

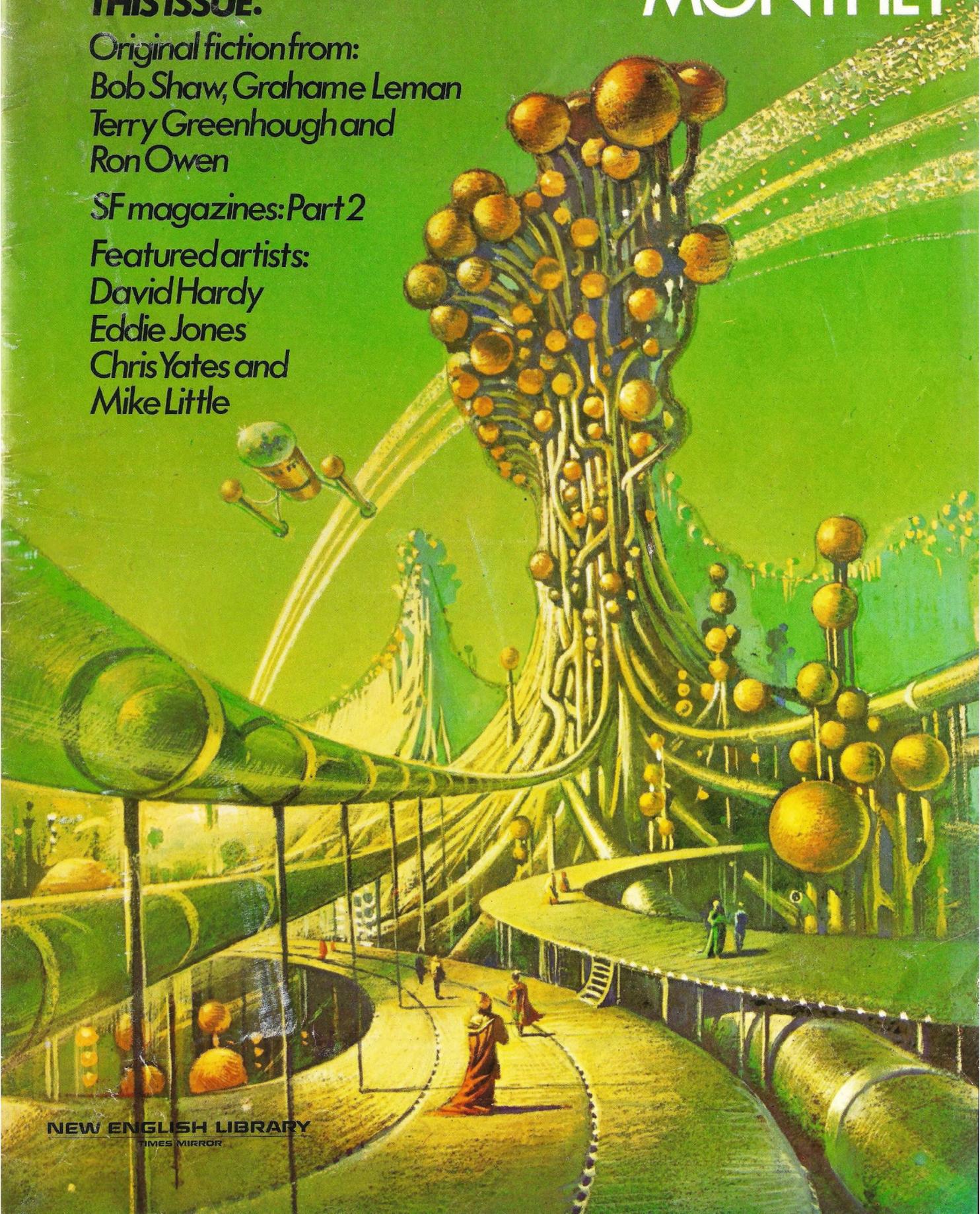
# SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

## **THIS ISSUE:**

Original fiction from:  
Bob Shaw, Grahame Leman  
Terry Greenhough and  
Ron Owen

SF magazines: Part 2

Featured artists:  
David Hardy  
Eddie Jones  
Chris Yates and  
Mike Little



SCIENCE FICTION

NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY





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TIMES MIRROR

## SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

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Cover: 'THE CANOPY OF TIME' painting by Bruce Pennington

Errata: Last month's cover was by Ray Ferbush not, as stated, by Bruce Pennington

## LETTERS

● Have now received the first two copies of *Science Fiction Monthly* - truly a unique publication.

Many congratulations on the format marred only by one fault. Is it really essential for the full-page artwork to be overprinted with the words 'Science Fiction Monthly - New English Library'?

Some of these pictures are suitable for mounting - at least they would have been without the overprinting. Can this be avoided in future issues please?

MD Hamilton (London SW12)

Ed: Sorry, no.

● I am greatly disappointed to see that *Science Fiction Monthly* is on the side of sales promotion rather than a forum for the creative aspects of science fiction.

There are other art forms involved in sf which don't normally reach the public eye due to their uncommercial aspects. I do feel that *Science Fiction Monthly* has not only the potential that could help this

situation but a duty to expose other channels to its readers. Two examples that come to mind are Bruce Lacey, an English sculptor, and Paul Van Hoeydonck, a Dutch one who has a piece of work on the moon, left there by the last landing. I hope you find this point relevant.

Charles Alexander (Bromley)

● I am tremendously impressed by the first couple of issues of your new magazine *Science Fiction Monthly*. I have been waiting for a long time for a worthwhile sf magazine which features not only short sf essays and news but art as well. I was very impressed with the work of Chris Foss in particular as transportation in the future happens to be my own interest.

JC Mulberry (Welling, Kent)

● I think *Science Fiction Monthly* is very good, especially the idea to include some book front designs. At the same time I would like to enquire where the nearest Science Fiction Club or meetings are to me. I live near Eastbourne and would be grateful if you could tell me as I might then be able to join one.

K Graves (Poigate, Sussex)

Ed Can anyone help here?

While the name of Eddie Jones appears as a featured artist in this issue, the Publishers regretfully announce that owing to production difficulties this work has had to be postponed until the next issue.

THE DEAD COP came drifting in towards the Birmingham control zone at a height of some three thousand metres. It was a winter night, and the sub-zero temperatures which prevailed at that altitude had solidified his limbs, encrusted the entire body with black frost. Blood flowing through shattered armour had frozen into the semblance of a crab, with its claws encircling his chest. The body, which was in an upright position, rocked gently on stray currents, performing a strange aerial shuffle. And at its waist a pea-sized crimson light blinked on and off, on and off, its radiance gradually fading under a thickening coat of ice.

Air Police Sergeant Robert Hasson felt more exhausted and edgy than he would have done after an eight-hour crosswind patrol. He had been in the headquarters block since lunchtime, dictating and signing reports, completing forms, trying to wrest from the cashier's office the expenses which had been due to him two months earlier. And then, just as he was about to go home in disgust, he had been summoned to Captain Nunn's office for yet another confrontation over the Wellwyn Angels case. The four on remand - Joe Sullivan, Flick Bugatti, Denny Johnston and Toddy Thoms - were sitting together at one side of the office, still in their flying gear.

'I'll tell you what disturbs me most about this whole affair,' Bunny Ormerod, the senior barrister, was saying with practised concern. 'It is the utter indifference of the police. It is the callousness with which the tragic death of a child is accepted by the arresting officers.' Ormerod moved closer to the four Angels, protectively, identifying with them. 'One would think it was an everyday occurrence.'

