off just above the tops of the craters and we stared at a surface that seemed to be of solid stone, bleak, desolate and lifeless; without air or water, where nothing lived nor had ever lived since time began.

All of us stood in the control room, silent as the vast world beneath us.

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Enson turned to me, his cheeks seeming to be more gaunt than ever.

"Pixley had planned to land near Tycho," he said, indicating the huge crater south of us. "While we are there, I must request that no one leave the ship until we find what forces confront us."

"Forces?" I asked. "Man, you're crazy. This world is dead. Even one of your devils wouldn't have this place for a home! The only force we need fear is the force of gravity or a falling meteor!"

"Whether you trust me or not," replied Enson, "I am in command of this expedition and you must obey. There is menace below—a menace greater than anything known on Earth. If we are not careful, we will be trapped and held in a living death like Dr. Pixley."

We crossed over the crater of Tycho and there, in a valley of basaltic rock, lay the MD-65. The task of landing beside the craft was not difficult and within a short time our anxious eyes were going over every inch of the craft in search of signs of life.

The craft might as well have been a boulder on the lunar plain. It is impossible to describe the unreality of the scene. On Earth we see sights described as desolate, but there are drifting clouds overhead; the moon and the sun rise and set; a gentle breeze raises dust or shakes limbs of trees and grass. There are noises of insects and even in the most desolate of places there is motion.

On the moon, nothing but the sun ever moved, and the sun traveled across the sky in fourteen days—a pace so slow that it could hardly be traced from hour to hour. The Earth always hung in exactly the same spot in the sky; there were no clouds, no

wind, no trees. Everything was as motionless as a picture.

Then, to our surprise, something did move! In the deep, black shadow of Tycho a sudden, brilliant flash of light flared. It hung, brightly glowing for an instant, then faded to cherry red, and finally went out.

"What was that?" whispered Susanna and in the lunar silence the whisper sounded like a shout.

"A meteor," replied Enson. "It was one of those that threw Will Pixley into the power of this planet!"

He raised his finger and pointed toward the MD-65. In the top we saw a jagged hole, six inches or more in diameter, through which a meteor had plunged on its trip toward lunar soil.

"A hole as big as that would have released his air supply instantly," I remarked. "Do you still think he's alive?"

"We'll see," replied Enson. "If the same thing doesn't happen to us!"

As he spoke, we saw another meteor blaze in the shadow of another mountain and I realized how lucky we of the Earth are to live beneath a deep, protecting layer of atmosphere. The universe is filled with cosmic debris which bombards all things in space.

On Earth most of these fragments are vaporized before they reach the ground, but on Luna, where there is no atmosphere to halt the downward plunge, there is a constant hail of meteors. We saw now why the floor of the valley was so smooth. Most of these meteors are changed to liquid by the heat of the sudden stop and these few drops of liquid flow like water into the low places of the moon, freezing again into a lake of smooth rock. Millions of meteors had made the floor of our valley.

From a locker Enson pulled forth

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a suit of insulating material and a helmet, similar to a diver's helmet. which he fastened over his head. He opened the oxygen valves in the outfit and after waving a solemn goodby he stepped forth through the locks of the cabin onto the lunar soil.

We watched him walk in bounding leaps across the short space that separated the two rocket ships. He fitted a key into the door and swung it open. For several minutes we saw no signs of life aboard the craft, then Enson reappeared and Susanna smothered a shrill scream. Dr. Nils Enson was carrying a stiffened human form.

Dr. Pixley, lifeless as the lunar mountains, was being carried with ease by Enson, for the moon's gravity made the doctor's weight only a small fraction of what it would have been on the Earth.

Enson reached the rocket's locks, laid the body on the smooth stone, lunar surface outside the craft and then came in.

Susanna sat in a chair, sobbing, as Enson entered.

"Get adrenalin, heart stimulants, and a respirator!" ordered Enson, huskily. He didn't open his helmet, but he talked through the microphone inside.

"Surely you don't expect to bring him back to life?" I exclaimed. "You couldn't! He's been dead for months, almost a year!"

