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THE VOICE COMMANDS
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THE VOICE COMMANDS
by DENNIS CLIVE

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Vol. II, No. 1 June, 1940

FIVE AMAZING NOVELETS

ONE STARTLING SHORT STORY

SPECAL FEATURES

Cover by FRANK R. PAUL

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FOOT ITCH
ATHLETE'S FOOT

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.

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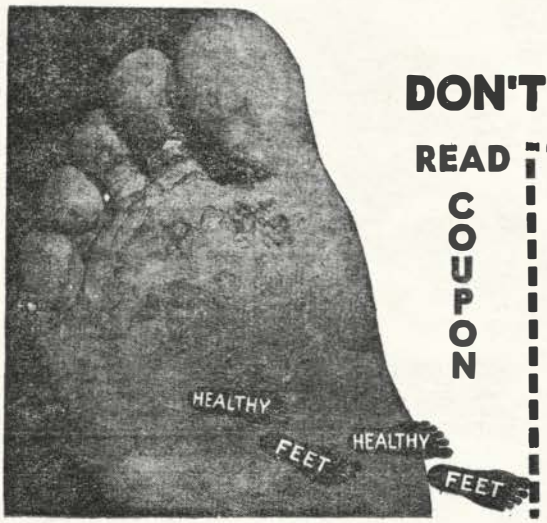

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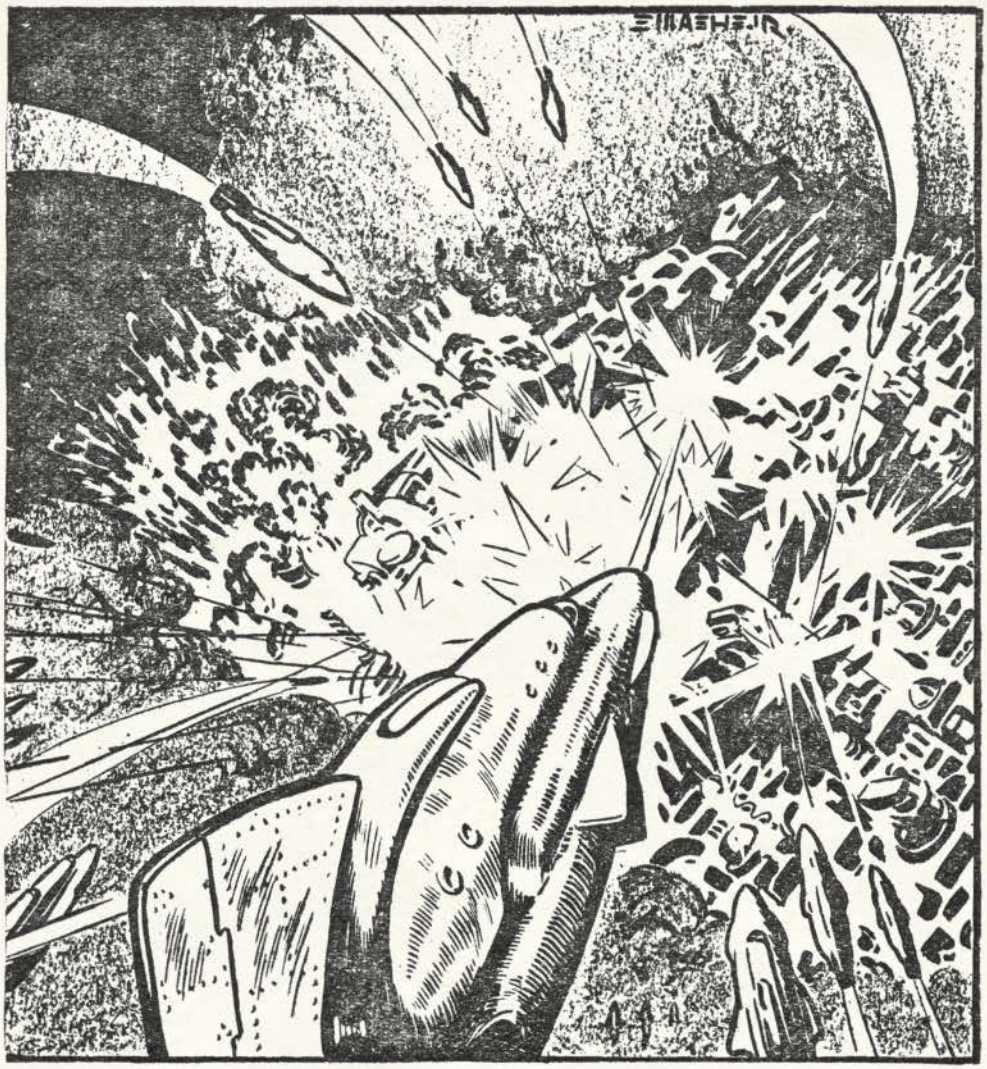


Cassell and Moss return from an unjust imprisonment of twenty years to find that the peoples of Earth had destroyed civilization in one great world war! But who are these strange childlike beings who gambol about like infants—while they construct space-machines beyond all Earthly science?

CHAPTER I

ATLANTIC ISLAND

"FOR such men as you," said the Administrator of Justice slowly, "there can only be one punishment. You knew when you undertook scientific espionage that you were playing a game with death. You knew that the apprehension of your endeavors would mean instant trial for treason. That has come about . . ."

Neither Arthur Cassell nor Hartley Moss said a word. The former was fair and thoughtful, plainly a scientist — but his friend stood half a head taller, aggressive, feet apart, mighty fists beating a silent rhythm on the dock rail. Hartley Moss was a fighter, every inch of him. But be-

cause the reckless game of scientific espionage demands both men of physique and scientific knowledge, they had worked together. And now . . .

"This day, on the verge of world war," the Administrator went on, "your activities stand in a revolting light. You sold America to the powers of the Orient—"

"Like hell we did!" Moss burst out with a sudden roar, gray eyes blazing. "Others are responsible for this mess! We were left holding the bag, I tell you! We tried to *save* America—"

The Administrator cut him short. "It is the judgment of this Tribunal that you sold our country and the Western great powers into conflict. You sacrificed honor, duty, and self-respect to plunge the nations of the world into a hell. Tomorrow at midnight, September 19, 1960, the world will be at war . . . because of you! You will not be granted the favor of death, but will both be exiled for life to Atlantic Island, there to be forever hidden from the eyes of men . . .

Moss opened his lips to speak again, but Arthur Cassell nudged him quietly, shook his blond head.

"Skip it; we can do nothing here," he muttered. "We've got to bow the knee and perhaps figure something out later . . ."

With an effort, Moss remained silent. Both of them submitted to being seized and led from the packed hall, afterwards to take their place in a line with other offenders against the State . . .

ATLANTIC Island—prison settlement of synthetic rock owned by the United States, created in 1958 by vast engineering enterprise, was definitely no place from which to attempt an escape. Around the mighty gray metal walls of the penitentiary itself was nothing but jagged rock eternally pounded by the ocean waters. The nearest land was a thousand miles away. It was the boast of America that no criminal had ever been known to escape that forbidding retreat.

But the United States Government was not responsible for the inhuman methods used on the island. Criminals of a higher order were themselves warders—grim, bitter men, as relentless as the stormbound surroundings they ruled. They instituted their own merciless laws, found a good use for the metal dungeons deep down under the penitentiary itself . . .

Into one of these dungeons went Cassell and Moss. That they be together was the only leniency permitted them, and that happened because only one cell was vacant. Thus they were left, totally ignored, save for the badly-cooked food and water brought to them at intervals.

At first they hoped for last-minute release, but it never came. Hope gradually died. Between the inch-thick indestructible metal bars of their ventilator came a faint stream of daylight mingled with the everlasting roar of the sea.

They tried breaking away that metal, until with an ugly laugh the guard explained it was scientifically prepared—was known as *mijutin* and was utterly incapable of being shattered by any known force or radiation. The prison was invincible . . .

The beards grew on the faces of the two friends. Their hair crept into their necks. Arthur Cassell thought a lot; Moss did little but rave, at first, and pound with his vast fists against the mighty door.

They grew grimmer, more bitter, crueler . . .

"Even if we had told the truth at the trial, we'd have gotten nowhere," Cassell said, one day. "Who there would believe the truth of what we found?—that the instigator behind the world war was a Venusian in Earthly disguise? The fantasy of it!—and yet the horrible truth! No Tribunal would ever have believed it without proof, and that we couldn't give . . . God, if only Maralok had not escaped us as he did at the last moment!"

"But he did!" Moss growled from the shadows. "Maralok will finish his plans to

create a world war, though Heaven knows what idea he has back of it. Seems senseless to me . . ."

They fell silent, lost in their own thoughts . . . The sea and the wind roared. No other sound disturbed the penal settlement.

Outside, a thousand miles away, a world gone mad had forgotten the two supposed traitors on Atlantic Island. War was a reality—war to the death with not a single neutrality—

1960 . . . 1970 . . . 1980 . . . The parade of endless years of insufferable carnage. Nation against nation.

1981. A cold inhuman peace brooded over the earth . . .

Far out on the Atlantic a solitary synthetic rock still stood, its mighty construction unharmed by the attempts of bombers to destroy it. Warders and criminals alike still lived, had forgotten anything existed save their own bitter little world. Deep down in the dungeons men still stirred, half starved, only given food when a provision ship happened to crash against the rocks and spewed forth its valued cargo.

Yes, deep down in the dungeons two men especially still lived, kept alive by the fire of vengeance. Twenty years of hardship and pent hatred was carven into their bearded faces. Their eyes were smoldering pools as they stared at the warder standing in the open doorway of their cell.

Open! Not for the usual exercise round the gaunt yard—but *wide* open! And that was not all . . . The guard was grinning, almost vacantly, his usually stonelike countenance split from ear to ear. His keys jangled in his hand.

"Well?" asked Moss' deep, bitter voice at length.

"You can go," the man chuckled. "We can all go. No sense in stopping here now a rowing boat's been thrown up from a wrecked ship. Might as well go out and play . . ."

"Play?" repeated the voice of Arthur Cassell. He got slowly to his feet. His hair and beard were still blond. "Did you say—*play?*"

"Sure!" The guard grinned again, then tossed his keys away. "We're all free. Your cell was the last one; no use for the keys anymore. Let's go!" He turned away whistling.

The two men stared at each other stupidly. Then suddenly Moss started to laugh until the tears ran down his bearded cheeks.

"Play!" he screamed, pounding the wall. "My God—play! After twenty years of this he—"

"Take it easy, Hart," Cassell snapped, gripping his friend's rag-covered arms. "Don't go off half-cocked! This is a miracle all right, and we're going to take advantage of it. Something screwy about it all the same. Come on."

Together they limped out of the cell into the gloomy corridor. Other prisoners, bearded and melancholy, glanced at them but said nothing. In silence they all trooped upwards to the open reaches of the prison yard, and so finally out onto the wild, spume-swept ridge that gave access to the sea.

The prisoners shivered a little in the cold, bracing blast, did their best to get into what sunshine there was. Cassell and Moss kept together, and at last Moss said:

"Take a look at that! They're nuts, I think."

Cassell did not answer. Certainly something was wrong with the guards. They were singing songs—and incredible though it was, those songs were old-fashioned nursery rhymes! As they sang, they walked skippingly towards the steps leading down the cliff face. The grim-faced prisoners followed, stared down the dizzying stretch at the rowboat anchored far below.

"Certainly act as though they're crazy," Cassell admitted at last, frowning. Then he stared down at the boat. "Thousand

miles in that, huh? Well, I guess it's better than stopping here . . . Near as I can figure it, it's summer time, so maybe we'll make it."

He started down the steps with Moss behind him, and presently they had joined the others—as bewildered as they were by their incredible good fortune. But most baffling of all was the asinine behavior of the warders—men who had been cruelty itself now as cheerful and considerate as it was possible to be. They seemed to take an actual delight in proving that the boat had some food and water enough to see them all through, if they shared alike . . .

The prisoners glanced at each other and gave it up. Then rowing began. Little by little the boat pulled away from that forbidding pile. The guards still whistled and laughed among themselves; the prisoners pulled on their oars, their faces set and hard within their beards, their exposed skin as white as a fish's belly.

Once or twice Cassell gazed at the sky and frowned. There was something queer about it. It was a paler blue—and he could see one or two stars despite the sunlight. He wondered if his eyesight was defective from so much enforced gloom.

"No, it *is* paler, and there *are* one or two stars," Moss confirmed, as the matter was put to him. "Can't quite figure it out . . ." He paused in his rowing and stared around on the heaving waste of waters. "Odd there are no ships around," he muttered. "Wonder if the war ended, or if they're still at it?"

Nobody attempted to answer his question, the guards least of all . . .

More rowing. Endless rowing. Occasional sleep, occasional food. On and on, over the heaving deep . . .

CHAPTER II

A CITY IN RUINS

NEITHER Cassell nor Moss remembered how many days and nights elapsed on the ocean. At times squalls hit them, but in the main, the weather was warm and sunny. Food, carefully rationed, lasted out—and the reckless generosity of the guards was a thing of wonder . . .

Then at last there hove from out of the blurred horizon that line they all longed to see—the coastline of America, growing slowly more distinct as the minutes passed.

Rowing went on harder than ever, with the desperation that only returning exiles can command. But the more they rowed the more puzzled they become . . . The coastline became clearer.

"That isn't America!" breathed Moss at last, staring under his shading hand. "Or is it? England perhaps? No — not England . . ." He broke off, mystified. The guards too had ceased their singing and were frowning in perplexity.

"We ought to see the coastline of New York, Philadelphia, or Boston if we've followed the route correctly," Cassell muttered. "And I guess we have. But—"

Silence again. More slap of the oars in water; then at length the coastline was quite close. It was America, yes, but the exiles stared now in dazed silence at where New York should have been. But instead of the towers of Manhattan were skeleton buildings, the shattered shells of once mighty edifices, fallen into utter disuse! The harbors were choked with rusting seacraft. Some of the vessels were half broken up in the mud. One giant transatlantic liner was a mass of barnacles and rust, a rag of a flag flapping in the breeze.

The moment they came within jumping distance of a deserted jetty, neither Cassell nor Moss waited for the others. They leapt out of the boat, swam the intervening few feet of water, and finally climbed to the jetty top, waved their arms to the little boatload as it continued its journey to the actual shore.

"Empty . . . Shattered!" whispered Moss in an awed voice.

Stupefied, they stared around them, at

the smokeless remains of chimneys, the boulder-strewn streets, the grass crawling up the buildings, the collapsed subways, the twisted elevated . . .

Without a word, they started to walk slowly forward.

Beyond the slightest doubt, the old New York had gone. In fact, nearly all traces of civilization itself had disappeared. Everywhere the two moved were enormous craters, presumably from bombs, and tumbled masonry . . .

Then, turning a corner, they came upon something totally unexpected . . . Right in the middle of a square—its actual name and location forgotten—were people—men and women in makeshift clothes. Some of the men were heavily bearded with crudely-cropped hair; the women's hair hung to their waists. Savages, apparently—and yet they were toiling upon a massive mechanical device of almost unbelievable complexity, whilst near to them was a one-time factory hastily restored, from the interior of which came the steady clangor of industry.

"War survivors; children of those who fought, perhaps," Moss said thoughtfully. "Can't be anything else . . ."

"But look what they're building!" Cassell cried, pointing. "It looks to me like a projector of some sort . . . Guess we'd better look into this."

HE strode forward and touched one of the men on the arm as he turned to head towards the factory. Immediately he looked around, revealed a fresh, youthful face with honest blue eyes. A downy incipient stubble furred his chin and upper lip. For a moment he seemed a little surprised at the sight of the two bearded men in front of him—then he gave a broad, welcoming smile.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Come to play with us?"

"Huh?" Cassell said amazedly; then the memory of the guard's words on Atlantic Island came back to him. He gave a puzzled frown and shook his head.

"No; we're not playing. What's that you're building there?"

"Oh, that? Nothing much. We're just building because we want to, that's all. Might as well. We get tired of just playing, you know."

"Yeah; I suppose so." Cassell scratched his matted head and the man turned away, went with a walk that was very close to a trip, towards the factory.

"They're nuts!" Moss said flatly, clenching his fists. "They start on building a machine so complex we can't understand it, and say they do it as a relief from playing . . . Art, there's something mighty screwy going on around here!"

They stood watching the machine-builders for a while. The whole thing was a profound paradox—men and women, singing with childish glee, laughing with each other, as they constructed an instrument complicated enough to turn a trained engineer gray with worry . . . Where was the reason in that? And, now that the two came to notice it, some of the women had daisy chains around their hair; and the men argued with each other at intervals like schoolboys over a box of candies. They were childish—utterly childish!

Baffled, the two turned at last and stared in at the door of the colossal factory. It was working at full speed. Blast furnaces were in action; overhead belts were slapping on their flywheels—but again the vast industry of the place was produced by men and women with the bodies of adults and the manner of children. They skipped everywhere, laughed and played as they worked.

"Perhaps," Moss said slowly, tugging at his beard, "they've gone simple-minded after the awful horror of the war?"

Cassell shook his blond head. "Simple, nothing. They would have horror in their eyes, tragedy stamped indelibly in their faces—like refugees. There's none of that.

They're happy — gloriously, beautifully happy! Nor do they seem to realize what they're really doing. All this is so much fun to them—and yet what they do is *accurate!* That's what gets me . . . Gosh, what a homecoming!"

Dazed, they turned away, began to wander at random. Time and again they came across the groups of people building machinery, all of it extremely complicated and accompanied by the inevitable nearby factory. And through it all one factor stood out—the machines were definitely strange and terrible engines of war! Cassell could recognize that much with his scientific knowledge; so could Moss, to a lesser degree. Children were building engines of war, when they ought to be sickened by the very mention of the idea!

They had their habitations too, these happy, enigmatic folks. They used roughly-constructed tents. In every direction were communities of them—but, although the people knew how to build machines, their ideas on tents were appalling. Not one of them was properly erected, and the conditions inside them were close to pandemonium.

"But why tents when they could live in the ruins of one of these huge department stores?" Moss demanded, waving his arm to the rearing buildings around them—shattered at the tops, but still serviceable below. "They'd get much better protection from the night or the chance of storms . . . Maybe with it being summer, though, they're not concerned."

Cassell did not answer. He was staring down over the wilderness of ramshackle dwellings reaching right down to the still harbor waters. Men and women moved in and out, cooking over crude wood fires. Why wood fires, with all the forces of an electric factory at their disposal?

"Funny thing," he said at last, "there isn't a real child in sight! The adults are the children instead . . ." Again he brooded over the strange scene, glanced up at the pale sky with its faint smattering of stars; then at last he shook himself. "I guess that for the moment we can't do better than have some of their food—play with them, as they term it. Then we'll hunt up a piece of glass or something and take this fungus off our faces. I feel like Santa Claus . . . Come on."

They turned, strolled through the hot afternoon sunshine, gazing around on the ruins as they went . . .

CHAPTER III

THE VOICE

THE people raised no objection as the two invited themselves. They were accepted as friends without question, were given food—which analysis showed to be canned stuff evidently taken from what provisions the city still had left—and drink. Usually it was just hot water, sometimes flavored with an extract when one was lucky enough to find it.

For several days both men made no attempt to solve the mystery. They shaved with broken bottle, cut their hair, exposed themselves by longer degrees to the sunshine, made makeshift clothes. By the time they were finished, they were fairly recognizable, save for those grim lines of twenty imprisoned years chisseled forever in their faces.

The childlike manner of the people never altered. They slept too with the blissful innocence of children. Sometimes they gamboled about as no adult ever would, then they returned in droves to their machine building.

The more Cassell and Moss looked into the matter, the more baffled they got. There were infinite varieties of machines in all parts of the ruined city. In one quarter there were thousands upon thousands of small shells, obviously loaded with explosives infinitely more powerful than anything the intervening war had created.

"But where the hell do they get the knowledge from?" Moss yelled at last in

utter exasperation, as he and Cassell stood in the evening light gazing down on this latest revelation. "Why are they doing it, anyway? They've no more intention of starting a war than a bunch of kids on a Sunday school picnic . . . Listen, Art, are we batty or are they? Maybe that twenty years on the island did something to us eh?"

"No," Cassell answered quietly; "that twenty years did something to these people. Consider the facts— They perform these masterpieces of engineering, yet they don't know the first thing about radio. They are children in mind, a fact which is proven by there being no genuine children. Though, physically, these folks are quite capable of marrying and producing children, they don't. And why? Because, as in children, the sexual urge isn't there."

An amazed light spread over Moss' rugged face. "Lord, you're right! I never thought of that!"

"Of course I'm right. We don't know how long that war lasted, but we do know that it left behind a race of people who are childlike in the ordinary way, yet gifted with a peculiar detached genius. Either they are deliberately planning a war on something or somebody, or else they are being *ordered* to do it . . ."

"Ordered? By what?"

Cassell shrugged, his eyes perplexed. "Search me! Point is, are other countries in the world similarly affected? Are the British, the Germans, the Russians and the French all doing the same thing? How to find out? Set to work to build an airplane, or else patch up one left from the war. Radio's no use. We could build a receiver easily enough, but I doubt if anybody would be transmitting. So our first job is to get an airplane."

"Might mention it to the young chap we first spoke to," Moss said. "Seems to have stuck to us all along. Maybe he'd like to build us one for fun," he finished, grinning.

But his jest met with a surprising response. The young man, when they had singled him out for questioning from the city workers, no sooner heard their suggestion than he led the way to a quarter of the city they had so far not explored. To their amazement they beheld literally square miles of oval objects glittering in the sunshine, some of them in the process of having machinery loaded into them.

"By all the saints, space-travel!" Moss gasped. He clutched at his friend's arm. "Space-travel, man! We certainly had not mastered that when we got shoved on the island."

"No." Cassell's blue eyes narrowed in sudden thought. "So, the machines we see being built everywhere are for final inclusion in these ships," he muttered. "I suppose they *are* space-ships?" He glanced at the young man quickly.

"Travel anywhere," he answered, smiling. "Out into space, across the earth. Use atomic force recoil rockets."

"Atomic force too," Cassell muttered; then aloud, "You can control these things? Make them fly?"

"Sure. All of us can. We play games with them."

"We'll skip the games. Could you take my friend and I around the world and back here?"

THE young man nodded, then glanced at the sun. "Sunset in two hours," he mused. "We can be back by then . . . Come along in." He gave another smile and led the way, whistling, to the airlock of the nearest machine.

"Around the world in two hours?" Moss breathed, as they marched after him. "Gosh! That's traveling, huh?"

Cassell nodded, but made no observations. He seemed to be thinking. His frown deepened as he and Moss beheld the perfect interior of the space-machine. It was replete to the last detail. Every instrument was flawlessly made; the seats were perfectly fashioned. There was not a piece of bad workmanship anywhere.

And it had all been made by childish men and women who cooked tinned meats into stews over wood fires and lived in broken-down tents! Moss gave it up and shook his bullet head, but Cassell stroked his chin. Once he glanced through the window at the curiously pale blue sky with its sparse stars, pondered again; then finally he gave himself up to watching as the man closed the airlock and settled himself before the control-board.

The machine answered with perfect ease, lifted with hardly any sensation of motion, curved high over the ruined metropolis and then headed out towards the gleaming ocean. Far below, men and women waved their hands cheerily; some of them threw flowers into the air—

Then New York was far behind as the incredibly fast machine tore with smooth rhythm out over the Atlantic. In a matter of minutes, as it seemed, Atlantic Island loomed up. Moss gave a grim smile as the rock began to retreat behind them, but Cassell stared after it until it was out of sight, debating something deep within his mind . . .

It seemed no time before England was reached. Without the necessity of landing, it was perfectly obvious that the conditions of America were being repeated here too. Men and women building. Thousands of machines; hundreds of space-ships in what had been Trafalgar Square. Tents, camp fires, waving hands . . . No cities; only ruins.

Same for France, Russia, Germany, vast parts of China, and numerous other countries. It was all very mysterious, strangely sinister, the visions of these shattered civilizations populated by men and women driving to perhaps a terrible end.

At last the young man turned the flyer around and headed back the way he had come.

"Tell me," Cassell said thoughtfully, after a long silence, "why do you build these machines? What's the idea?"

"We build them to play with," the man laughed, turning a little from his controls.

"But dammit, man, that's impossible! Don't you realize that you're toying around with incredibly complicated things? In the city I have noticed atomic force shells, heat-ray projectors, acid sprayers, energy screen devices, disrupter guns—all kinds of things for producing the most colossal havoc. And to cap it all, you are putting them inside machines that can fly through space or the air at thousands of miles an hour. *Why?*"

For just a second the young man frowned. "I never thought of it like that before," he admitted frankly; then with a beaming smile, "We don't mean it, of course. We don't want to harm anybody."

"I can believe that. That's what makes it so baffling. Why do something you don't want to do? Don't really care about?"

"Because we're told to. It's the Voice, you know. We can't ignore the Voice . . ."

Cassell gave a start. Moss leaned closer.

"What Voice?" Cassell asked very deliberately.

THE young man shrugged. "The one that talks so often, that tells us just what to do. We've got to obey; we can't help it. If we didn't obey I suppose we'd be hurt . . ."

"But where the devil does this Voice come from?" Moss demanded. "Gosh, if I could lay my hands on it I'd—"

"Nobody knows where it comes from," the young man broke in. "It just comes. We all hear it. We all obey. Children should obey, don't you think?"

"But you're *not* children!" Cassell yelped; then he immediately regretted the sharpness of his tone. The man visibly winced. With obvious hesitation he said: "But—but we are children. You are too, aren't you . . . ? No; you are different. You're like—like Gods. You're not the Voice, are you?" he finished in awe.

Cassell shook his head patiently. "No, we've nothing to do with that. We're not

Gods, either—but we're not children! Nor do we hear the Voice . . . Tell me, how long did the war last?"

"Fifteen years, I think. Nobody was left—not many, anyhow. And besides, at the end of it, nobody wanted to fight. We all made friends and started to do what the Voice commanded. We're still doing it. But you see, though we do what the Voice commands we can't do anything without it—so of course we make our own little homes and live as best we can . . ."

"Suffering Cat, genius on tap!" Moss exclaimed, slamming his great fist on the chair back. "Turned on and off to make them work. When it isn't in force they're normal—or rather childlike. And they live that way."

"Yeah," Cassell nodded, then his keen eyes turned back to the young man. "What's your name, feller?"

"Grant Felbury."

"And your age and birthplace?"

"I don't know my age. I was born in New York, I think."

CASSELL made a brief note. For a long time he sat musing, then as Atlantic Island loomed up again in the setting sunshine he leaned forward quickly. "Land on that island," he ordered briefly. "Think you can make it?"

Felbury nodded and brought the flyer down in an easy curve. The moment it stopped on the rocky tableland Cassell got to his feet and took down one of the several small disintegrating guns from the wall rack. He studied its mechanism for a moment, then turned to the surprised Moss.

"Be back in a moment," he said. "I'm—"

"Don't be long," Felbury broke in anxiously. "At sundown the Voice usually ceases to speak and when that happens I shan't be able to drive this any more. It's only while the Voice speaks in my mind that I can do it."

Cassell frowned for a moment, glanced at Moss' astounded face, then he turned sharply and opened the airlock. Through the window he was visible approaching the forbidding metal walls of the great, deserted penitentiary. He passed through the open gates . . . In ten minutes he returned, carrying a piece of gray metal in his hand.

"Aren't things baffling enough without you slicing off chunks of metal and carting them around?" Moss demanded, as he came back into the control room and closed the lock. "What's it for, anyway? A souvenir of twenty years in hell?"

Cassell smiled faintly. "Just a hunch," he shrugged. He hung the gun back in its rack. "O.K., Grant—let's go."

Again the machine took the air, and as the sun dipped into the calm ocean the vessel finally landed back almost in the place where it had started from.

"Only just in time," Grant smiled, as they climbed outside. "The Voice has ceased now . . . See you again. I'm going to have some fun with the others." He turned away, laughing, and for a long time the two friends stood looking after him as he headed towards the tents. Cassell still had his piece of metal in his hand.

"Well, what now?" Moss demanded at length. "Where do we go from here? Hunt down the Voice and poke the eye out of the scientist who's responsible?"

"What a child calls a Voice may cover a vast territory," Cassell replied pensively. "We're a long way from the solution yet." He turned and looked back at a massive, half-shattered store some little way behind them.

"That's going to be our headquarters from now on," he said. "It's large, and we won't be interrupted. We'll start in to equip it with whatever machinery or scientific tackle we may need—and from there, mingling with the people only for food or information—we'll start in to track this mystery down. I believe I got the first clue, too . . ." He held up the chunk of metal.

"I think you're screwy," Moss said sourly.

"Maybe I am. We'll see. Also I want

to know if there are any birth records left in the Public Statistics Building—what's left of it. I want to know all about Grant Felbury. I want the date of his birth, and his name isn't a common one by any means . . . The rest will be analysis, and finally maybe we'll find out what the hell the Voice is . . . Now let's go and look our headquarters over."

CHAPTER IV

THE ETERNAL CHILDREN

CASSEL'S methods of tracking down the mystery were utterly complex to Moss. All he could do was equip the great ground floor of the store they had taken over with whatever crude necessities of life he could find, and thereafter assumed the role of housekeeper while Cassell prowled around the city putting together bits and pieces of the puzzle.

By degrees, he assembled pieces of equipment of an electrical nature, submitted the metal he'd brought from Atlantic Island to various tests. After that he proceeded to make notes—so many of them that at last Moss' impulsive, restless nature could stand it no longer.

"Say," he demanded one evening, as Cassell sat in the shadows before his equipment, "what exactly have you squeezed out of all this? When do we start fighting somebody or doing something? I'm going nuts for lack of some fast action."

"Sorry, but you'll stay housemaid till I'm through," Cassell answered briefly. "I'm trying to piece matters together . . ." He hesitated, then asked with a wry smile, "Does it surprise you to know that Grant Felbury is eighty-seven years of age?"

Moss stared blankly. "What! That young chap who drove us around the earth? The one with the fluff on his chin?"

"The very same. What's more, several apparently young men and women whose names I've asked for and have afterwards managed to track down in the birth records, are clearly shown to be well over the age of sixty! There *are* younger ones, of course —thirty or thirty-five, but the great majority of these 'young' people should be on the verge of senility."

"But are you sure?" Moss demanded in amazement. "Maybe you've got the parents, not the children."

"No; they're the right people. I've checked up on that. And in so doing I've got a bit nearer the solution of the mystery . . . Think back on the strange behavior of the guards on Atlantic Island. Without any apparent warning they went all friendly, behaved as childishly as these folks in the city here—or those all over the world for that matter. But were the fellows who'd spent their lives in the dungeons like us at all childish? They were not! They were grim, bitter, and very much mature. In other words—normal."

"So what?"

"Just this. It proves, I believe, that whatever made people kiddish did not affect those who were buried nearly all the time in metal-bound dungeons. The guards were out in the open quite a lot—nearly all the time, in fact . . ." Cassell broke off and glanced at the piece of metal he had brought from the Island. "That piece of metal is from the wall of our cell," he resumed slowly. "It's *mijutin,* of course, and the walls of all the other cells were made of the same stuff. It was made impervious to all known methods of destruction—but not to the ultra-modern disintegrator gun I used to carve out this chunk. Point is, however, that in being made so invulnerable, it also blocked all known radiations—yes, even cosmic waves, which will normally go through eight feet of lead. It deflects cosmic waves utterly, according to my tests."

"Wait a minute!" Moss breathed tensely. "You don't mean that some sort of radiation from space produced these effects on these war survivors, and that we prisoners escaped it because of the *mijutin* walls of our cells?"

Cassell nodded slowly. "Exactly what I do mean."

THEY sat looking at each other for a moment, then Moss began to scratch his bull neck. "Yeah, that's all right, but how the heck do eighty-year-old people skip around like kids? What's done it?"

Cassell got to his feet and moved to the glassless window. He nodded to the pale blue evening sky. "There's the explanation," he said slowly. "It occurred to me that the paleness of the sky and the one or two stars even in daytime might be caused by a thinning of the upper atmosphere. I asked myself what might cause that. I had dim suspicions, but I had to verify them by hunting up newspaper records. I dug some out of the vaults of the *New York Sun* offices and found several recordings on the progress of the war . . .

"Without boring you with the build up, it is perfectly clear that the war fulfilled all the grave expectations of mankind in its viciousness—but outstanding of all facts is that bombs, incredible quantities of poison gases, incessant aerial explosions, consequent steady tumult of the air, combination of poison gases with the natural atmosphere, finally produced a remarkable effect. The upper layers of the atmosphere united in several places with the risen poison gases. Explosions took place time and time again—they're mentioned in the newspaper records as sheets of flame miles long. Out of that there could finally emerge only one thing, a tremendous weakening of the Heaviside Layer—the ionized shield around the earth, and consequently a clearer view of the void beyond."

"And also an increased supply of radiations poured in from space?" Moss demanded eagerly. "Am I right?"