Hasson shrugged. 'It is, practically.'

Ormerod allowed his jaw to sag, and he turned so that the brooch recorder on his silk blouse was pointing straight at Hasson. 'Would you care to repeat that statement?'

Hasson stared directly into the recorder's watchful iris. 'Practically every day, or every night, some moron straps on a CG harness, goes flying around at five or six hundred kilometres an hour, thinking he's Superman, and runs into a pylon or a towerblock. And you're dead right - I don't give a damn when they smear themselves over the sides of buildings.' Hasson could see Nunn becoming agitated behind his expanse of desk, but he pressed on doggedly. 'It's only when they smash into other people that I get worked up. And then I go after them.'

'You hunt them down.'

'That's what I do.'

'The way you hunted down these children.'

Hasson examined the Angels coldly. 'I don't see any children. The youngest in that gang is sixteen.'

Ormerod directed a compassionate smile towards the four black-clad Angels. 'We live in a complex and difficult world, Sergeant. Sixteen years isn't a very long time for a youngster to get to know his way around it.'

'Hell,' Hasson commented. He looked at the Angels again and pointed at a heavy-set, bearded youth who was sitting behind the others. 'You - Toddy - come over here.'

Toddy's eyes shuttled briefly. 'What for?'

'I want to show Mr Ormerod your badges.'

'Naw. Don't want to,' Toddy said smugly. 'Sides, I like it better over here.'

Hasson sighed, walked to the group, caught hold of Toddy's lapel and walked back to Ormerod as if he was holding nothing but the piece of simulated leather. Behind him he heard frantic swearing and the sound of chairs falling over as Toddy was dragged through the protective screen of his companions. The opportunity to express his feelings in action, no matter how limited, gave Hasson a therapeutic satisfaction.

Nunn half rose to his feet. 'What do you think you're doing, Sergeant?'

Hasson ignored him, addressing himself to Ormerod. 'See this badge? The big 'F' with wings on it? Do you know what it means?'

'I'm more interested in what your extraordinary behaviour means.' One of Ormerod's hands was purposely, but with every appearance of accident, blocking his recorder's field of view. Hasson knew this was because of recent legislation under which the courts refused to consider any recorded evidence unless the entire spool was presented - and Ormerod did not want a shot of the badge.

'Have a look at it.' Hasson repeated his description of the badge for the benefit of the soundtrack. 'It means that this quote child unquote has had sexual intercourse in free fall. And he's proud of it. Aren't you, Toddy?'

'Mister Ormerod?' Toddy's eyes were fixed pleadingly on the barrister's face.

'For your own good, Sergeant, I think you should let go of my client,' Ormerod said. His slim hand was still hovering in front of the recorder.

'Certainly.' Hasson snatched the recorder, plucking a hole in Ormerod's blouse as he did so, and held the little instrument in front of the Angel's array of badges. After a moment he pushed Toddy away from him and gave the recorder back to Ormerod with a flourish of mock-courtesy.

'That was a mistake, Hasson.' Ormerod's aristocratic features had begun to show genuine anger. 'You've made it obvious that you are taking part in a personal vendetta against my client.'

Hasson laughed. 'Toddy isn't your client. You were hired by Joe Sullivan's

old man to get him out from under a manslaughter charge, and big simple Toddy just happens to be in the same bag.'

Joe Sullivan, sitting in the centre of the other three Angels, opened his mouth to retort, but changed his mind. He appeared to have been better rehearsed than his companions.

'That's right,' Hasson said to him. 'Remember what you were told, Joe - let the hired mouth do all the talking.' Sullivan shifted resentfully, staring down at his blue-knuckled hands, and remained silent.

'It's obvious we aren't achieving anything,' Ormerod said to Nunn. 'I'm going to hold a private conference with my clients.'

'Do that,' Hasson put in. 'Tell them to peel off those badges, won't you? Next time I might pick out an even better one.' He waited impassively while Ormerod and two policemen ushered the four Angels out of the room.

'I don't understand you,' Nunn said as soon as they were alone. 'Exactly what did you think you were doing just now? That boy has only to testify that you manhandled him...'

'That boy, as you call him, knows where we could find the Fireman. They all do.'

'You're being too hard on them.'

'You aren't.' Hasson knew at once that he had gone too far, but he was too obstinate to begin retracting the words.

'What do you mean?' Nunn's mouth compressed, making him look womanly but nonetheless dangerous.

'Why do I have to talk to that load of scruff up here in your office? What's wrong with the interview rooms downstairs? Or are they only for thugs who haven't got Sullivan money behind them?'

'Are you saying I've taken Sullivan's money?'

Hasson thought for a moment. 'I don't believe you'd do that, but you let it make a difference. I tell you those four have flown with the Fireman. If I could be left alone for half an hour with any one of them I'd...'

'You'd get yourself put away. You don't seem to understand the way things are, Hasson. You're a skycop - and that means the public doesn't want you about. A hundred years ago motorists disliked traffic cops for making them obey a few commonsense rules; now everybody can fly, better than the birds, and they find this same breed of cop up there with them, spoiling it for them, and they hate you.'

'I'm not worried.'

# WARRIOR

'I don't think you're worried about police work either, Hasson. Not really. I'd say you're hooked on cloud-running every bit as much as this mythical Fireman, but you want to play a different game.'

Hasson became anxious, aware that Nunn was leading up to something important. 'The Fireman is real - I've seen him.'

'Whether he is or not, I'm grounding you.'

'You can't do that, Hasson blurted instinctively.'

Nunn looked interested. 'Why not?'

'Because . . .' Hasson was striving for the right words, any words, when the communicator sphere on Nunn's desk lit up redly, signalling a top priority message.

'Go ahead,' Nunn said to the sphere.

'Sir, we're picking up an automatic distress call,' it replied with a male voice. 'Somebody drifting out of control at three thousand metres. We think it must be Inglis.'

'Dead?'

'We've interrogated his commpack, sir. No response.'

'I see. Wait till the rush hour is over and send somebody up for him. I'll want a full report.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I'm going up for him now,' Hasson said, moving towards the door.

'You can't go through the traffic streams at this hour.' Nunn got to his feet and came around the desk. 'And you're grounded. I mean that, Hasson.'

Hasson paused, knowing that he had already stretched to the limit the special indulgence granted to members of the Air Patrol. 'If that's Lloyd Inglis up there, I'm going up to get him right now. And if he's dead, I'm grounding myself. Permanently. Okay?'

Nunn shook his head uncertainly. 'Do you want to kill yourself?'

'Perhaps.' Hasson closed the door and ran towards the tackle room.

He lifted off from the roof of the police headquarters into a sky which was ablaze with converging rivers of fire. Work-weary commuters pouring up from the south represented most of the traffic, but there were lesser tributaries flowing from many points of the compass into the vast aerial whirlpool of the Birmingham control zone. The shoulder-lights and ankle-lights of thousands upon thousands of fliers shifted and shimmered, changes of parallax causing spurious waves to progress and regress along the glowing streams. Vertical columns of brilliance kept the opposing elements apart, creating an appearance

of strict order. Hasson knew, however, that the appearance was to some extent deceptive. People who were in a hurry tended to switch off their lights to avoid detection and fly straight to where they were going, regardless of the air corridors. The chances of colliding with another illegal traveller were vanishingly small, they told themselves, but it was not only occasional salesmen late for appointments who flew wild. There were the drunks and the druggies, the antisocial, the careless, the suicidal, the thrill-seekers, the criminal - a whole spectrum of types who were unready for the responsibilities of personal flight, in whose hands a counter-gravity harness could become an instrument of death.