"You're on the moon, not on Earth, Jim!" rebuked Enson. "Here nothing dies, because nothing lives. Death, perhaps is a life process and cannot occur in conditions unsuitable for life. Pixley, when the meteor hit his craft, suddenly was placed in an environment of lifelessness. He stopped breathing, his blood froze and the cells of his body turned to ice. A chill colder than any temperature

ever recorded on Earth has preserved each cell, each drop of blood and every organ without injury during these months. There was no decay of body structures, no loss of anything that might prevent Pixley from living again, if we could start his body functioning. The moon, Jim, is a perfect example of status quo. Nothing ever changes so long as it is not hit by a meteor—and Will Pixley was lucky in that way."

As Enson spoke, Susanna was fumbling in a medicine cabinet, looking for stimulants. In a few minutes we had rigged up a makeshift apparatus to restore Dr. Pixley from his state of suspended animation. Then Enson stepped from the locks. As he started to lift Dr. Pixley I saw him stagger slightly, but I thought nothing of it at the time, and a few seconds later he brought the body of the scientist into the craft.

THEY worked furiously and I helped as much as I could, although I had not the slightest idea what they did. Enson and Susanna jabbed with hypodermic needles; they injected fluids into Pixley's heart and spine; they rubbed his cold body with stimulants and gradually restored its warmth with electric heaters. The body temperature was raised slowly so that no cell would be disturbed from its delicate balance and at the same time the respirator pumped oxygen into Pixley's frozen lungs.

During the whole time there was a strange silence amongst us. Once, Pixley's chest rose and fell and the heart fluttered. Then it stopped, started, pumped once or twice again before ceasing.

"Hell!" groaned Enson into his microphone. It was one of the few words he spoke.

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Once more the needle jabbed and once again the heart started and Pixley's pulse throbbed. Slowly, it went at first, then speeding up to a regular beat. Dr. Pixley's chest rose in a great sigh.

"He lives!" cried Susanna hysterically.

But it was six hours before Dr. Pixley opened his eyes and during the whole time all three of us stood at his side, fighting every inch of the road back from death.

"Hello, Susanna," said Dr. Pixley, with a wan smile as he noted the girl at his side. He turned his eyes to me. "And it's good to see you, Jim." Then he looked at Enson, who stood like an alien creature still clad in the insulated clothing and helmet. "I didn't doubt you for a moment, Nils," he said.

Dr. Enson nodded stiffly. His face through the glass was pale and his eyes were glazed. He showed no emotion over having forsaken his future happiness with Susanna in order to save Pixley's life.

"We'd better take off at once," Susanna whispered. "You take the controls, Jim."

I nodded and hustled to the control cabin to prime the rockets, while Susanna took Dr. Pixley to a sleeping cabin to feed him warm broth, the first food Pixley had taken in more than ten months.

"We're ready to go," I reported to Dr. Enson, a few minutes later.

Dr. Enson, still clad in his helmet and insulated clothing stood near the locks of the craft, looking through a small porthole at the mountains of the moon. He did not move as I spoke.

I repeated my words, wondering why the man had not taken off the bundlesome suit and helmet which he had worn to rescue Dr. Pixley.

During the time we worked over Pixley there had been no time to change, but now—

I noted the small hole in the top of the helmet for the first time. The hole had been clogged with frozen blood, which now had melted and was running down the back of the helmet.

"Dr. Enson!" I cried.

My hands grasped his shoulders as he toppled backward. I caught him in my arms, feverishly jerked off the helmet. Blood gushed like water from a bucket. Dr. Enson was dead.

A meteor had plunged through the helmet and into Dr. Enson's brain—but when? It must have been when he stepped outside the craft to drag Pixley's body in, for there was no hole in the cabin. How had Enson managed to live, perform the delicate surgery of restoring life to Dr. Pixley, while a pellet of stone lodged in his brain?

I recalled stories of suspended animation, suspended death; stories of men who performed feats while dying; tales of survivals of horrible head injuries. I was in such a state that I even thought of ghosts and vampires.

None of these explanations seemed to fit, although any might have been applied in Dr. Enson's case. Death in all human beings usually follows a familiar pattern, but sometimes there are bewildering, inexplicable variations that baffle science.

I examined the oxygen tank on Dr. Enson's suit and found the air had been shut off and the tank was nearly full of gas. For more than six hours, Enson had not breathed and his spoken words would not have used more air than the lungs could contain.

Sealed in a lunar vacuum within his space suit, Dr. Enson had for more than six hours existed on the

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misty border-line between life and death.