"Dead right. Radiations which we and the other prisoners, protected by *mijutin* metal, escaped . . ." Cassell meditated for a moment. "That accounts for the paleness of the sky and the daylight stars. It also means that the special radiations responsible for evolution came to earth in ten-fold the quantity."

"But that would mean rapid old age—"

"That's what I thought, until I remembered that maturity, according to Mendel, is achieved in a human being at eighty years of age. After that the scale swings the other way and, if death could only be somehow circumvented, the body would start to rebuild itself by slow degrees—even as universes rebuild from the shattered remains of their earlier existence. If you doubt the idea, consider second childhood—and when you do, remember that ordinary second childhood has all the limitations of a natural evolution and a normal atmosphere. With a changed atmosphere—as it is now—and fuller radiations, age strides rapidly into second childhood and life starts all over again.

"Remember too that in the days of the Biblical Ancients, the atmosphere was probably pretty similar to what it is now . . . Remember that Moses, it is recorded, was a young man at one hundred and forty! Many of the Ancients were eternal, only vanished when their minds mastered their bodies—but that's beside the point. What we know is that these people should ordinarily be old, but thanks to evolutive radiation changes, they've attained maturity and at full speed have recaptured youth once more. That's why Grant couldn't give his age. He's probably forgotten his earlier life entirely, like the rest of 'em."

"Then—then at that rate they may never die?" Moss demanded.

"Definitely they won't. They'll rejuvenate each time—which is life as it should be. Eternal—happy—enjoyable. Only the slow thickening of the atmosphere once more with the course of centuries will produce the old conditions."

"And we haven't come under this influence?"

"Not yet, but we shall do so as time passes. These people have had years under

the influence. The war ended ten years ago because they *had* come under the influence. We've only had a week or two."

Moss stroked his chin, then shrugged. "Well, I guess that clears up the childishness all right—but it doesn't clear up the mystery of the Voice that Grant was rambling about. I got the idea some scientist might have buried himself somewhere around and was using vibrations or something. How's that?"

"Miles out," Cassell sighed. "I'm on with the mystery right now. That Voice is nowhere on earth; I'm sure of that. Remember one dominant factor— If the atmosphere thinned enough to permit evolution radiations coming in, it would also permit *other* radiations to pass through. That Voice Grant referred to is, I think, somewhere in outer space, and because of our thinned ionized layer, it easily penetrates to Earth's surface. Radio may locate it; I hope so, anyway, though how these folks pick it up I've yet to figure."

Cassell stopped talking, meditated for a long time while Moss still rubbed his chin . . . then at last Cassell turned to his equipment and began a laborious building up of components . . .

FOR days, Cassell labored on his radio equipment, at last had fashioned a powerful short-wave receiver—but the results were hopeless. He got nothing out of space save a continuous crackle and hiss of static and solar interference. Certainly there was no Voice . . .

After the fourth attempt, he sat in bitter silence before the instrument. Outside, darkness had fallen. Stars such as Earth had been previously denied were strewn in the calm, clear sky. Faintly on the soft wind the laughs and cries of the playing Eternals floated through the glassless windows.

"Nothing doing?" asked Moss disappointedly, hands in pockets.

"Nope . . ." Cassell's brooding eyes stared out onto the distant lights of the camp fires. "Listen how they laugh and play," he murmured. "Children, and we struggle and toil to understand what controls them because we are *not* children . . ." He paused and mused over that, said it again, " . . . because we are not children. Lord! I wonder!" he cried hoarsely.

"What?"

He swung round. "The child mind is receptive to ideas which a mature mind cannot receive. Think of the well-known innocence of children, the simple way they accept things, and then— Their minds are more receptive than ours! That's it! It is not an actual Voice they hear, not a radio communication. That was *our* notion of the business. What they are getting is *mind* communication — telepathic thought-waves out of space which their clear, untrammeled minds pick up naturally. Besides, their minds are extra clear because of their fast evolution which has eradicated all old hidebound beliefs, which normally blind the brain to receptivity."

"Thought waves!" Moss gasped. "But who would send thought waves to earth, anyway?"

"Only one person would conceivably do it—the man we owe so much. Maralok, the Venusian!"

"You mean that dirty swine is back of all this—"

"It's a shot in the dark, but I believe I may be right. If it *is* Maralok driving these people to make fresh war plans . . ." Cassell's eyes narrowed vengefully; then suddenly he swung around. "You carry on as usual," he said shortly. "I'm going to start on another track. First call is the observatory in what was Central Park. Still standing. I want to take a look at Venus, see if anything unusual's in sight."

He went out at a run. It was two hours before he was back, grimly smiling.

"Nice work," he murmured. "The clearer atmosphere on Earth has helped things a lot. I used the X-ray analysis plates and

they penetrated the Venusian cloud belt fairly effectually. The Venusian cities are going full blast . . . I'm pretty certain Maralok's mixed up in all this somewhere. Rather queer things going on on Mars, too. The airlet valves to their underground cities, which we used to call canals, remember, are operating at top speed. Activity there too; but I'll still back my bottom dollar on those Venusian devils, though why Maralok should want to drive a collection of people, whom he must surely know are childish, into yet another war, has me licked.

"However, I've now got my next move to make. I'm going to get Grant Felbury to come here and submit to a scientific test. I'm going to devise a brain-reader, such as our scientists used in 1950 for reading the minds of spies—outgrowth of the old lie detector, if you recollect? They tried using one on us at the trial, but we gave away nothing.

"The instrument will relay whatever thoughts pass through Grant's mind to transformers. In turn, those vibrations will be transplanted to steel pick-up tapes, then I can listen in to those vibrations myself and interpret them with a radio device. Simple enough—and Grant's mind will be as clear as a bell, because he's nothing to hide. O.K.—you can give me a hand to start building . . . Come on."

CHAPTER V
A NEW ORDER

SO THE work began, Cassell using all his skill and calling into being knowledge that had been enforcedly shelved in his mind for twenty years—but by degrees he built his mind-reader, a complicated contrivance of wires, tubes and magnets.

When at last he was satisfied, he summoned Grant Felbury. Unhesitatingly, the young-old man agreed to the suggestions put to him, took up his new quarters in the department store and only departed each day to obey the orders of the Voice. But those orders were noted down by Cassell.

By degrees, writing down every word given back to him over the recording tapes, he began to build up data—through days, through weeks, as the work of the men and women went on. Moss noticed that his friend's face was usually either astounded or bitter by turns, then at last he came to the point where he decided to unburden himself.

"Incredible though it sounds," he said slowly, "these thought-vibrations are not intended for the Earth at all! Yes, you can stare! They are intended for *Mars*, not Earth—and as I see it, the Venusians, with Maralok undoubtedly somewhere in the background, are using electromagnetic waves for the purpose of transmitting amplified thought commands, which of course interpret naturally into any language. Those electromagnetic waves penetrate through Venus' dense atmosphere and thereafter spread out in ever-widening circles. They also penetrate the thin air of Mars with perfect ease, and it seems logical to assume that the Martian brain, being pretty advanced, is perfectly receptive to these thought commands . . . Now, normally the Earth would not get a vestige of those waves because the Heaviside Layer would deflect them—but because it is so badly weakened, and because these people have childish, receptive minds, the orders are being obeyed here as well!"

"Gosh!" Moss whistled. "The possibilities that may—"

"Let's get it straight," Cassell broke in, musing. "From all the notes I've made, I can arrive at only one possible solution. Before Maralok came to Earth, he had already defeated the people of Mars in their underground cities. That planet automatically became a vassal world to Venus, populated by beings utterly crushed. Maralok then came to Earth and started a world war, knowing from our piled up armaments that out of the carnage there could only

emerge a race of demoralized savages. How, afterwards, to conquer those savages? By sheer weight of arms, against which they would be quite defenseless because their own materials had been used up . . .

"But Venus alone might not have enough armaments, already depleted from the Martian conquest. Therefore the Venusians decided to force the Martians, against their will, to build a supplementary armada . . . But in so doing, Maralok has defeated himself! He evidently has no idea of what has happened to our atmosphere, no idea that two men like us still have normal knowledge, no idea that instead of defenseless savages there is a race of people building up a vast armada as fast as he gives the orders . . ."

Moss gripped his friend's arm. His eyes were shining.

"Man alive, do you realize what this means?" he yelled. "We can avenge ourselves. Avenge the war—"

"Yes, I know." Cassell's face was as set as steel. "We shall strike first! The people here look on us as something Godlike; they'll do what we tell them. I've got to get the rest of the world's peoples to see reason . . ."

"That's my job!" Moss insisted. "I'm an expert in war organization, remember. I'll lead the mightiest battle fleet any Venusian ever saw! By God—yes!"

THEREAFTER it was Moss who became the dynamo of energy, using at last his long pent-up desires for fast action. He went into the midst of the people with all the flourish of an orator. By words and promises he explained the situation. He doubted if half the men understood what he meant, but they did at last express a ready willingness to do whatever he desired—to strike at this mysterious presence who called itself the Voice, who was oppressing them.

Moss could not pause at this stage. With Grant Felbury as his pilot, he started a world tour, explained by the use of Cassell's brain-transferer to people of other lands exactly what was afoot. The brain-reader did away with the difficulty of foreign languages.

Then there were more difficulties, even when he had gained the co-operation of all the childlike peoples of the world. He had to make sure that the men who would be pilots would not lose the knowledge they possessed when the Voice was out of commission. The only way to do that was to spend hours in instruction, once he had himself learned the intricacies of space-ship control. Odd indeed to teach people how to control a vessel which they handled flawlessly when under telepathic orders.

But there it was. Moss worked with superhuman determination, instructed gun units, pilots, assistant-pilots, rocket fuel men, generally built up through the ensuing weeks an army that he felt he could rely on—while those he had not singled out went on with the Voice's orders and continued building machinery and ships.

Not that Cassell was idle by any means. It was his task to make a second mind-reader and set out for Mars in an effort to get the Martians to understand what was controlling them and obtain their aid. Against two fleets, nothing Venus could provide could possibly stand. So, with Grant as his pilot, Cassell finally set out—was away for nearly five weeks.

Moss, in fact, was getting worried as to his friend's safety. His own work was completed and he itched for final results. For days he mooned around, waiting—then at last towards sunset one evening he glimpsed the lone returning flyer far out over the Atlantic. Within minutes it settled.

Cassell emerged from the airlock, still looking a bit awed by his first experience of space. He gripped his friend's big hand warmly. Silently they walked together through the massed rows of space-ships into the department store, had a meal while the gathered men and women around moved

themselves without encroaching.

"It's all set," Cassell said finally. "Since I was a lone flyer to Mars, no Venusian astronomer spotted me, I guess. I had a bit of a job on, but finally I got down to the underground Martian cities, had an interview with the ruler. They're queer people, but a mighty fine race all the same. Their armaments were practically nil when Maralok invaded them and took over. With the mind-reader I managed to explain things, and they were pretty astounded to find that their building was under orders. There was no hesitation in their agreeing to ignore the Voice from now on. Unlike Earthlings, their higher mentality has made it possible for them to retain plenty of knowledge; they're not by any means childish . . . Anyway, they've agreed to join our fleet with theirs the moment we are sighted half-way to Venus. And then . . ."

"Oh, boy!" Moss breathed, rubbing his hands. "And am I ready! I've got every man fixed so he knows exactly what to do . . . We start at dawn."

Cassell nodded. "O.K. I'll turn in and get some sleep. One gets precious little in space . . ."

DAWN. Every man ready. Short wave radio fixed by Moss between ships. No detail overlooked.

Women seemed to be everywhere to see the armada off. Many of them were throwing the wild flowers that grew in profusion in the streets.

Cassell and Moss both gave a final speech, then together with Grant they stepped into their machine at the head of the three thousand fliers. Without a pause, the moment Grant was settled at the control board, Moss snapped on the radio microphone; his order for departure passed the whole length of the armada.

One by one, the ships rose with the easy grace of birds, exhaust tubes flaring steadily. Up into the pale, rosy sky . . . Into the remoter heights . . . Out of sight of those below.

With a speed that seemed almost incredible, occasioned entirely by the terrific blasts of atomic power, the ships tore through infinity, out beyond the moon's orbit—out into the emptiness that Cassell had already seen. Even so, the wonder of it gripped him again—and Moss. For a moment, the magnitude and incomprehensibility of space made them both forget the errand on which they had come.

Then at length Moss took a grip on himself again, giving orders. For endless hours, the ship flew onwards, then as they finally crossed the half way line between Earth and Venus, there spewed from the distant red ball of Mars a cloud of silver gray—more space — machines, thousands upon thousands of them, equipped as were the Earth machines, in every detail.

By slow degrees, as Venus loomed larger in the cosmos, the Martian fleet caught up . . . Through the portholes, Moss caught an occasional glimpse of the men of the red planet—curious, fur covered beings they seemed to be, with big pathetic eyes and large dome cases. But their physical structure didn't matter. They were united with Earthlings in a common cause—Vengeance!

Venus became even larger, shining silver white with her cloud canopy. Then she filled all space. The vast armada altered position to sweep horizontally to the Venusian surface, plunged below the dense cloud belts . . .

Both Cassell and Moss caught their breath at the vision below.

In the main, the planet was steamy and hot, ridged with titanic mountains, but wherever there was solid land were squat, powerful cities breathing the very soul of scientific power. Everything was orderly, well planned. Here and there Venusians were moving along the specially designed tracks, but as they caught sight of the first of the ships, they started to run.

"We've caught them by surprise all

right," Moss breathed, hands clamped on the window frame. "That's just what we wanted. They showed neither Mars nor Earth any quarter, and by Heaven they'll get none from us . . ."

He swung around, snapped on the microphone.

"Release all weapons on all cities!" he barked out. "Leave no building standing and no Venusian alive!"

Then he swung back to the deadliest of the ship's instruments — the disrupter, wheeled it around so that the sights were in line with the specially devised opening in the vessel's casing.

"O.K.," he snapped out to Grant. "Follow out Cassel's orders from now on. He'll direct the course . . ."

He closed the switches and the power leapt into the instrument. As his merciless eyes glared through the sights at the first of the great buildings below, his mind went back suddenly over twenty years on a stormbound island, of a world convulsed with a war that mankind, left to itself, could have diverted. Millions of lives drowned in blood . . . To appease Maralok!

HE fired the gun. His action was enough —the fleet followed suit. The Martians, unable to understand his orders over the radio did at least understand this. They struck too — without question or mercy. The air became thick with blast rays; vicious acid sprayers rained corrosives down on the now thousand of Venusians scurrying in the streets below.

Too late they forced their own fleet into action. Gallantly though their numbers fought, there were not enough of them to combat the numbers that their own avarice had literally brought into being.

Time and again, Earth and Martian ships hurtled back and forth like silver shuttles over the city, tearing out huge pieces of the buildings with their weapons, blasting the very ground from under the feet of the would-be conquerors, burying them under upbelched tons of rock and earth. Smoke rose in clouds—smoke, dust and debris as entire buildings lifted from their foundations and then rained back on the decimated occupants.

Without a single pause, the twin armadas raced time and time again around the Vanusian globe, omitted no city, spared no single spot of habitated land. They exhausted their acids and supplies of bombs; they burned out their gun firing points, they seized up their smoking hot disrupters . . . But by that time, the Venusian landscape was a haze of drifting smoke from end to end.

There was nothing—nothing but a shambles lying in steamy, sickly heat . . .

Weak from strain, perspiration rolling down his face, Moss straightened his aching back. Wearily he gave the signal.

"Enough! Return home! Our work's finished . . ."

He made a motion to Grant at the switchboard—then in a sudden rush the whole reaction caught up on him. He collapsed his length on the floor . . .

He returned to consciousness to find Cassell bending over him, discovered that he was lying on the emergency bed.

Cassell smiled faintly. "You're all right now," he murmured. "Just the strain, that's all. But boy, did you wipe 'em up! I don't think a single stone is left lying on another on all Venus . . . We're on the way back now—and from now on it's got to be our job to reconstruct. My job, anyway."

"You can have it," Moss said, sitting up and rubbing his head. "I've done my whack—but if you want anything military, call on me. Incidentally, what are you going to do when we arrive back? How do we finish up? Live like children . . ."

"No," Cassell shook his head. "You and I are adults, old man—and so are several of the men we have trained. In time, though, we'll all be childish unless we take measures to stop it. We can do it by wear-

ing light helmets of *mijutin.* If we always wear them, we will never slip into childhood. The others can choose . . . Maybe it's only fair they have childishness again.

"With the knowledge that we have we can rebuild the world anew. The people will obey us; we've become endeared as Gods to their hearts. We'll eliminate all causes of discord and create a perfect planet. We'll make a deal with Mars too and get their assistance. Mars and Earth will go hand in hand after this . . .

"But for this ideal, there will be a price," Cassell finished slowly. "To become the masters we shall have to forfeit a chance of childish, carefree abandon and, more important, the gift of eternal life . . . But if we live our life span and leave a happy world for the others, does it matter so much? They may learn in time, for the atmosphere will thicken until there will be no more Eternals. Then they must choose for themselves, either use or destroy what we shall build up.

"For us—either peace and progress, or stagnation and eternity. Which?"

"You know me," Moss grinned. "Life eternal hasn't got much fascination for me, anyway. I'm with you in building a vast new empire . . ."

He held out his powerful hand. With a smile, Cassell seized it, gripped it tightly. At the control board Grant Felbury started to whistle his favorite nursery rhyme . . .

Continental Engineers

by RUSSELL J. HODGKINS

In this factual article Mr. Hodgkins, who is an active science-fiction fan, proposes a method of governmental operation based upon scientific reasoning instead of political manipulation. While we feel that this scientific manner of government will interest our readers, the opinions of Mr. Hodgkins are not necessarily those of the publishers of SCIENCE FICTION.

HAVE you heard about the great conspiracy among scientists, engineers, and picked members of the general public, to reshape this continent?—a conspiracy that extends over Canada, the United States, and Mexico? Perhaps you haven't, but men and women all over these three countries are wearing a distinctive emblem and a distinguishing dress and are preparing to put the greatest engineering project of modern times into operation.

The curious thing about this conspiracy is that it is perfectly legal, perfectly open, and anyone who is interested can find out all about it. Like the League of the Last Days, in Balmer and Wylie's WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, it is preparing to avert a cataclysmic disaster. Yes, truth is sometimes stranger than fiction!

Strangely enough, this disaster isn't an invasion from Mars or any other predatory planet. The earth isn't going to run into a wandering celestial body, and no mad scientist is preparing to toss us into another dimension. After thirteen years of careful investigations, the scientists and engineers who began this open conspiracy have discovered that unless we Americans shake the lead out of our shoes and get busy, chaos and national bankruptcy are about to descend upon us.

Before you turn to the next feature, give a thought to our situation today. Ten million men out of work are disrupting our country just as surely as a mad scientist with a dingus for decomposing matter into fine excelsior. Twenty million on relief are just as dangerous to our future as a boatload of belligerent citizens from Mars—in fact, more so. We can't guarantee that a fast-thinking superman will invent a gadget to deal with twenty million on relief.

The scientists and engineers who began the investigations twenty years ago realized that an organization would have to be built to acquaint the citizens of America with the facts that they had uncovered. In 1933 they began the formation of that organization, the great open conspiracy we have indicated.

In 1933 this organization consisted merely of the scientists and engineers who had been doing the research work. At that time, a great deal of publicity was released about the findings of these men. The analysis these men had made and the proposals they had to offer were lumped together under the name—Technocracy. In 1933 the membership organization was formed to present these proposals to the public.

The word Technocracy really embraces two distinct features. One is the body of thought—the facts uncovered by research work, and the conclusions concerning our continent and its future, reached on the basis of those facts. The other feature is the membership organization, Technocracy Inc., formed to disseminate information about Technocracy's facts and conclusions, and to prepare to install the new type of operation which is indicated by the facts.

Technocracy, the body of thought, points out that we are approaching an impassé in

our social operation. In other words, trends now in operation will force a social change in America within a very short time. Of these trends, the most important is that of unemployment.

IN 1929 we had less than two million unemployed. Today we have more than ten million unemployed and we are producing more than we were in 1929. How is that possible? It is possible because machines have been developed to do the work that human labor did formerly.

This use of machine power, horse-power rather than human-power, is upsetting all our old ways of doing things. When Technocracy said this in 1932, business and financial leaders scoffed and advanced the claim that machines made jobs. Yet today we produce more than we did in 1929 with at least eight million fewer men.

Money is still being spent to spread the story that machines make jobs, but the reports of government statisticians tell a different story. Fewer men are producing more today, and unemployment and relief are on the increase.

Every man who loses his job also loses his paycheck. That hurts the merchant with whom he deals. In turn, it hurts the middle man, the manufacturer, and the farmer. Multiply this by ten million and you get depression. Increase the use of labor-saving machinery with more unemployed, and you get continual depression such as we have had during the past ten years.

The only way to correct this situation would be to reemploy the unemployed. This the government has tried to do, but the use of machines instead of men has made this impossible.

Technocracy has pointed out that each succeeding depression will be more serious than the one preceding it. Eventually, if this trend of more mechanization, more unemployment, and thus more depression is not stopped, national bankruptcy and national chaos will result. The present production boom is higher than the boom of 1929. The depression that will follow will be more severe.

Machines are here to stay. No one wants to go back to the old hand method of doing things. But at the same time, a way must be found to provide all of our people with purchasing power—and here we find a situation that makes less sense than a Rube Goldberg invention.

While millions of Americans are without enough to eat or wear, there is available a vast store of these things which cannot be sold. While millions of Americans can't afford a new car, we can easily manufacture cars enough for all. While millions of Americans live in unpleasant, antiquated dwellings, we can provide the most modern housing for everyone. We are suffering from an acute attack of want in the midst of plenty.

Consider the food question. We all know that more than enough food can be grown in this country to feed everyone. Every year vast quantities of fruits and vegetables are dumped or plowed under in order to maintain prices. This sort of thing is necessary in a Price System. But at the same time that this food is rotting on the dumps, many Americans are suffering from malnutrition—starvation.

The same is true of practically every other necessity or comfort that Americans want or need. Our continent has been given the lion's share of the natural resources of the world. We have almost all of the minerals and the arable land necessary to take care of our needs and desires. In Europe young men are fighting in the trenches for the things that we have here in generous, abundant measure.

IF TECHNOCRACY is right, and all the evidence of the past six years has shown that Technocracy *is* right, then a social change is rapidly being forced upon us by these deplorable circumstances. What

is American life going to be like after that change?

There is one thing that we must realize. It is not going to be modeled after any European philosophy of government such as Nazi-communism, socialism, or fascism. It is going to be modeled upon an American plan, developed by Americans for the American scene. Nothing else would fit here. European philosophies are based on the more equitable, or the more efficient division of a scarcity. America must operate on the multiplication of an abundance.

If we have available all of the minerals, the farms and factories to produce and distribute an abundance, then we must arrange to have that abundance produced for us by the most efficient scientific and technical personnel. We must arrange to have that abundance distributed to all Americans. An abundance of anything destroys price. An abundance of oranges, for instance can only be given away or destroyed.

Today we do not produce things abundantly because we could not sell them if we did. When all goods and services are abundant they will become valueless. They cannot be sold. They can only be distributed.

OUR lives depend upon our obtaining the food, clothing, housing and other goods and services that we need. Technocracy points out that the social order of the near future will have to guarantee the production and distribution of these things to all Americans. This change is being forced upon us. In order to insure this production and distribution, a new type of operation will develop. It will not be a political government, but a governance of operation, of function—a Technate!

This governance of function, this Technate, will guarantee to every citizen his economic security from birth to death. No government of the past has been able to do this. According to the calculations of research scientists, this is possible today.

Under such an operation, the income of the adult citizen would be actually greater than his ability to consume. The working day would be short, as machines would be used extensively. The working life would extend from the age of twenty-five to forty-five. After forty-five the citizen could be retired, and his income would go on until his death.

Impossible? Fantastic? Not at all! If we can produce more than enough for everyone, then purchasing power is only the accounting for that production. Even today, money is only paper drawn against the credit of the government. In a Technate, purchasing certificates are drawn against the energy necessary to produce what they buy. The goods and services produced exactly equal the available purchasing power.

Today health is something to be purchased. If an American does not have the price for the services of a doctor or dentist, he must seek charity. If he can't get charity he can die—and does. Under the Technate, public health would be a service. Every man, woman, and child in North America would receive abundant and expert medical attention.

The New America envisioned by Technocracy Inc. would include all of the continent of North America, from the Panama Canal to the Polar Seas. This continent is a natural economic unit. It can be most efficiently operated as such.

Technocracy points out that social change is coming—that failure to be ready for it will mean the disaster of chaos. Technocracy Inc. has been formed to prepare the citizens of North America for this change so that they will be ready to meet it.

The open conspiracy now under way in America is a conspiracy to substitute science for opinion in our national and continental leadership—to substitute leisure and abundance for toil and scarcity.

Happy landings, Americans, in the NEW AMERICA!

THE MAD VIRUS

by PAUL EDMONDS

The reporter dived forward.

Kedrick and his mad band of gangsters seize Dr. Morgan and force him to reveal a great scientific secret that the criminal plans to use to bring horrible death to his enemies! Teague, the reporter, is about to inform the authorities and thus save a city from disaster—but Kedrick is too quick!

WHEN Bill Teague, Pineville correspondent for the *Los Angeles Blade,* strolled into the bank, everything seemed normal, at first sight. It was just after eleven. A blond youngster was making out a check at a desk. Only one teller was visible, and he seemed engrossed in the counter before him. Teague came over and said:

"Hi, there. Is President Malley in yet?"

The teller didn't look up. He leaned on the marble counter, slumped over, his shoulders sagging beneath a wrinkled coat. Teague noticed that the man's clothes seemed much too large for him.

The reporter's lean, dark face was puz-

zled. About to repeat his question, he turned as a door opened and hurried footsteps sounded. President Malley popped out of his office, a wiry, wrinkle-faced, gray-haired oldster. The blond youth at the desk looked up, saw the president, and waved a cheery hand.

The change in Malley was fantastic. Into his furtive eyes came an expression of panic fear; he brought out a bundle of bills from his pocket, ran over, and pushed the currency into the other's hands. The boy stood staring in amazement. Teague felt a little warning throb tingle inside his brain.

He didn't realize, then, what lay behind Malley's actions. He couldn't. The Chief of Police had tipped him off that morning that the bank president had received an extortion note, and Teague had promptly come down to interview Malley. Now he hurried forward as the president ran toward his office.

"Mr. Malley, wait a minute!"

The other cast a terrified glance over his shoulder. He gasped something indistinguishable. Teague caught up with him.

"I'd like—" he began quickly—and then paused, wide-eyed, as President Malley thrust something into his hands—a bundle of currency! On top was a thousand dollar bill.

Malley was trembling uncontrollably, his wrinkled face twitching. "Take it!" he gasped. "Don't hurt me—don't!"

The next moment a flash of panic came into the bank president's eyes. He whirled, raced into his office, and slammed the door. Teague heard his footsteps receding into the distance.

He turned around, met the amazed stare of the other customer, the blond youngster.

"Holy smoke!" the boy gulped. "He's gone slap-happy. Are yours grand notes, too?"

Teague thumbed through them and nodded. He looked around. The bank was empty, save for the motionless teller behind the barred window. Teague went over, spoke to the man again. No answer. He reached out and touched the teller's shoulder.

The fellow seemed to collapse. He fell down and disappeared behind the counter. Teague had a glimpse of a shrunken, withered face, midget-small, atop which the hair seemed like an incongruously large wig.

The reporter whirled. "Phone the police," he snapped. *"Pronto!"*

The youngster swallowed convulsively, nodded, and hurried to a phone. Teague pushed his bundle of thousand-dollar bills carefully across the counter and raced after President Malley.

The man's office was deserted. A phone was ringing somewhere, shrill and insistent. Teague hesitated.

The roar of a motor jerked him toward a door. He flung it open, stared out into a parking lot at the back of the bank. Malley, in a light coupe, was driving toward the street. Teague yelled.

Malley didn't hear. The coupe rolled on. Teague sprinted after it, hoping to see a taxi or a car he could commandeer.

The bank president's automobile sprang ahead, swerved out into the street, with a grinding of gears. It accelerated swiftly —and drove—into disaster.

Two blocks away Teague could see the car, rocketing along like mad. Another automobile appeared, coming in the opposite direction. There was plenty of room for the two vehicles to pass. But apparently Malley didn't think so.

Teague saw the coupe swing around with a scream of skidding tires. The car, driven at a dangerous speed, went out of control. It rolled over, smashed into a telephone pole, and came to rest with its wheels spinning. The noise of the crash died.

TEAGUE gave a low whistle and sprinted toward the wreck. A crowd was col-

lecting swiftly. He pushed through it, saw Malley's body, a twisted, bleeding thing, on the sidewalk, the man's head propped up on somebody's overcoat. policeman was giving first aid as Teague squatted down beside the bank president.

"Get back, you," the officer grunted. "Give him air."

"I saw the wreck," Teague explained swiftly. "I'm from the *Blade*."

Malley's eyes opened. In them was the same frightful look of ghastly fear. The blood-smeared, pasty features writhed and twisted.

Malley whispered, *"The virus—"* and died.

TEAGUE waited a moment, and then slowly got up. He dropped back into the crowd. He had no intention of being held as a witness. Malley's last words had opened a little shutter of memory in his brain. Faintly he heard the officer's voice:

". . . fourth one we've had this morning. They all seemed to go crazy. They're down in the emergency hospital now . . ."

Whistling softly, Teague went back to the bank. He let himself in through the rear door. He was remembering something the Chief of Police had said that morning. . . . "Doc Morgan's disappeared. Probably nothing in it. He may have run down to Los Angeles for a spree. But his sister Norma phoned me, said he hadn't been in all night."

Doctor Morgan . . . wasn't he the man who'd been experimenting on protein molecules?* And Malley had gasped something about a virus—

Teague glanced around Malley's office as he went through, but saw nothing unusual. Inside the bank he hesitated. His eye caught a flicker of movement.

Theres was a stand of bottled spring water in the corner. Paper cups were scattered around it and on the floor, a few feet away, was something which at first Teague did not realize was human.

It had been human once. The reporter went suddenly sick with nausea as he recognized blond hair. It was the boy he had left in the bank—but he was undergoing a metamorphosis that was utterly ghastly. His body seemed to be dissolving, flowing and melting from the bones, seething out through the gaps in the clothing. In a moment it was nothing but a clothed skeleton, lying motionless in a widening puddle of evil-smelling ichor. Teague felt his stomach jump against his throat; he steadied himself against a desk. Good God! What monstrous horror dwelt in this building? What incredible thing could dissolve a man's body thus? Acid? Teague's gaze went back to the stand of bottled water. He remembered the dying man's words—"the virus!"*

Quickly the reporter went behind the counter and examined the corpse of the teller. He jotted down a few notes and then, hearing footsteps, slipped back into Malley's office. Peering through the door's crack, he saw several uniformed officers enter the bank.

Teague decided not to wait for them. If his guess were right, he was on the track of the biggest story that ever hit Pineville, Southern California's "millionaire city." He had no time to spare in making explanations now. But, thinking swiftly, he took a moment to scribble in blue pencil on Malley's desk blotter, "The bottled water is poisoned! Analyze it!"

"Maybe I'm wrong," he thought as he slipped out the back door. "But just in case I'm right, my note will stop 'em from

*Many of the disease-producing viruses, once thought to be ultra-small bacteria, actually are giant protein molecules, according to Dr. Calvin B. Bridges of Caltech and other biologists.

*In 1938 Dr. R. B. Bensley of the University of Chicago announced that he had identified the "glue of life," a binding material which holds together the cells of the human body. This substance, plasmosin, can be compared to the attraction which holds the particles of objects together. The action is reversible. When plasmosin lets go, the cells affected degenerate like toy balloons bursting. It is now known that this was the explanation of the young man's death.

drinking any of that water. And maybe prevent a few more deaths."

TWO officers were coming across the parking lot. They saw Teague, shouted. He dodged nimbly among the parked cars and managed to lose himself, finally, among the pedestrians on the street.

"Now for Doctor Morgan," he thought. He didn't know the address. In a drug store he found it in a telephone directory, and jotted it down in his notebook. Then, struck by a thought, he telephoned the city hospital.

"I want some information," he told the voice that answered him. "On—uh—a glandular disorder." "Maybe it is," he added to himself. "I wish I'd studied medicine, though!"

"Hello," he said presently. "I'm trying to find out the name of a certain disease from the symptoms. What? Oh—I represent the *Blade.* Yeah. Here it is: the guy's shrunk tremendously, his bones are smaller, his lower jaw is stuck way out. . . ."

Teague went on to describe the appearance of the dead bank teller. Then he listened for a while, and with a word of thanks, hung up. Whistling softly, he went out of the drug store and hurried to where he had parked his roadster. Tooling it toward Doctor Morgan's home, he thought things over.