Hasson set his police flare units at maximum intensity. He climbed cautiously, dye gun at the ready, until the lights of the city were spread out below him in endless glowing geometries. When the information display projected onto the inner surface of his visor told him he was at a height of two hundred metres he began paying particular attention to his radar. This was the altitude at which rogue fliers were most numerous. He continued rising steadily, controlling the unease which was a normal reaction to being suspended in a darkness from which, at any moment, other beings could come hurtling towards him at lethal velocity. The aerial river of travellers was now visible as separate laminae, uppermost levels moving fastest, which slipped over each other like luminous gauze.

A further eight hundred metres and Hasson began to relax slightly. He was turning his attention to the problem of homing in on Inglis when his proximity alarm sounded and the helmet radar flashed a bearing. Hasson twisted to face the indicated direction. The figure of a man flying without lights, angled for maximum speed, materialised in the light of Hasson's flare units. Veteran of a thousand such encounters, Hasson had time to calculate a miss distance of about ten metres. Within the fraction of a second available to him, he aimed his gun and fired off a cloud of indelible dye. The other man passed through it - glimpse of pale, elated face and dark unseeing eyes - and was gone in a noisy flurry of turbulence. Hasson called HQ and gave details of the incident, adding his opinion that the rogue flier was also guilty of drug abuse. With upwards of a million people airborne in the sector at that very moment it was unlikely that the offender would ever be caught, but his flying clothes and equipment had been permanently branded and would have to be replaced at considerable expense.

At three thousand metres Hasson switched to height maintenance power, took a direction-finder reading on Inglis's beacon and began a slow horizontal cruise, eyes probing the darkness ahead. His flares illuminated a thickening mist, placing him at the centre of a sphere of foggy radiance and making it difficult to see anything beyond. This was close to the limit for personal flying without special heaters and Hasson became aware of the cold which was pressing in on him, searching for a weakness in his defences. The traffic streams far below looked warm and safe.

A few minutes later Hasson's radar picked up an object straight ahead. He drew closer until, by flarelight, he could make out the figure of Lloyd Inglis performing its grotesque shuffle through the currents of dark air. Hasson knew at once that his friend was dead but he circled the body, keeping just outside field interference distance, until he could see the gaping hole in Inglis's chest plate. The wound looked as though it had been inflicted by a lance . . .

A week earlier Hasson and Inglis had been on routine patrol over Bedford when they had detected a pack of about eight flying without lights. Inglis had loosed off a miniflare which burst just beyond the group, throwing them briefly into silhouette, and both men had glimpsed the slim outline of a lance. The transportation of any solid object by a person using a CG harness was illegal, because of the danger to other air travellers and people on the ground, and the carrying of weapons was rare even among rogue fliers. It seemed likely that they had chanced on the Fireman. Spreading their nets and snares, Hasson and Inglis had flown in pursuit. During the subsequent low-level chase two people had died - one of them a young woman, also flying without lights, who had strayed into a head-on collision with one of the gang. The other had been a pack leader who had almost cut himself in two on a radio mast. At the end of it, all the two policemen had had to show for their efforts had been four unimportant members of the Wellwyn Angels. The Fireman, the lance-carrier, had got away to brood about the incident, safe in his anonymity.

Now, as he studied the frozen body of his former partner, Hasson understood that the Fireman had been inspired to revenge. His targets would have been identified for him in the news coverage given to the arrest of Joe Sullivan. Swearing in his bitterness and grief, Hasson tilted his body, creating a horizontal component in the lift force exerted by his CG harness. He swooped in on the rigid corpse, locked his arms around it and, immediately, both bodies began to drop as their counter-gravity fields cancelled each other out. No stranger to free fall, Hasson efficiently attached a line to an eye on Inglis's belt and pushed the dead man away from him. As the two separated to beyond field interference distance the upward rush of air around them gradually ceased. Hasson checked his data display and saw that he had fallen little more than a hundred metres. He paid the line out from a dispenser at his waist until Inglis's body was at a convenient towing distance, then he flew west, aiming for a point at which it would be safe to descend through the commuter levels. Far beneath him the traffic of the Birmingham control zone swirled like a golden galaxy, but Hasson - at the centre of his own spherical universe of white misty light - was isolated from it, cocooned in his own thoughts.



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Lloyd Inglis - the beer-drinking, book-loving spendthrift - was dead. And before him there had been Singleton, Larmor and McMeekin. Half of Hasson's original squad of seven years ago had died in the course of duty . . . and for what? It was impossible to police a human race which had been given its three-dimensional freedom with the advent of the CG harness. Putting a judo hold on gravity, turning the Earth's own attractive force back against itself, had proved to be the only way to fly. It was easy, inexpensive, exhilarating - and impossible to regulate. There were eighty million personal fliers in Britain alone, each one a superman impatient of any curb on his ability to follow the sunset around the curve of the world. Aircraft had vanished from the skies almost overnight, not because the cargo-carrying ability was no longer needed, but because it was too dangerous to fly them in a medium which was crowded with aerial jaywalkers. The nocturnal rogue flier, the dark Icarus, was the folk hero of the age. What, Hasson asked himself, was the point in being a skycop? Perhaps the whole concept of policing, of being responsible for others, was no longer valid. Perhaps the inevitable price of freedom was a slow rain of broken bodies drifting to Earth as their powerpacks faded and . . .

The attack took Hasson by surprise. It came so quickly that the proximity alarm and the howling of air displaced by the attacker's body were virtually simultaneous. Hasson turned, saw the black lance, jack-knifed to escape it, received a ferocious glancing blow, and was sent spinning - all in the space of a second. The drop caused by the momentary field interference had been negligible. He switched off his flares and flight lights in a reflexive action and struggled to free his arms from the towline which was being lapped around him by his own rotation. When he had managed to stabilise himself he remained perfectly still and tried to assess the situation. His right hip was throbbing painfully from the impact, but as far as he could tell no bones had been broken. He wondered if his attacker was going to be content with having made a single devastating pass, or if this was the beginning of a duel.

'You were quick, Hasson,' a voice called from the darkness. 'Quicker than your wingman. But it won't do you any good.'

'Who are you?' Hasson shouted as he looked for a radar bearing.

'You know who I am. I'm the Fireman.'

'That's a song,' Hasson kept his voice steady as he began spreading his snares and nets. 'What's your real name? The one your area psychiatrist has on his books?'

The darkness laughed. 'Very good, Sergeant Hasson. Playing for time and trying to goad me and learn my name all at once.'

'I don't need to play for time - I've already broadcast a QRF.'

'By the time anybody gets here you'll be dead, Hasson.'

'Why should I be? Why do you want to do this?'

'Why do you hunt my friends and ground them?'

'They're a menace to themselves and to everybody else.'

'Only when you make them fly wild. You're kidding yourself, Hasson. You're a skycop and you like hounding people to death. I'm going to ground you for good - and those nets won't help you.'

Hasson stared vainly in the direction of the voice. 'Nets?'

There was another laugh and the Fireman began to sing. 'I can see you in the dark, 'cause I'm the Fireman; I can fly with you and you don't even know I'm there.' The familiar words were growing louder as their source drew near, and abruptly Hasson made out the shape of a big man illuminated by the traffic streams below and by starlight from above. He looked fearsome and inhuman in his flying gear.