I recalled Dr. Enson's own words, "On the moon nothing dies because nothing lives."

Could that be the explanation?

From the next room came Dr. Pixley's voice, speaking to Susanna.

"I was conscious, yet dreaming. I felt often as though I were talking across space to Dr. Enson, warning him not to rescue me. I felt somehow that if he did he would never return alive to the earth. I seemed to know his reaction—he seemed to feel I was speaking the truth. Of course, it was all ridiculous! Imagine mental telepathy from the moon to the earth!"

"Dr. Enson always endorsed telepathy—when he wasn't in the laboratory," Susanna said. "But he did feel as though he were in touch with you, Will."

"It may have been telepathy," Dr. Pixley went on. "I knew when you folks arrived here. I realized when he came for me. Then something happened that baffles all explanation. For a few minutes, it seems, I was in complete control of Dr. Enson's mind and body. I controlled his hands and I saw my own body before me. I seemed to work his fingers as he brought me back to life. I felt as though I were dwelling in his mind—"

It was then that I interrupted to announce that Dr. Enson had died six hours before.

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*ding" was actually passable; it might almost have been good enough to appear in somebody else's magazine. "Ship of Cold Death" presented some very good description of Uranus but the rest of the yarn wasn't much.*

*Added up, these were hardly specimens to present along with an article on how to write fantasy. As for the rest of the departments, nothing much. I am staggered with indifference about "Fantasy Times," rather stupid piffle. Inaccurate, furthermore. And the "Fan Mag Digest" is hardly inspiring. If out of all the fan magazines published, these items represent points of interest, then they must be bad magazines indeed. As it happens, I know better; there's plenty of fine stuff to be had in fan magazines other than some infantile's carpings against fans who have more brains than to buy his particularly trashy sheet. The term "un-American" is particularly asinine in this regard.*

*I don't, of course, suppose that this letter will produce any results. However, all is not lost. I can always turn to some other magazine for good writing and good fantasy. What more can any fan ask?*

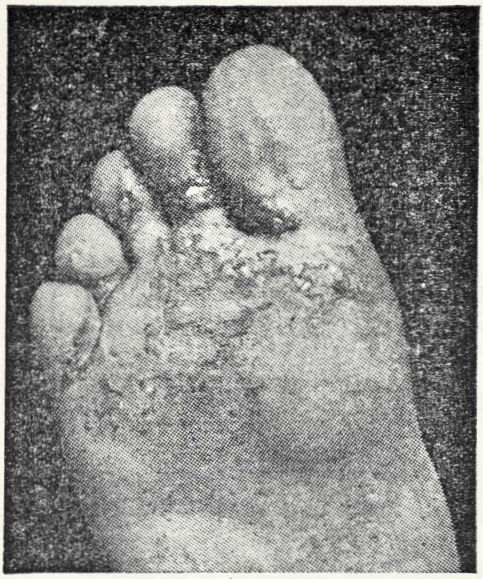
*Utica, New York*

(Dear Mr. Conway:

Being only human, our first reaction to your letter is to take the editorial supersonic guns from the shelf and blast away. However, realizing that we are far from perfect, and that there is always the possibility that your indictment may carry more truth than vituperation, we are restrained.

Obviously, however, you cannot be 100% right; if you were, then FUTURE FICTION simply wouldn't be. On the other hand, with your wide range of reading in this field, you cannot be 100% wrong. It may well be that the magazine is not all that it might be. At any rate, we shall not argue. Other readers may agree with you; they may disagree. Something tells us that, if you are more than just a little right, the flood-gates will soon be opened. Very well, readers; don't spare us; we can take it! In fact, if you agree with Mr. Conway, we expect every loyal reader of FUTURE FICTION to say so.

So . . . thanks for your letter. Whether you realize it or not, the fact that you took the trouble to write shows that you really do consider us capable of perceiving and correcting mistakes. For which we thank you; some would not grant us so much. And, just as a special request, may we hear from you as to your reactions to this issue. Our frank opinion is that it is rather good.)



# FOOT ITCH

## ATHLETE'S FOOT

***Send Coupon***
***Don't Pay Until Relieved***

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

## BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

## DISEASE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

The cause of the disease is not a germ as so many people think, but a vegetable growth that becomes buried beneath the outer tissues of the skin.