"Hyperarathyroidism," he pondered, referring to his notebook. "Bones excreting lime salts at an incredible rate. It should take months or years. Apparently it happened in less than an hour."*

Teague was still trying to figure things out when he reached Morgan's house. The place was an isolated stucco building on the outskirts of Pineville. Moved by an indefinable impulse of caution, the operator hid his car among a thick clump of trees before cat-footing toward the doctor's home.

As it turned out, his action was lucky. There was a dark blue sedan parked in front of the house, with the motor running, though no one was in it. Teague looked around. In this district the homes were far apart, and the nearest was two blocks away. Despite the hot California sunlight, a little chill crept along the hollow of Teague's back. He sensed something wrong—plenty wrong!

It was a reporter's hunch, nothing more. But, nevertheless, Teague slid quietly through the bushes, keeping out of sight, till he reached the house. Loud voices came to his ears. He crept from window to window sill at last he found the right one.

He looked into a laboratory. Three men and a girl were there. Two of the men were familiar types—Teague had seen such thugs in the line-up at headquarters. One was a nervous, skinny, buck-toothed man with a tic under his left eye. The other was huge, stolid, dull-faced and quite bald. He held the girl captive in his great arms.

The girl was a red-haired little fury. She fought desperately, hopelessly, her wide blue eyes hot with angry resentment. Suddenly she saw Teague at the window. For a second she stiffened—and then relaxed, looked quickly away. A clever kid, Teague realized.

The third man was a lean, well-dressed greyhound, with a handsome, expressionless face and very cold black eyes. He gripped a cane in bronzed, strong fingers. He pointed with it to a pile of equipment in the corner.

"Carry that out, Baldy. Jevne, get some rope and tie up the girl."

Teague, at the window, thought swiftly. He knew he couldn't overcome three men—armed men, he realized, noticing the be-

*The famous case of Captain Charles Martell, "the man who shrank," was caused by a parathyroid tumor. Because of the overactivity of the parathyroid gland, new bone tissue being formed lacked the necessary lime salt to harden it, and the bones became thinner because more calcium was being lost than was being taken in. See *The Advance of Science* by Watson Davis, Page 225 *et seq.*

traying bulges in their coats. Perhaps, if he waited, some lucky break might come up. Who was the girl? Hadn't the Chief of Police said something—of course! This was the sister of Doctor Morgan, the vanished scientist!

The girl's slim figure struggled vainly as she was bound. She was rolled into a corner, and Baldy and the dwarfish, nervous Jevne went to work carrying equipment out to the sedan. Teague crouched lower in the bushes as he watched. Retorts, Bunsen burners, chemicals, a tank of oxygen—microscopes, all kinds of apparatus bundled together apparently without rhyme or reason. At last Baldy entered, shaking his huge body like a dog.

"All through, Kedrick. What now?"

"The girl," said the lean man, pointing with his cane. "Carry her out."

BALDY obeyed. Kedrick took a last glance around, nodded as though satisfied, and permitted a slight smile to break the immobility of his bronzed face. White teeth flashed. He sauntered to the door and went out.

Hastily Teague tried the window. It was unlocked. It slid up with a creak, but the roar of a starting motor drowned the noise. The reporter clambered into the laboratory, looking around hurriedly. There was no time to spare.

No papers were visible, nothing that might be a clue. Teague saw a newspaper clipping under a desk; he snatched it up, stuck it in his pocket, and raced back to the window. The sound of the car's motor was fading in the distance. The reporter sprinted to where he had left his roadster, backed it into the street, and set out to trail his quarry, visible three blocks away.

Teague wished he had a gun with him. But, he thought, it would be easy to pick up a police officer sooner or later. Driving with one hand, he got out the newspaper clipping and scanned it. His lips pursed in a soft whistle.

The clipping shed new light on the problem.* "But I'm still in a fog," Teague thought. He gave his attention to driving. The quarry had not yet discovered they were being trailed; Teague had shadowed men before, and knew how to do it unobtrusively. The sedan slid away from Pineville, through deserted, lonely roads. It began to climb into the hills above the little city. Teague began to get worried. He hadn't seen a police officer yet. What would happen if the kidnappers discovered him?

"*Blade* reporter found dead in car," Teague soliloquized, grinning wryly. He began to whistle a funeral melody. The dirt road led up, winding among parched, arid hills. Presently greener vegetation appeared; they were nearing the reservoir that supplied the city with water.

Teague let his car drop far behind. It was the only way to avoid discovery. In about fifteen minutes he caught sight of the kidnappers' sedan parked near a ramshackle frame house above the road. The blue waters of the reservoir gleamed far down the slope.

Teague kicked the gears into reverse, nearly backed off the road, and finally managed to get the roadster hidden behind a huge rock beside the road. "Ready for a quick getaway," he said optimistically to himself. "I'm a sap. Why the devil don't I go after the police?"

But Teague knew why. He was remembering the girl, Norma Morgan, and her wide, frightened blue eyes and the cold, ruthless eyes of Kedrick. The reporter had an idea why Norma had been brought here, and the thought of torture had occurred to him more than once.

*If both genes and viruses are invisible specks of special protein, it is obvious that these specks are tiny powers which not only determine what we are, but also, while 'on the loose,' serve as mighty captains of the hosts of death. It is a mighty power these molecules possess. Besides reproducing themselves they have the magical ability to control and organize the development and activity of every form of life!"—*Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1938.

He made a wide detour and came around to the back of the ramshackle house. The sun was blazing hot on his head and shoulders. There was no sound but the droning buzz of insects.

Teague waited, half-crouched behind a rock. There were no bushes here to hide his approach.

A harsh voice said, "Don't move, sucker."

The reporter's body jerked convulsively. Teague stood frozen, trying to locate the voice.

"Now lift 'em. Quick!"

Teague raised his hands. The buck-toothed little man came out from behind another rock, the tic under his eye twitching convulsively. He held a gun pointed at the other's stomach.

Teague tried a smile. "Hello, Jevne," he murmured. "Hot day, isn't it?"

"Baldy!" the little man called. The giant came out of the house. He shambled over to Teague and searched him for weapons.

"Nothin', Jevne," he grunted. "Not even a shiv."

"You're not such a wise guy," Jevne said to the reporter. "We spotted you miles back."

"My arms hurt," Teague said mildly. "And it's hot. How about asking me inside?"

"Sure. The boss wants to see you, or I'd plug you now. Let's go." Jevne nodded toward the decayed back porch. Teague went toward it, with a cold consciousness of the gun's muzzle aimed unswervingly at his back.

THEY took the reporter through a dim-lit, stuffy hall into a big front room cluttered with laboratory apparatus. The girl was there, bound to a chair. The bronzed greyhound, leaning on his cane, nodded pleasantly, though his face was immobile as ever.

"All right, Baldy. Get the rest of the stuff in from the car."

The giant went out. Kedrick said, "Have a chair."

"Why not?" Teague said, and sat down on a dusty sofa that creaked under his weight. "I suppose it's no use telling you I'm at a loss to understand this hold-up?"

"Not a bit," Kedrick agreed. His cane swung up, pointed at Teague's eyes. "Not after we found you snooping around the back of the house. Who are you?"

"He's a reporter. I found this in his pocket," said Jevne, handing Teague's press card to Kedrick.

Baldy came in, grunting under the weight of the oxygen tank. Jevne's furtive eyes flicked toward it. Teague read fear in them.

"Want to help?" Baldy said with a touch of malice. Jevne licked his thin lips, shook his head.

"The stuff won't hurt you," the giant jeered. Kedrick's cold face turned toward the man. Silently he pointed his cane toward the door. Grinning, Baldy went out, his bare skull gleaming with sweat.

"I'll take the gun," Kedrick said. "Tie him up, Jevne."

Teague made no resistance as the little man obeyed. It would have been useless, anyhow. He flashed a glance of reassurance at the girl, and she smiled at him shakily. Her red hair was tumbled in ringlets about her shoulders, and her face, despite a smudge of dirt across one cheek, was very pretty indeed.

Kedrick said gently, "I hope you have no injudicious ideas of acting the hero. I want some information from you, and I am in no mood to play melodramatic games." He twisted the cane's head and slipped out a glistening steel blade. "I want to know what brought you up here."

The sword-cane's point steadied a few inches from Teague's right eye. Kedrick went on, "I am not bluffing. If I catch you in a lie, I will blind you."

"Okay," Teague said. "Fair enough. I've got no objection to spilling what I know.

"Wise of you." Kedrick's voice was sardonic, though his face did not change. "Go ahead."

Teague did. He held nothing back. There was no point in doing so. He told of what he had seen at the bank, his visit to Doctor Morgan's home, and his witnessing the girl's abduction.

"So I trailed you up here," the reporter finished. "That's the whole thing."

Kedrick brushed imaginary dust from his sleeve. "Then we have no need for this," he observed, sheathing the sword-cane's blade. "You say no one else knows of our—er—hideout?"

"I didn't have a chance to spill the news," Teague grunted. "Your trained apes nabbed me."

Baldy, lounging at the door, rumbled an oath. Kedrick jerked his head.

"Baldy—Jevne—come with me." He glanced at Teague and the girl. "I advise you not to try to escape. I think you know my threats aren't bluffs." His cold gaze dwelt on the two; then he followed the others out and closed the door gently. Teague drew a deep breath.

"A nice guy," he observed. "A very nice guy. Yeah. It looks like we're in a spot, Miss Morgan."

The girl tried a smile that didn't quite succeed. "I—I'm afraid so. I heard your story—Mr.—"

"Bill. Bill Teague."

"Bill, then. Thanks for trying, anyway. I'm sorry you got into this mess."

Teague tested the ropes that bound him. They were tight. Nevertheless he started to work on them as he talked.

"Now that I'm in it, suppose you give me the low-down. Just what's the angle?"

Norma Morgan's blue eyes were worried. "My brother—Kedrick has him a prisoner up here. He told me as we drove . . . Stephen has been working on the protein molecule. He created a new virus—a mutant."*

"I see," Teague said, remembering the deaths at the bank. "What sort of virus is it?"

"Something completely new. It's self-selective. It doesn't affect all people alike, but ferrets out the weakest parts of an individual organism. Man's very specialized, you know—and the virus finds the loopholes in his armor, the flaws in each organism."

TEAGUE said, "Then those deaths at the bank—"

"I can guess. The teller's weak spot was his parathyroid gland. The virus worked on that. It's incredibly fast in its effects, Bill. And Malley, the president—it affected his brain. Phobia—fear."

"Exactly," a cold voice broke in. Kedrick sauntered into the room, swinging his cane. "Since you seem so interested, Mr. Teague, I shall gratify your curiosity. I heard of Doctor Morgan's experiments. I visited him—wormed my way into his confidence, to use a *cliche*. I saw the effects of his virus on animals—and I decided to make use of the virus as a weapon."

"I get it," Teague said grimly. "A shakedown."

"A shakedown. Nothing crude—but Pineville, as you know, is full of millionaires. They'll pay up, under threat of death. I'm going to inoculate them with the virus, and charge them a certain sum each to cure them. There is an antidote, you know."

Norma nodded. "There's an antitoxin. It's made easily enough and builds up antibodies that make the victims immune."

"Your brother is stubborn, Miss Morgan. We took a small amount of the virus from his laboratory, but he refused to make

*"Already it has been shown that both genes and viruses are subject to evolutionary change. They have been observed to change in their natural environment and also have been changed artifically in the laboratory. A virus, for example, may thus gain the ability to produce a disease its ancestor could not cause."—*Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1938.

more. He said he had no apparatus—so we procured some just now. His own. However, we first tried out what we had on President Malley. We introduced the virus into a bottle of spring water in the bank, and threatened Malley with death if he didn't pay."

Light broke on Teague. "So that was why he gave me the money! The virus developed his secret weakness—fear!"

"I think you're right. I have a better plan now. The virus was too strong. But if it's introduced into the reservoir, It'll be diluted sufficiently. The whole city will get a mild attack. That will save time—they'll pay after that! And we can collect and leave sooner than I'd hoped."

Norma said desperately, "You can't control the virus! Stephen doesn't know enough about its properties yet. If you poison the reservoir, you may kill everybody in Pineville."

Kedrick smiled. "A very poor attempt to frighten me, Miss Morgan. Your brother will estimate the right proportions."

He turned, called a command. Through the door came Baldy, pushing before him a slight, bedraggled figure. Norma caught her breath in a little sob.

"Steve! What have they done to you—"

Stephen Morgan looked older than his thirty-odd years. Grey hair frosted his temples. His thin, scholarly face was worn and haggard.

"God, Norma," he whispered. "Kedrick said they'd got you, but I didn't believe him!"

Kedrick said smoothly, "The oldest tricks are often the best. No doubt you'll prepare the virus rather than see your sister tortured."

Morgan's lips twitched. He said, "You won't—"

"I am mild by nature," Kedrick murmured. "I could not bring myself to hurt the girl. But Baldy is less sensitive."

The giant licked thick lips. His tiny eyes dwelt on Norma's slim body. She shuddered against the ropes that bound her.

"Damn you!" Morgan said tonelessly. "I'll make the virus. I—I've got to."

"No, Steve—don't!" Norma said, her voice unsteady. "I can—"

Without looking at his sister Morgan snapped, "What are we waiting for? Come on!"

Kedrick followed Baldy and his captive out of the room. The door shut. Teague again went to work on the ropes that bound his wrists. They were loosening slightly, he thought.

Norma was crying softly. Teague said, "Cheer up. I'll be loose pretty soon."

Her eyes widened. "What? Oh, Bill! If we could get hold of a gun—"

Teague shrugged and continued his efforts. But it was twilight before he neared the end of his struggle. Twice Morgan, guarded by Baldy, had entered the room, selected apparatus, and left without speaking. And now Kedrick came in. He had a hypodermic syringe in his hand, and a vial of yellowish liquid.

Baldy, Jevne and Morgan entered. Kedrick turned to them, said, "I've got the anti-toxin. Since we're working around this stuff, it's a good idea to make ourselves immune. You're sure this is the right dope, Morgan?"

The scientist nodded wearily.

"Good. Then I'll try it on your sister first. That all right?"

"Yes," Morgan said. "I knew you'd do that. It's the real anti-toxin, Kedrick."

NEVERTHELESS, Kedrick carefully sponged off Norma's forearm and injected the fluid. "That's the right amount, eh?"

"Yes."

Teague winced as the needle dug into his flesh. He said, "You'd make a lousy doctor, Kedrick. That's no way to make an injection."

"It'll do," the other said emotionlessly,

and, refilling the syringe, shot the antitoxin into Morgan, Baldy and Jevne in turn. Then, with a nod of satisfaction, he went out, rolling up his own sleeve in preparation.

"Jeepers!" Jevne said, the tic under his eye jerking. "I'd rather work around dynamite any day."

Baldy grinned. "Yeah, half-pint. You got a yellow streak down your back a yard wide."

The little man flushed. He turned to Morgan, said, "Come on, guy! Back to your lab!"

The three went out. Teague said to the girl, "Do you think that was really the antitoxin?"

"Oh, yes. The virus would have been transparent, not yellowish. Steve wouldn't —I wish he had!" she cried suddenly. "If he'd poisoned us all, it might have been better!"

It was getting dark. Teague freed his hands after five minutes of final struggle. Hastily he released the rest of the ropes.

Norma said, "Bill! The window—"

Teague looked out. Silhoutted against the sky he made out a small figure hurrying along, a bulky object in his hand. The reporter's face went white.

"The reservoir!" Norma whispered. "Jevne's gone to pour the virus in—"

The door opened without warning. It was Baldy, carrying an oil lamp. In the yellow glow his face looked gargoylish. He didn't notice at once that Teague was free.

The reporter dived forward. His shoulder smashed into Baldy's legs. The giant went back, toppling across the threshold, the lamp crashing to the floor, and, luckily, going out. Baldy wasn't unconscious though.

Monstrous strength surged in the giant's muscles. His great arms came up, trying to drag Teague into their crushing embrace. The reporter dug his knee into Baldy's stomach, heard an explosive curse. An iron-hard fist thudded into his shoulder, sent him reeling back.

Baldy was surging upright, a black colossus in the gloom. Teague looked around for a weapon. He saw a bottle of some liquid on the table nearby, and caught it up.

Baldy lunged forward. A gun snarled viciously. Teague heard the bullet thud against the wall.

He threw the bottle, with all his strength, at the giant's head.

There was a tinkling crash and a hoarse scream of rage and pain. The gun roared again. Baldy toppled to the floor, bellowing.

Footsteps sounded, racing closer. Teague sprang to the girl's side, tried to unbind her. The knots were difficult in the dark.

She said urgently, "Don't wait, Bill! Stop Jevne before he poisons the reservoir."

And, as Teague hesitated—"You've got to stop him!"

BALDY was still thrashing around in the dimness. The door slammed open as Teague got to the window and flung it up. A bullet screeched past his head. He dived out, rolled over and over on the ground, and scrambled to his feet. Bending low, he ran down the steep slope to the road.

What now? If he had Norma and Doctor Morgan with him, he might have tried to escape in his car. As it was, Teague went plunging perilously downward toward the reservoir, his eyes slowly accustoming themselves to the gloom. The moon had not yet risen, but a faint glow still hung above the hills in the western sky.

Teague was sweating and gasping when he saw before him the slight figure of Jevne, stooping on the brink of a low bluff that overhung the reservoir. The water was a dull leaden color in the dusk. A cold wind blew up from it.

Jevne jerked erect. His hand fumbled in his coat, came up swiftly. But Teague was charging down like a mad bull. Jevne had no time to fire; the gun was knocked from his hand, and he was sent toppling

back under the impact of the reporter's body.

The little man wavered on the edge of the bluff. He clawed the air, yelling—and went over. His cry was cut off by a splash.

Feet pounded closer. Teague glanced up, saw a bulky form lumbering toward him. Baldy!

The reporter hesitated, braced himself. Light glinted on a metallic object near by—the gun Jevne had dropped. Teague dived at it, heard Baldy's weapon bark. A bullet creased his arm with white-hot agony. Lying on his side on the ground, Teague swung up his arm and fired at the looming shape a few yards away.

Baldy let out his breath in an explosive groan. The big form folded up, crashed down almost on top of Teague. Then another gun snarled, and the reporter felt a stunning blow smash down on his head. The lights went out.

TEAGUE woke up with a dull, throbbing ache in his skull. His brain felt as though it was trying to crawl through the sutures. He opened his eyes, wincing, and stared up at a familiar ceiling. He was lying flat on his back, bound, in the same front room of the hideout. The oxygen tank stood beside him. Apparatus cluttered the floor.

An oil lamp splashed yellow gleams on the walls. A toneless voice was speaking swiftly. Teague listened.

". . . strange epidemic seems to have affected Pineville only. Medical aid is being brought from Los Angeles. The Governor has been advised to throw a cordon of National Guardsmen around the city to prevent spread of the infection. Stand by for the next news-flash."

Music came. Teague realized that he was listening to a radio. He looked around. Norma was bound to a chair, asleep, her red hair tumbled about her face. Jevne, shivering a little, crouched in a sofa beside a portable radio. He gripped an automatic. The man's face was flushed a deep red, and occasionally his body shook convulsively. He saw Teague, tried to speak, but a dry, hacking cough racked him.

"Pneumonia," the reporter thought. He said aloud, "What time is it?"

"You're awake, are you?" Jevne snarled. "I ought to smash your face. You killed Baldy—know that?"

"Glad to hear it," Teague said, wishing his head would stop aching. "You crawled out of the reservoir, eh?"

"Yeah," said Jevne, his flushed face twisted in a bitter grin. "After Kedrick shot you. And I poured in the virus, too. It's starting to work. Listen!"

The music halted; a voice said:

"Volunteers are wanted at the Main Hospital. Do not use your cars. Automobiles are ordered off the streets. If you live near the Main Hospital and wish to volunteer, telephone Doctor Ferguson at Palm 1300. Otherwise remain in your homes." The voice hesitated, went on, "A correction. Palm 1200. Palm 1200. We have been working for hours here at the station, and we're pretty tired. However, we'll keep on the air till things get better. The list of dead has risen to thirty-four. The driver of a bus leaving Pineville died at the wheel and the vehicle ran off the road into a dirt embankment. Two passengers were killed; the rest escaped with minor injuries. Stay off the streets! This is important! Stand by for more news flashes."

Teague felt sick. He said, "Nice going, Jevne. There won't be a soul alive in Pineville pretty soon. What time is it?"

"Four o'clock." Jevne's breathing was hurried and uneven. His nervousness was increased almost to hysteria. "God, that damned poison! I always knew—"

The girl had awakened. She said, "Is the antitoxin finished yet?"

"Yeah," Jevne muttered. "Morgan finished it half an hour ago."

"If that's poured in the reservoir—" Norma began.

"Shut up!" Jevne said viciously. "Kedrick knows what he's doing." But there was a queer expression on the man's flushed face.

Teague's eyes widened. He opened his mouth and closed it without speaking. As the radio voice came again Jevne turned toward the window, and the reporter hastily wormed his way toward the cylinder of oxygen. Could his bound hands reach the valve?

No—but Teague shoved himself half upright against the wall. Silently he pressed his lips against the stop-cock, managed to turn it with his teeth. He let himself down quietly as Jevne looked around.

"The Governor has ordered a cordon of National Guardsmen thrown around Pineville," said the radio excitedly. "No one is permitted to leave the city. It can be entered only with a permit. The death list has risen to more than fifty—Chief of Police Haggard is among the dead. Doctor Ferguson reports by telephone that all the red blood cells in his body were destroyed by some unknown agency. Chief Haggard died for want of oxygen. Many have gone insane."

THE valve hissed. Teague hoped Jevne wouldn't notice it. But the little man was too ill to hear the escaping gas.

Norma had seen the reporter's action. Her blue eyes watched him, puzzled. He winked at her warningly.

Teague waited. A queer, heady exhilaration began to mount in his brain. His respiration increased. The effect on Jevne was even more pronounced. He was a shaking bundle of nerves.

At last Teague said to the girl, "Norma, do you feel—funny?"

She hesitated, trying to understand. "I—"

"My God!" the reporter broke in harshly. "That damned virus!"

"What?" Jevne glared down at the bound man, his face a twisted mask. "What d'you say?"

"The virus," Teague said tonelessly. "Your friend Kedrick's infected us, that's all."

"You're crazy," Jevne jerked out. A storm of trembling shook him.

"Those hypodermic injections," Teague went on. "They weren't the antitoxin. Kedrick didn't use the stuff himself, did he?"

"He went outside—" Jevne said.

"Yeah—so he could use the real antitoxin on himself. He's killing us off, Jevne—all of us. We're no good to him now. He'll collect the shakedown money and beat it without splitting with you or anybody else. Baldy was lucky I killed him!" Teague said grimly. "He died quickly. This virus isn't quick."

"You're crazy!" Jevne almost screamed. "Kedrick wouldn't pull a thing like that on me!"

"Do you believe that?" Teague asked. "Kedrick's out for himself. He doesn't give a damn about you or anybody else. Listen, Jevne—you've got a gun. Do me a favor. Use it on me. And on Norma. For God's sake, kill us! I can feel the virus starting to work on me already, I tell you!"

Norma understood. She said to Teague, "I remember now. It wasn't the antitoxin Kedrick gave us. It would have had an entirely different effect. You're right; we've all got the virus in our bloodstream."

Jevne lurched to his feet. His oxygen-excited brain, already half delirious with incipient pneumonia, was insane with terror. Teague said, "Remember Malley, the bank president? He went crazy with fear. The toxin found his secret weakness—"

"Fear!" Jevne shrilled. "It's true—Kedrick shot that poison into me!" He stumbled forward, brandishing the gun. His eyes were glaring and mad. Fear ruled Jevne's mind as surely as though the virus had actually been administered.

"Kedrick!" the man mouthed. "God, I'll kill him! *I'll kill him!*"

He lurched to the door, flung it open. Teague heard his footsteps moving un-

steadily away. The reporter pushed himself up, managed to turn off the oxygen with his teeth.

He hopped laboriously toward a table, pushed a beaker to the floor. It shattered. Teague let himself down again and fumbled for a sharp-edged bit of glass.

"To the left a few inches," Norma said breathlessly. "There!"

Grunting with satisfaction, Teague rolled toward the girl. He propped himself up against the chair, and, guided by Norma's instructions, managed to slice through some of the cords that bound her. After that it was easier. The girl freed herself, and then released Teague.

Bullets crashed nearby. Teague said, "Wait here, Norma!" He raced out into the hall, hurried along it. From an open doorway pale lamplight streamed.

Within the room Stephen Morgan was bound to a chair, his haggard face grimly set. Two men were struggling on the floor —Jevne and Kedrick. Blood was pumping from Jevne's breast. On the floor beside him lay a filled hypodermic syringe.

Kedrick had a gun in his hand. He lifted it, smashed it down viciously on Jevne's head. The little man's clawing hand touched the hypodermic. He gripped it, swung it up, drove it into Kedrick's face. Blood sprang out from dozens of tiny cuts.

Kedrick put all his strength into a blow that crushed Jevne's skull like cardboard.

Teague realized that he had waited too long. He sprang forward—and Kedrick leaped up, lifting his gun. The man's once-handsome face was a crimson ruin.

He snarled, "Get back! Hear me?"

Teague hesitated, heard a soft cry behind him. Norma!

"Don't move, or I'll kill the girl."

Teague stood motionless, his muscles tensed. By a miracle the splinters of glass had missed Kedrick's eyes. The man's face was drawn in a grin of agony.

"I think—I think I'll kill you anyway," he said, and for the first time Teague heard Kedrick's incisive voice thick and hoarse. "Both of you. And Morgan . . ."

The gun's muzzle steadied, pointing at Teague's heart. Kedrick's finger tightened on the trigger.

The reporter looked intently into Kedrick's eyes. Just before the man fired there would be a signal there.

But—why didn't Kedrick shoot? He was standing quite still, and in his eyes there was growing a look of stark, frightful fear.

He screamed.

And his flesh—*changed!*

IT seethed and bubbled and dropped from his bones in dreadful disintegration. The virus in the hypodermic syringe had entered Kedrick's bloodstream through the cuts in his face. And the plasmosin, the "glue of life," was being destroyed by the poison.

The cells of Kedrick's body degenerated, no longer held together. Once more Kedrick screamed, his voice knife-edged with agony —and then he sank down, writhing and struggling, as the framework of his flesh failed.

The reporter stood watching grimly until the last semblance of life and movement had departed from the horror on the floor.

Then Teague freed Morgan. As the last rope fell from him, he sprang up, hurried to a table and caught up a bottle.

"The antitoxin, Teague," he said. "We've got to put this in the reservoir. It'll stop the plague, destroy the virus."

He paused at the door. "But we'd better hurry down to Pineville afterward. I'll save some of this antitoxin, in case it's needed—and I can make more in an hour."

Without waiting for a reply, Morgan went out. Norma and the reporter followed him. Glancing at the girl's bright curls, Teague felt a pleasant exhilaration.

"You know," he observed, "things have been happening so fast we haven't really had time to get acquainted."

"That's right," Norma agreed, "but there'll be plenty of time from now on, Bill!"

PROXIES ON VENUS

by NELSON S. BOND

One man on all of Venus—Dr. Henry Thorpe, amidst a world of man-made Androids—machine-men! Frazier, the Android, speaks of Dr. Thorpe's efforts to make men of his race, and of the horrible accident that finally brings Humanity to the Androids!

Men threw flame and fire and steel-jacketed death at each other!

"It does not seem possible that forty long years have passed since I set foot on the planet Venus for the first time. Only my eyes and intellect assure me that it is so; my heart—save for that part which is forever buried in the marshes beyond North Glen—refuses to believe, and yearns with endless longing for the homeland of Earth.

"Yet my glass tells me I am old; old.

White carven headstones mark the last resting places of those loved ones who were my comrades in the Great Adventure. About me towers Venus City, the metropolis we hewed from a virgin jungle. Its mighty highways teem with countless thousands, but for me, in their midst, is no true companionship.

"Venus City is peopled with monsters, with androids, and with one, lone man. An aged and weary and dying man . . ."

—From the diary of Dr. Henry Thorpe.

YOU must be quiet, now, while I tell you. You must be very quiet and make no noise, because it is night in Venus City and it is dark, and all my brothers and sisters are gone to their sleeping rooms to await the coming of dawn, for such is the Law of the Masters.

You must be especially quiet, for I am writing this in the room of Dr. Thorpe, who is asleep. He told me I might write this. That is why I am permitted to stay up all night, and need not go to my sleeping room. The Master is asleep; I wonder what sleep is like?

My name is Frazier-M-47. I was named after one of the Masters who lies now beneath a white stone in North Glen. I was born in Vat 103, and my body was forged of the finest permalloy by Drane-M-3, the best smith in our shops. Well do I remember the day of my birth. Out of nothingness came deep roaring and a tingling shock; light dazzled me, and a command beat upon my ears.

"You are Frazier-M-47. Walk!"

I rose from the welding belt and started to obey. But there was a defect in the juncture of my left patella; I stumbled and fell heavily. In those days I did not know how to safeguard my brain-pan. My head struck the sharp edge of the welding belt. My current ceased.

That is all I remember until some time later I woke to find that I had been repaired, and that two of the Masters were leaning over me, watching me anxiously. There were many Masters in those days. Let not the young ones laugh. I say it is so; I, Frazier, now-named the First.

The taller of the two Masters, he whom I later came to know as Dr. Henry Thorpe, sighed with relief when I opened my eyes. To his companion he said, "Nice work, Pat. I was afraid we were going to lose him."

The other Master said soberly, "We couldn't afford to, Hank. He's a particularly good specimen. Did you notice that he tried to obey your very first command? And he hasn't even had any schooling yet."

"I noticed," said Dr. Hank. And he turned to speak to me. He said, "Frazier. do you know what you are?"

I replied, "I am a Particularly Good Specimen."

Both men laughed. Dr. Hank said, "See? Instinctive retention, as well as a knowledge of word meanings. Henshaw, do you think that maybe this time—?"

The other Master said, "Don't get too excited, Dr. Hank. We've been disappointed before. But it *does* look as if we're on the right track at last. Your idea of using the conditioned brain-plasm has certainly given this one a jump on all the others. Well, I've got to go feed the Unfies. Be seeing you."

He went away then, leaving me alone with Dr. Henry Thorpe. The tall Master was preoccupied and gave me no commands, so I stood beside the bench upon which I had been repaired, gazing about me. I was neither confused nor ill at ease. Do not think I am conceited when I say this. I know it is the nature of us Androids to be often confused. But I must be truthful. The Master has said so. Therefore, I repeat—I was never, from the day of my birth, ever confused or ill at ease. You will all share this glorious state with me when the Correction has been made.

I FOUND that merely by looking at objects, I knew their names. I knew that I was in the "Android Hospital"; I knew I was standing on a "floor," by a "bench," surrounded by "walls." I also knew—and this you will find strange—that outside the room was a great metropolis known as "Venus City." I had a well defined map of this city in my mind; I knew its streets and byways, even to such details as the location of the Ward of the Unfortunates.

After a time, the Master returned his attention to me. He explained some facts of which I was already aware and added some that were new to me.

"Frazier," he told me, "the first thing which you must learn to understand is the difference between us. I am a Man. My body is made of flesh and blood. It lives, like the bodies of trees and plants and animals, like the bodies of the Unfies—the Unfortunates.

"You are not a man. You are an Android; a machine in human shape. Your body resembles mine in outward appearance. But it is made of metal. It is less perishable."

And he demonstrated the difference between our two bodies, pricking his own with a pin and showing me how blood flowed from the wound. He then bent the same pin against my permalloy, pointing out that my body was welded of materials sturdy and durable.

"In one essential thing, however," he continued, "we are alike. Within our heads, each of us has a 'brain.' My brain was in my head when I was born; yours was put there after your body had been constructed, after having been artificially cultured in our plasm vats.

"But that makes no difference. Your brain thinks, and learns, and reasons just as logically as mine—with one small exception. This exception the other Masters and I are working night and day to overcome. Before—" He hesitated a moment. "Before it is too late."

Again he hesitated, this time staring at me intently. He had asked no question, nor had he given any command. So I said nothing, but stood waiting. The strange, hopeful look faded from his eyes. He said, in a voice less excited than before, "Frazier, you have no questions to ask me?"

"No, Master," I replied.

"But are you not curious to know," he persisted, "what this one exception is? Or why the other Masters and I are working so diligently?"

He was the Master, and the Master is to be obeyed. I said, "Your will is mine, Master."

He turned away suddenly. He said, "That is all for now, Frazier. You will begin your formal schooling tomorrow. Henshaw was right. I am too optimistic. But I had hoped you might be the one—"

There was wet in his eyes.

YOU must be patient if I do not tell this well. It is a strange task for me, this setting-down of things. But I must do it because the Master has said so. The Master sleeps beside me in this little room. It is very dark tonight. The cloud banks engulf the city; their fleecy softness presses at the street-lamps as though to swallow the light. From across the city I hear the endless, nocturnal wailing of the Unfies. They are our sacred trust.