Hasson yearned for the firearm which was denied to him by British police tradition, and then he noticed something. 'Where's the lance?'

'Who needs it? I let it go.' The Fireman spread his arms and - even in the dimness, even with the lack of spatial reference points - it became apparent that he was a giant, a man who had no need of weapons other than those which nature had built into him.

Hasson thought of the heavy lance plummeting down into a crowded suburb three thousand metres below and a cryogenic haired stole through him, reconciling him to the forthcoming struggle, regardless of its outcome. As the Fireman came closer, Hasson whirled a net in slow circles, tilting his harness to counteract the spin the net tried to impart to him. He raised his legs in readiness to kick, and at the same time finished straightening out the towline which made Inglis's body a ghastly spectator to the event. He felt nervous and keyed up, but not particularly afraid now that the Fireman had discarded his lance. Aerial combat was not a matter of instinct; it was something which had to be learned and practised, and therefore the professional always had the edge on the amateur, no matter how gifted or strongly motivated the latter might be. For example, the Fireman had made a serious mistake in allowing Hasson to get his legs fully drawn up into the position from which the power of his thighs could be released in an explosive kick.

Unaware of his blunder, the Fireman edged in slowly, vectoring the lift of his harness with barely perceptible shoulder movements. *He's a good flier*, Hasson thought, *even if he isn't so good on combat theory and . . .*

The Fireman came in fast - but not nearly as fast as he should have done. Hasson experienced something like a sense of luxury as he found himself with time to place his kick exactly where he wanted it. He chose the vulnerable point just below the visor, compensated for the abrupt drop which occurred as both CG fields cancelled out, and unleashed enough energy to snap a man's neck. Somehow the Fireman got his head out of the way in time and caught hold of Hasson's outstretched leg. Both men were falling now, but at an unequal rate

because Hasson was tethered to Inglis whose CG field was too far away to have been cancelled. In the second before they parted, the Fireman applied the leverage of his massive arms and broke Hasson's leg sideways at the knee.

Pain and shock obliterated Hasson's mind, gutting him of all strength and resolve. He floated in the blackness for an indeterminate period, arms moving uncertainly, face contorted in a silent scream. The great spiral nebula far below continued to spin, but a dark shape was moving steadily across it, and part of Hasson's mind informed him that there was not time for indulgence in natural reactions to injury. He was hopelessly outclassed on the physical level, and if life were to continue it would only be through the exercise of intelligence. But how was he to think when pain had invaded his body like an army and was firing mortar shells of agony straight into his brain?

For a start, Hasson told himself, *you have to get rid of Lloyd Inglis*. He began reeling in his comrade's body with the intention of unhooking it, but almost immediately the Fireman spoke from close behind him.

'How did you like it, Hasson?' The voice was triumphant. 'That was to show you I can beat you at your own game. Now we're going to play my game.'

Hasson tried drawing the line in faster. Inglis's body bobbed closer and finally came within interference radius. Hasson and Inglis began to fall. The Fireman dived in on them on the instant, hooked an arm around Hasson's body, and all three dropped together. The whirlpool of fire began to expand beneath them.

'This is my game,' the Fireman sang through the gathering slipstream. 'I can ride you all the way to the ground, 'cause I'm the Fireman.'

Hasson, knowing the tactics of aerial chicken, shut out the pain from his trailing leg, reached for his master switch, but hesitated without throwing it. In two-man chicken the extinguishing of one CG field restored the other one to its normal efficacy, causing a fierce differential which tended to drag one opponent vertically away from the other. The standard counter-move was for the second man to kill his own field at the same time so that both bodies would continue to plunge downwards together until somebody's nerve broke and forced him to reactivate his harness. In the present game of death, however, the situation was complicated by the presence of Inglis, the silent partner who had already lost. His field would continue negating those of the other two, regardless of what they did, unless . . .

Hasson freed an arm from the Fireman's mock-sexual embrace and pulled Inglis's body in close. He groped for the dead man's master switch but found only a smooth plaque of frozen blood. The jewelled horizons were rising rapidly on all sides now, and the circling traffic stream was opening like a carnivorous flower. Air rushed by at terminal velocity, deafeningly. Hasson fought to break the icy casting away from the switch on Inglis's harness, but at that moment the Fireman slid an arm around his neck and pulled his head back.

'Don't try to get away from me,' he shouted into Hasson's ear. 'Don't try to chicken out - I want to see how well you bounce.'

They continued to fall.

Hasson, encumbered by his nets, felt for the buckle of the belt which held, among other things, the towline dispenser. He fumbled it open with numb fingers and was about to release Inglis's body when it occurred to him he would gain very little in doing so. An experienced chicken player always delayed breaking out of field interference until the last possible instant, leaving it so late that even with his harness set at maximum lift he hit the ground at the highest speed he could withstand. The Fireman probably intended going to the limit this time, leaving Hasson too disabled to prevent himself being smashed on impact. Getting rid of Inglis's body would not change that.

They had dropped almost two thousand metres and in just a few seconds would be penetrating the crowded commuter levels. The Fireman began to whoop with excitement, grinding himself against Hasson like a rutting dog. Holding Inglis with his left hand, Hasson used his right to loop the plasteel towline around the Fireman's upraised thigh and to pull it into a hard knot. He was still tightening the knot as they bombed down into the traffic flow. Lights flashed past nearby and suddenly the slow-spinning galaxy was above them. Patterns of street lamps blossomed beneath, with moving ground cars clearly visible. This, Hasson knew, was close to the moment at which the Fireman had to break free if he was to shed enough downward velocity before reaching ground level.

'Thanks for the ride,' the Fireman shouted, his voice ripping away in the slipstream. 'Got to leave you soon.'

Hasson switched on his flares and then jerked the towline violently, bringing it to the Fireman's attention. The Fireman looked at the loop around his thigh. His body convulsed with shock as he made the discovery that it was he and not Hasson who was linked to the dead and deadly skycop. He pushed Hasson away and began clawing at the line. Hasson swam free in the wind, knowing that the line would resist even the Fireman's giant strength. As he felt his CG field spread its invisible wings he turned to look back. He saw the two bodies, one of them struggling frantically, pass beyond the range of his flares on their way to a lethal impact with the ground.

Hasson had no time to waste in introspection - his own crash landing was about to occur and it would require all his skill and experience to get him through it alive - but he was relieved to find that he could derive no satisfaction from the Fireman's death. Nunn and the others were wrong about him.

Even so, he thought, during the final hurtling seconds, *I've hunted like a hawk for far too long. This is my last flight.*

He prepared himself, unafraid, for the earth's blind embrace.