To obtain relief the medecine to be used must first gently dissolve or remove the outer skin and then kill the vegetable growth.

This growth is so hard to kill that a test shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy it; however, laboratory tests also show that H. F. will kill it upon contact in 15 seconds.

## DOUBLE ACTION NEEDED

Recently H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It both gently dissolves the skin and then kills the vegetable growth upon contact. Both actions are necessary for prompt relief.

H. F. is a liquid that doesn't stain. You just paint the infected parts nightly before going to bed.

## H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.


**GORE PRODUCTS, INC.** **D.A.**
**880 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.**

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....


# "SECRETS of LOVE and MARRIAGE"

## Daringly Revealed

***Edited by Dr. Edward Podolsky***

This is an enlightened age. Are you one of those, still *afraid to know the truth* about the many intimate questions of man or woman? Or are you one of those who thinks—"I know it all"— and is actually unaware of many important facts and pleasures? Do you know how to live a complete, vigorous and delightful sex life? Do you know your part in the game of love? Every happy marriage is based, to a great extent, on a happy sex life. But how can you lead a satisfactory love life, if you do not know—or are not sure, of the many, many facts and ways of love, of marriage, of sex—of the 1000 ways of a man with a woman! Are you getting ALL that you expected, that you dreamed of—from your love, from your marriage, from your sex life? Or are *doubts* and *difficulties* in the art of love troubling you, holding you back, spoiling everything?

### *Offers a Liberal Education in Sexual Science*

At last the whole truth about sex! The time has come to bring this intimate and necessary knowledge into the light of day—into the hands of every adult man and woman who wants to lead a satisfactory, healthy, full love life. Written in simple and frank language—SECRETS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE explains: How to attract the opposite sex—how to win love—how to conduct yourself during your honeymoon. The book teaches the proper sexual conduct in marriage and the technique of performing the sex act. The book explains: the problems of the wife and how to solve them—and the problems of the husbands and how to overcome them. Sometimes they are actual physical disabilities, such as impotence, sterility, etc. The book advises you on correcting these difficulties. It also devotes a chapter to "BIRTH CONTROL" with reasons for and against—and the method of accomplishing. It features a table of "safe periods." It explains conception, pregnancy. In short, it is a complete teacher and guide on practically every phase of Love and Marriage.

"Secrets of Love and Marriage" is an endless source of intimate, intriguing information, from the first awakening of youthful love to the full flowering of grand passion... answering many questions you hesitate to ask even your closest friends. You must know the real facts and ways or be cheated out of life's most precious pleasures!

### Let Us Send You This Book on Trial!

Send no money now. Just mail the coupon. When book arrives, deposit with postman only 98c plus shipping charges, under our MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. You risk nothing. Mail coupon now.

**HERALD PUBLISHING CO., Dept. DA-4**
**26 East 17th St., New York, N. Y.**

Send me "SECRETS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE." in plain wrapper. I will pay postman 98c plus shipping costs on delivery. I can return the book, if not satisfied, and my money will be refunded. (I am over 21 years old.)

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

State .....

☐ Check here if you are enclosing $1.00 with the coupon and thereby saving C. O. D. charges. Your book sent postpaid under same MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.
Impossible to send C. O. D. to Canada; please send $1.20 with order.

## —PART OF CONTENTS—



**HERALD PUBLISHING COMPANY**
**26 East 17th St., Dept. DA-4, New York**

# DO THE DEAD RETURN?

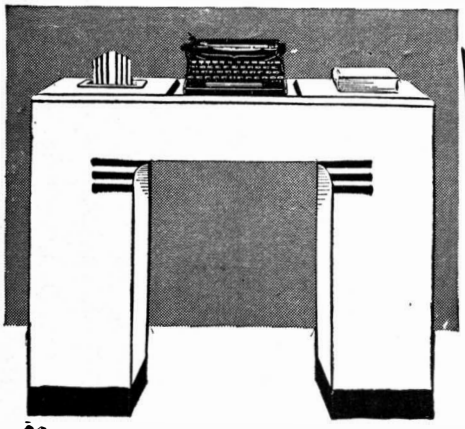
A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

"The time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world," declares the author, and offers to send his amazing 9000 word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 202N, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.



# THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK for only $1.00 EXTRA

## WITH ANY REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green which will fit into the decorations of any home—trimmed in black and silver—and made of sturdy fibre board—is now available for only one dollar ($1.00 extra) to purchasers of a Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble—it is so strong that it will hold six hundred (600) pounds. With this combination of desk and Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter, you will have a miniature office at home. Learn the complete details of this offer. Mail the coupon today.

*The*

# COMBINATION

## FOR AS LITTLE AS 10c A DAY

How easy it is to pay for this combination of desk and Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable Typewriter! Just imagine, a small good will deposit with terms as low as 10c a day to get this combination at once! You will never miss 10c a day. Yet this small sum can actually make you immediately the possessor of this amazing office-at home combination. You assume no obligations by sending the coupon.

## MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

The Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money back guarantee. If, after ten days trial, you do not wish to keep the typewriter, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges. You risk nothing in buying a Remington Portable Typewriter on terms as low as 10c a day.


## THESE TWO EXTRA FOR YOU

### LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get free with this special offer a 32-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent free while this offer holds.


### SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a sturdy, beautiful carrying case which rivals in beauty and utility the most attractive luggage you can buy.

## SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key and shift lock; two color ribbon and automatic ribbon reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide. There are also extra features like the card writing attachment, black key cards and white letters, touch regulator, rubber cushioned feet. These make typing on a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable a distinct pleasure. Thousands of families now using the Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable know from experience how wonderful it is!

## MAIL COUPON NOW!

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 164-4.
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable, including Carrying Case and Free 32-page Typing Instruction Booklet on terms as low as 10c a day. Send Catalogue.

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Address. .....

City. ..... State. .....

# SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

Every hour, day and night 4,080 people are disabled through sickness and accident. You never know when tragedy strikes. The Policy of the Century comes to your aid at the time of your most dire need—at a time when you are down, financially handicapped, unable to care for your loved ones.

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**YOU RECEIVE**
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Accumulating to
**$7,500.00**
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**$25 PER WEEK FOR SICKNESS**

**$25 PER WEEK FOR ACCIDENT**

**$100 EMERGENCY ALLOWANCE**

All subject to Century Policy provisions.

**COST TO YOU $1 ONLY PER MONTH**

The United Insurance Company of Chicago, a legal reserve insurance company, which has paid millions of dollars to policy-holders offers you the new "Century" Policy. This company is not an association or assessment company and is old and reliable. It is approved by state insurance departments. Rated "A" plus Excellent in Dunne's Insurance Report. Be safe! Costs only $1.00 per month. Pays big cash accumulated benefits for accidental death, besides financial protection during Sickness and Accidents. Act now, before it is too late. Just send coupon today for complete information. You are under no obligation and no agent will call.

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The new "Century" Sickness and Accident Policy insures both men and women with the benefits shown, plus many other liberal features outlined in the policy.

**ANYONE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 75 CAN APPLY**

This policy protects you against such misfortunes that often occur in the home, in the streets, on farms, in factories, etc., subject to its provisions. Half benefits after age sixty.

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No medical examination is required. No agent will call. Remember, in addition to the liberal accident features, the "Century" Policy covers SICKNESS as well—it provides liberal benefits in times of both Sickness AND Accident. This vital protection gives "Century" policy-holders a safeguard against the misery of lost income and increased expenses during times of adversity. Don't delay—Get this safe protection at once.

## Send No Money–Just Mail Coupon

Remember, you do not send one cent—just mail coupon for complete information. The "Century" Policy covers both Sickness and Accidents. Get the facts without obligation at once. No agent will call—Rush the coupon today. Tomorrow may be too late. The time to act is NOW—before a terrible, unforeseen accident or sudden sickness tears at your heart.


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When emergencies arise, this remarkable policy provides quick cash payment of specified benefits for family aid. Get complete details at once. Send no money—just mail the coupon. No agent will call.

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The United Insurance Company was founded in 1919 and has paid more than *Four Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars* in claims. An old and reliable insurance company with more than $2.00 in assets for every $1.00 of liability. The company rating is "A" plus Excellent in Dunne's Insurance Report. For over 18 years has unfailingly made prompt and just claim payments. Covers both Sickness and Accident. Reliable, honest, stable.

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**ELGIN, ILLINOIS**

**NO AGENT WILL CALL**

Please mail me at once complete information and how to get the "Century" Policy for Free Inspection without obligation.

Name .....

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