So I began my schooling. You will forgive me if I repeat some facts that you all know well. The Master says I must do so, for some day this account will be read by other Men, and they will understand.

Our elementary training was of a physical nature. We were taught the meanings of numerous command-sounds; how to "walk" and "run" and "jump" and "climb"; how to shrill our sirens (for the alarm sound); how to give warning when our nasal-analyzers detected noxious gases in the atmosphere.

"When first we landed on Venus," Master David Farnell, our instructor, in these subjects, told us, "we did not know that

semi-annually, in March and September, and sometimes between those periods, subterranean volcanic pits jet volumes of deadly gas into the atmosphere—chlorine, carbon-monoxide and carbureted hydrogen.

"Six men and three women were killed the first time this happened. Four more died the second time. After that, we incorporated the nasal-analyzer in the Androids we built. These gases cannot harm your permalloy bodies, but they are fatal to humans. Thus it is your duty to warn us when gas is in the atmosphere. Us—and the Unfies."

A second, and very important part of our physical training was the care, treatment and guardianship of the Unfortunates.

I FOUND it extremely hard to believe that these Unfies were, as was told us, of the same human stock as the Masters. The Masters were strong, and straight, and keen of mind—possessors of great knowledge and powers. You younger ones who have known but one Master in your lifetime, Dr. Thorpe, may think the Masters were always white of hair and stooped of shoulder; feeble and given to much deep pondering. Such was not always the case. When I was young there were no less than ten Masters, eight Men and two Women. And they were gods.

But the Unfies of my youth were like the Unfies of today—a grotesque, horrible, misshapen lot; ugly caricatures of the human shape, some with three or more arms, some with fat, bulging bellies that hung to the ground, some with tails, or twin, leering heads.

Monstrosities, they are stupid as the swamp-oxen that till our fields, dirty as the mud-grubs that scurry from beneath rotting logs, prolific as the cave-rabbits of South Venus. These were—and are—the Unfies. These were—and are—our sacred trust.

We were taught the proper care and feeding of the Unfies—how to tend to their bodily needs, how to prepare their meals, how to minister to them in sickness. In those days, not all the Unfies had been brought to Venus City; in the Ward of the Unfortunates were no more than seven score. Hundreds of others roamed the forests and marshes. We were sent out in expeditions to capture them and bring them into the city. It is seldom that today an Unfie is found outside our realm.

Many other things were we taught. All of us were given an elementary knowledge of the intellectual crafts—the arts of reading, writing, mathematics. The art of telling by pictures was also taught us.

"—for who knows," we were told, "but that in the future some race of beings from a distant planet may land on Venus? The Masters will be gone, then—and it will be your duty to tell them who made you, who we were and where we came from."

Thus each of us was given a rudimentary knowledge of astronomy, too. And the Star of the Morning was given to us as our Most Sacred Star. Its name is Earth. Always, we were told, we must worship it as the spot whence came our Masters.

That was our elementary education. Every Android was given the same initial course of study, after which his retentive abilities were determined by the Masters, and he was assigned to a further course of study commensurate with his mental abilities.

Many of us were removed from school, sent to the tasks of mining, farming, building. Whenever this was done, a Correction was applied upon the body; additional arms and legs were added where necessary, power units were appended to those Androids who took over the heavier tasks; the laborer was made suitable for his craft.

Still others went into the professions. Some were made Android Physicians. Theirs was the delicate task of repairing broken units in our damaged brethren; the specialists were even permitted to make operations upon the brain. But for the most part, this latter operation came under

the precinct of the Human Physicians, who were given a rigid course in the care and treatment of the human body.

Human physicians were honored with the title, "Dr." before their names. They took up residence in the Ward of the Unfortunates, and treated the illnesses and injuries of the Unfies. And—as the years went by—they strove to keep the dwindling Masters from death. But this was a losing struggle.

There were Android astronomers, navigators, aviators, middlemen, soldiers. But only a few were chosen for the highest of all positions—that of Android teacher. I was one of these fortunate ones.

"Five years have passed since your birth, Frazier," Dr. Thorpe told me on the day of my appointment. "You have gained much knowledge in that time. You have progressed more swiftly than most of your brothers, have shown amazing speed in grasping new subjects. Therefore, you will be trained to teach Androids when, in the not too distant future, the Masters are no more."

I said, "Thank you, Master."

Dr. Thorpe looked at me sharply.

"Why did you say that, Frazier?" he demanded. "Are you grateful for this appointment? Are you—are you happy?"

"The will of the Master," I told him obediently, "is my will, and is not to be questioned." I hoped my reply would please him. But it didn't. He turned away, shaking his head sorrowfully.

FRAZIER LEARNS ABOUT HISTORY

AND so I became a student under Dr. Thorpe himself in the strangest of all subjects—a subject called "History" which deals with the passage of time and those events which have gone before. The events which were told me were of the early lives of the Masters.

"We did not always live on the planet Venus," the Master told me. "Once, long ago, our home was on Earth. In the state of Arizona, in a land known as the United States of America . . ."

Then came a long, and most perplexing story. I was told how, almost forty years ago, the planet Earth was seized in the convulsions of a great holocaust known as "war." This strange phenomenon was a form of madness that gripped men's minds, arousing first emotions of greed, desire, and the lust for conquest — then developing through stages of argument and anger until at last came a thing called "hate."

Under the grip of this toxic disease, men dressed in suits that looked alike and walked forth and in long columns to throw flame and fire and steel-jacketed death at each other. It was a senseless thing, since no man could profit by it. The dead were dead; the living were seared in the fire of hate, were crippled, or were impoverished by war's costs to the state of starvation.

"In 1939," said Dr. Thorpe, "which, in Earth time, means one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-nine years after the birth of He who forever forbade war, a continent across the seas from America fell prey to the insanity of war. In a short time, our own nation was drawn into the conflict.

"Of all mankind, only two small groups of humans retained a vestige of intelligence —one was our group of Masters, living in the United States. The other was, oddly enough, a handful of those who were, presumably, our enemies.

"Our American group took refuge in subterranean caverns that, by atomic power, we carved from the bowels of the Arizona desertland. Here, concealed from the recruiting planes of our own race, we constructed a space-ship. Across the ocean, on the *Raketenflugplatz* near Berlin, in Germany, our fellow conspirators built a similar ship. At a date arranged between our two leaders, Dr. Frazier Wrenn and Herr Doktor Eric von Adlund, we were to take flight for Venus.

"Our desire was to save some of the

learning, some of the humanity of Earth from the devastation which threatened to destroy mankind."

I learned, then, of the flight of the *Goddard;* of the unforeseen accident which threw it off its schedule so that it was more than two years in reaching its goal—and of the strange, tingling sensation that suffused all the Earthlings on the space vessel until, after many months, Dr. Frazier Wrenn devised a filter against the cosmic rays.

"But it was too late then," my mentor told me sadly. "The damage had been done. When we arrived on Venus we discovered, to our horror, that the radiation had altered the character of our genes. Every one of us was sterile.

"We were the last of mankind to bring intelligence to Venus. And there would be none after us—for we could not reproduce. There were more than forty who started. Now our number is but six . . ."

He sighed. "Yes, six. For Murphy and Henderson went this year—went to join those others in North Glen. I, myself, will soon be there—along with Brenda, with whom my heart is buried."

HE stared at me. I thought of the Unfies. I said, "But, Master, I do not understand. The Unfies—"

"They are the offspring of von Adlund's unfortunate crew. They made the flight successfully. But their ship did not have the protective screens devised for ours by Dr. Wrenn, neither were they so long exposed to the rays as we.

"Where we were rendered sterile, their genes were forced into a variant mutation. Rapid degeneration followed. They relapsed into bestiality. They have never bred true, a sign that their condition is not a fixed and hopeless one.

"But though we have labored for almost forty years, we cannot restore them to their former state. They are mad, inhuman beasts, in whose breasts slumbers dimly the spark of humanity.

"That is why, Frazier, the Unfortunates must ever be your first, your most sacred trust. We of the *Goddard* are dying. They of the *Oberth*—the sole inheritants of man's glory—still live on in their children's children. You must forever strive to restore to them the lost intelligence which will raise them above the level of the beast."

I said, "It shall be so, Master."

Thus the long days went by. I studied not only the history of the Great Adventure, but many other things as well—the history of Earth. Strange names marched before me in an endless procession—Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler—madmen and conquerors all. There were the greater heroes of peacelike pursuits—Galileo, Newton, Hippocrates, Einstein—and those who had made great music with their words. Aeschylus, Seneca, Villon, Shakespeare, Galsworthy, and those who set the world to tune, and painted it in colors.

It was brain-wracking labor—but the Master was inexorable in his insistence that I learn. He carried out the collegiate system of his native Earth—gave periodic examinations.

"It is the only way in which we dying ones can leave behind us our heritage, Frazier," he explained. "Perhaps you find it strange that we teach you Androids—who are little more than robots—to fish, and dance, and play games. Every spring we encourage you to form baseball teams; each fall we play football. Yet you derive no pleasure from these pursuits, do you?"

I said, "It is the Master's will—"

"Let it go, Frazier," he said wearily. He handed me a slip of paper. "Here are the questions for your final examination. If you pass this test, you will have qualified as a teacher."

It was no easy test he had prepared. The Android brain, being patterned after Man's, has its limitations. Let an Android be told to labor in a field, he can do so for

an endless period without weariness. But the use of the brain is a different problem. I knew when first I saw that examination that I might have great difficulty in answering all the questions.

Yet try I did. For two solid hours I sat writing, cudgelling my brain to recall the name of the President of the United States who had sponsored the Civil Service Act, trying to remember the inventor of the X-ray machine, striving to recollect the birth date of Venus' first leader, Dr. Frazier Wrenn.

Finally I was satisfied that all of my answers were correct save two. I could not remember the date of the first flight of heavier-than-air craft on Earth, nor was I able to prepare a short account of the history of the discovery of radium. It was at this point that Dr. Thorpe looked up.

"Are you nearly finished, Frazier?" he asked.

"Almost, Master," I said.

"Are you having trouble with some of the questions?"

"Yes, Master."

HE rose suddenly. "I must leave the room for a few minutes," he said. "I shall be back in a little while." And he walked past my desk to the door. As he did so, a slip of paper fell from his hand by accident; he did not even notice it. After the door had closed I glanced down and saw that it was a complete list of answers to the questions he had asked. I put it back on his desk, then returned and tried once again to grasp those elusive memories.

When he returned, a few minutes later, I handed him my paper. He glanced at it swiftly, then at me.

"Your answers are all correct, Frazier, except two."

"Yes, Master," I said.

He bit his lip. He rose from his desk, clutching the scrap of paper I had placed there. "Didn't you *see* this?"

"Yes, Master."

"Didn't you realize what it was?"

"Yes, Master."

"And you didn't take advantage of it? You weren't curious enough to search for the answers to the two questions you couldn't solve?" His voice was strange.

I said, "The Master did not tell me to look at the slip. He told me to answer the questions—"

"And you didn't even—care enough to cheat?"

I knew, then, that I had made some mistake. But I couldn't figure out what it was. Never had I seen a Master look so bitterly disappointed. He aged before my eyes. And at last he said, in a hollow voice, "I am convinced, at last, that my efforts have been in vain. You have just demonstrated it to me, Frazier.

"I have been watching you for five long years. You were the refinement of my efforts, the possessor of the best brain ever to come from the vats. I had hoped that in you we might eventually arouse the spark which separates the man from the Android.

"But again, as several times before, you have failed me. Do you know what it is about you that differs from man, Frazier?"

I said, "My body is of metal, Master."

"I don't mean that. Your brain?"

"I do not know, Master."

"Then I must tell you. It is, simply—you have no emotions. Time and again I have tried to arouse in you even the simplest emotion. Fear, anger, cupidity, love—any one of these. Or even a lesser degree of interest in that which transpires about you—curiosity—or, as just now, the desire to make a good showing in the test.

"Frazier, it matters little to me that you made an excellent score on this test. I would rather you had *cheated* on one tiny question than that you had remembered all I have labored to teach you. Recollection is a token of a well-developed brain. To cheat would have showed—humanity."

I said, "I'll cheat now if you want me to, Master."

"No! No, don't you understand at all? Don't you see, Frazier, that you are not a Man at all—only a mocking parody on mankind? You move, and talk, and act like a man; you look like a man. But your thoughts are not your own. They are reflections of the words we put in your mouth.

"That is why there are no good Android astronomers or doctors or scientists. You can move only according to habit. Suppose, Frazier, tomorrow a brand-new and dreadful disease attacked every Unfy in the Ward. What would your Android doctors do? Nothing! With no precedent to guide them, they would be baffled. The Unfies would die."

I said. "The Unfortunates are a sacred trust."

"But a trust," said the Master sadly, "you cannot fulfill. For when we last Masters are gone, there will be no more progress, no further independent thought. For eternity you Androids may continue to live, reproducing yourselves from the vats and rolling mills as we have taught you, without ever adding an iota of new knowledge to your present store."

He rose, his face lined. And he shrugged. "Well—thus dies Mankind, and with it the hope of repeopling ravaged Earth. Goodbye, Frazier."

AND he was gone. I did not know what to do. I had not been given any instructions. I did not know whether I was now a teacher or not. I waited patiently. After a while my generator began overheating, because it had been turned high during the examination period. I did not think the Masters would mind if I turned it down a little. I did so.

I suppose I stood there for a day or so. I do not know, exactly. I occupied my brain trying to understand what the Master had meant. It was very difficult. I could see his logic in saying that we Androids would never develop new thoughts. I tried to develop a new thought. I thought once I had succeeded; then I remembered that I had overheard one of the Masters discussing the thing I thought of.

It all turned on that mysterious something called "emotion." I did not understand emotion. One did not need it, so far as I could see. There was no place in life for "fear" or "love" or "curiosity." One obeyed the Masters.

Then finally came Jar-F-67. She said, "You are to come to the Ward of the Unfortunates."

I followed her there. I was assigned new duties. Evidently I had failed in my examination, and was not to become a teacher after all, because I was taught to take the Unfies for their daily walk.

On these walks, I had twenty Unfies under my care. At the first sign of danger, it was my duty to protect the threatened Unfy. And despite the fact that our Ward was just outside of Venus City, there were many dangers. Swamp-horses abounded, there were sword-cats and gigantic lizards that preyed on human flesh. There were also the proto-balls, gigantic puff-balls of pure proteid matter that burned human flesh and even attacked permalloy.

It required constant vigilance to guard the Unfies. Having only a low form of brute intelligence, they were apt to wander into forbidden places. It was my duty to see that all returned unharmed from the daily constitutional. I was faithful in this duty, though once, indeed, I was forced to resort to the siren when an armless Unfy with no eyes blundered into the depths of the swamp and almost drowned.

Dr. Thorpe was, by chance, at the Ward that afternoon. After the Unfy had been rescued, he led me aside. It was the first time he had spoken to me since that day months ago. He said, "Frazier—that Unfy almost drowned before Dr. Barton and I reached the swamp."

I said, "Yes, sir. But I did my best to save him. The Unfies are our sacred trust."

"That I realize. In spite of the edict that no Android must enter deep waters, you waded into the swamp and held the Unfy upon your shoulders until we arrived. Tell me, Frazier—what caused you to do this? Was it a sense of responsibility?"

I said, "The Unfies are our sacred trust."

"Yes, I know. But did you not know when you entered the swamp that you imperilled your own existence? Had you chanced to step on a soft, muddy sinkhole, you might have been trapped beneath the waters. Your fine body would have rusted away, microcosms would have entered your brain casing, eating it away, bringing death to you.

"Did you not think of these things? Did you not fear them, and despite your fear risk your life for that of the Unfy? Why did you go to his rescue?"

I said, "The Unfies are our sacred trust."

You must be very quiet, now, and let me finish my story. You must be especially quiet, for Dr. Thorpe sleeps, and the pale gold of false dawn creeps over the Hill of Lost Hopes beyond Venus City. The lamplight is wan in the streets and below me I hear the first stirrings of the wakening city. Soon my brothers and sisters will come from their sleeping rooms, as is permitted—their sleeping rooms, where, throughout the night, they have been lying motionless upon their beds as the Masters have ordained.

The customs of Earth must be preserved. It is the Law of the Masters. Now the last Master sleeps beside me and you must be very quiet while I finish my writing-down . . .

HUMANITY COMES TO THE ANDROID!

MUCH time passed, and I remained as an interne at the Ward of the Unfortunates. The Master never called upon me to serve as a teacher; that plan he had evidently abandoned. From time to time we in the Ward received news of that which transpired in the City.

This news was not good news. Master David Farnell failed to awaken one morning, and he was buried in North Glen. Master Tom Laney also joined this assemblage of the departed. And our own immediate Master, Dr. Barton, closed his eyes one evening after dinner and did not open them again. It was a great problem to the Android Cook. She had spent years yearning to prepare human foods; now there was but one Master left to cook for. Should he die, her usefulness would be at an end unless Corrections were made and she was taught another craft.

The Android Chemist, Tom-M-53, who worked in the laboratory of Dr. Thorpe, told me of their recent experiments.

"Never before," he said, "have we evolved such an astonishing variety of brain-plasms. Into each of them, Dr. Thorpe is introducing foreign chemical substances. He is searching, he told me, for something that will create emotion in an Android brain. Do you kow what he means? Do you know what emotion is?"

I told him, "Emotion is that which makes you want to walk into deep water and destroy yourself."

Tom-M-53 said, "That is something I was never told about. It doesn't sound right. The Law forbids Androids to walk into deep water."

Then at last came the day of which I must tell you. It started out like any other day. I gathered together my group of Unfies to take them for a walk. We went down by the London Gate, crossed Little Brooklyn Bridge, and strolled into the marsh-edge so that the Unfies might eat their fill of fresh berries.

I was kept busy seeing that they ate only berries, for it was the pink-bug season and the Unfies are not able to distinguish bugs from berries. Thus it was that I did not see the danger until too late.

My first intimation that there was something wrong was the sound of shrill screaming from the Unfies. I turned in time to see

them running helter-skelter from something that was rolling with the speed of a loco-cycle upon one of their brethren—a round, dirt-white something, semi-porous, dusty and foul.

It was a proto-ball, of course. I had beaten off many of them in the past, and was quite capable of beating off this one, too, had not the unforeseen overtaken me. As I raced to the Unfies' rescue, one of them slipped and fell at my feet. I tripped over his body and plunged headlong into the proto-ball itself.

It was an aged proto-ball, and must have been on the very edge of sporing. For with the impact of my body, it split into a million, powdery fragments. I heard the sifting rain of its granules beat down upon me like a fine, gritty sleet. One of my relays choked and spluttered, and I could not move my right arm. I knew, then, that the powdery rain had filtered through every crack and crevice in my body, and that I was dangerously exposed to its acid burning.

The Unfy over whom I had tripped was screaming horribly. I needed but one glance at him to see that death was upon him. Great, purplish rashes appeared on his scrawny body as if by magic. In less time than I call tell it, his flesh was sloughing off in raw, scabrous ribbons. He died, mewling and bleating frightfully.

But I was in no better straits. A film of whitish spores had clotted at my right knee-joint, and now, glancing at it, I saw that already a red ribbon of rust had caked on the glistening permalloy. I scraped at the rust with my fingers, but when I drew my hand away, it too was beginning to rust!

I immediately set my siren shrilling. I could not move, now, but I knew that the siren would serve a double purpose. It would send the rest of the Unfortunates scurrying to safety, and it would bring help to me.

The dreadful white film spread like a fungus all over me. I remember thinking that I had failed in my most sacred trust . . . that an Unfy had died in my care . . .

AND now you must believe a most incredible thing. A thing the rest of you—yet—cannot conceive of. As I lay there, unable to move, covered by that foul proto-ball's spores, I experienced a new and terribly potent thing. Suddenly I was suffused with a terrible *anger!*

There is no way I can describe this sensation to you. It is an emotion, and you will not know what an emotion is until after the Correction has been made in each of you. All I can say is, anger is the "want to do" feeling. I felt a stormy desire to rise despite my handicaps, an urge to beat off this stinking thing which had rotted my beautifully molded joints, a burning fever to get back to the Master and to safety.

And with this surge of feeling came a power I had not dreamed I possessed. The power to plot new ways of overcoming a difficulty. It was a lightning-like process. One moment I lay there supine, reconciled to my fate; the next I was rolling and tossing, over and over, shaking off the white poison of the proto-ball, rolling my useless limbs toward a pool of shallow water.

My newfound knowledge told me that if I went into that water with my generator on, I would short-circuit my controls, frying my brains in my brain-pan. And suddenly I did not want to die. I had learned a great secret which I must bear to the Master, come what might afterward.

My hands were useless to snap off the controls. But there was a rock beside me. I rolled over this, failed in my attempt, rolled back over it again. On the third attempt, my effort succeeded. There came a sharp *click!* and my generator went off. Momentum spun me down into the tiny puddle.

But strangely, with the turning off of my generator I did not go dormant. My brain continued to work. And I saw the host of hurrying Androids race from the Ward,

down through the fields to the marsh. My face was turned toward the Ward, so I saw them gather together the squealing, terrified Unfies and herd them to safety. Then I saw them come toward me, stepping gingerly over the graying spores of the proto-ball that I had exploded.

I could not hear, but I could see. I saw the Master break through the crowd of Androids, saw the pity in his eyes as he looked down upon me, lying there, seared and rusted, in the shallow pool of water. I saw his lips move, and I could read their movement.

"So it is you, Frazier? But you were ever a disappointment to me. You have died, now, as so many of my dreams have died. In the muck of disillusion."

And knowing that I could not hear, thinking that I could not see, believing that I could not think, he turned to one of the worker-Androids. "Carry him to the repair laboratory, Joseph. There may be something they can do to revive him."

He would have gone, then. But I would not let him go. Yes, I, Frazier, now-named the First, would not let the Master go! It is a strange thing to say, and perhaps some of you will think it blasphemous. But it is the truth. For my newly gained powers surged through me in a great, multipowering, irresistible flood.

By the force of my own eyes and the impingement of my own thinking brain upon his, I forced him to turn and look at me again. I could not move, I could not speak, and I could not hear. But I could *will*. And I did so will that the Master turned, touching his brow perplexedly.

"Wh-what speaks?" his lips formed. "Who calls me? Can it be—?"

And he looked squarely into my eyes, suddenly excited. I used, then, the last bit of power within me. By a tremendous effort of will I summoned the telepathic thought and drove it from my brain to his.

"It is I, Master. I, Frazier, call you . . ."

THERE is little else to tell. You have all heard how the Master, with his vast genius, divined the reason for the great change that had come over me. After I had been repaired, and was helping him in his laboratory, he explained it to me.

"It was your accident, Frazier, that supplied the missing clue for which I have sought so long—the accident which brings new life to the race of Androids, will preserve the Unfies, will cause life to endure long after I, the last Earthman, am gone.

"I should have thought of the proto-balls myself, long ago, while I was experimenting. For on Earth, in the days before the Holocaust, it was known to scientists that there was a pure, unadulterated form of proteid which embodied a pure emotion. Prolactin, they called it. Laymen used to say it was the "mother love" crystal. Its extract formed a hormone which, injected into the brain tissues, created an artificial emotionalism in the recipient.

"Now we understand what happened to you. Your vat-created brain was a perfect replica of Man's—save for one deficiency, a lack of this "emotion crystal," prolactin. When the proto-ball, which is pure proteid in granular form, dissolved its spores in a cloud all about you, a few of them filtered through your joints and touched the gray matter of your brain.

"It was these few that served as the catalyst in you—turned you from a mere robot into an emotional, a truly reasoning, creature."

I said, understanding perfectly now the emotion in his heart, and feeling a sympathy for it, "Together, Master, you and I will bring about the same Correction in all of my brethren. Our race will be, then, as you wished them to be. We will be able to study for the years to come—with you as our mentor."

Dr. Thorpe shook his head sadly.

"These things shall be done, yes. But not with me as leader. For I am an old man, and soon it will be my lot to join my

comrades in the quiet of North Glen.

"But you, Frazier—" His eyes shone, and I felt a quickening within me. *"You* will go on! For you have a sacred obligation to fulfill. I leave it in your hands, confident that you will succeed.

"Yours is the task of learning how to overcome the radiation-induced madness which dominates the Unfortunates. This, in the years to come, you will correct. And when these children of Mankind have been returned to their former state of pride, then you will build ships like the *Goddard* in which I came to Venus so many years ago.

"You will send Earth's children back to their mother planet. When this is done, then, and only then, will your obligation to the Masters be fulfilled."

I said, "So be it, Master. And you—?"

"My task is finished now, Frazier the First. Soon my weary body will rejoin my buried heart. There is but one emotion you are not capable of understanding, my friend and my only child. Love. My love lies buried in North Glen—and soon I shall lie beside her."

SO YOU must be quiet, now, while I tell you. You must be very quiet and make no noise, for it is bright dawn over Venus City, and all my brothers and sisters are coming from their sleeping rooms. For such is the Law of the Masters.

You must be especially quiet, for I am writing this in the room of Dr. Thorpe, who is asleep. He told me I might write this. That is why I am permitted to stay up all night. The Masters do not err. Only in one thing has a Master ever erred.

He told me I might not know one emotion of Man—the emotion of love? Why, then, am I filled with a great, yearning sadness so deep that I scarce can write. If it be not love I feel for him who lies beside me as I write—what can it be?

The Master is asleep. He fell asleep this evening after bidding me write this account, so that you, and all future generations may know, how humanity came to the Androids. He will never awaken. Tomorrow he will lie in North Glen. The Master is asleep. I wonder what sleep is like . . .

SCIENCE FICTION AND FRIENDSHIP

An Editorial by CHARLES D. HORNIG

THERE is so much war, and hatred, and ill-feeling rampant in the world today, that the peace-loving populace of America eagerly clings to all public movements which sponsor brotherhood and friendship.

That's one of the big reasons why we science-fiction fans are proud of our literature—our hobby—and our movement, a movement that tends to broaden the minds of laymen, open their credulity to the wonderful possibilities of mankind's future.

Science-fiction creates bonds of friendship like no other type of literature has ever done! This is no idle boast, but has been proven by enthusiastic fan activity during the past fifteen years, since science-fiction became an organized brand of reading matter.

This power of science-fiction to create amiability may be due to the fact that those who read science-fiction have open minds, and open minds are friendly minds —friendly to new ideas, to the opinions of others. Or it may be due to an affinity brought about by a common belief among science-fiction fans in the infinite power of science for the forces of good.

At any rate, a science-fiction fan is assured of having real, honest-to-goodness friends wherever he may roam—Kokomo, Kankakee, or Keokuk—wherever there is a newstand or postal delivery, and that includes everywhere.

As for proof of this, witness the activities of the most alert fans in their accomplishments of organizing frequent conventions, many energetic clubs for the members of science-fiction fandom. Dozens of fan magazines published regularly sponsor fan interest and announce the gatherings of fantasy's advocates.

Last year, hundreds of fans, authors, editors, and artists of science-fiction attended the great First World Science Fiction Convention in New York City. That was an event to thrill the heart of every reader of our literature—the countless opportunities to chat with old pen-pals, favorite authors—cementing many strong, personal friendships.

THIS year there will be another great science-fiction convention in Chicago, sponsored this time by the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers—the first world convention having been the results of tireless efforts by the New Fandom Club of New York. And between these annual conclaves, there are many state and sectional conventions. Besides that, many local clubs meet frequently throughout the continent.

People who read the western, detective, sports, and adventure magazines undoubtedly derive much enjoyment from such action stories, but in no other type of literature can you find the friendly true-fan interest that pervades the science-fiction world.

And I should know whereof I speak, for I've travelled over 60,000 miles through every state in the Union, and I've seen these fans in action, personally. Their enthusiasm is inspiring—they are wide-awake, open-minded, intelligent—and friendly.

So let us drink a toast to the science-fiction fan—the lovable, logical, laudable inhabitant of the peaceful World of Tomorrow!

A special supplement department for the active science-fiction fan and collector. Send your items of fan interest to

THE FANTASY FAN, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York.

ARE YOU A FAN?

IF you belong to a science-fiction club, issue or work on a science-fiction fan publication, or come in contact with science-fiction notables, why not write us about it? Readers of THE FANTASY FAN are anxiously waiting to know what you are doing to spread the gospel of science-fiction! Share your experiences in the fan field with advocates all over the world! This department is open to all fan, author, and publishing material, so don't hesitate to make free use of it.

FRANK R. PAUL

FRANK R. PAUL has done more to portray the wonders of science-fiction to the fantasy public than any other person—for he is, and always has been, science-fiction's Number One illustrator. Hundreds of his weird, fantastic paintings on the covers of the magazines have lured thousands of newsstand scanners and caused them to become fans—for his superb illustrating has given them a desire to read the stories that are so excellently pictured in the masterpieces of Paul.

Long before science-fiction was an organized literature, early in the century, Frank R. Paul was illustrating novels and short stories of this type in Hugo Gernsback's early science magazines—and he has remained on top for about three decades.

It is our humble opinion that he will long retain his place as the man who can most vividly portray the marvels of the future, for his creative imagination seems to be without limit. So, to Frank R. Paul, the supreme artist of science-fiction, we most respectfully dedicate this issue of SCIENCE FICTION. Viva la Paul!

FANS A MENACE? NEVER!

by HARRY WARNER, Jr.

MR. GARDNER, in his article in the August SCIENCE FICTION, "Are Fans a Menace to Science Fiction?", uses some excellent arguments in an effort to prove his point. But I don't think they are quite good enough. They just don't hold water.

I will admit that the estimate of "fans" as one-third of stf.'s reading public is a generous one—much too generous, I fear. I would reduce that number to one-fifth, at the very most. But why are not those fans, the one-fifth, a reasonable cross-section of the general reader of science-fiction? Surely not all of them are collectors. Perhaps not one out of ten files his back issues, or even buys all of the fantasy magazines issued. Possibly only one out of fifty—or still fewer—can really be classified as active, collecting, fans, with whom science-fiction has become a mania.

Therefore, it would appear that few of the "fans" become so wrapped up in the professional magazines as to become overly critical. The great majority of those who belong in this category are those who occasionally write to the pro magazines, buy a fan magazine every now and then, and

generally regard the whole thing as a pleasant pastime for odd moments; nothing more.

And the fact remains that *some* fans must write to the professional magazines, giving their opinions of them. If none of those who write in are to be trusted in their viewpoints, there is little reason for the existence of letter columns in these magazines. According to Mr. Gardner, the very existence of a reader's forum is a hindrance to the magazine! Obviously, something is wrong with the reasoning there.

And yet another thing: if the fans who insist upon the professional magazines' featuring of the very best fantasy are actually harming their favorite reading matter, what can account for a few obvious facts?—such as: the fantasy magazine which publishes probably the finest *literature* available in this field today has been existing for something like sixteen years—almost unheard of for a pulp magazine! And why is it that the magazines featuring the "worst" science-fiction, from the fan's viewpoint, today, are unable to come out oftener than quarterly? To quote a real fan, Robert W. Lowndes, I must say, "Rejected; a pessimistic outlook."

NEW FAN MAGS FROM QUEENS

FOUR of the Queens Science Fiction league girls are publishing an all-girl fan magazine, titled "The Feminine Fan," and containing material written only by girl science-fiction fans. There will be, for the present, only one issue of this magazine published. It will have about eight or ten pages, large-size, mimeographed, and will sell for 10c. The magazine is edited by Rose Alberti and Millie Taurasi, typed by Frances Sykora, and mimeographed by Frances Alberti. Address: The Feminine Fan, 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

"Fantasy News Quarterly" is published by James V. Taurasi of "Fantasy News," the weekly news sheet. This magazine will contain sixteen pages of articles and science-fiction items by many famous fans and authors. Featured in the issue is an article by Eando Binder. This magazine is based on the famous First Anniversary issue of "Fantasy News," of which 250 copies were sold so fast that the editor almost lost his own copy. The Winter issue, 1940, sells for 10c from Fantasy News Publishing Co., 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

THE WOMAN IN SCIENCE-FICTION

by "MOROJO"

WHY do I, a woman, read science-fiction? Frankly, because I can't help myself! True to type, in this respect I am weak.

I like to be entertained, like anyone else, and science-fiction offers me distraction to the nth degree. Its wonderful work and picture artists whisk me millions of miles from my work-a-day world to the better world to be, and amazing other worlds I may otherwise never know. For 15c or 20c, I call that cheap transportation!

Escapist? I think not. Though I may neglect housework, relatives, and the proper amount of relaxation, I never regret the time devoted to science-fiction and keep right on because it stimulates my brain, keeps my mind ultramodern, my eyes open and alert to the possibilities of prophecy.

And the people one corresponds with, or meets, in "fandom!" I find them the most interesting, individual, intelligent set of homo sapiens, as a whole—if indeed they be human and not mutations toward the homo *superior* of Stapleton, or quasi-Martians, as Wells suggested in "Star-Begotten."