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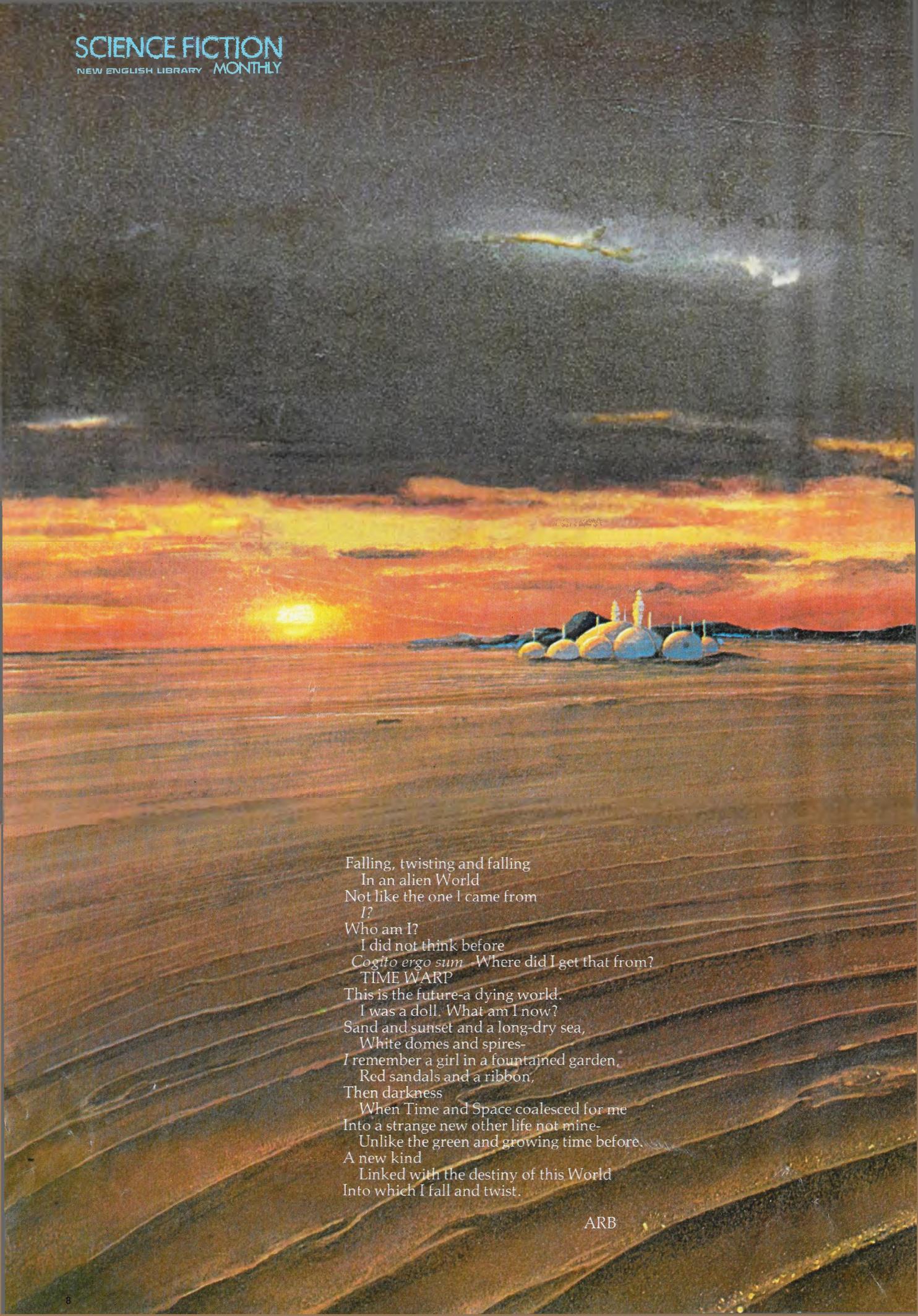


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HARDY





Falling, twisting and falling  
In an alien World  
Not like the one I came from  
I?  
Who am I?  
I did not think before  
*Cogito ergo sum* - Where did I get that from?  
TIME WARP  
This is the future-a dying world.  
I was a doll. What am I now?  
Sand and sunset and a long-dry sea,  
White domes and spires-  
I remember a girl in a fountained garden,  
Red sandals and a ribbon,  
Then darkness  
When Time and Space coalesced for me  
Into a strange new other life not mine-  
Unlike the green and growing time before.  
A new kind  
Linked with the destiny of this World  
Into which I fall and twist.

ARB

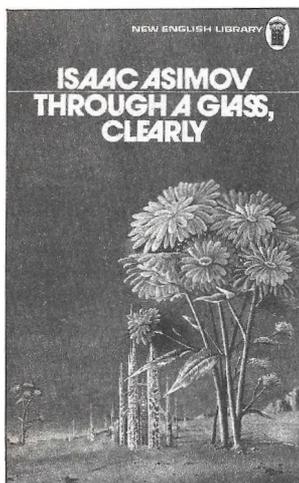
# NEWS

By AUNE R BUTT

British sf fans will be pleased to hear that Isaac Asimov is at last coming to this country for a long-overdue visit. He is being sponsored for a lecture tour by the British Mensa Society (for those with an IQ of 148+), of which he is a member, and will be arriving in early June for a three-week stay. This will be his first ever visit to England, and indeed, only the second time he has travelled outside the USA. Apparently he suffers from a fear of flying, so he plans to cross the Atlantic in the QE2. As well as lecturing to the Mensa Society it is hoped that Asimov will talk to sf clubs and organisations, including the British Science Fiction Foundation. After touring this country, visits to Paris and Scandinavia are also scheduled.

Isaac Asimov is noted for being an extremely prolific writer of sf. Three or four novels a year is his normal output – a trend which will hopefully continue for some time yet. As the creator of the 'three laws of robotics' in his novels *I, Robot* and *The Rest of the Robots* he is justly one of the foremost writers in the sf field. Other novels such as *Pirates of the Asteroids*, *Space Ranger* and *The Asimov Mysteries* also continue to be unfailingly popular.

On behalf of sf fans throughout the country, SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY would like to extend a cordial welcome to Isaac Asimov, and wish him a successful and pleasant visit to England, the first, we hope, of many others.



"Through a Glass, Clearly" by Isaac Asimov. Painting by Ray Feibush

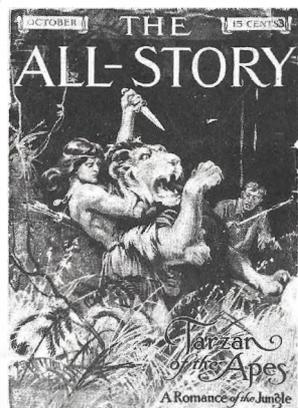
**EUROCON 2** There had been some doubt that the Second European Science Fiction Convention would be held at all this year since the meeting scheduled in Brussels was cancelled. However a new rendezvous has been announced, and Eurocon 2 is now to be held in July at Grenoble, France.

**HAWKWIND**, the rock group who specialise in science fiction themes are currently on another tour of the USA which they are calling *Into Space*. We hope they have a soft landing!

Science fantasy fans who enjoy the numerous works of Edgar Rice Burroughs will be aware that 1975 is the centenary of his birth in Chicago on 1 September 1875. To commemorate this the US Mint



Edgar Rice Burroughs



Cover of "All-Story" magazine, October 1912, first publication of "Tarzan"

is issuing a special Centenary stamp, to honour the memory of one of the most popular fiction writers of early this century. In connection with Edgar Rice Burroughs' Centenary, Warner Brothers and ERB Inc are to collaborate on a new film of *Tarzan of the Apes*. Also a *Tarzan Rock Musical* is in the planning stage, as well as a statue of *Tarzan* which is to be put up by *Tarzana Chamber of Commerce*. The original artist of the comic-book *Tarzan* strips, Burne Hogarth, is doing a new series of illustrations, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, which will be coming out in the Autumn of 1974.

## FILMS

Fox/Rank are bringing out a new film *Zardoz* in which Sean Connery of erstwhile James Bond fame is playing the part of 'Zed the Exterminator'. This film is described as a futuristic adventure story. Need we say more?