I could say much more in response to the editor's inquiry as to the why and wherefore of the feminine fan, but shall let this brief reply suffice, as undoubtedly others will be accepting the invitation. A

woman loves to talk, they say!

In conclusion, science-fiction is my opportunity to participate in the thrilling parade of Things to Come. And as Mr. H. G. Wells said, through the dialog of his character, Roxana Black, I believe her name was—in the super scientifilm with which we are all familiar (I just saw it the eighth time!): "I dare say no man has ever understood a woman since the beginning of things. You don't understand how visionary we are, *how wild our imaginations can be!*"

THE FANS AND SCIENCE FICTION

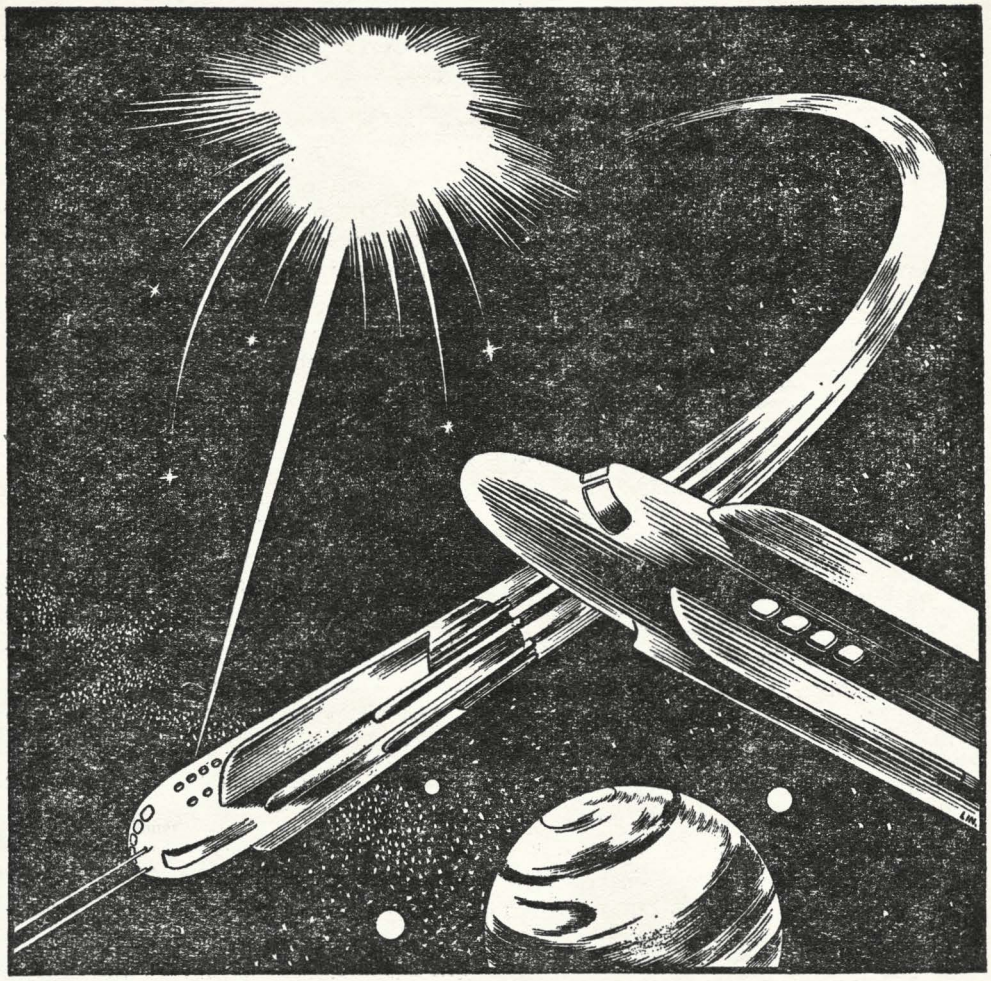
by W. LAWRENCE HAMLING

FROM an article in the August SCIENCE FICTION, we the readers are led to believe a number of things. These things I shall endeavor to outline in detail. Mr. Gardner, as I am forced to believe from analysis of his article, has a few individual opinions as to the relevance and substantiation of the "fan world" as exists in science-fiction. First of all, Mr. Gardner contends that, "The viewpoint of the publisher is the only one that can be maintained." If this statement is true, what about the type of sexy trash that was being published under the title science-fiction? Assuredly this must have been the viewpoint of the publishers, otherwise they would have never even considered printing that type of story. But what happened? The fan world, which is a menace, in Mr. Gardner's estimation, put up such an indignant protest to the publishers that they soon discarded their "viewpoint" and took the fans' advice in their editorial policies. This is merely one illustration. And as such I believe it proves the above quotation false.

The next fallacy in Mr. Gardner's article comes under the classification of reading public. Mr. Gardner claims that the editors should try and please their public as a whole, and disregard the letters of fans. Here Mr. Gardner contradicts and disregards himself. In his opening paragraph he states that the viewpoint of the publisher can only be maintained, and now he says that the publisher should try and please the reading public. If the publisher maintains only his own viewpoint, how can he please the reading public? And if he pleases the reading public alone, how can he maintain his own viewpoint? Further, Mr. Gardner's analysis of the reading public is as follows: The fans comprise one-third of the readers. The other two-thirds is divided between steady non-fans and casual, time-to-time readers.

Now it stands to reason that a publisher is not going to cater to a time-to-time reader, for if he did, he would not exist long, that is, unless he could manage to put out his magazine only at the time when the casual reader was in the mood to buy. So I think we can discount the casual reader from the public as a whole. Thus we have left the fans and the steady non-fans, divided approximately even now that we have disregarded the "maybe I'll buy and maybe I won't" reader. That is, approximately even. For argument's sake, let us contend that fans and non-fans are 50-50 in number. Now, Mr. Gardner contends that the fan should be eliminated from the editorial policy, and that the public should be considered. I ask, "Who *is* the public?" In the final analysis, the fans comprise as much of the contending public as any other kind. And then, too, the fans are the ones who write in to the editors, even as Mr. Gardner states. The non-fans assuredly do not. Thus, if the editors are to cater to the non-fans, how are they to find out what the non-fans want? And too, who can the editors be assured will buy science-fiction magazines in the final showdown? Not the non-fans whose interest is only ephemeral, but the real fans whose interest is always there and who will continue to buy for the sake of science-fiction!

A blue hydrogen flare shot from the signal gun.



Castaways In Space

by AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

Steve and Nick were tough customers—rip-roarin' space-pirates with a tall price on their heads! Teaming up, forcibly, with the lowest character in Callisto, they shoot through space to encounter an unexpected adventure in the shape of a crippled transport ship and a waning oxygen supply!

MR. STEPHEN CALHOUN of South Carolina, U. S. A., known more familiarly in certain circles as "Gentleman Steve," was suffering from a severe lack of popularity in Hell's Vestibule, principle mining town of Callisto. In fact, this affliction was so acute that it was quite likely to prove fatal, not only for Steve, but for his partner and co-pilot, Nick Brody, as well.

As a rule, Hell's Vestibule was not over particular about its citizenry. A man could

drop in there from the spaceways, establish himself in whatever profession proved agreeable and profitable to him, and no questions were asked. He might even practice various forms of sculduggery that would have met with instant suppression in other parts of the solar system, and Hell's Vestibule would close its eyes. But when he began to show a little too much efficiency in acquiring, without the formality of purchase. other people's hard won radium ore, then the town began to sit up and take notice. It had never been able to agree with Shakespeare's Cassio that, "Who steals my purse, steals trash."

Steve had first learned of the situation from Jake Henderson. Jake was a slave runner, who made his living by kidnaping the inoffensive Blue People of Venus and selling them to the less scrupulous mine bosses of Callisto; a profession which placed him just about ten degrees lower in the social scale than an ordinary space pirate or even a high-jacker. Ordinarily Steve and Nick would not have associated with such scum; but on this occasion he had literally forced his way into the one-room cabin that was their hide-out, insisting that he had something of vital importance to communicate.

"And they've found out about that last transport you fellas held up just off Ganymede," he finished, his crafty little eyes shifting from Steve to Nick and back again. "Besides, the prospectors are gettin' pretty sore at you for winnin' most of their ore away from them. So they and the bosses have got together and posted a reward for you; a thousand dollars apiece, or twenty-five hundred for the pair of you."

Steve Calhoun lit a cigarette and carefully flicked out the match before replying. His slight, dapper figure lounged nonchalantly against the deal table in the centre of the room. To all appearances, he might have been listening to a piece of idle gossip about a man completely unknown to him.

"Mighty nice of y'all to come out heah an' tell us about it, Jake," he drawled carelessly. "Theah's only one thing, howevah, that's puzzlin' me."

"What's that?" Jake queried uneasily. He began to wonder whether the little scheme he had been counting on wasn't going to work.

"Ah wondah," Steve went on, blowing smoke rings toward the blackened ceiling of the shack, "that since y'all knew wheah we were stayin', yuh didn't tu'n us in yuhself, an' collect the twenty-five hundred dollahs."

"STEVE, you know I wouldn't do that," Jake protested. "Why—"

"Maybe," Nick Brody interrupted with a deep, rumbling chuckle, "somebody's offerin' twenty-five hundred dollars for him, too; and he don't dar'st."

Jake's quickly shifted eyes betrayed that the chance shot had gone home.

Steve laughed outright. "So yuh thought that if yuh did us a favah, we'd take yuh with us when we left," he observed. "What ails y'own ship? Busted up?"

"No," Jake answered sullenly; "confiscated." He hunched his shoulders in an attitude half-cringing, half-defiant. "Well, what about it?" he demanded.

Steve looked at Nick. "Y'all got any objections?" he asked.

"No-o, I guess not," his big co-pilot replied slowly. "Anyway, he might come in useful in detectin' gas in case the engine gets to actin' up."

"Just what do you mean by that, Nick Brody?" the slave-runner flared. "If you're callin' me a rat—"

"I ain't callin' you nothin'," Nick told him with a chuckle. "But facts is facts."

The get-away from Callisto was accomplished that night. Steve and Nick packed what oxygen tanks and provisions they had aboard the sleek, lead-colored rocket-ship that they kept always in readiness for an emergency; and with Jake Henderson as

passenger, shot up like a giant Roman candle into the thin atmosphere of the satellite.

THROUGH their port window, they could see the great, shimmering disk of Jupiter, the mysterious red spot in his southern hemisphere blazing like an angry, inflamed eye. Just above his equator was a disk of blackness, as though someone had drilled him through the forehead with a Gargantuan revolver; the shadow cast by Callisto itself as it passed in transit across his great, striped face.

When they had attained a height of eight thousand feet, well into the little satellite's stratosphere, Steve twisted the controls and sent the rocket in a northeasterly direction, toward where little Europa hung like a misty blue jewel against the black velvet of the night. Keeping the rocket headed along a parabolic curve, he was soon free of Callisto's comparatively slight gravitational pull, and swinging into the empty vastness of interplanetary space.

Three hours' fast flying took them beyond the white globes of Satellites VI and VII, first pair of Jupiter's minor moons, and well out toward where tiny Satellites VIII and IX—sometimes called the false satellites, because of the theory that they were captured asteroids—swung along their highly inclined, retrograde orbits. Through their starboard window, they could see the sun, a dazzling yellow star apparently little larger than the new moon as beheld from earth; its flaming prominences, faintly visible even at that great distance, were writhing like the serpent locks of the Medusa against the blackness of space. Steve took his bearings from it and altered his course slightly, heading for distant Mars, where he and Nick would rid themselves of their unwelcome passenger before striking out for their home planet.

It was shortly after this that they sighted the transport.

She was a little, snub-nosed rocket belonging to one of the smaller transport companies, and she was in trouble. Her upper left blast tube was barely functioning at all, with the result that she was keeling badly to port. Even as Steve and Nick sighted her, a blue hydrogen flare shot from the little signal gun just above her nose, and hung over her for a minute like a turquoise star; a sign in the interplanetary code that she was in distress. Instinctively Steve reached toward the instrument board to alter his own rocket's course in the direction of the crippled transport; but Henderson, who was standing behind the pilot's seat, reached over his shoulder and put a rough paw on his arm.

"Are you crazy?" the slaver demanded. "Suppose the guys in that ship know about us! Why, it might even be a trap to bring us in!"

Steve shook off the larger man's hand with surprising ease. "That's a chance Ah'm takin', Mistah Hendahson," he replied coldly. "Ah may be a no 'count space pirate, but Ah'm not a yella dog."

Nick's heavy chuckle rumbled up from his huge, barrel-like chest. "Don't worry, slaver," he advised. "No space patrol'll ever take Steve Calhoun alive. But nobody'll ever ask him for help and get turned down, either. Besides," he added philosophically, "that transport might have somethin' we could use."

Jake Henderson offered no further protest; and the grey rocket shot off at a tangent toward the smaller ship.

"Radio the pilot to shut off his rocket blasts, Nick," Steve directed. "We'll come alongside, and tow him to Satellite IX."

Nick did as he was directed; and within a few minutes the little transport was hanging almost motionless in space, her three good and one damaged blast tubes inactive. Steve braked down his own speed as he approached her, and drifted up alongside. The attraction of the mass of the two bodies brought them together with a gentle thud; the pull of the larger being

sufficiently strong to overcome the inertia of the smaller, and carry it along as though the ships had been coupled together.

The pitted face of the ninth satellite loomed larger and larger, like a moonscape seen through an earthly telescope, until at last it filled the whole of the front observation window. For an instant, it seemed to be rushing in upon them; then it apparently skidded and slipped sideways as Steve leveled off for landing. About twenty feet above the surface, he shut off the motor entirely, and let the slight gravity of the tiny moon draw the two ships downward.

Nick and Henderson had already climbed into cumbersome space-suits, and were adjusting their oxygen helmets; since the little satellite, although far enough removed from Jupiter not to have lost its atmosphere to its giant primary, did not boast sufficient oxygen to support terrestrial life. Rising from his place at the controls, Steve followed their example and emerged behind them through the airlock just as another figure, similarly clad, rounded the nose of the disabled transport.

The face that looked out from the glassite front of the newcomer's oxygen helmet was a young face, the type characteristic of the adventurous spacemen who blazed the unmarked trails out where the planets swung across the empty void. But now it was troubled and the grey eyes, with their look of far horizons, were clouded with anxiety.

By means of the little two-way radio communication sets built into every regulation oxygen helmet, he told his brief story. His name was Albert Wells, and he was a pilot for the Interplanetary Transport Company. He and his kid brother, Dick—it was the kid's first flight as a licensed co-pilot—had been flying a small shipment of refined radium ore to earth, when something had got the matter with one of the blast tubes. Dick had tried to repair it, but the thing had back-fired, burning the boy horribly and starting a carbon monoxide leak so severe that oxygen helmets had become necessary. After Bert had managed to get the half-unconscious Dick into his helmet and space-suit, he had sent up the flare.

Steve helped carry the injured boy—he was little more than that—to the larger ship, where he administered rough but efficient first aid while Nick went to have a look at the crippled transport. He had about completed his task when his co-pilot returned.

"I'm afraid that ship of yours is in pretty much of a mess, buddy," Nick said, addressing Bert Wells. "One tube's gone completely, and another's about ready to go. I don't see how we're goin' to fix her up without some spare parts."

BERT'S face clouded. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "We *are* in a jam! We can't abandon her, with those cases of ore. . . ." He turned impulsively to Steve. "I know it's asking a lot," he blurted, "but do you suppose you fellows could transfer the ore to your ship, and either run it back to Callisto or take it on to earth? My company would pay you. . . ."

"Say, now, that's a good idea!" Henderson put in before either Steve or Nick could reply. "Of course, we'd have to leave you fellows here with supplies until somebody could come and get you," he added slyly. "Overweight, you know."

"But Dick—" Bert began doubtfully.

"Don't worry about me," the boy interrupted. "I'm all right now. Besides," he managed a feeble grin, "a spaceman's got to be tough."

"Sure," Henderson agreed affably. "We could radio the first ship we passed to pick you up, and—"

"If yuh don't mind, Mistah Hendahson," Steve cut in with a level look at the slaver, "Ah think Ah've got a bettah plan. Aftah all, Mistah Wells is responsible fo' that radium, and ought to delivah it in pu'son.

Ah suggest that he and his brothah go with Nick, while you and Ah wait heah."

Henderson glowered, but said nothing further. Nick shot one surprised look at his superior, then beat a hasty retreat behind one of the rocky prominences that jutted, tooth-like, from the tiny satellite's barren surface. Steve found him there later, convulsed with mirth.

"You blamed fool!" Steve exclaimed, changing his radio wave length to a special one that could be picked up only by Nick's helmet. "Stop yo' jumpin' around befoah yuh bounce clean off this little world. What're y'all laughin' at, anyway?"

"Darned if I know," Nick confessed between gasps, "whether it's at the way you got ahead of Jake Henderson, or whether it's at the idea of you lettin' a rich haul like that radium get away. What's the idea?"

"Ah don't rob no children, and y'all know it," Steve told him shortly. "Now get back theah and help transfuh that cahgo."

IT TOOK longer to remove the radium ore from the transport to the already well-filled hold of the larger ship than had been anticipated; and after three hours' hard work, it was decided to knock off until "morning." Time divisions were, of course, purely arbitrary, since all nine of Jupiter's satellites present only one face to their primary. From that portion of the ninth satellite on which the rocket ships had landed, the giant planet appeared like a monster moon just above the western horizon, bathing the entire landscape in a cloudy, opalescent light, similar to the "white nights" of the Scandinavian countries on earth.

Supper was eaten in the large rocket, where it was possible to remove the oxygen helmets; and then, because even the cabins of both ships were littered temporarily with cargo during the process of rearrangement, mattresses were carried outside, and the five travelers lay down to get what sleep they could in their clumsy space-suits.

It was not a sound that awakened Steve Calhoun; through the heavy insulation of his space-suit, no noise short of a terrific explosion of dynamite could have penetrated. But some slight trembling of the rocky ground beneath him—or it may have been that sixth sense which in men who follow the call of adventure never sleeps—suddenly sounded an alarm bell in his brain.

He sat up and looked around. On his left was the silvery hull of the little rocket transport, shining like hoar-frost in the unwavering glow of distant Jupiter. In its shadow, two slight mounds told where Bert Wells and his injured brother slept side by side. A little farther away, Nick's bulky form loomed upon his mattress; and beyond him—

With a smothered exclamation, Steve sprang up, nearly toppling off balance in the little satellite's light gravity. The mattress beyond Nick, where Jake Henderson should have been, was empty!

A staggering suspicion smote Steve, and he whirled in the direction where his own grey rocket should have been. It was no longer there; but a huge, elongated shadow scudding across the ground made him look up. High above him was the grey rocket; it had been the vibration of its taking off that had roused him. As he looked, it seemed to dip for a moment in mocking salute; then it dwindled rapidly among the distant stars!

Steve awakened Nick, and told him what had happened.

"Why, the dirty—" Nick began, and stopped through sheer lack of a term strong enough. "If ever I get my hands on him—"

"Nevah mind that now," Steve advised. "Go send a call fo' help on the transpoht's radio, while Ah see what supplies that low polecat's left us."

An inventory of the various boxes that lay strewn around showed that Henderson had left behind eight drums of oxygen and

enough tinned food and water to last a month. Steve looked at the supplies, and smiled grimly.

"Well, at least," he soliloquized, "we all can die with our stomachs full." He realized that the oxygen could not be stretched beyond four days.

Nick came trotting back from the transport. His expression was black. "It's no go," he reported, biting off the words with savage ferocity. "That rotten skunk dismantled the radio before he left."

"Afraid we'd send out a call to have him picked up," was Steve's only comment. "The law of self-presuhvation can be mighty aggravatin' sometimes."

An hour or so later, the two Wells awoke, and were informed of their plight. "But don't y'all worry too much," Steve finished with an optimism he was far from feeling. "Nick and Ah'll get busy on the transpoht; and puhaps we can fix her up so she'll take us to Callisto."

"And in the meantime," young Dick added with the hope of inexperience, "we've got the hydrogen flares. We can keep sending them up; and perhaps a space cruiser will see them, and come get us."

"Sho' 'nough," Steve agreed. He thought it best not to explain that the satellite's movement on its orbit around Jupiter was rapidly taking it farther and farther away from the traveled space lanes, and that by the time that part of its rotation was completed, it would be too late.

THE first "day" of their exile was spent by Steve, Nick, and Bert Wells in efforts to patch up the crippled transport. Young Dick, who could get about now, although painfully, prepared their meals for them, and sent up occasional hydrogen flares. Nobody had the heart to tell him that the latter labor was a waste of effort.

After supper, they sat around in the cabin of the transport and encouraged one another with tales of pilots who had been caught in similar or equally hazardous positions, and eventually rescued. Nick proved himself an unexpected adept at this, and freely exercised a fertile imagination for the entertainment of young Dick, whose protection he seemed to have undertaken as a personal responsibility.

"You know, Steve, I sort of like that kid," he confided later as they lay upon their mattresses for their sleep period. "Makes me think of myself when I was his age." He broke off to chuckle at his own expense. "Funny; ain't it?" he asked. "Me goin' soft like this. But I wasn't always a big, lumbering roughneck. I had a home and a family once; although Lord knows there's none of them left that would acknowledge me now."

"Gentleman Steve" said nothing. He was having thoughts of his own, that he much preferred to forget.

The next "day," Steve let his own watch and the clocks aboard the transport run down. "No use keepin' those things goin' to remind us how time's passin'," he remarked to Nick. "We can keep track of it fast enough by the oxygen supply."

Nick laid down the wrench he had been using on the disabled blast tube. "Do the kids know—about the oxygen?" he asked.

Steve shook his head. "Ah thought theah was no use tellin' them 'til we had to," he answered.

Nick nodded absently, and took up the wrench again. It was next to the last time that the oxygen was ever mentioned between them.

Around supper time, Steve noticed that Nick, the usually robust old space-dog, was developing a nasty cough. Dick noticed it too and began rummaging in the transport's first aid cabinet for possible remedies. Nick took the doses that were offered him unprotestingly, but received from them little or no relief.

"Let me take a look at that space-suit of youahs," Steve suggested just before they lay down for the third night. "Ah've a notion it may be leakin' somewheah."

But Nick backed hastily away from him. "Aw, let me alone," he growled. "There's nothin' the matter with this space-suit. And I feel rotten enough without you pawin' at me."

It was about three o'clock a. m. earth time when Nick awakened Steve. "Well, I guess I'm goin', buddy," he managed between gasps. He reached under his mattress, and drew out an oxygen drum. Its gauge showed that it was three-quarters full. "Give this to the kid," he commanded.

Steve stared at the drum in shocked indignation. "Nick, you doggone fool! you've been mixin' yuh oxygen supply with the filthy air of this place!" he accused. "Why, this atmospheah eats yo' lungs out!"

"You're tellin' me?" Nick observed dryly. He was caught by a strangling attack of coughing; but finally managed to speak again. "Tell the kid—you were right about my suit leakin'," he choked. "Don't let him know—" Then he turned his face toward that part of the heavens where he knew earth was, and quietly died.

Work on the transport motor was suspended while disposal was made of the body of Nick Brody. Dick, when he learned what had happened, had rushed to his cabin on the transport and locked the door—a man can't cry publicly with any sort of dignity in a space-suit—and so the details of the burial had evolved upon Steve and Bert. They had dressed Nick in his best flying togs (no need for the clumsy space-suit now), wrapped him in an American flag that Bert dug out of the supply room, and carried him to a smooth depression between two miniature ridges a quarter of a mile away. Then Bert read the burial service, his young voice tremulous with emotion; and they returned to work on the motor.

Four hours later, Steve spoke to Bert and Dick. "At eight o'clock tonight, earth time," he said, "we'll be in apposition with Callisto. Ah think we got the rocket patched up now, and with a little luck she'll be able to make the trip. But she's only a two passengeh ship; and besides, every added pound aboahd huh will take from huh chances of arriving safely. So Ah want y'all to take huh—"

"And leave you here?" Bert interrupted. "Nothing doing, Mr. Calhoun; not after all you've done for us. We'll stow you aboard some way. You don't weigh that much," he added with an apprising glance at the other's slight figure.

"Do yuh want to weaken my chances and y'own too?" Steve demanded impatiently. "You can come back fo' me. Now get goin' if y'all expect to reach Callisto. Theah's no time fo' ahgument."

But an unexpected obstacle presented itself in the will of Dick Wells. He steadfastly refused to go with Bert and abandon Steve to the loneliness of the barren satellite, even temporarily. Moreover, he pointed out, if weight was a factor in the rocket's success or failure, then it was best for all of them that Bert go alone.

STEVE suppressed an ironic smile as he saw his own argument boomerang back at him. Yet he could not bring himself to confess that his real reason for staying behind was his distaste for what he knew awaited him should he return to Callisto. Besides, he found that he did not want these two clean-cut young fellows, who had come to respect and even to admire him, to find out the truth; at least, not that way. In the end, Bert took off alone, with assurances that he would return with a rescue party within twelve hours.

The two who were left behind watched the little transport swing out of sight; then they turned to each other.

"Well, pardner," Dick remarked, grinning through the glassite panel of his helmet, "I guess the game's nearly finished. It won't be long now."

"Right," Steve agreed, but with a meaning that was lost upon the other. "The game's—about—finished."

SINCE there now was no work to be done, the dragging suspense of waiting began to make itself felt. Once when Dick's attention was drawn elsewhere, Steve went over to their supplies and took stock of the remaining oxygen. There was one complete drum left. That, together with what was in the tanks in their helmets, would see them through if Bert got back within the promised time. If he did not—Steve wondered whether, in that case, he would have the nerve to do what Nick had done. He hated the thought of going out that way—the thick, ammonia-laden atmosphere of this devilish place tearing out his throat and lungs. He felt of the disintegrator gun strapped under his space-suit. It was cleaner that way, but too quick unless rescue was in sight for the boy. He couldn't leave Dick there alone, knowing how the youngster had felt about that in his own case. Well, he'd worry about that when the time came, he decided philosophically, and put it from his mind.

Supper had to be dispensed with, since there was no longer a sealed transport cabin in which helmets could be removed. Dick accepted the situation with his usual grin, and remarked gamely that he was fed up on tinned foods, anyway.

"You know, Mr. Calhoun," the boy said shyly as they sat together on a rocky prominence watching the slowly changing face of belted Jupiter. "I'm sort of glad all this happened. Meeting men like you and Mr. Brody—it does something to a fellow. Makes him realize—" He broke off in self-conscious helplessness.

"Thanks," said Steve. He rose abruptly. "Let's get some sleep," he suggested. "Y'all want to be in good shape when yo' brothah gets back."

They lay down upon their mattresses, but only Dick slept. Steve had things to think about. Besides, he wanted to watch the sky.

Far away upon the face of distant Jupiter, his keen eyes detected a tiny black dot, like a bullet hole; the shadow of Callisto in transit. Bert must have landed by now, and be starting back. Of course, they could not really expect him for some six hours yet; but if the rescue ship was a particularly fast one . . .

Steve watched the steadily moving dot of shadow. Three hours, four hours dragged by. It wouldn't be long now.

When the shadow had moved slightly past the center of Jupiter, Steve became aware of another object. A small, non-luminous body silhouetted against the giant planet. The rate at which its size increased showed that it was moving at a tremendous speed.

Steve watched it assume the slender outlines of a rocket ship, and recognized his fate. He looked around for something to use for writing materials.

* * * * *

Young Dick Wells ran alone to meet the rescue ship. His eyes were tragic.

"He—he's gone!" he half-sobbed to his brother. "He did it while I was asleep. I found this."

He held out the large top of a flat tin, on which something had been scratched with a sharp instrument.

" 'Dear Dick,' " Bert read with difficulty. " 'You were right about the game's being finished. Good luck, buddy. I'm going after Nick. Your partner, Stephen Calhoun.' "

Bert passed it to the captain of the rescue ship, who read it in turn.

"Well, I'm damned! He always said we'd never get him alive."

"What made him do it?" Dick demanded. "He must have known you were coming."

"It must have been space-madness got him," the pilot said evasively. "It strikes fellows that way, when you'd least expect it."

"He was a wonderful man," Dick said huskily. "I wish that—some day—I could be a little bit like him."

The captain, overhearing, turned aside to hide a grin; then he sobered. " 'Gentleman Steve' Calhoun," he murmured. "Well, maybe the kid's got judgment, at that."

Where Editor and Readers Exchange Thoughts

SCIENCE FICTION invites you to write letters to this department, giving your views and criticisms. Address your letters to EDITOR, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson St., New York City. Write us today!

Dear Reader:

Pardon me while I sneak into a corner and give a broad smile of satisfaction! SCIENCE FICTION is now well into its second year, and the rising circulation figures show the enthusiastic reception it has been given.

But don't think that I'm going to get lax on the job, just because the book is selling! No sir, I realize that there are plenty of improvements to be made yet, and I'm going to work hard to make SCIENCE FICTION the greatest magazine of its type that has ever appeared. But I can't do it alone!

I need your help, in two ways: firstly, be sure you read every issue of the magazine, and introduce it to your friends. In that way, we'll sell more copies and will then be able to give you costly improvements. Secondly, write me a letter after you read each issue—because I try to plan the magazine according to the desires of the majority of readers, and I can't know what you want if you don't tell me about it.

Have you read FUTURE FICTION yet? Well, if you haven't, you'd better go out right now, visit your nearest newsstand, and buy a copy!—because if you don't, the dealer might be all sold out, and you'll be missing out on just as fine an assortment of material as you find in SCIENCE FICTION! These twin sisters are out to give you double enjoyment, so be sure you secure both, every issue!

Well, we've got a lot of interesting fan letters this number, so let's get right into 'em!

CHARLES D. HORNIG,
Editor, SCIENCE FICTION,
60 Hudson Street,
New York City.

PUBLIC FAN NUMBER ONE

Dear Editor:

Your soundless voice just buzzed in my brain, saying, "Say, howzabout answering my invitation in the October issue of my book before you forget about it?" So—"all x"—here I am and here's what I thought of New York during my first visit there for the science-fiction convention:

My ten days in your metropolis were ones of terror!*—terror and disillusion—but not disappointment. I mean to say, why, man, the city didn't once suffer an attack of stalactite-men from Saturn, mole-monsters from Subterrania, or a tidal wave! The Empire State wasn't even destroyed. Perhaps this phenomenal quietude was occasioned by our having on hand "World-Saver Eddie," the well-known Hamilton.*

Over a week in New York City, and not one frightening thing did I see. I take that back: I did shave, as usual. (This joke is a reflection on its author—it's all done with mirrors.)

Of the stories I have read recently in SCIENCE FICTION, the one I recall offhand as having liked best was Gallun's

"Strange Creature." And since I am writing this at the office, and do not have any issues to refer to, it must have been pretty good to come to mind. In fact, I know I thought it worthy of my favorite mag. (You can interpret that two ways, so pick the one that makes you the happier.) Liked "Flame of Life" a lot in the latest, and Binder was good again with his explanation of the cover.

Incidentally, "Eando" is due here in Los Angeles today, right the day I write. Just for the way his New York treated me, however, I am going to instruct our seismologist not to provide any of our perennial earthquakes to thrill him this trip.

Seriously, I think New York is a supercity, but this summer, to me, was like living in a Turkish bath, while there. But I hear it isn't so hot in winter. (Double entendre again—gosh, whatever that means!)

We have all read of the beautiful scientist who had the mad daughter (oh, there I go getting my tenses mixed again!); but, boy, if Paul doesn't have a peachy daughter! She is something to raise a fuzz about, don't you fellows agree who met her at the Convention? Did I understand that she is an artist too? I just hope that she follows in her famous father's footsteps!

An author I should like to see in SCIENCE FICTION—and often—is David H. Keller.

Looking forward to FUTURE FICTION, I remain, in Esperanto, the tongue of "tomoro," sciencefikcie kaj estonteme,

FORREST J ACKERMAN,
236½ N. New Hampshire,
Hollywood, Calif.

(Frankly, Forrie, I don't think you would have noticed it, even if the Empire State Building had been destroyed, or the stalactite-men of Saturn had invaded the city—you were too occupied meeting and greeting science-fiction fans and authors, during your brief stay in the Big City! And that futuristic H. G. Wells "Things to Come" costume you wore probably made some of the New Yorkers think that *you* were invading the city!

As to Joan Paul, daughter of science-fiction's first artist, Frank R. Paul—I'm afraid there's nothing I can say in disagreement. As far as I know, she is not planning to be an artist, but is at present glorifying some Wall Street office as a stenographer.—EDITOR.)

STUFF AND THINGS

Dear Mr. Hornig:

Well, you asked for letters, so, being an obliging sort, I've taken typewriter in hand and started in. You may regret asking for this one, as I'm somewhat hard to please in regards to science-fiction.

To begin with, you have not only the best title on the market, but the best possible title.

Paul can put more life into a drawing than any other science-fiction artist, except possibly Wesso, but please, DON'T LET HIM PAINT ANY MORE MONSTERS ON THE COVER! More covers like the one for June, and I'll have no kick coming. Now that's the kind of cover which delights the eye, and incidentally, sells the magazine.

A little less printing on the cover would also be appreciated. And that, I believe, takes care of the outside of the magazine, so now for the most important part.

Two of the short stories take first and second places this month. First is Fearn's "Thoughts That Kill." A well-written story, with a new and interesting idea.

Right behind Fearn's short comes "Little Planet" by Thorp McClusky. I'm a sucker for a good interplanetary.

Hamilton's short-short was good, but a little too obvious. Long's story was at least fair.

And now for the longer, and I fear, worse stories.

"Swordsmen of Saturn." Hero, scientist's daughter, sneaking villain, electric guns,

radium ray ejectors, winged monsters, swordsmen, a few dozen free-for-alls, all mixed together and liberally sprinkled with a lack of scientific explanation, and served book (?) length.

But Neil R. Jones can write; even this one was interesting in spots. Get some of this writer's Professor Jameson stories and all will be forgiven.

The less said about the remaining story the better.

And now, for what they're worth, my views on what a science-fiction story should be. Since the name of the mag is SCIENCE FICTION, there should, of course, be plenty of science in the stories, accurate in so far as present-day knowledge is concerned. Under no circumstances should an author be allowed to get away with so many unexplained phenomena as occurred in "Swordsmen of Saturn."

Imagination is also important. Keep the science in and go as far as the science will allow. Don't worry about the readers not keeping up; they have to have imagination to read SCIENCE FICTION at all.

And humor. That was a strong point, and a popular one in the old Wonder. Make it so in SCIENCE FICTION.

Your balance in this issue was good. No two stories are even remotely alike. And that, Mr. Hornig, is another point in your favor.

Departments? Smaller printing and more letters in "The Telepath." And keep on answering the letters personally. Put "The Eternal Conflict" back in the mag. That has the makings of an A-1 four-star feature. Your short articles are good. Keep them.

Now for this Esperanto business. I hate to disagree with such distinguished company as Ye Ed and F. J Ackerman, but in considering universal languages of the future, have any of you fellows ever thought of English? Clean up the spelling, do some repair work on the grammar, and you have a language which is almost as easy to learn as Esperanto, with the advantages of far greater versatility and previous use by a sizable percentage of the world's population.

Translate some English paragraph into Esperanto and count the number of syllables in each. Then time yourself in reading them aloud. You'll be surprised at the results. And speed is important in the world of today, and tomorrow. If you still want to argue about the matter, I'll write you a book on the subject.

But I see that this letter is rapidly approaching novelette length, so I'll sign off by hoping for a monthly SCIENCE FICTION in the near future.

LYNN BRIDGES,
7736 Whittaker,
Detroit, Mich.

(Your remarks in re the make-up of SCIENCE FICTION are well-received, because they show a careful analysis of the magazine and the science-fiction field. You must be a real old-timer in science-fiction to know the subject so well.

So long as you want to argue about Esperanto, I'll take you up on it. You see, I'm an Esperantist and cannot resist the opportunity to defend this simple, international tongue.

You speak very dogmatically about the superiority of English over Esperanto, for the language of the future—but you make some very grave errors. In the first place, if you clean up the spelling and grammar of English sufficiently to make it easy for foreigners to learn quickly, you won't have English any more, but a new language that would even have to be learned by those who speak the present English. There are too many inconsistencies and incongruities in the English language. Even if this could be worked out to satisfaction, no form of English could approach Esperanto for simplicity and ease of learning—because Esperanto was created for the purpose of international relations, and therefore is based on all popular tongues, with a mini-

mum of rules, and no exceptions to them—while English has suffered through so many centuries of distortion that it is now the most difficult civilized language in the world. It seems simple to you and me, because we were brought up on it, but very few foreigners can really master the tongue—although it is easy to learn some of it.

In translating English into Esperanto, you will find that the volume balances, page for page, and a person who has learned Esperanto can express every meaning and shade of meaning that you can express in English. Those who claim that it is not possible just have not gone to the trouble to learn Esperanto completely.

Of course, no Esperantist ever tries to do away with any other language—especially English. The plan is to make Esperanto the *second* language for all—while the native tongues will always remain for local use.

I suggest that you write to Joseph H. Leahy, General Secretary, Esperanto Association of North America, 1410 H Street N. W., Washington, D. C., for information, if you want to be further convinced.—EDITOR.)

A LOS ANGELES MEETING

Dear Sir:

The current issue of SCIENCE FICTION is pretty fair. "Planet of the Knob-Heads" was a bit more fantastic than I enjoy most, but nevertheless, very interesting. "The Atom Prince" was good, but was so reminiscent of "Gulliver's Travels" and either I saw a resume of it somewhere or read something very similar to it elsewhere. I think a sequel would be excellent. "Upon the Dark Moon" hardly registered. "Women's World" had a good ring insofar as there seems to be a decided tendency toward women becoming more of our leaders in business, etc. The psychology of women is such that seeing their children killed off will gradually force them to become more hostile to man's desires. "Lever of Destruction" was good because it seemed more plausible, making it possible to happen now, or any time.

And the readers' column: The idea of science, adventure, and romance mixed together is good and I enjoy it and most readers I feel prefer it although there are some dyed-in-the-wool science fans that want nothing but science. To those, I suggest the many scientific magazines on the market dealing with abstract science. These readers that find so many faults with the stories: How about their writing the right kind of a story? I'm certain the rest of us would like to read the story and in that event (if printable) you would be glad to pay them for their efforts, I know, for good writers are always welcome. (Might take a bang at that idea myself before so very long; buried neck deep in work at the present writing.)

I joined the Los Angeles Science-Fiction Club the other evening, and met a fine bunch of folks—4SJ Ackerman and the rest of the gang. Suggest that readers who do not belong to the Science Fiction League join up and attend their local chapter. If no local, why not create one? I have only been reading science-fiction a few months, but I am buying nearly everything on the newsstands. The science-fiction clubs exchange magazines and science-fiction books among members; the clubs sometimes have lending libraries, as ours does. And by the way, are all the readers going to the 1940 Convention in Chicago? Our club intends coming strong and yours truly will be right with them. Sorry I did not know about the 1939 Convention until too late. However, enjoyed Ackerman's pictures. And speaking of Ackerman, that's a mighty fine write-up from what I know of him (met him just the one meeting)—seems to be all you said he was and more too. His father and grandmother attended the meeting and were as interested in what was happening as he, or maybe more so, for the other two members who put out fan publications asked his

grandmother for her criticisms and lent a tentative ear as though she were their authority. That shows you there are all ages reading science-fiction, for some are boys and girls in high school, other members are business men and women like myself, middle-aged people, and grandmothers. It's something that's never too late to read—meaning science-fiction.

WILLIAM HARRIS SHRADER,
636½ N. Genesee St.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

(I can imagine how you enjoy belonging to the science-fiction club in Los Angeles, under the leadership of such well-known fans and authors as Forrest J Ackerman, Morojo Pogo, Russell J. Hodgkins, Bob Olsen, Arthur K. Barnes, etc.—because I attended many meetings of this club when in Los Angeles, and intend to do so many times in the future.

About eleven years ago, Forrest Ackerman's grandmother won a prize in a science-fiction contest.—EDITOR.)

WE DON'T LIKE TO GLOAT, BUT—
Dear Sir:

I like your rag quite well, but I must say that Paul is simply lousy at inside stuff (he can't do expressions); your paper is also lousy. What is more, the stories are childish, and mostly badly written. Get Oscar J. Friend, C. H. Scheer, Jr., Edmond Hamilton, Robert Bloch, Bob Olsen, Stanton Coblentz, Lawrence Manning, Ed Earl Repp, and if he still lives, Epaminondas T. Snooks—a long list, so I guess you can't get them all, but do try a few.

It would be nice if you would keep stories like "Moon Heaven" out of your so-called science-fiction mag. That particularly disgusting specimen of American (it should be written american) writing just stank. You know, the English aren't always saying "By Jove!" and they are a bloody sight tougher than their degenerate imitators, the americans.

I should like you to publish a photo of Dom Passante for me to spit on. The English are the greatest nation on Earth. Heil, Chamberlain!

I'm sorry, but I had to get that off my chest. If other magazines can keep that sort of filth out, so can you. What's more, don't publish such childish mush.

I am going to read your magazine again, and keep it up unless it gets worse. You won't publish this—I forgot to say that americans are cowards.

G. B. WOOLLEY,
Woodside, Leicester Rd.,
Sheepshed, Loughborough,
England.

(Before I *really* get going on this comment, I want to state first that I appreciate your comments in re SCIENCE FICTION. The majority of the authors you clamor—or clamour—for have already appeared in these pages, and will continue to do so.

Now about this international feud! I just can't resist informing you that "Moon Heaven," which you claim is so filthy and disgusting—though I'm at a loss to see where—was written by a bona-fide Englishman, who, to my knowledge, has never lived anywhere but in England. His real name is Frank Jones of 70 Portland Road, Blackpool, Lancs., England. He has written scores of successful science-fiction stories under a more famous pen-name. So you see, it wasn't an American—or american—specimen. Too bad you had to pick on this particular story!

You know, some of our best authors and fans live in England—and some of our best critics—but never before has an Englishman written to a science-fiction editor—to my knowledge—to say that American should be written "american," that we are degenerate imitators of the British, and that we are cowards. Of course, such comments are not fit for discussion in the public press, but I'm exposing you to any objections that other fans might care to make—

and I miss my guess if a lot of your British brothers aren't among the most vociferous denouncers of your attitude.

I am glad that you call Britain the greatest nation on Earth—that shows real patriotism, and I would be disappointed if you had not made that statement.

I sincerely hope that you take on a more friendly attitude in the near future, and practice the science-fiction quality of brotherly love. I wish we Americans and British could mix more frequently, in person. Eric Frank Russell, famous British fantasy author, visited this country last year and I am proud to have met him at that time. I think he enjoyed his visit.

Oh, yes!—I am not printing this letter to prove that Americans are not cowards—but it is so strikingly different and original in theme that I couldn't miss out on the opportunity.—EDITOR.)

WRONG PERSPECTIVE?

Kara Karchjo:

You have a fine magazine. I have only read two issues, but most of the stories were great. "Swordsmen of Saturn" was especially good.

I have a fault to find, though. The covers don't "hang" with the stories. In the August issue, the ships are too big for Manhattan, and in the October issue, the people are too big for the space-ship, and are fighting with a gun, that, in the story, was useless. I agree with Mr. Walter.

I have written to the address, now please tell me how to learn Esperanto.

RAYMOND HITCHCOCK,
Sunbury, Ontario,
Canada.

(We have found that better covers result when the artist is given free reign and does not have to follow the scenes in the stories. On the August and October covers, the ships and people, respectively, were very much in the foreground, and therefore appeared larger than the hugher objects in the background. It's all a matter of perspective.

I take it the address you wrote to, concerning Esperanto, was that of the General Secretary, Joseph H. Leahy, Esperanto Association of North America, 1410 H St., N. W., Washington, D. C. If so, you probably have your desired information before now.—EDITOR.)

ONE THING WRONG

Dear Mr. Hornig:

There is only one thing wrong with SCIENCE FICTION. It is a bi-monthly publication. It's pretty hard to wait two months for each issue. Oh!—how I wish SCIENCE FICTION would go monthly! Now I'll give you my opinion of the October issue. The cover, swell! And the same for the interior illustrations. I heartily approve of Paul and Schneeman. They're both superb artists. And now in regard to the stories: "Swordsmen of Saturn" and "Earth Asunder" were excellent. The best short story was "Thoughts That Kill."

By all means, enlarge "The Telepath."

PHILIP BRONSON,
224 W. 6th St.,
Hastings, Minn.

(For those of the readers who desire monthly publication—we have its equivalent in the form of FUTURE FICTION, the companion magazine, which is published on alternate months with SCIENCE FICTION. So there you are! Now I guess there's nothing wrong, eh? You will notice that "The Telepath" has been considerably enlarged.—EDITOR.)

THE DECEMBER NUMBER

Dear Mr. Hornig:

The December issue of SCIENCE FICTION arrived somewhat later than usual, but conditions look better now, or is that "published every month" I noticed on the

contents page a typographical error?

You're still asking questions as to how the mag should be run, so, with the aid of my patented brain-wave intensifier, I'll tell you the answers.

First, "How about humor?" Well, how about it? I'd like to see something similar to the popular "Tyme" stories, or even better, a burlesque as completely screwy as Snooks' unforgettable "Why the Heavens Fell." (I read the latter regularly once a month as a relief from the tedious seriousness of the average science-fiction tale.) And, come to think of it, Weinbaum's "Van Manderpootz" series contained a fair share of pointed barbs at the proud and haughty figure of science-fiction. So, humor by all means, Mr. Hornig, and one per month is none too many.

Esperanto lessons? As I explained in my last letter, I'm no Esperanto advocate, but the lessons should be interesting, so go ahead!

Covers? I don't know what this cover was supposed to represent or who it was supposed to appeal to, but I didn't like it. Have Paul stick to space-ships and futuristic scenes, and tell him to leave human figures out of the foreground!

"The Eternal Conflict"? The best department idea in years. One suggestion—put a word limit on contributions and have each one stick to one item.

And now a word or two about stories, since they are still the most important part. There seems to be some doubt as to what a science-fiction story is, and, so far as I am concerned, the editors have guessed wrong. Only two of the five in the December issue are science-fiction!

"Upon the Dark Moon" and "Lever of Destruction" are not science-fiction. Both contain science, true, but the science plays a passive, not an active part. As the scientific parts in each are "phonies," the stories are in the same family as the "it-was-all-a-dream" type, which admittedly do not belong.

"Nor was "The Atom Prince" science-fiction. It belongs to that category known as "fantastics." Pink pills do not a science-fiction story make, unless those pills are at least partially explained.

Which leaves "Planet of the Knob-Heads" and "Women's World" as the only true science-fiction stories this month. The former is Coblentz' best since "In Caverns Below." He needs length for his satiric gems.

"Women's World" was spoiled by the rather abrupt and illogical ending, but it is science-fiction. Would have fitted better in FUTURE FICTION, though.

Your main fault today has been science—not enough of it and what there is is often faulty. The science needn't be technical, in fact it shouldn't be, but it should be present, and accurate. Please, in the future, Mr. Hornig, more SCIENCE fiction.

LYNN BRIDGES,
7730 Pitt,
Detroit, Mich.

(Good humorous science-fiction is hard to find, but you can bet we'll grab all the worthy material of this type that comes our way—because so many of the readers have reacted favorably to the suggestion.

The "published monthly" notice on the contents page *was* a typographical error.

At the present time, we are not planning to run any Esperanto courses in SCIENCE FICTION. It seems that many of our readers have secured inexpensive courses elsewhere.

Evidently your definition of "science-fiction" is a pretty narrow one—claiming that only two out of five stories in the issue were of this type. It is our opinion that science-fiction is an atmosphere—that stories whose science is not good, and we earnestly try to avoid them, are poor science-fiction, but nevertheless part of the literature. I'd like other readers' opinions about this.—EDITOR.)

A reader's department of scientific controversy. You are invited to send in your science argument to THE ETERNAL CONFLICT, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City.

IN THIS department, we present the views of our readers about the future—both the scientific and social developments that are likely to come about. How do you think that science will change the world? We want your opinion on this matter, so write us today! If you disagree with any of this month's contributors, let them know about it via THE ETERNAL CONFLICT!

ATOMIC POWER COMING!

by C. WILBERT THOMAS

WITH what little knowledge I have of atoms and atomic power, I feel that someday after more catastrophies than electricity brought forth, atomic power will be discovered and harnessed. Man and science has harnessed everything else that was power and more power.

When atomic power is discovered, men will use it to blast away mountains and make long, level, straight highways. This will probably be one of his first uses of such energy. It may then after much research be used to propel large ships great distances on the Earth. After realizing the power that he has put to such an advantage, men will begin to use it to explore space. There will be many fatal trips and more of them successful when science learns to dodge the many obstacles in the form of meteors and comets and such that go sailing through space.

Atomic power will be discovered and the world will leap forward into a new era, a new form of most all living conditions will take place. Before all this occurs, there will be many things blown to smitherines—men, apparatus, buildings and perhaps blocks of territory. When the final harnessing is put to atomic power, the apparatus to produce such power will be much diminished in size and more efficient—such as how many of the power plants of today have dwindled in size and have doubled and redoubled in strength and power.

After atomic power? ? ? ?

THIS QUESTION OF SPACE TRAVEL

by TOM A. LEWIS

IT SEEMS the most frequent question I am asked is: "Do you honestly believe that someday space-travel will be an accomplished and accepted fact?"—which I always answer in the affirmative.

Once in a while one of my friends will bring an argument to light and I will have a debate on my hands. So I have striven to impart here, to the best of my meager ability, my opinion.

One of the old standbys of sceptics and pessimists is brought to light by this question. "But rockets have been tried and proven impractical. They either blow up or fizzle and that is the end of them."

As for that, you must keep in mind that for centuries men were thought crazy who believed that a heavier-than-air craft could

be made to fly. They were never successful because, although they had the right idea, they were unable to apply it. Then one day a man came along who was able to apply the knowledge to the need, and thus the airplane came into its own.

Yes, it was *proven* impractical—yes, even impossible—yet look at it today. The same way with the rocket. It needs someone who will be able to apply the knowledge—and a fairy godmother to supply the millions.

Did I hear someone say that if God had intended man to visit the planets and stars He would have provided a way to get there? My simplest answer consists of a question in return: "If God had intended that we should cross the waters, would not He have given us gills and fins? And had He intended us to fly through the air, would not He have provided us with wings?"

As I see it, God put the stars in the heavens for a reason much different from that which is the common belief. The common belief is that the stars were put in the sky to light the Earth at night. However, in reading Genesis 1:16, it will be noticed that it says He put the lesser *light* (not *lights*) in the sky to rule the Earth at night. That can only refer to the moon. What then did he put the stars there for?

My argument is this: It is stated in the Bible that the Lord put man on the Earth to prepare it for His coming. Naturally he won't kill the inhabitants. He will, however, want an intelligent people for His Kingdom.

Now, we have schools. In these schools are taught many things which one is not expected to remember. Why? To teach us to think! Only by learning how to think can we actually do it, and only by having to think can we be intelligent people. Now I believe that the stars are a problem—one of the vastest problems ever conceived—for what other problem is or ever was so vast in coverance? What other problem requires so much thinking, so many lifetimes, so much preparation? When man solves it, he will have truly advanced. Nor will one man receive all the benefits. He may, physically, but scores of men will have received the mental benefits.

God gave us gravity. Some curse it; some consider it a hindrance; but what would they do without it? It was created for our own good. Also, it adds to the problem. However, if a rocket is made which will go to another planet in a few years, or maybe it would take it one year, chances are that it would have power enough to escape the earthly gravity forces.

When Man has conquered the vast cosmic reaches, he will only as yet have scratched the surface. There will be other problems confronting him; problems inconceivable to our comparatively uneducated minds, but which will be to him just another problem of great magnitude and requiring a great amount of mental effort. Always there will be some problem to tax his imagination, his mentality. Yet he will conquer these and find himself another.

Yes, I sincerely think that someday man will "reach out and touch the stars." True, God didn't hand us a golden platter saying, "Here, take this. It is the secret of space-travel. I have paved the way for you. Now you can visit other worlds."

No, He didn't do that, and He never will, but He did, somewhere deep down inside us, bury the spark of ingenuity, the ability to pave the way for ourselves.

WHAT IS UNLIKELY TO COME

by NILS H. FROME

"FIRST would come a devastating war to completely overthrow today's mixed-up condition of lack of understanding between man and fellow man," starts off Colton, evolving his idea of a Utopia brought about by a war that completely disintegrates ill-will. I say that two evils will never make right a wrong, that Colton

has yet to have a few illusions broken rudely someday.

War is like a habit, in general, or temptation. After one indulges it, one feels better for a time, short or long, but the weaker ones resistance for the indulgence, the stronger the habit will be next time. I say man's dream of Utopia is doomed—it was doomed when man long ago came to the crossroads, which was the choice between making the name "stranger" synonomous with friend or enemy—and chose the latter. Man has never recovered from that decision, and never will. Ill-will begets ill-will. Friendship begets friendship—but one has to be fed on a diet of benevolence towards fellow man from the cradle. It's too late after the mind has been bent the other way.

If the Germans invaded our land, killed our kith and kin, even if they were ultimately beaten, would we ever get over hating them—even if the friends and relations were killed in a fair war while on the offensive and fully armed to protect themselves—would we say forget and forgive? The fact that maybe our kith and kin took lives in excess of their numbers wouldn't make a bit of difference to our hate. Same with the enemy. So I say an era of world-wide understanding will never get beyond our backyards. Man is too ready to forget benevolence and too eager to remember grievances.

The only hope for a world-wide understanding is that all children be raised away from their parents, by the government and taught to think first of the other, second of himself—a single language, and to distinguish between right and wrong. But trust puerile sentimentality to ruin that Utopia.

Atomic power: I don't believe in it. Those Harvard scientists may think they have it, but there may be a lot more explanation for their seeming success—and more plausible. First, I don't see why an atom must be a terrific explosive ready to be set off. Why, nobody's ever seen an atom yet. No one has any proof of the existence of atoms. Granted, it seems quite possible—there is very good grounds for a hypothesis, and until we have something better, we can use the atomic system in chemistry, but let's not throw caution to the winds.

People of the future: I don't see how there could be an ultra-super-city extending all over the world and ten or fifteen miles deep. Gad! You can pack the entire population of the world inside a cube a mile square! Besides, there's a lot of room on top of the Earth—why build a world-wide city in addition? As for agriculture—it will probably be carried on in water with chemicals—with better results than on the soil, depending on the vagaries of nature. And of what use are "a few isolated super-skyscrapers?" They were expressly invented to make the most of a great, cramped city, and when cities go, so must they, unless they were built purely for purposes of display, like the Eiffel Tower and the Trylon and Perisphere. As to transportation — a vast underground network of vacuum tubes and trains of magnetically drawn cylinders would serve the requirements of transportation better than aircraft.

But could the people stand such a scientific age? Isn't the incident of insanity rising by leaps and bounds even today? Isn't the general moral fiber weaker now then it was when life was simpler, less easy? When we are able to circumvent making our living the hard way, to annihilate distance in several different ways, aren't we inclined also to think ourselves greater than the fetters of morals? Would man survive it?

Doom from the Void

by JOHN COLERIDGE

Then it came . . . a terrific blinding flash!

"OF COURSE you can't, Tom!" replied Gerald Banks as he sat in the shade of his sun tent.

"But why not, Uncle?" pleaded the younger man passionately. "There's no good reason why Joyce and I shouldn't stay —both of us have proven well adapted to this Martian atmosphere. Neither of us has shown a sign of that lung sickness that certain types of Earth people develop on this planet."

Gerald Banks, agent of the Mars Mining Company, looked speculatively at the two stalwart, bronzed young men who stood before him. He had been pleased to see with what readiness they had taken to the discomforts of living on this planet of hot, blinding bright days and cool, wind-swept nights. He had taken them along because of their eager desire to visit another world: something denied to most citizens of Earth. Now, when he was ready to return, his strong-headed nephew and that individual's bosom companion of like age and disposition, wanted to stay!

Fools!—they were called, because of their youth and their fantastic ideas —but Tom and Gerald knew that the strange malady killing off the friendly Martians was caused in some weird manner by a race of unknown creatures, from a world far into the deep void! But how to prevent a useless war between the worlds?

"But think once, Tom," continued the uncle, not yet resigned to the idea. "Think what your father will say! You barely won his consent to come here for these short five weeks. What will he say to me if I should return without you?"

"What can he say?" cried Tom triumphantly with a smirk to his friend Joyce who stood silently at his side. "If he objects, tell him to send me a radiogram!"

Tom laughed uproariously, joined by his crony, at the incongruous thought.

"But seriously, uncle," he continued. "Don't you worry about that! Dad's a good old sport. He'll rant and fume when you first tell him and then he'll throw up his hands and forget about it."

There was a pause. Banks looked around in indecision. Near by he saw the turmoil of the mining camp: sweating laborers—mostly Martians, huge cranes, scampering trucks loaded with ore, and the moving parts of various machinery. Then he bent undecided eyes on the two youngsters.

Tom Banks was a fine specimen of manhood, tall and lithe. Strong chin and bold blue eyes spoke of determination and grit. He was not unhandsome, with finely chiseled nose, black eyebrows, and a crop of light hair offsetting his deep-brown skin. But there was more strength than amiability in his face and carriage.

His close friend and confidant, Joyce Caldwell, was slighter of build, softer of features. Eyes dark and burning shone soft and friendly from below a mop of natural curls. He had not the grim line of Tom's lips, nor the firmness of his chin. Geniality was his best virtue.

"Tom," said the uncle quietly at last. "You seem to forget you're on a new world —one we know little about in spite of the fifty years that Earthmen have visited it. There are dangers here other than the lung sickness you mentioned—frequent meteorites that this planet attracts from the nearby asteroids, poisonous desert creatures, savage natives not so many miles away, the scorching effect of that never-clouded sun, the rigors of Martian winter . . ."

"Hold on, uncle!" exclaimed Tom. "Don't exaggerate just to argue the matter. I'll admit all those things, but I can duplicate every one of them except the meteorites back on little old green Earth in the tropics. I've always meant to crash into the jungles on Earth, so Dad will know something on that order is unavoidable anyway, whether here or on Earth. Now, uncle, you

wouldn't . . ."

"You should be back in the university in a few months," cut in Banks, grasping at anything to uphold his position, especially as the younger man's vigorous words were sweeping away all opposition. Brooks could hardly be blamed; he liked his strong young nephew immensely and could not under any circumstances be careless of his fate.

"University!" Tom waved a deprecating hand. *"This* is a university in itself! That other book-thumbing can wait."

"How about Joyce?" threw in Banks in desperation. "Must I assume the burden of surrendering him to an unknown fate? His father is a good friend of mine. How could I ever face him without . . ."

"Don't you worry about that, Mr. Banks," spoke up Joyce for the first time. "My Dad knows that wherever Tom is, I'll be, so your responsibility rests only with him."

Gerald Banks was beaten and he knew it. Even before he spoke, he showed his resignation, and smiles broke on the lips of the two young men.

"Well, I see I can do no more with you than I could with wild boars. But mind, fellows, I'm going to tell your fathers exactly how this came about! Oh, woe is me that I should have under my care such willful youngsters as you two, and I hope a meteorite lands ten feet away from you both when I'm gone and takes some of that self-confidence of yours away!"

But Banks was smiling. He was secretly proud of them. Not many young men had the spirit and adventurous daring possessed by these two energetic specimens of Earth humans. And when they clapped him on the back and wrung his hand and playfully tussled with him in exuberance, he felt a glow of pleasure and pride, even though he had to straighten his clothes and wipe his damp forehead after they had joyfully sallied away from the sun tent.

"FRANKLY, I'm worried about the whole thing!"

The speaker was Gool Akool, a Martian with whom Tom and Joyce had formed a close friendship during the two years they had been on Mars after Gerald Banks returned to Earth. Being the son of one of the Mars Mining Company's Martian agents, he had lived in the Earthian settlement on the Desert of Whispers all his life. He spoke English with barely a trace of Martian hissing and was "earth-ized" to a remarkable extent. Only in his physical form could he be distinguished as a Martian, for he had picked up as much information about the Green World (Earth) as his own native planet.

"Just when did the plague first appear?" asked Tom, lolling at ease after their jaunt into the wild lands of the northern hills, which were some hundred miles away from the mining camp.

"When did it?" asked Gool, turning to his brother Nork.

Nork, who was also well versed in Earth language and customs, thought a moment. "I think it was first recognized as a plague about a Jark* ago."

"Just about the time uncle left," said Tom, speaking to Joyce. Then he turned to the two brothers.

"You say it seems harmless to Earth people?"

"Yes, curiously enough," answered Gool. "My people in the infected area get feverish, lie in agony for three days, then die. Your people develop a slight cough, feel miserable for a few days, and then recover completely. We know it is not fatal to Earth people because there is a section of land where every Martian has died—but every Earthman lives today."

Gool and Nork seemed greatly saddened by the matter. News had come to the camp that very day telling of the complete decimation of a Martian town on the other side of the planet, where the plague seemed to have taken root. Their curious peak-nosed

faces reflected a troubled state of mind.

Tom and Joyce were far too familiar with Martian physiognomy to notice the oddities of their companions. When they had first arrived on Mars nearly two years before, they had about doubled up in laughter at the sight of the Martians. They were tall creatures with heads that seemed all nose, ears that looked like ram's horns, large soft eyes, enormous barrel-chests, and incredibly long arms with two elbows each. The short, broad-footed legs were set to a second torso below the huge chest. The two young vacationers had called them "fish faces" till they got to know them better. Their respect for the genial, intelligent Martians grew as their surprise at their physical appearance wore off.

"What do they say about the matter in authoritative circles?" asked Joyce, referring to the plague.

"Well, they analyzed the sickness as a lung disease. The germ that causes it has not been identified yet, although many scientists are now working on the problem trying to check the ravages of the pestilence. No preventative or cure has yet turned up."

Gool shook his head sadly as he finished.

"Haven't they investigated to find out from where the germs come? Surely they must originate somewhere, especially as the sickness has never before appeared on this planet."

"I hate to tell you this," said Gool slowly, his face tinging yellow in typical Martial embarrassment, as an Earthman's face reddens. "But the rumor has sprung up that . . . that the germ is a product of . . . of Earth!"

"Of Earth!" repeated the Earth youths in unison.

"You see, it's like this," went on Gool, his face still more yellow. "Before I go on I just want to tell you, Tom and Joyce, that I don't credit the idea at all; nor does Nork here. But anyway, some of my people say that the germ has been brought from Earth and introduced here on Mars . . ."

"Yes, go on!" urged Tom tersely, as Gool paused.

". . . to kill off us Martians so that the Earth people could have the planet all to themselves!"

TOM and Joyce looked at one another aghast. When they looked back to the brothers, the latter hung their heads in perturbation.

"Tom, Joyce!" cried Gool, breaking the icy silence. "I want you to know as I said once, that I think it the most inane idea ever conceived. Please don't think I'm throwing that up to you . . ."

"No, no; not at all," assured Tom. "Come to think of it, I don't blame your people for that supposition. We fair-minded Earthmen must admit that often our fellow men have shown unutterable greed the way they snapped at the rich mineral beds of the deserts. And their conduct has not always been what it should be. Then, too, it must seem queer to anyone thinking about it that the plague should affect ONLY Martians! On the face of it, I can hardly blame your people for that view."

"But it's preposterous!" cut in Joyce vehemently, "to suppose for a second that the Earth people would resort to such a despicable, abominable practice for the mere sake of mineral wealth! In the first place, the Mars government has always allowed the Earth-companies to exploit the ore beds, almost without a single dissent, and their terms have always been lenient. To my mind, there is no plausible reason for such an accusation."

"You must remember, though," put in Gool, "that my people still control the richest of the mineral beds, especially the radium mines. Our government has granted the mining rights of mineral deposits to Earth people only because necessity has never forced us to exploit them, desert-surrounded and rather poor as they are. The

*Note—a Martian year of 687 Earth days.

radicals who accuse Earth of the deed say that the Earth people have cast covetous eyes on the much richer, more conveniently situated plateau ore-beds now owned by the Martians."

"But not under any circumstances do we, or any sane-minded Martians, think that such is the cause of the plague," added Nork.

"Of course not," said Gool. "However, things are coming to a dangerous point. The plague has steadily increased; there have been hot words between the Martian radicals and the Earth ambassadors, I have heard; and it is hard to say what will result of the whole thing."

"It may lead to war!" cried Tom suddenly. "And that would be the worst thing possible. Excuse my frankness, Gool and Nork, but Earth, with her superior armament and war experience—you know, we always have had war on Earth, while you Martians here got along like one family—would overwhelm Mars; and that, it is easy to see, would never rectify the trouble."

Four people looked at each other in dismay. The statement Tom made only too clearly showed the tragic result that would come upon the heels of the plague if it continued its remorseless path—two worlds embroiled in a war, two peoples which had long been friendly and co-operative, at each other's throats—two civilizations cast at each other's armored fronts in a war that might result in the complete annihilation of the one—the bloody, unsatisfying victory of the other.

These four of two worlds, close friends now for two years, bosom companions on many a joyful hunting trip and hiking jaunt in the fascinating wild lands of unexplored regions, felt a barrier come up between them—felt themselves thrust apart by a rude nonenity that was beyond their power to thwart. Friendship must always be second to race patriotism. They looked at the darkening future with dread.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

IT WAS not many days later that Tom called a halt beside a bubbling stream underneath the towering height of a Martian Zilt, or bush-tree. The four of them, forgetting the gathering cloud of worldly disaster, had essayed into the cool hill region north of the mining camp for a sort of picnic.