Paramount's new science fiction film is *Phase 4*, starring Nigel Davenport, Michael Murphy and Lynne Frederick. The action is centred on a battle for survival between intelligent ants and two

scientists and a girl who are trapped on a desert research station.

*The Day of the Dolphin*, put out by Avco Embassy, should now be doing the rounds in the provinces. This film, starring George C Scott, is set on a Bahamas Island, where scientists set up a secret laboratory in order to train intelligent dolphins. They actually succeed in teaching one dolphin to speak English, but then a plot is started to use the dolphin to help blow up the president and start a war. Rather than allow it to be used for such a purpose, the trainers destroy the laboratory and free the talking dolphin.

## BOOKS

*The Van Vogt Omnibus III* by AE Van Vogt. Published by Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.25. This Omnibus contains three novels by AE Van Vogt, *The Universe Maker*, *The Changeling* and *More than Superhuman*. In *The Universe Maker* Morton Cargill is condemned by the mysterious Inter-Time Society for Psychological Adjustments because he accidentally killed a girl in a car crash. He escapes their execution chamber to find himself in the far future where he is hunted by three conflicting societies, The Floaters, The Tweeners and the Shadow Men. *The Changeling* is about a man, Lesley Craig, who wakes up one morning to find himself looking, acting and even thinking like someone else. Apparently there is not a thing he can do about it. . . . . *More than Superhuman* – A lone scientist working against time to speed evolution so that man will have one desperate chance against the conquerors from space. . . . A man and woman attempting to retain their humanity in a world where the war between the sexes has become a struggle to the death. A future civilization that commands its citizens to be happy or be destroyed. A desperate plan of rebellion against the all-powerful dictatorship which has taken over Earth – all these elements combined in one brilliant novel.

*Hook No 1 – Whirlpool of Stars* by Tully Zetford. Published by New English Library, 30p. The first of a new series about a space superhero, Ryder Hook, who undergoes experimental surgery which replaces some of his bodily atoms by ones of light metal. His molecules are similarly treated so that the strength of his muscles and the loadbearing capacity of his skeleton are increased. Unfortunately the experiments do not turn out as planned and Hook finds himself alone in the galaxy and on the run from RCI – Rocket Consortium Interstellar – the company which had been using him in its anti-gravity experiments. Hook is travelling in a spaceship en route for the planet Coldharbour when an accident occurs and he and a lovely girl land on the planet Lerdun. Hook becomes involved with a conglomerate planetary manager who employs him to kill his rival in business.

*Hook No 2 – Boosted Men* by Tully Zetford. Published by New English Library, 30p. Ryder Hook lands on a new planet and becomes immediately aware of the presence of Boosted Men, the successful results of RCI's experiments. He discovers that they are on the planet for the sole purpose of creating more and

more Boosted Men. Hook, who reckons he has a grudge against RCI to settle, prepares to do whatever he can to destroy their work.

*Corgi SF Collectors Library – The Shape of Things to Come* by HG Wells. Published by Corgi, 75p. This is HG Wells' look at the future, from 1929 - 2105. In it he prophesies the world of the future, including wars, technological advances and the growth of society. This is a Wells classic which has already been made into a film.

*The Shape of Further Things* by Brian Aldiss. Published by Corgi, 35p. A critical appraisal of the way sf has evolved and the part it plays in society today. It is an intelligent and credible glimpse into how futuristic sf is rapidly becoming science fact.

*Star Trek 10* by James Blish. Published by Corgi, 35p. The US starship *Enterprise* hurtles through uncharted light-years of space, with a ravaging and murderous monster aboard whose only instinct is to destroy. Captain Kirk discovers a lovely creature with strange powers of healing, and Spock risks insanity when he views the forbidden Kolloos.

*Nine Princes in Amber* by Roger Zelazny. Published by Corgi, 35p. This is light science fantasy, the first of a trilogy by Roger Zelazny. Corwin of Amber is inheritor of the kingdom of Amber the Beautiful, the perfect pattern of civilization sought after in all men's dreams.

*The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge* by Harry Harrison. Published by Sphere, 40p. No 2 in the series about an irreverent super-hero, Jim diGritz, who goes on inter-galactic missions.

*The Best of Fritz Leiber* edited by Angus Wells. Published by Sphere. A collection of representative stories by the great authors of sf in Sphere's series, chosen and collected in collaboration with the author.

*The Best of AE Van Vogt* edited by Angus Wells. Published by Sphere.

*The World's Best SF 2* edited by Donald Wollheim and Terry Carr. Published by Sphere. A collection of the best in modern sf writing.

*Simon Rack 1 – The Earth Lies Sleeping* by Laurence James. Published by Sphere, 35p. The first in a series, with a Star Trek type hero from the Inter-Galactic Security Service whose job it is to track down evil in space.

*The Fall of the Towers* by Samuel R Delany. Published by Sphere, 50p. A new edition of one of this author's most popular novels.

*Death World I, II & III* by Harry Harrison. Published by Sphere, 30p each. New editions of the adventures of Jason diAlt who fights and learns about the destructive, anti-life forces on different planets.

*Inverted World* by Christopher Priest. Published by Faber & Faber. When Helward Mann leaves the city of Earth, he has no reason to believe that the world that lies beyond the walls could be anywhere but his own planet. Indeed, despite similarities, there is evidence – which he cannot ignore – that slowly betrays all his preconceptions.

# TURNING POINT TUESDAY MORNING

By Grahame Leman

**BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, am Tuesday.** Mrs Judy Garland Murphy empties the family pisspot into the sink and puts her lace curtains and the family smalls in to soak. While she is doing this, the buzzer on her fuse box alerts her to the fact that the electricity and water are on for the morning ration hour of charge and tanking, and she scurries about the house to check her water meter and the level and specific gravity of her secondary cell battery. There is some water and a good charge on, as her husband has been working two shifts on the trot and the two boys are out to camp with the Soil Reconstitution Corps of the US Army Engineers: so she decides to filter some water for drinking and treat herself to some radio newsak; she fits the activated carbon filter to the tap and allows a small trickle to flow into the water crock, switches on the radio and shucks on her headband and earphone.

**NEW YORK CITY, am Tuesday.** Angela Davis Strachowska, PhD, high yaller news 'n' continuity speakerine at the public service radio station, makes like a girl frowing up at the engineer in his glass box, checks that her script is in right reading order while the second hand of the studio clock moves in small pounces towards 1100 hours, and finally begins to read at dictation speed:

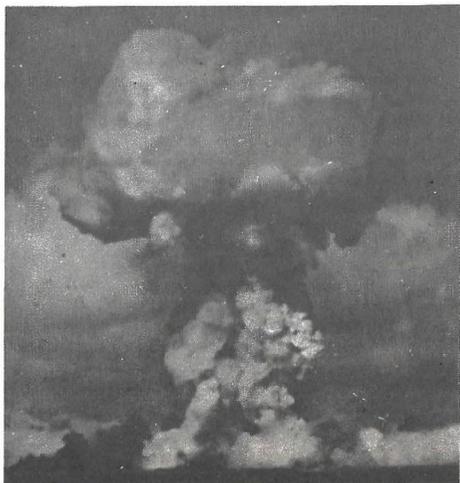
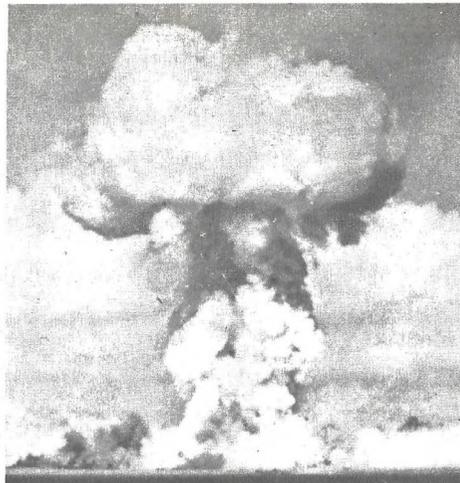
'According to an unattributable official leak from the White House, still operative as we go on the air, President Fink is meeting with his first string think tankers today to finalise plans for a further leap forward in economic growth. Secretary of Defence McNimble has requested three further divisions of Soviet Internal security troops to help maintain public order and the rule of law in Canada and in European countries bordering oil-bearing areas of the North Sea. There are unconfirmed reports of serious rioting near Galveston, Texas, where drunken Chinese and North Vietnamese troops guarding the giant Shesso fast breeder reactor complex have been attacked by the local Caucasian population. Miss Jane Fonda is 102 today, keep pitching Jane ...'