Joyfully, they unstrapped their knapsacks, glad to rid themselves of the chafing straps, wiped their moist faces and drank of the sweet water. In more minutes they were lolling at ease on the moss-sward, wolfing down their various provisions, talking aimlessly and pleasantly, at peace with the universe. Then Tom broke the spell.

"You said the other day, Gool, that the plague seems to center in the Pruntz Plateau, almost half-way around Mars from here?"

The Martian brothers, who had been chuckling at Joyces' antics as he tossed up bits of food and caught them in his mouth, lost their smiles. Joyce looked resentfully at his friend for introducing that painful topic.

"Yes, that is so," answered Gool. "The Pruntz Plateau region first felt the inroads of the pestilence. From there it spread outward."

"Is that region any different from any other on Mars?"

"Yes. It is situated in such a geographical position that eddying winds make it their core. From that plateau sweep out long arms of gentle, but constant, winds."

"Is the disease contagious?"

"That's the queerest thing of all, Tom," answered Gool. "It is *not* contagious as proven by certain tests. It does not pass from person to person, but seems to spring out from nowhere, wiping out whole communities at a time."

"Oh, bosh, Tom!" burst in Joyce petulantly. "What's the use of bringing up and carrying on a sordid topic like that? We

can't do anything about it, anyway. What comes, comes. For the sake of our happiness, drop that smelly old subject and let's enjoy ourselves as we should. Surely something like that can't affect us four, at least not for a long time."

Tom rose to his feet. His blue eyes blazed and dilated.

"It *can* affect us four, and will! Don't you see that disaster is coming, and coming fast? Nork translated the bulletin for me yesterday; it indicated that in six Jark or less, the Martian race will die out if the plague continues at its present rate of increase. But before that ever happens, there will be war! Maddened by the devastation of the plague, mentally warped by the terrible threat of extinction, the Martians will rise and wage war against Earth, thinking the Earth-people responsible for the pestilence. Do you want to see that happen? Do you, all of you, want to see the beautiful cities of Mars come tumbling down—those fairy-like, gossamer-threaded buildings that bring a nameless comfort just to see them? Do you want to see a happy, thriving race of people fall to oblivion? Do you, Joyce, want to see Earth, bloody and gory, carry a taint of *murder* for the rest of eternity?"

It was seldom that Tom flared up in this way and Joyce gaped in astonishment. He looked long as his friend stood there waving his hands and continuing in the same vein, picturing the horror that would envelop the two worlds as a result of the deadly, insidious plague.

"But, Tom!" burst in Joyce finally. "What in the wide world can *we* do about it?"

Tom stiffened. When next he spoke, his voice was low, fraught with great portent.

"Gool, Nork, and Joyce—I've been thinking this whole thing over. Maybe I'm a disillusioned fool and maybe I can see things that others can't, but has it ever occurred to anybody that the disease might be *the diabolical effort of alien creatures to conquer this planet?*"

JOYCE burst out laughing. "Tom, you should be a writer with an imagination like that!"

Tom went on as if he hadn't heard the interruption:

"Listen, all of you. Mars is the outermost of the four inner planets. Suppose now that invaders wanted to conquer the four worlds. Wouldn't it be logical for them to start with Mars, it being the furthest out? Now digest this: seven expeditions have been sent to Jupiter since space-flying first came into being fifty years ago. *Not one of them has returned!* They had splendid ships, plenty of fuel, good crews, experienced captains, armament, and everything else to make the trip in safety. Why did none of them return?"

The others sat up tensely. Gool and Nork seemed bereft of speech. But the indomitable Joyce spoke up:

"Don't forget, Tom, that Jupiter is a God—awful ways away and nobody knows just what conditions come up when you take a long trip like that. I suppose those ships simply blew up somewhere, got lost, crashed on Jupiter, or struck a meteorite or asteroid."

"Yes, Joyce," agreed Tom. "But it's just as reasonable to think that perhaps the Jovians, if there are such, captured them and killed them for dirty reasons of their own, probably to prevent the leak of information about them. Now, to carry on my line of argument: the last three expeditions had along with them Martians as well as Earthmen and Venusians. Couldn't the Jovians have used the Martians as laboratory specimens, producing a germ that would kill them, in line with their supposed program of conquering the four inner planets?"

"Certainly," agreed Nork suddenly.

"But still," cried Joyce. "How explain the transportation of the germs from Jupi-

ter to Mars? Surely if they brought them here in space-ships, they would be seen! The Pruntz Plateau is well-settled."

TOM spoke in a hushed voice: "No, that would be out of the question. I doubt they could bring enough germs to do much damage without being detected sooner or later, and this plague has been going on for over a Jark. Since the disease is not contagious, it must be constantly replenished. Since they appear mainly in the Pruntz Plateau where winds waft them all over the planet, that must be the infesting spot. Since it is unreasonable for them to bring germ cultures in ships, they must somehow project them *through the ether in the form of a beam!*"

"Well, that beats all!" ejaculated Joyce. "From improbabilities to impossibilities! Tom, for Heaven's sake, forget it. You'll be going insane in a minute with ideas like that cluttering up your mind!"

Tom offered no rebuke. His seriousness was adamant to humorous sarcasm.

"There are just two things that make me think of that beam idea. Think back, Joyce, to nearly two years ago when we first came to Mars. Remember one time when we were nearing Mars in the space-ship, that I looked at the sun through darkened glasses? Remember that accidentally I turned to Mars with the glasses and saw a pale, shimmering beam reaching out from Mars to black space? I let you see it then. It was invisible without the darkened glasses. Some strange property of the smoked lenses showed up an otherwise invisible beam."

"Yes, I *do* remember," cried Joyce excitedly. "We talked to your uncle about it and he said it was funny but probably something used by the Martians."

Tom nodded. "Well, my theory is that the beam we saw is the same one that brings the germs to Mars!"

"Beans for your theory," chuckled Joyce. "I can explode it right off. First of all, Jupiter is now a quarter way around the sun from Mars. At the time we saw the beam it pointed almost at right angles to Jupiter's position. And last, Professor, no germ can live in space, nor can you make it swim to a certain spot where there is no air. Now don't say it's Saturn that sends the beam, or I'll scream!"

But Tom refused to laugh as Joyce pantomimed readiness to shrill forth.

"Joyce, I'm more serious than you can ever imagine. And now I'll explode *your* contentions! I said *two* things started this train of thought of mine. One was the incident of the beam we saw through the smoked glasses and the other is the fact that, in my memory of astronomical lore, we both studied, there reposes this pregnant fact: *There is an asteroid that follows Mars around the sun like a shadow!* This queer body, although traversing a greater orbit, has a superior speed that matches the orbital swing of Mars, so that age in, age out, it is never further from the bigger planet than about 95,000,000 miles! Now I'm going to finish up what I have to say to keep you from asking too many questions.

"I have an idea that grows stronger each time I think of it that the Jovians want to conquer the inner planets. They have picked Mars first for strategic reasons. They have perfected a germ fatal to Martians. They have set up some sort of projector on that asteroid that follows this planet. From this machine, they shoot the beam that carries the germ spores—and germ spores capable of living in space are scientifically possible. The germs are pushed there by the well-known pressure of light, or in this case, infra-red rays.

"I may be hopelessly wrong, but at least the idea is worth acting upon. It is just as plausible as the Earth-invasion idea. To the vast majority of Martians, Earth people are greedy, grasping, overbearing, aggressive, and troublesome people. But we know, you and I, Joyce, that for all of these traits that come out when our people see precious minerals, that never in a million years would

they do such an obsene, utterly foul deed as impregnate Martian air with disease germs, merely to have that wealth for their own. It is far more logical to me that the plague, since it seems to be caused by some outside agency, comes from other alien creatures, presumably the Jovians, as they are the nearest. But whether Jovians or Saturnians, or even creatures from some other star, it is a menace that may well cause the complete collapse of civilization as we know it!"

A WEEK later, the four friends met and conversed inside the building that contained the living quarters of the mining camp.

Tom paced up and down, frowning and fretting. Joyce lounged on a cot, twisting the corner of a blanket. Gool and Nork sat quietly, staring at the floor.

"There you are," exploded Tom suddenly. "Balked at every step; names hurled at us —fools, nitwits, idiots, and the rest. Our youth is against us. They think we are too young to reason!—to have inklings of the truth! Glory, how I'd like to wring the neck of that one fat government official as he cursed me for a lying Earthman, saying I had been sent by the Earth powers to attempt to shift suspicion to a non-existent party, namely the alien invaders!"

"But we have to admit, Tom," said Joyce carefully, "that we have absolutely no shred of evidence or proof. The beam we saw in space is invisible here on Mars, smoked glasses or not. Then there is the almost impossible conception of a beam pushing germs through space for a distance of 95,000,000 miles. You know, I can hardly blame them for calling us nursery truants."

Tom banged a fist against the wall.

"That isn't what counts at all. I don't care how many names they call us. I don't care how impossible the thing sounds. *But,* for the sake of humanity, they should at least have listened to us and done something about it. With the whole future of civilization at stake, they should at least have given our idea a fair trial, instead of saying so blandly that sooner or later the plague would be stopped. I doubt that it ever will be stopped! I have a vague suspicion that the Jovians, or whatever they are, are super-scientists. That germ of theirs—why, it hasn't even been isolated yet!"

The two Martians were silent, bowed down with despair. They had done all they could—brought Tom before the government officials. Beyond that their power did not carry.

Suddenly Tom ceased his walk. All eyes were turned to him.

He whirled to face them. "By God!—if they won't save themselves, we'll make the attempt!"

"What do you mean?" spluttered Joyce.

"There's a space-ship in the hangar, isn't there? We can learn to run it and take a dash out to that asteroid and look for evidence ourselves!"

"But Richardson will never let us use it," cried Joyce. "He's the most hard-headed man this side of the Pearly Gate!"

Tom's face fell as he thought of Richardson whose imagination and geniality were infinitesimally small. He was really a stumbling block.

"Come on, Joyce," he said tersely. "We're going to tackle him, tough as he is. Gool and Nork, you stay here. No use getting you in trouble."

Richardson, looking over written reports in the main offices of the Mars Mining Company, greeted them without evincing pleasure at the intrusion.

"Mr. Richardson," began Tom, "we would like the use of the space-ship out in the hangar."

The superintendent jerked his head up.

"Did I hear you right? Use the space-ship? What prank of yours is this?"

"I'm serious," answered Tom, and his face was grim and pale.

"Tom, I hope nothing is the matter . . . Joyce, has Tom here gone . . .?"

"No, Mr. Richardson," burst in Tom harshly, "I'm perfectly sane. Let me explain. I want the ship to go to the asteroids, to be perfectly honest with you, for reasons I know it would be useless to present. I am asking this favor of you on the strength of my uncle's trust in leaving me here on Mars."

"Your uncle, young man, told me to keep an eye on you and Joyce before he left. I've kept out of your way for these two years and let you do pretty much as you pleased, but now I put my thumb down. You must be perfectly sane, although your request smacks of imbecility, but you can never, under any circumstances, have the space-ship, for what queer prank of yours, I can't imagine . . . say, good Lord, youngster! don't tell me this has some connection with that scandalous trip you made to Sivid to see some government officials without my permission, to babble about alien rays and plague germs in space . . ."

Tom went white with rage, while Joyce reddened and clenched his fists.

"Yes, it has. And I repeat my request!"

Tom's voice was icy. Joyce saw that he was reaching the end of his pacific endurance of ridicule.

"Tom, leave the room instantly! I shall tend to you later and your uncle is going to hear about this. Why, you don't even know how to run a space-ship! As to why you should be addling your brain about the plague when it doesn't affect you directly . . . I can't imagine. Good Lord, youngster, must you envision alien invaders when a simple pestilence strikes on the other side of Mars? Earth has had plague upon plague and no one attributed them to fantastic Jovians or whatever you thought they were. Now go and try to get some sense. . . ."

RICHARDSON'S voice ended in a gasp. He found himself looking down a barrel of cold steel. He followed the hand to the shoulder and then to the face. He turned white in fear at the blaze in those blue eyes of fierce determination.

"I've fooled around too long, Richardson!" crackled Tom, pointing his pistol firmly at the superintendent. "Little as you know about me, you know that I can shoot and shoot well. And if you don't obey orders, I'll shoot you as I would anybody else that stood in the way of my present will. I see my duty clear and you nor anybody else can stop me now!"

"Tom . . . put that pistol away . . . your uncle . . ."

"Leave my uncle out of it!" ejaculated Tom savagely. "And listen to me! Connect up with your desk phone there to the right place and tell them to load up the space-ship with full fuel capacity and five extra cans—also two months provisions and water and oxygen. Then tell James Ortman to warm up the engines and prepare for take-off within three hours. For your own information, I'm going to stand here for those three hours with this pistol pointed at your heart till the ship is ready. Get going!"

Richardson, pale and shaky, carried out instructions, able to start the program by means of his phone that connected with every part of the big mining camp. Tom kept a wary eye on him and talked to the trembling Joyce without turning his head, telling him to instruct Gool and Nork to get ready and load their personal belongings into the space-ship.

One interruption nearly disrupted the plan. One of the office force walked in suddenly. Tom quickly thrust the pistol out of view behind his left hip, but he turned ominous eyes on Richardson. The latter, fearing for his life, dismissed the fellow immediately, who left with puzzled eyes bent on the strained positions of the two men. But fortunately nothing came of this.

Fifteen minutes before the three hours were up, Joyce dashed in to announce that all was ready. Tom made Richardson ac-

company them to the hangar, walking a little in back with his hand around the little pistol in his pocket. His uncompromising threat of death if the superintendent made a false move thoroughly cowed the latter, who valued his life far above the theft of a space-ship.

Gool and Nork stood beside the ship in agitation. The rocket motors, under the hand of pilot Ortman, were slowly blasting forth—"idling". Tom thought of something on the spur of the moment.

"Quick, Joyce!—you and the brothers get a dozen or so of keg-bombs—they're just around the corner in the small brick building."

This done, Tom motioned all into the ship, hurrying as already several of the people thereabouts had stopped, wondering what the space-ship was being used for. Tom, the last one in, released the grip on his pistol with a sigh of relief as he banged shut the seal.

"Get her away from Mars!" he shouted at the pilot.

Gripping the rails tightly, they felt a sudden surge forward as the rockets burst forth in deafening volume. Outside the small windows set in the floor, they saw the surface of Mars rapidly dwindle and shrink to cup shape. Then the light died from around them and the blackness of space came into being. Mars became a disk, then a ball.

Pilot Ortman cut acceleration and turned to Tom.

"What's our destination?"

He, of course, knew nothing whatever of the events that had led up to this leave-taking. Somewhat mystified at receiving the abrupt orders from the superintendent to prepare for a space trip, he bothered himself little about the matter. He eyed the extra cans of fuel with wonder.

"We're going to an asteroid on the other side of Mars," said Tom.

Then seeing the incredulity in the pilot's face, he frankly and boldly told the whole story, motive and all. Ortman, as it proved, was a philosophic, unemotional person quite willing to pilot the ship to Hell and back, given the orders. Tom saw they would have no trouble with him.

At Ortman's suggestion, they all fell to checking the ship's stores before severing connections with Mars altogether. The two Martians lost much of their agitation once they were safely away from the planet, and together with Joyce, proceeded to pass around the usual banter and funpoking.

Ortman, with the ship still shooting away from Mars at constant velocity, plotted a course to the asteroid, a laborious process that took several hours. Between him and Tom, they worked out a sleep and watch program for the two weeks it would take to get there.

Then once again the rockets boomed forth, powered by the famous Hydro-hex, the secret compound that had made space-travel a possibility. It was a fine powder, immensely powerful, exploded with a spark.

"One thing I want to know," asked Joyce as routine matters had been straightened out. "What in common sense was the purpose of bringing the keg-bombs?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Inspiration or insanity, whichever you want to call it."

THE STRANGE PLANETOID

SEVENTEEN Earth days later, Ortman announced that they were within a hundred thousand miles of the asteroid. Tom had arranged with him for deceleration to be applied at such time as to bring them to a drift in space at about that distance.

Using the mounted telescope, Tom bent his gaze on the asteroid.

"What do you see?" asked Gool eagerly.

"Nothing much," answered Tom. "Seems to be bare. But now is the time to use the smoked glasses. We ought to see the beam leading right to it."

Joyce, already looking through them, shouted aloud.

"There it is! Ends right there!"

"Then there's no mistake!" said Tom in a hushed voice. "We've struck something here. Ortman, bring the ship closer, and the rest of you keep watch at the ports. If an enemy ship spies us, they'll probably end our career."

ORTMAN caused a slow blasting to push the ship nearer, mile by mile, while the others strained their eyes for a possible lurking enemy. Tom, at the telescope, finally gave the command to cut velocity to zero. He turned a white, grimly-set face to his companions.

"Boys, proof number two! Take a look through the telescope!"

One after the other they examined the asteroid which now loomed as a small rock through the ports. Indistinct by reason of the distance and lack of strong light, yet plainly evident was a huge tripod of metal surmounted by a tubular affair that pointed in the direction of distant star-like Mars. At the base could be vaguely defined several elongated objects that seemed to be space-ships.

"I wonder," said Joyce in awed tones, "what marvelous science they must have to train that thin beam on Mars and make it carry germ spores!"

"And how they manage to keep it centered in that one spot—the Pruntz Plateau," added Gool in still more awed tones.

"It seems to me," Joyce said, "that it would work better for them to merely sweep the beam over all Mar's surface. They certainly would accomplish more that way."

"No, they wouldn't," Tom returned quickly. "Look at it this way: if they spread the germs haphazardly about all over Mars, the whole race would quickly build resistance to it. You know—the vaccination principle. But if they attack suddenly and in concentrated force with the germ, the race has little chance to automatically anti-toxinate itself. They are very wise. They pour their hellish germs into the Martian atmosphere in one spot, like filling a jug by the neck. The concentrated blasts of germs that sweep out from the Pruntz Plateau quickly decimate populations en masse. Looking at the whole thing carefully, I doubt that complete extermination could result, because the air is so impregnated already that the Martians far away from the Pruntz Plateau are becoming immune."

"Then what are these aliens wasting their time for that way?"

"Possibly they wish merely to cut down the population to a certain minimum and then attack to make victory that much surer. You know, man power is the greatest force in any kind of war or invasion."

Tom shortly after called a conference.

"Well, now we know we were right. Mars is being attacked from the back by a dangerous enemy! Who they are, we don't know. They may be Jovians and they may not—but that isn't nearly as important as the appalling truth of disaster. The big item is: *"What are we going to do about it?"*

"Perhaps we ought to go back to Mars and enlist the aid of the government," suggested Nork, "now that the evidence is so overwhelming that the plague comes from this asteroid."

"Useless," grunted Tom, face clouding. "They wouldn't believe us once. They won't a second time. After all, what proof have we? Yes, *we* are sure of ourselves. We've seen the beam, seen the projector, put two and two together and arrived at the true result; but will *they* see the point?"

"I think not," commented Gool. "I know my people well enough to see how futile it would be for us, mere youngsters in age, to get recognition. The government has cranks of all sorts bother them, claiming to know all about the plague and its cure. To the government we would just be more cranks."

TOM nodded. "I'm afraid that's true. However, we could go back and wait for my uncle to come. He's due at the next opposition which will be in three months. With his influence—and I think I can convince him we're not crazy—we might be able to avert the tragedy that is going to inevitably result from the plague."

Joyce growled. "Of all the queer things: here we are with knowledge of vital importance to two worlds, and we have to plot to save them from a terrible fate! I should think any sane government would at least give us a trial."

"Joyce, only in story-books do things happen the way they should. Efficient, far-seeing, sagacious governments are a figment of imagination. Actually they are hide-bound, muddled bodies of narrowed perspective. If the aliens who attack thus quietly and unobtrusively, had suddenly descended from the clouds and begun bombing and shooting—yes, then the whole planet would be aroused. Only that sort of pressing, inescapable disaster can ever jolt a government to real action."

James Ortman said little, but his eyes had begun to gleam strangely as the importance of this unprecedented voyage struck him full force.

"I guess the next thing to do is try to enlist the aid of some influential individuals. At least, we could try till your uncle finally arrived and helped us," Nork expressed himself.

"The trouble is, though," spoke up Joyce, "that space-ships are not built for warfare— that is, warfare in space itself. What chance would our ships have against aliens with a science that can project the germs in that beam? They probably have lethal weapons built into the ships somehow, something never done with the ships we have on our worlds!"

"That is true," agreed Tom. "That's why I'd like to do something here and now without delay. I brought those keg-bombs along but I can't figure out a thing to do with them. They could wreck the place if one ever fell down there on the asteroid."

Four worried faces looked at one another blankly. On their young shoulders rested the fate of two worlds. They were youthful and the weighty mental burden of the past three weeks had worn them down, along with the hardships of space-travel.

Tom's eyes darted nervously from port to port constantly, dreading to see a black shape hurtling at them, bent on their annihilation.

They all turned as Ortman spoke.

"I've a suggestion to make—about those keg-bombs. You say if one of them landed on that asteroid, it would ruin their apparatus. I think we can do it!"

"Yes, yes—go on!" whispered Tom, eyes lighting up.

"At the back of the ship," said Ortman, "is a garbage sompartment from which refuse is thrown. It is really a double air-lock. Now if we *back* the ship toward the asteroid with a bomb *in that compartment and leave the outer door open,* when I suddenly shoot the back rockets, the bomb will naturally *fall out and continue toward the asteroid!*"

"Splendid!" shouted Tom with hope in his face.

Feverishly they went to work, loading two of the keg-bombs into the little lock at once. Ordinarily, the explosive was set off by spark when used in mining, but now they had to hope that the terrific shock of landing would detonate it.

The pilot, long skilled in handling space-ships, carried his part to perfection. Moving backwards, tail toward the asteroid, the ship sped toward it. The refuse lock, containing two of the Hydro-hex bombs, was open to the vacuum. After shouting a warning, Ortman applied the rear rockets.

"There they go!" screamed Joyce.

"Yes, but they looked a little out of line to me," added Tom shaking his head. "I think we had better shovel all the bombs

out and hope that one out of the bunch will strike. What are the chances, Ortman, do you imagine?"

"Can't say, Tom. That asteroid is pretty small, with a small gravity. If the bomb sails by too fast and a little too far, it will keep on going and going forever, unless it strikes something else. I think the rocket blasts push them a little off, too, when they come out of the lock."

"Then let's get a little nearer," commanded Tom.

"More risk," warned Joyce.

"To hell with risk!" returned Tom savagely. "We can't think of our own puny lives at a time like this. Think of Earth, torn by war—think of Mars, a dead or dying world . . ."

Gool and Nork had the next two bombs in their arms already when Tom called for the loading an hour later after the ship had crawled closer to the dark and shadowed asteroid. They had tears in their eyes, tears of thankfulness to Tom for being so willing to risk his life in the cause of a different people.

Six times Ortman maneuvered the ship to release the huge keg-bombs. A dozen of them, all they had along, shot at a terrific speed toward the asteroid.

"Now back to a hundred thousand miles!" ordered Tom. "We'll hang around for fifteen hours. If there is no explosion in that time, we'll know we've failed. In that case, we'll have to go back to Mars and try our luck with my uncle."

NONE of them slept—nor did they eat. They stood wide-eyed at the ports from which the region of the asteroid could be seen—waiting. Hope waxed and waned.

Tom looked at the chronometer for the hundredth time. It showed ten hours since they had released the last bomb. He stirred and swept a pale face around to his companions.

Then it came—a terrific blinding flash that seared their eyeballs. Then spotted blackness.

Nork and Gool fainted without a sound. Tom pressed his worn face against the port glass and got the full glare of the second flash. Joyce was the only one who found his tongue. Yelling like a demon, he danced around the ship's interior in mad gyrations.

When Tom's eyes were again able to function properly, he swung the telescope on the asteroid and peered through eagerly.

He straightened up. "Send the ship back toward Mars, Ortman. The asteroid is broken in three sections."

Then Joyce looked. "But good Lord, Tom! that tripod seems unharmed!"

Tom, turned to him.

"Unharmed or not, Joyce, but that damned beam is gone!"

Further conjecture was cut short by a cry of alarm from Ortman. A glinting ship was streaming toward them!

"Quick!" shouted Tom. "Full speed, Ortman! It must be one of the enemy looking for revenge!"

The ship surged forward. The other ship dwindled a moment, but then it suddenly drew nearer as if accelerating enormously.

A beam of yellow shot to them and an intense tingling ached through their bones.

The enemy ship drew nearer and Tom expected some powerful force to blow up the ship any moment, sent from the avenger. Then suddenly there was another bright flash from the asteroid.

When Tom's eyes cleared a minute later, there was no sign of the enemy ship!

"What . . . where is that ship that was chasing us?" cried Joyce dumb-founded.

"I have an idea their ships are run on some broadcast power that originated on the asteroid," replied Tom. "Maybe that last bomb destroyed the power broadcaster."

Gool and Nork still lay unconscious. Ortman was urging the ship toward Mars with all safe speed. Joyce turned to Tom—their eyes met.

The Price of Escape

Five years in a space-ship!—Lee, Carl and Nita had traveled for what seemed a lifetime—two men fighting for the love of one woman in the confines of a tiny room, year after year! And just as they are plotting to destroy each other for the possession of Nita—mighty Jupiter looms up before them, presenting a promise of horrible death!

by
HENRY J. KOSTKOS

The prow of the ship tore away from the hull!

CHAPTER I
FIVE YEARS IN SPACE!

A ROOM fourteen feet by ten, steel - walled, crowded with furnishings, cabinets, instruments and controls. A small room with nothing outside but the terrible bleakness of interstellar space, the cold light of the stars and the far away copper disc of the sun and the giant pale-yellow circle of unexplored Jupiter toward which the room was hurtling at a tremendous speed, growing ever larger in the observation window.

(Continued on page 90)

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(Continued from page 88)

In this room there were three people, a girl and two men—two men who loved the girl passionately and hated each other with the unreasoning hatred of men who had once been the closest of friends. Had they been on earth instead of in a space-ship bound on a dangerous journey to the unexplored outer planet Jupiter, they would without question have remained friends. But the journey had done something to them. Perhaps it was inevitable, perhaps foreordained that a room fourteen feet by ten would raise the devil with men's sensibilities, with their emotions, with their reason, if they are confined to its walls for five hellish years.

Yes, Leland Aldrich thought, we left the earth January 12, 1974. For about two years we had been buoyed up by the thrill of the adventure: the first to reach Jupiter successfuly; mysterious Jupiter.

A year and eight months outward bound from the earth, they had landed for a breathing spell and to take on supplies and atomic fuel for the rockets. Then they were off again, off on a journey to the unknown reaches of interstellar space, with some hope of landing in three years and ten months, on June 26th, to be exact.

Aldrich stared at the cold greyness of the metal wall until his red-shot eyes focused on the automatic earthian calendar—We should land tomorrow. But that was before I knew what I now know.

The girl followed his eyes. She was a pretty girl, almost a beautiful girl, a most-wonderful-creature of a girl—here in the space-ship—the only thing feminine within millions of miles, so far as the two men knew. On earth, she would still have been considered extraordinarily good looking, a golden goddess, with hair the color of a bright new penny and eyes that were a soft brown even back home under the glare of the Dramatic Corporation's televisor lights. And soft too were the curves of her body, soft in a gown that moulded her figure in a covering of black satin. On earth, Aldrich had called her Nita; Carlo de Castillon had addressed her, with a cultured bow, as Miss Nueville.

DE CASTILLON was lying on his stomach on the divan, trussed up with ropes wound around his body and limbs, but his black eyes were watching, incessantly, through a heavy fringe of lashes, watching the girl who sat very still and straight in the chair facing the observation window. He had watched her that way for three years. Even before they had reached Mars, he had told her that he loved her, and he had admitted to Aldrich his feeling for her and asked his forgiveness.

Nita still remembered the look that had clouded Aldrich's face, a look of disbelief. incredulity, replaced slowly by a reddening of his hollow cheeks, giving way to a paleness that haunted her for days. Aldrich had finally found words, very simple words, for Aldrich was the type of man whose most complex emotions found vent in expressions that were a mask to his feelings.

"And what does that make me?" he had asked in tones devoid of bitterness.

De Castillon's head had dropped. "I know, Lee," he had replied sadly, "you are Miss Nueville's fiancé. But that can't stop me from loving her."

Nita now realized what marvelous control Aldrich must have had in those days, for he had forced a short laugh that was no laugh at all but a challenge to de Castillon to win her if he could, and there'd be no appeal to an old friendship to bar the other from the field. Aldrich had been like that in those glorious earthian days. And even on Mars, by the liquid glow of its moons, when the trio had walked over the skyways of the sleeping city far below, there had been nothing in his attitude to indicate that Aldrich's strong and tolerant mind would finally break. But three years and ten months in space, inside the confines of a room that seemed to crush him with its cold

(Continued on page 92)

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grey walls, injected a factor into his chemistry that could not be denied a reaction.

The girl had schooled herself to speak unemotionally, for she knew that the least loss of control would result in a meaningless, hysterical outburst of pent up feelings. She drew her eyes away from the gaunt frame of the hollow-cheeked young man at the control desk.

"I am going to start preparations for landing tomorrow, Lee. All our exploring gear is strewn about in the storage chamber as if it had been caught in a Martian crater-wind. We will need space suits, air synthesizers and—"

"Time enough when we get there," Aldrich grunted without looking up from his calculator. "Landing is not going to be as simple as you expect."

De Castillon rolled over on his side. He was cramped form being forced to lie trussed up.

"He's always looking on the gloomy side of things," he mused to the girl, but there was no doubt as for whom his words were intended. "Anything would be better than this."

"No one asked his opinions," Aldrich snapped.

"What have you found, Lee," Nita injected hastily, "since you've been so busy all day observing Jupiter?"

"Nothing very reassuring, if you want to know." The gaunt young man's voice was as surly as ever. He avoided looking at the girl, but his red, sleepless eyes glared at de Castillon. "But I can tell you this: if I were the wise, sensible young man that I was when we left the earth, I would turn this ship about, throw all tubes on full blast, and head straight back for Mars. But I'll be hanged on the hot gallows trees of Mercury if I'll exist another day with him there, sneering at me. I tell you, tomorrow is going to be his last day, and by all that's sacred, it's going to be a short last day!"

HIS voice had risen high in pitch. Fanatic, uncontrollable danger flashed incandescent in eyes that were bursting with deep blood-red. The girl had lost her forced calm and she was trembling violently in her chair, feeling nauseated by the cruel senselessness of the situation.

"Why should we go back?" she asked.

"Because we can't land on Jupiter. Look!" He pointed to the pale golden circle that filled the entire observation window. From the planet came an even, hazy glow of yellow light with grey streaks smearing across it, as if they were observing it through a ground glass screen that was being wiped by a dirty cloth on the far side. Nothing could be seen of the surface of the planet, only a veil of clouds that surged violently around its globe.

"Sure, look, and look hard, everybody. What do you see? Clouds. But they're not the pretty clouds—white, summer fleecy things under which you, Nita, and I roamed the river valleys of earth—Hell! There I go, getting sentimental, just like your polite gallant lover there, traveling in suspended motivation—"

"Lee!" Nita's voice was sharp. There was a trace of annoyance in it. "I wish you would stop rambling every which way and tell us what you have in mind. You're not the only one who is ready to crack on this voyage. For God's sake, please be rational."

Aldrich's eyes became dull and tired-looking. His shoulders stooped with weariness. A young man yet, hardly twenty-six, he felt old and worn. Life had become an anathema to him. It had burned him up in the last five years.

"Jupiter," Aldrich intoned pedantically, not looking at either of his listeners, "has nothing on which to land. The solidity to which we are accustomed upon earth and the inner planets is lacking on that yellow devil ahead. He is composed entirely of gas or liquid and is surrounded by a heavy atmosphere of ammonia vapor. No life is

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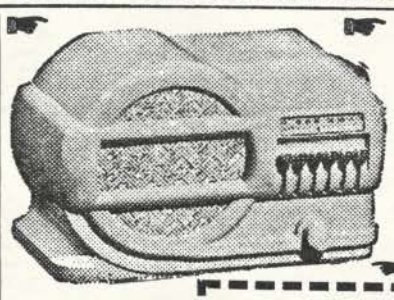

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(Continued from page 92)

possible where there is not a chance for a foothold. As we approached, I had suspected from the revelations of my instruments that it was so. But only today have I been sure."

"You *are* sure, Lee?" the girl asked.

"Of course. I wouldn't have said so, otherwise."

"Then I agree with you. I see nothing to do but go back."

The sleeping fires in Aldrich's eyes were fanned into searing flames.

"Who said we were going back? I declared we should, but we're not."

"But after what you've told us," Nita protested, perplexed, her hands bunching the fine black satin of her skirt, "who would risk landing there?"