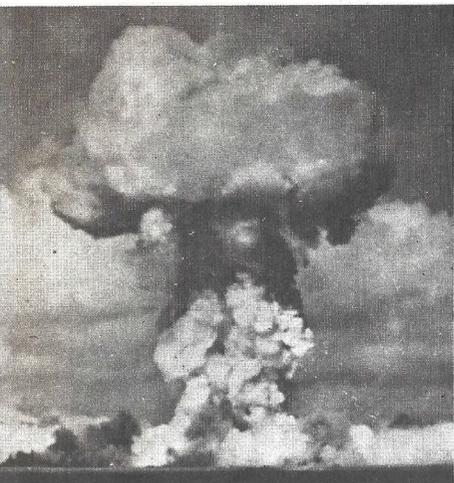
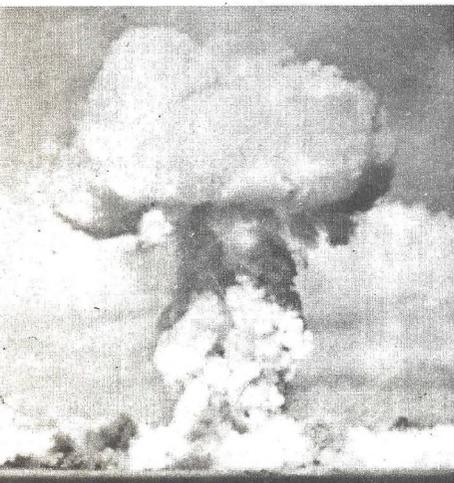
**WASHINGTON DC, am Tuesday.** The incoming British Ambassador removes his bicycle clips, boots, and hand knitted socks, and begins to soak his feet; after a few pensive moments, he remembers to remove his upper and lower dentures and set them to soak in a glass of imported potato jack on the real antique orange crate at his elegant elbow. Cleared for action, he tips back his toupee to signal to his bright young man (age 54) that he is ready for his morning briefing on the current political situation in Washington.

'John Wayne Fink second, Sir, is a historic figure: the first illiterate President of the US. Of course, since educational expenditure reached 34 per cent of the GNP, and the concurrent introduction of universal postgraduate education for all, the illiteracy rate has reached 91 per cent and is still climbing, so he has a big constituency in the country.'

'What sort of man is he?'

'Narrow, I'm afraid. You know, he was never meant to be President, only Vice, as a folksy draw on the ticket. But then there was that trouble with faulty water filters in the White House, and Fink took over. He's never been outside the Union, and





not much outside Durham North Carolina: he was head of the English Department at the tobacco university there; used to teach courses too, to keep his hand in, in Mnemonic Verse 2 and Creative Sales Presentation 5; folksy, you see. The real power there is supposed to be Biff Arnold, the marijuana importer, who picked up all Fink's advertising bills in his early running days: there's a rumour *he's* a literate, a litty-head as they say here.'

**THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC, am Tuesday.** In the famed Pentagonal Room of the White House, where the Nation's real business is done, President John Wayne Fink second is yelling down the speaking tube to an importunate newspaperwoman in the reporters' room next door:

'You can deny that absolutely: you won't get any come-backs if you deny that absolutely. Litty-heads have their uses, but we don't see them socially and we never will. You know, Clare baby, I'm not silly and superstitious about litty-heads; I don't believe they have any magics in their books and that; but there's man's work and the other kind, and of course you gotta draw a firm line and hold to it. . . . What? . . . Biff Arnold? Biff *Arnold*? That's a damnable smear on the finest public servant it's been my privilege to meet. You just tell your editor, young lady, if he prints any damn muck like that his newsprint ration'll come up for review out of time. Right? *Right* . . .'

**PEKING, CHINA, date and time equivalent to am Tuesday in Eastern States of the USA.** The Foreign Minister is giving an unattributable background briefing to William Rice-Felix, roving correspondent of the (London) MORNING STAR and reliable informal pipeline to Sinophils in the Foreign Office:

'Biff Arnold is our man, Rice-Felix. He has to be: we have helped him fiddle his US taxes by giving him funny invoices for the fine marijuana he imports from us into the US: and we have ample evidence that he is a crypto litty-head, concealing his stigma of literacy; we could break him in a day, and he knows it. Well, Arnold informs us that the US and the SU . . . not their *peoples*, Rice-Felix, but the little criminal gangs who oppress them . . . that the US and the SU have agreed that they will have to get rid of all the other peoples, who are an obstacle to their own continued economic growth.'

Rice-Felix scowls and fingers his rosary: 'What can China and her friends in England do about this threat?'

'It is fortunate that we purged those who would have discontinued our development of nuclear weaponry. We are resolved on a pre-emptive strike with our new, suitcase hydrogen bombs. We shall introduce them into the US in Arnold's shipments of marijuana, and they will be used by dissident environmentalists in our pay to destroy the fast breeder reactors on which the US economy now depends.'

'England can help you there, I think: eighty per cent of your marijuana exports to the US is carried in British bottoms, and our tobacco smugglers know which of the US customs and coastguard men can be bribed or blackmailed. I'll spread the word at home.'

Rice-Felix leaves for a routine call on the Soviet Ambassador to Peking. He is wondering whether Moscow or Peking has made the correct Marxist-Leninist analysis of the direction of history. A good Communist (he thinks, as he checks the tyre pressures of his air-portable folding bicycle) always sells out to the people who have History On Their Side, and it might be wiser to . . .

**PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA, am Tuesday corrected to Eastern Time.** In the offices of the Bland Corporation, world's leading think tank, ranks of sweated litty-heads are hard at work on the prediction 'n' control of the future, while their betters are sitting around at meetings in the front-office block. At one of these meetings, skinny Dr Klein is biting his nails and giving the story to the Chief Executive of Bland, Martha Mitchell Linebacker:

'Arnold is the real power in the White House, Madame Martha; and Arnold will do what we tell him to do. We all know he's a crypto litty-head, up to his neck in tax evasion, and over his head in selling our secrets to the Chinamen. We could bust

him in half a day, and he knows we know he knows we know it.'

'Didya clear the project with Comparative Religion for Ethics?'

'Sure, sure. No sweat there. Why, hardly a one of those redundant naked apes has a five star credit card or a London bootmaker: it's not as if they were real people, more like spraying greenfly.'

'Spraying, yeah. What does Ecology say about the blowback problem in using biologicals for the project?'