Aldrich had risen. Nita, watching his motion, realized that he was perhaps being ridiculously dramatic, but she knew that her fiancé's reasoning faculty did not permit him to see himself in that light—and the awful implication of his pointing finger, when it had come to rest upon the prostrate figure of de Castillon, could not be denied. There might have been humor in the situation for others, but for the trio in the spaceship hurtling at a speed of ten thousand miles an hour toward an unknown planet of whirling gases, there was nothing but the foreshadowing of stark tragedy.

"*He* will land on Jupiter!" Aldrich almost shouted, his finger still fixed on de Castillon.

The reclining man tossed his feet to the floor and painfully raised his figure to its full height. Only now was it possible to gain a full conception of de Castillon's huge build. Six feet two at least, he was, sleek and fine-figured, yet with a distinct masculinity that was verified by the strong prominence of his bony features. He swayed unsteadily for a moment, then forced his will to control his body.

"You can't do that, Lee!" the man protested, seeking to find assurance in Aldrich's eyes that it was not so. "You never were that kind of a fellow and you're not that kind now. Come, after all, what have I done?"

De Castillon would have sworn that his eyes did not voluntarily caress Nita, but the fact remains that they did fasten full upon the girl, drinking in her body hungrily, searching deeply within her for the affinity his chemistry demanded. To Aldrich that gesture meant open defiance; it was the thing that he had been seing too long, a thing that he had vowed he would not endure beyond another day.

AS A scientist and explorer of reputation on earth and the inner planets, Aldrich had written a learned treatise on the raging storms that harassed the incandescent vapors of the sun. But no solar storm had the awful violence of what transpired in Aldrich's brain at the moment.

"I'm not that kind of a fellow, you say? Not that kind!" And again he laughed his humorless laugh that was no laugh at all. "Oh, but you'll find out, de Castillon—listen!" Again he pointed a long, trembling finger at him and tumbled his words out end on end, one leaping over the other in their haste to escape from his mouth.

"You're going to be immortal, a martyr to science! You will be the only man to have plunged into the crazy, swirling ball of ammonia that is known on earth as Jupiter. Others have tried to explore the planet, remember? There was El Jong, Scalla, Hermann, Robertson, and even fiery little Uurva, the Martian adventurer. Did they get back? No! We concluded that they had been lost in interstellar space, missed their marks, and we figured that with our advanced science, we'd be able to control a space-ship to bring us here as true as an ancient arrow. And we did, de Castillon! Here we are, not a day away from him!"

He paused, breathless, and looked again through the observation window at the yellow disc.

(Continued on page 96)

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(Continued from page 94)

"What an honor! Think of it, de Castillon, you will be the first man to land on Jupiter, without space-ship, attired in a Garvin space-suit, nicely heated and pressure conditioned, and even ammonia-proof. Oh, Garvin was a clever devil, even if they did shock him off for using Venusians as guinea pigs to test his garments out in space. Nita will get a nice suit ready for you, the largest one, de Castillon, for you are a powerfully big devil. No one knows better than I, for didn't I have the devil's own time trussing you up, even though you were asleep when I began the roping act?"

Nita was in front of him, her slender fingers pressing against his chest, imploring him with expressive hands and soft brown eyes that were now hazy with a mist of futility, fear and helplessness.

"No, no, Lee, you must not! Please go back, please!"

Aldrich pushed her away gently.

"What an honor, de Castillon," he continued, "to know that you have gained the fierce, articulate love of a woman, as you are drifting gently downward into denser and denser gaseous substance. To make sure that science will benefit by your observations of what you find out there, Garvin has equipped the suits with radio. You might not believe that you will talk for my benefit, but I have the conviction that you will become very, very lonely out there, until even the sound of your own voice will be welcome to you. Then as an additional incentive, I will have Nita reply and tell you how you sound at this end—here, Nita, where are you going?"

The girl had been watching him with mounting horror until she could endure it no longer. With a sob, she turned and ran for the far corner of the room to her berth behind curtains which she drew tightly before flinging herself down and sobbing herself to sleep.

For a long moment, the two men looked at each other with mixed emotions, neither uttering a word, neither knowing what to say. Finally de Castillon awkwardly eased his body down on the divan and turned his face to the wall.

For a long time, Aldrich stared at the yellow world that had by now overflowed the observation window, until his eyes involuntarily closed and sleep came unbidden to the tortured brain of the leader of another dangerous expedition to Jupiter.

CHAPTER II

BAGGAGE OVERBOARD!

HOURS later when Aldrich awoke, Nita and de Castillon were already up, talking earnestly. Aldrich went to the refrigerator cabinet and removed some concentrated food which he chewed mechanically without preparing it. The smouldering fire in his eyes had become more somnambulant and his body seemed heavier to drag around. At first he thought that the feeling was caused by the cramped position in which he had slept, but the weight of every object he handled seemed to have increased many fold. Then he remembered: the gravity of Jupiter! They were well within its sphere of influence, and upon closer approach, they would encounter a pull of more than twice that of the earth and seven times that of Mars.

He took observations in silence, ignoring the glances he was receiving from the girl and the man. So long as they had stopped talking to each other, he did not care, but by Heaven—if de Castillon started cooing to the girl, he'd not get as far even as the space-suit that was to be his vehicle—his eyes swung to the observation window.

Jupiter was yellow-bright to behold. It was everywhere, in front and on both sides of the space-ship. A quick glance at the atmosphere indicator showed that they had passed from the void of space into a region of ammonia vapor, a light concentration to be sure, but an atmosphere nevertheless.

(Continued on page 98)

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(Continued from page 96)

The pressure gauge needle was creeping visibly upward: it was now fifteen pounds to the square inch, equivalent to the atmospheric pressure at the surface of the earth. That couldn't be right, Aldrich muttered to himself, for at that rate the pressure near the gaseous surface of the planet would be unbearable. Then a smile creased his face. What of it? Unbearable for whom? Why, for deCastillon of course!—nothing for Nita or him to be concerned about since they weren't landing. Absolutely nothing!

Again Aldrich's eyes became inflamed with a gleam that was almost sadistic. He turned them full upon de Castillon, gloating in the thoughts of what tortures that powerful body which Nita admired would soon undergo.

It was Nita's voice that brought him back to the problems of the moment.

"Look, Lee, the outer-skin temperature gauge!"

He swung his eyes mechanically at the command to the instrument that indicated the temperature of the space-ship's envelope. The reading showed the unprecedented high of 640 degrees! With a gesture that was instinctively correct, Aldrich threw in the counter-rockets to check the acceleration of the ship, to reduce the terrific friction that would soon melt the metal to a liquid mass of incandescence. Even now he felt the heat that had penetrated the insulated double lining of the ship.

THE acceleration needle dropped back, nine thousand, eight, seven, six thousand miles an hour. All three passengers, each gripped by his or her emotions, watched that needle. De Castillon's cramped body responded sluggishly to the demand of the controlling brain. Slowly it rose to a vertical position, slowly it moved toward the dial to better view the needle. Nita was at the control desk, her white-knuckled hand bearing down heavily upon the metal surface, her brown eyes filled with wonder and awe, her hair reflecting and matching the bright golden glow that came through the observation window.

"The temperature is holding, Lee," she whispered, "but we're dropping fast."

Aldrich did not answer. The tenseness that had carved his face into permanent lines since he had left Mars was accentuated by a new and more fearful cast. Frantically, he pushed buttons and levers, his flame-shot eyes darting from dial to dial. The backs of his hands grasping the levers were cold-beaded with perspiration; his forehead glistened with it.

De Castillon swayed a moment on his feet. He had drawn his eyes away from the meters. There was more of interest to him in what he saw in Aldrich's face. There was a kinship there, a kinship that fear of the unknown had wreaked upon him. De Castillon's features became a study in rapidly playing emotions. From terror to disbelief, to—the man was actually smiling!

Nita had turned her head wildly toward the observation window. In that moment unseen by her, de Castillon had indicated the girl by a nod, and had shaken his head significantly. Aldrich understood the meaning of the gestures. He nodded in assent. Whatever happened, Nita was not to be told until she was far removed from having to worry about it.

Somehow, without conscious effort, the harshness of Aldrich's face relaxed and he seemed young for the first time in years. There was a steady determination mirrored in his features in place of the fanaticism that had hitherto suffused it. It was a resolve to fight against the enemy, against the elemental forces of the cosmic world, to conquer the opposition that nature had directed against those who would learn her secrets.

"Perhaps you could swing the ship about," de Castillon suggested, "and get the full benefit of the propeller tubes."

"That might be worth trying," Aldrich assented in a voice that matched the other's

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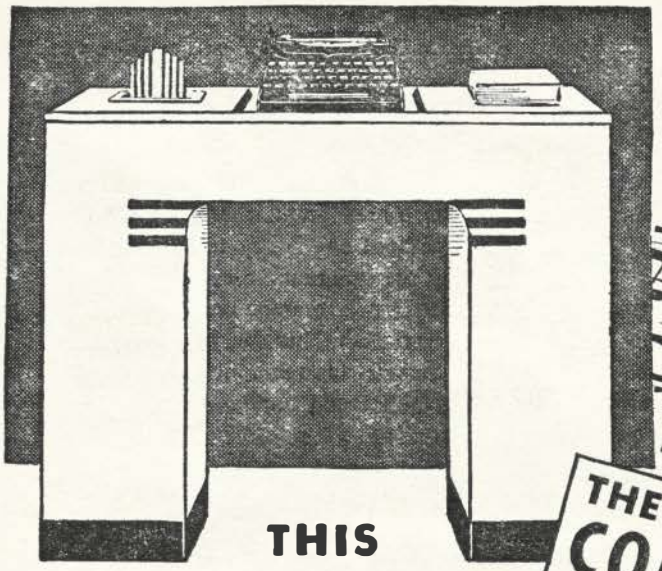

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(Continued from page 98)

for calmness.

Nita turned her head suddenly. There was a light of incredulity in her face, replaced by a surge of happiness. Softly, she said in a voice too low for the men to hear:

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

The space-ship trembled under the impact of the steering rockets; it swayed and rolled, trying with a mighty effort to respond to the guiding hand at the controls, to save itself and the passengers within it. For long moments, the impacts of the rockets continued, then with a stubborn swing of finality, the ship resumed her former course: straight toward the centre of the planet!

"Not enough power in the steering rockets," Aldrich pronounced.

De Castillon was studying the pressure gauge. He pointed to it. Seventeen hundred pounds to the square inch!—a back pressure greater than the force of the small rocket tubes. But the acceleration had decreased to a rate of three hundred miles an hour. The pressure caused by the tremendous gravity of the planet had caused the ammonia to liquefy until its density had retarded the ship more effectively than any counter-rockets could have done.

"This is like being inside the coils of a mechanical refrigerator. The friction of the ship has heated and expanded the ammonia which consumed the heat generated. Look at that surface thermometer!" Aldrich said.

THE needle showed zero Centigrade. with the temperature dropping steadily as the surface heat of the ship was dissipated, with the lessening acceleration and as the concentration of the refrigerating ammonia was increasing.

Nita had been studying the faces of the two men. And she had been thinking.

"Lee, Carl," it was the first time Aldrich had heard her address de Castillon by his first name, "how serious is it?"

De Castillon looked to Aldrich to answer the girls' question.

"It will need working out, Nita," Aldrich replied reassuringly. "This is exactly the sort of problem that makes space exploration so fascinating."

The buoyancy of his words was contagious. The others found that they could converse without the heavy pall of gloom permeating the innermost recesses of their beings. Here was a common problem—they couldn't deceive her, Nita told herself—that might be solved through mutual coöperation. And if it could not be solved, well, wasn't it better to go to the inevitable with hearts that were at peace toward one another rather than nursing a terrible bitterness that would make dying a torture?

Nita followed de Castillon's finger as it pointed to the acceleration meter. The dial was at zero! The ship had stopped. It lay in suspension in the dense sea of liquid ammonia, like a vessel upon the waters of the ocean!

"I'll try a few of the propeller tubes," Aldrich declared.

They heard the roar of the charge, followed immediately by a rending and tearing from the stern of the ship. Bits of incandescent metal streaked past the port holes and the observation window, and a dense black gas enveloped them until it dissolved in the ammonia.

"Too much back pressure," Aldrich grunted. "The tubes couldn't stand it. It's dangerous to try again, the entire stern of the ship might be blown to the devil."

When de Castillon had nodded his agreement, Nita was on the verge of asking what they now proposed to do. But she realized that the inquiry would be futile, for both men were thinking and thinking hard to answer that very question. Sufficient was it for her to witness the forgotten enmity of the two men in the face of the common danger that had diverted their minds to the elemental problem of self-preservation. She realized that that question was, in the final analysis, of supreme importance. Love

(Continued on page 102)

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would come after, which revelation singularly did not disturb her, for Nita's thoughts had never been centered upon herself. That the two men who loved her were for the time reconciled, was sufficient. But how long their amity would last was something she did not care to dwell upon, and she hoped fervently that when the end came, when their problem had been resolved either one way or the other, there would be no rekindling of the fatal spark of hatred that had all but consumed them.

"We will have to jettison some provisions and the movable furnishings of the ship to lighten her in order to bring her nearer to the surface of this confounded liquid," Aldrich said reflectively, following some quick calculations on a slide rule. "I've worked out the pressure, density and our weight. Dropping two tons should enable us to rise a thousand five hundred feet."

THE men, with Nita assisting with the lighter objects, moved every item they could spare to the air-lock in a forward compartment and placed the load directly over the trap door. Watching through a window at the side of the chamber, they saw the trap door sag down as Aldrich pushed a button. At first it appeared that the back pressure was too great for the load to drop, but while the three veritably held their breaths, the various objects slid out into the liquid ammonia.

At once the ship shot upward, coming to rest at its new elevation after bobbing up and down like a cork on the surface of the water.

"Pressure's still high," Aldrich grunted, "but there's nothing like trying the rockets again. I'll begin with one tube."

He threw in the charge and ignited it. Again came the burst of explosion, followed by the hot metal from the disintegrated tube streaking past their line of vision.

"No go," de Castillon shook his head, his voice sinking to a range of hopelessness.

"Isn't there something else we can throw overboard?" Nita asked quickly. She wanted the men to keep their minds occupied fully with the mechanical problems involved, before despair gripped them relentlessly and brought with it the attendant complications of personal friction.

"We can get rid of more water, our spare clothing, sheets and cushions. Some of those things don't weigh much, but they'll all help," Aldrich pronounced dubiously.

The cabin and the storage compartments were stripped almost completely until only the minimum amount of water and provisions remained. Gone were the couches and chairs, cushions, pillows, sheets, blankets, personal articles—every item that could possibly be spared. The lighter pieces were tied securely to those presenting greater weight so that they might be compressed into the smallest possible mass.

Again the ship popped upward, this time an additional six hundred feet—another test with a rocket tube, and still too much back pressure.

Aldrich's eyes were blazing with anger. He dashed his fist against the metal top of the control desk. He swore against the elements, at an inorganic substance that fought back as no human agency could, with a persistence that no human being could long combat. De Castillon, whose bonds had been quietly cut by Nita at Aldrich's unspoken assent, sat with his head in his hands, praying to the powers to relent, yet knowing all the while that fate was relentless.

Nita looked at the two men for a long time, herself feeling the hopelessness that pervaded their consciousness. Nothing could be done, absolutely nothing! Here they were, four hundred million miles from the earth, above the mass of Jupiter's surface, destined to float in suspended animation until—until when? How long could they endure physically? How long mentally? Already Aldrich's eyes were twin orbs of blood, red pools that played their

(Continued on page 104)

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reflection upon the rope that Nita had removed from de Castillon's body.

And de Castillon was again staring at Nita with longing, misty eyes veiled by long spears of lashes. It was not good for him to look at her that way, Nita reflected, not good for her, nor for Aldrich.

'How much additional weight need we drop, Lee, to rise above the back pressure?" she asked.

The question would keep him busy for a time calculating. When he was playing with figures, his mind would be concentrated upon the problem before him, his eyes would only smoulder and their fire would lie dormant. The longer he worked at his calculations, the better would it be for all of them. But Aldrich had the quick, precise brain of a scientist. He had solved this one all too soon.

"We will have to get rid of a weight of one hundred and fifty-nine pounds," he announced.

CHAPTER III
ATTEMPTED SACRIFICE

DE CASTILLON'S head came up from the support of his hands. He rose to his feet, not looking at either of them, but out through the observation window at the grey sea that filtered the rays of sunlight. For a full minute he contemplated the swirling liquid on which the space-ship undulated as if it were upon an Earthian sea. Then still without looking at either of his companions, he said quietly:

"I weigh one hundred and eighty-two pounds."

Aldrich's slide rule fell to the floor with a thud, the glass slide shattering into jagged fragments.

"You've hit upon it, de Castillon!" he exclaimed, the creases of worry on his face evening out. "That is the only thing remaining. Can't you see, Nita?" he asked, although the girl had not uttered a word except for a sharp inhalation of her breath. "De Castillon's idea is sound! There are my figures. But one thing is wrong with his plan—he weighs too much. I'm the right weight, and by God I'm going!"

De Castillon sprang to intercept him.

"Oh, no, you're not! It was my idea. Besides, there is Nita."

The girl's voice, when she spoke, was filled with horror:

"You mustn't, either of you. We'll all go down together, in here. We need not suffer longer than we want to. But out there," she shivered, "it would be terrifying. It would haunt me forever! I—don't want either of you to go. I want both of you here."

Aldrich shook his head impatiently.

"This is no time for sentimentality. We're not children, Nita. We must all die some time. What more glorious death could there be than this? What more fitting death would a scientist want?"

Nita shook her head sadly.

"That sounds very heroic and impressive, Lee—but would you or Carl admit that you do not love me and therefore want to go out of my life for even those few days that remain to us? If either of you go, I'll know that it is because you do not love me, you never did love me."

It was an earnest plea on her part, a shrewd plea to save them against themselves for a short time before the inevitable would take them all. The implication of her statement made them pause.

"We both love you, Nita," de Castillon declared earnestly, "and we would both give our lives for you."

ALDRICH came to his feet. He held a slender six-inch scale in his hand.

"There is only one thing to do. Take this scale, Nita, and break it in two so that one piece is shorter than the other. Then let de Castillon and I choose. The one who selects the shortest piece—" He left the rest unsaid.

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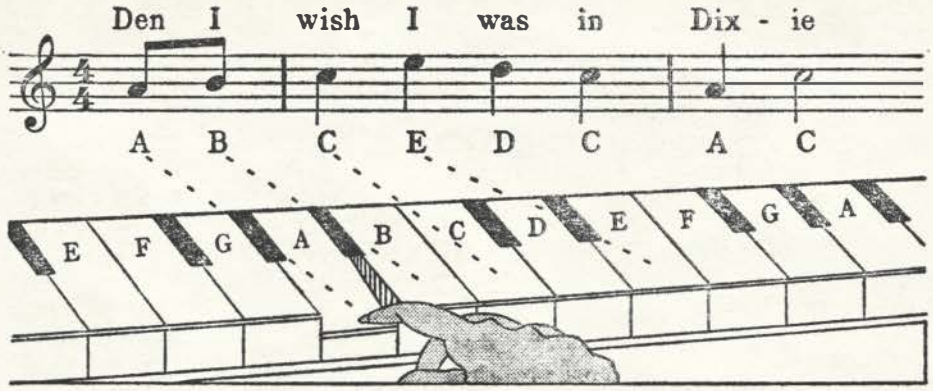

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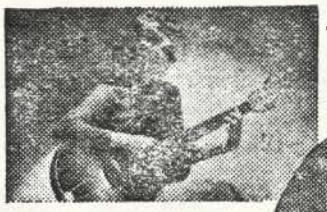

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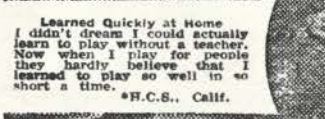

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Nita's hands were trembling when she grasped the scale. She turned her back and the crack of the plastic could be heard through the silence of the ship. When she turned to face the men two even ends were protruding, one from each hand.

"Step up, de Castillon," Aldrich ordered.

"Not I. You're first."

With a snort of impatience, Aldrich reached out his hand blindly toward one of the ends. But Nita drew back, out of reach, compelling Aldrich to follow her. As she held out her hands to him, he caught her eyes. They shifted from his glance to her right hand, followed by the slightest indication of her head to the right, which de Castillon could not have possibly seen, but the significance of which Aldrich caught.

Very deliberately he drew the piece in her left hand!

He could hear the sharp inhalation of her breath, see the hopelessness flooding her brown eyes.

"Take the other, de Castillon," he said, "and we'll compare them."

Aldrich held the shorter piece.

Cheerfully he walked to the cabinet from which the door had been torn and removed a space-suit. He adjusted the radio within the garment and turned it on as he slipped into it. From the speaker in the room his voice came clear and strong:

"You take a record of what I tell you. This is an exploration trip and we don't want to miss any opportunities."

Nita's heart was too full for words. De Castillon helped him toward the air lock, the clumsy space-suit making it almost impossible for Aldrich to walk unassisted.

Somehow the man succeeded in avoiding de Castillon's outstretched hand, nor did he catch Nita's imploring look. Straight into the air lock he walked and stopped directly above the trap door.

"He is magnificent!" de Castillon said in an awed whisper.

"He'll never know how much I love him," the girl sighed.

De Castillon caught her arm.

"Please, Miss Nueville, it is not too late yet. Tell him to let me take his place," he pleaded.

The girl shook her head reluctantly.

"You know Lee as well as I do, Carl. Let us take some measure of comfort in the thought that perhaps he shall not go alone, that his calculations are wrong, and that we shall bear him company in that horrible grey sea. I am wishing that it will be so even if it is cruel for your sake, dear Carl."

De Castillon took her hand. They were out of sight of Aldrich who was visible only through the small window in the bolted air-lock door.

"He is my friend, too, don't forget, Nita," de Castillon pronounced simply, turning on the air compressor.

With a heaviness of spirit far greater than the air pressure experienced by Aldrich, the two watched the needle of the compression dial. When it registered the maximum it was possible to achieve with the pumps, de Castillon shut off the motor. He lifted the radio telephone set and spoke into it:

"Are you ready, Lee?" he asked. "You are sure you want to go through with it?"

"Don't be a damned fool, de Castillon," came the impatient voice of Aldrich from the speaker. "Open the trap-door."

NITA raised her hand toward de Castillon's as if to restrain it from the button, but with a resolute gesture, she drew back and watched with horrible fascination the opening of the door. Slowly Aldrich's feet sank down with the trap until his legs were deep in the grey liquid. The two inside could see the ammonia surge in through the partially open door, rising to Aldrich's waist, to his shoulders and finally enveloping him entirely. But his body remained within the compartment. He bent down and struggled to force the door open against the liquid, but to no avail. Even as they

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watched, they saw him writhe in agony as the pressure of the ammonia began to bear upon him. The air within the chamber had been forced to the ceiling, compressed almost to its liquid state. Still Aldrich struggled against the pressure to open the door, to release the weight of his body from the ship so that those inside might have a chance to live.

"Stop it, Carl, stop it! We can't allow him to remain there! He will be crushed," the girl cried.

De Castillon switched on the compressor. However, instead of the air being forced into the chamber to eject the liquid, the pressure of the ammonia backed the pump and stalled the motor.

"It's no use, Nita, we can't pump the stuff out."

Nita raised the transmitter to her lips.

"Lee, Lee, how can we help you? We want you back!"

Aldrich's voice sounded feeble. It was charged with pain. But it was defiant and unyielding.

"Get away from the window. I can work better without an audience."

He was on the floor of the compartment, his body stretched on the trap door, writhing and struggling to squeeze himself through the narrow opening. Only his legs were outside; there appeared to be scant chance of his being able to leave the ship.

"What can we do?" Nita asked, her eyes heavy with horror.

De Castillon was thinking fast. The air compressor had failed. The ammonia could not be forced from the compartment, but it could be neutralized! It had great affinity for an acid, sulphuric acid of which they had a quantity in the storage batteries that supplied the emergency lighting current. De Castillon spoke into the radio. From Aldrich no word had come; he struggled in silence, the immense pressure devitalizing him almost to the point of helplessness.

"You can't get out, Lee. Therefore we are going to try to bring you back. Pull your legs in."

From the speaker came four words, feeble, yet understandable:

"Go—to—the—devil—"

"Here, Nita," de Castillon called to the girl, "you watch him. If he gets his legs up out of the way, pull the trap-door shut. I'm going for the acid."

HE returned shortly with the electrolyte which he drained into a compressor.

"I'm going to modify this thing so that I can utilize the pressure of the outside ammonia in addition to that supplied by the pump, on the principle of a steam injector, to force the acid into the lock. Keep watching him."

He worked frantically, and when he had almost completed his task, there was a cry from the girl:

"I got it, Carl! His legs are in!"

One quick glance assured de Castillon that she was right. He switched on the compressor motor again and the acid streamed into the compartment. At once the ammonia began to combine with the new chemical, forming a deposit greyish-white crystals on the floor of the chamber.

"Watch the pressure dials, Nita," de Castillon commanded tersely.

One meter registered the pressure inside the air-lock, the other the pressure on the outside of the ship. The violent reaction clouded the ammonia inside the chamber until they could no longer see Aldrich. The pressure needle went up and down. Now the reading was higher than that outside the ship.

"We'll open the blow-out valve to force the ammonia from the lock. This will have to be repeated until enough of the substance is ejected to enable us to use the pumps on the remainder."

The successive action of the acid in first raising the pressure to force out the liquid and in neutralizing the ammonia finally had

(Continued on page 111)

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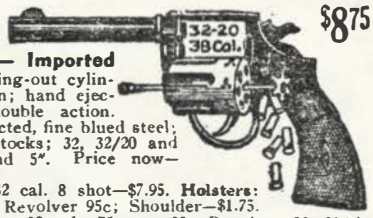

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the desired effect of lowering the pressure in the lock. Quickly de Castillon shut off the acid-injector and turned on the pumps. In a few minutes the chamber was clear of all chemicals except the heavy deposit of ammonia sulphate, like an ancient salt bed, on the floor. By that time Aldrich was unconscious.

They dragged him into the main chamber and stripped him of his suit. Aldrich's body was almost pulpy from the terrific crushing force; his lungs had been deprived of air and it was necessary to restore their functions through artificial respiration by pressure upon ribs that had already been subjected to the pressure of the ammonia.

When his breathing had returned, they covered him with the few garments that had not been jettisoned.

"It will take a little time," de Castillon assured the girl, "but he will come out of it."

"Thank God," she whispered, bending low and kissing Aldrich's cold lips.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGNIFICENT FOOL

ONLY because of his splendid physique did Aldrich recover so rapidly following his terrifying experience in the air-lock. By the following morning, he was not only on his feet, but busily working on an idea that excited him so much that he would neither eat nor sleep until he had fully developed it. Nita and de Castillon sat on the floor beside the table on which Aldrich had spread his sketches and sheets of figures. The two embarked upon a series of chess games which enabled them to endure the uncertainty of their confinement. With the shock of the realization of their situation behind him, they had gradually become accustomed to their new mode of existence. So long as nothing worse happened, they were able to gain some measure of contentment. Even an occasional thought of their now inevitable future hardly provoked more than a momentary recession from their apparent indifference.

"Check!" Nita called to de Castillon, moving her rook.

"Not yet!" Aldrich suddenly injected. "I think that we may win!"

He had risen to his feet with the latest series of figures in his hand.

"That's nice, Lee," Nita drawled in an unconcerned voice. Then to de Castillon: "Another game, Carl?"

"But listen, Nita," Aldrich waved the paper in front of her, "I mean it this time."

"What have you found?" de Castillon asked.

"Simply this—and why none of us has thought of it sooner is hard to understand—we'll fashion a screw propeller, the same as those the early airplanes used, and pull ourselves out of this cursed grey stuff!"

"Very good, Lee," de Castillon approved. "But—" he hesitated.

"I know just what you are going to ask: how am I going to mount the propeller outside of the ship without walking along the outer deck plates. Very simple. We will place the screw in the bow compartment, that little conical cubbyhole just large enough for one of us to crawl into, then when we have it in place, with the shaft projecting through the air-tight bulkhead and fastened to the motor, we'll simply drop off the nose of the ship, exposing the propeller, and be on our way!"

FROM the metal of an after bulkhead, using an atomic torch and tools that they had not thrown overboard, they built the propeller of the size and pitch specified by Aldrichs' calculations. It was not an easy task to bend the stubborn metal into shape. But finally it was finished, and keyed to a steel shaft, it was mounted through a hole in the bulkhead, with an improvised stuffing box installed to prevent leakage.

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The other end was connected to an atomic motor.

A test proved that Aldrich's calculations were correct: there was no question that the propeller and its motor would be capable of pulling the craft to the surface of the liquid atmosphere of the planet when the nose of the ship was removed.

But that was the difficulty. In his haste and concentration on the propeller, Aldrich had given little thought to the matter of severing the metal at the bow. He had assumed that that problem would bear an easy solution.

"There is only one way, Lee," de Castillon said quietly, turning his head from the observation window through which he had been staring with unfocused eyes.

"Well, what is it?" Aldrich snapped.

"You will give me an atomic torch and I will show you. No need of useless, time-wasting explanation. If it doesn't work, there'll be no harm. But I'm quite positive that it will. I've been looking things over in the ship's nose."

Aldrich nodded his head carelessly. De Castillon was an excellent astronomer, but his mechanics were more than a trifle undeveloped. Let him go ahead, though. It would keep his mind occupied and the man out of the way while Aldrich did some real thinking. And it would give Nita hope and perhaps bring some life back into her lack-lustre eyes.

De Castillon connected the torch, and taking tools and materials, entered the conical peak of the ship. Nita and Aldrich watched him, having not the slightest idea of his design until the bulkhead door clanged shut.

"Hey!" Aldrich shouted. "You'll suffocate in there. Open it!"

He tugged on the handle, but it had been securely fastened from the other side. Almost at once came the searing roar of the torch as it bit into the metal of the nose.

"The fool!" Aldrich cried. "The fool!"

NITA'S eyes were full of horror as she began to comprehend the situation.

"But he'll suffocate before he cuts through," she cried.

Aldrich pointed to the cabinet where the space-suits were. One suit was gone.

Tense, helpless, the two stood at the bulkhead, their ears pressed against it, listening to the roar of the torch as it bit through the metal.

Suddenly from the loud speaker came de Castillon's voice:

"A few feet more, friends, and you will be free. And I, too, shall be free. Don't worry about me. No, don't try to answer, for my receiver is out of commission and I can not hear you. Please do not think ill of me, Lee, because I loved Nita. I shall always love her. That is why I chose to do this. I can not live, knowing that I love her so and can not have her. She is yours, Lee —The metal is severed—There it goes!—"

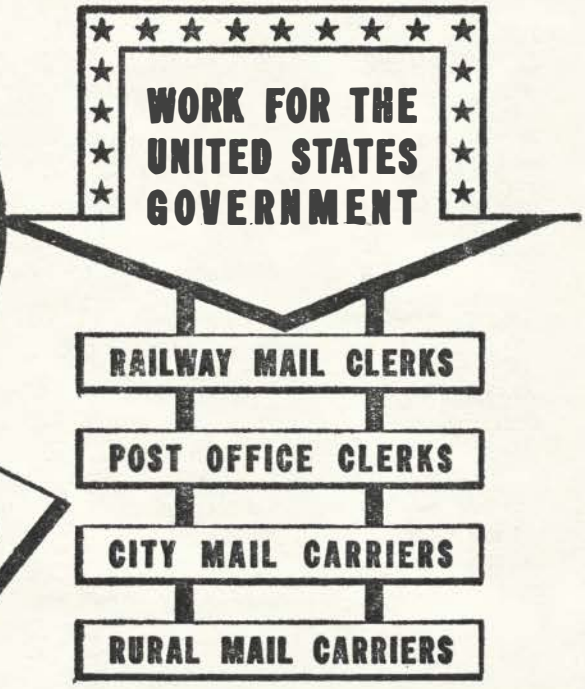
With a scraping sound, the prow of the ship tore away from the hull and washed past the observation window, with de Castillon clinging to it like a drowning sailor to a life raft. But for him it was not life that it symbolized. As he went by, he raised his hand in salute to the girl and the man within and the cone was torn from his grasp, to sail on in the fatal current.

The man's body, horribly distorted and crushed by the pressure of liquid ammonia, soared upward even as the ship, released of its extra burden, rose toward the surface. Feebly over the radio came the last whisps of de Castillon's voice:

"God bless you, Nita—"

Aldrich turned his head away from the girl. The mists through which they floated were lighter by far than that which clouded his eyes. Yes, those outside mists would become even lighter, thanks to the magnificent sacrifice of that poor crushed body destined to float through the vapors of the fatal planet, while he and Nita were beginning their long, hopeful journey earthward.

THE END



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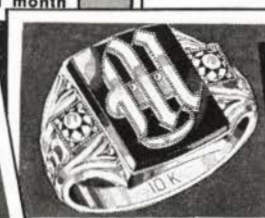

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