'Ecology say nukes would be too poisonous and ruin the whole world, like for real people too. So biologicals we *have* to use. Sure, there's blowback, but that's an advantage. It works like this: diseases affect the badly nourished more than the well nourished, so we just soak the whole world with every biological we got in the armoury, and we end up on top. As for the blowback, well, we can use it: after all, we have a lot of redundant peasants here at home - like *old*, like *poor*, like *ethnics*, and that; and it's just them who tend to eat less well, so the blowback will improve our social structure at home too. Pity you can't read, begging your pardon, or I'd show you the print-outs: the project computes good.'

She laughs as she waves the litty-head out of the room: 'I'm not superstitious, thanks. Tarot cards, computers, Aetherians, math. Just bully the scared, bribe the greedy, seduce the idealists, and kill the brave, and you got it made, Klein. Computers are for the birds.'

**LONDON, ENGLAND, date and time equivalent to am Tuesday in Eastern States of the USA.** Adam Cromwell, age seventeen, is crouching in his bunkette in the family's one-room luxury flat, wrestling with an acute Identity Crisis: he has just been thrown out of the Young Communist League (ritual destruction of his party card at a ceremony in King Street) for being hostile to private enterprise, and so thrown back on owning nothing, being nothing really, but his two names. Which are not that much help to him: is he Adam and the beginning of it all; or Cromwell who made the modern age, by starting the bourgeois revolution against kings in favour of bankers; or what? In the vague hope of making a self for himself as a technological wizard, and with more hope of at least distracting himself, he is fiddling with the family's only really valuable antique, his great grandfather's crystal wireless receiver. The family's vintage 1990 hyperheterodyne ziptronics super set has finally gone home, like all its kind: the atomic power cell has faded, and spares are no longer made. If he can get the old crystal set to work, the Cromwells will be the envy of all Belgravia. He is moving the 'cat's whisker' of springy wire over the surface of the carborundum crystal, trying to find the sensitive spot that will demodulate the signal and bring in the audio. Suddenly, it comes in, and he can hear a hectoring voice above the mush: it seems to be the Voice of the Chinese People, roaring out on the short end of the Medium-wave band from the mountains of Free Albania. He soon tires of its accelerando rant about the iniquities of the Russo-American condominium in South America, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific, and India, interlarded with threats to call its mercenaries on hire to the condominium out on strike and singing commercials for Peking Gold marijuana cigarettes (treble coupons this month only), and he carefully turns the tuning knob. More mush, and then the BBC comes up in the middle of the band. After a while, he places the programme, the last of a series he had been following when the ziptronics super set ran out of energy: it is the annual Reith Lectures, given this year by Professor Jack Bruno, with solo violin accompaniment. It must be the peroration of his final lecture, since he is saying in his mellow, carefully modulated voice: '. . . and who knows what further glories may not be achieved by this extraordinary creature, Man, when, as he surely will, he ventures in his frail barks to the limits of his Galaxy and beyond . . .'

There is an extraordinary crescendo of radio noise, inevitable accompaniment of the explosion of a large number of nukes, and the radioactive ashes of Adam Cromwell, whirling on the world's winds with the ashes of her flora and fauna, miss the rest of the lecture.

# the Artist in Science Fiction

by Lynne Whites

**Hardy, David A. Born April 1936. Studied: Margaret Street College of Art, Birmingham. Science illustrator and author; work includes co-writing and illustrating Challenge of the Stars (Mitchell Beazley 1972), numerous covers for Worlds of If and Fantasy and Science Fiction**

David Hardy has been working as a space artist for the past 20 years – during the most exciting and active period in space exploration. And, not surprisingly, he has seen great changes in the general acceptance of space and science fiction art as the scenes he was painting in the 50s have been verified by the space flights of the 60s and 70s. Hardy says:

When I started my "flights to the moon" paintings many people thought they were science fiction; they laughed and would not take them seriously. Now some of my paintings hang in places like the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC and the Manned Space Flight Centre at Huntsville, Alabama.

His most important work to date is the book *Challenge of the Stars* which he co-wrote with Patrick Moore, and illustrated. The 36 paintings, some showing Hardy's idea of life, vegetation and the terrain of distant planets, were checked and commended by NASA for technical accuracy. But this does not mean they are just scientific records; they are all imaginative, speculative works and many of the original paintings have been bought by non-scientists for their artistic merit. In 1968 the late Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones bought two Hardy originals and many other pop groups and personalities have become interested in his spacescapes. Hawkwind, a progressive rock group who sometimes play with Mike Moorcock, use slides of Hardy's work as an integral part of their stage act and David Bowie, Pink Floyd and the Moody Blues also own his work or have expressed interest.

The first full series of spacescapes, painted in 1952-6 for an earlier version of *Challenge of the Stars*, today look like photographic references of the early space explorations while Hardy's latest work like *Alien Life Forms* and *End of a World* is what we would now call the real science fiction. He has been able to develop from the early, undocumented but realistic paintings to the more recent ones which are imaginative representation based on a solid scientific background:

'When I was at school I was interested in art and science but at this time the two subjects were

not meant to go together – you were either an artist or a scientist. I began reading science fiction at about the same time, starting when I was 10 with comics and later going on to science fiction novels. And I spent many hours stargazing through telescopes.'

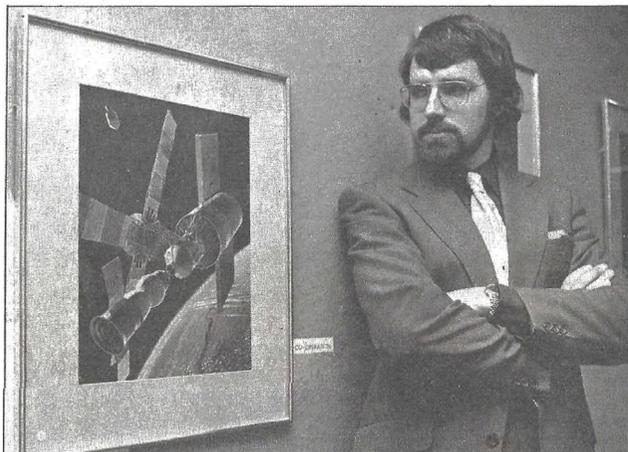
This dual interest continued when Hardy began work. He balanced a full-time laboratory technician's job with part-time painting for an exhibition of the British Interplanetary Society until he joined the RAF for his National Service in 1954. Five days before he entered the Air Force he was

After leaving the RAF Hardy worked in a studio in his home town of Birmingham and from there was sent to art college on a day release course. But Hardy says:

'I found when I had finished at the college I had to disregard nearly everything I had learnt because they taught a broader approach to painting and frowned on the precise, detailed work I was doing. I picked up a few techniques there but I learnt more from the actual studio job about production techniques, colour separations and the practical problems of art and especially illustration.'

Hardy works mainly in acrylic and gouache, although he will paint in oils if specifically asked to, and to obtain the effects he wants uses a number of techniques. The designs are carefully drawn out on the board before he begins to apply any paint.

Inspiration for Hardy's work comes mainly from his continuing interest in space research. Contacts at NASA keep him informed by sending the latest handouts about progress in their work and Hardy keeps up to date



David Hardy at an exhibition of his work. Courtesy Eastern Daily Press.



David Hardy cover for "Worlds of If" No. 8. Published by Universal Publishing and Distribution Corp., New York, distributed in British Isles by Universal Tandem Publishing Co.

asked to illustrate the Patrick Moore book *Sans, Myths and Men*, legends about moon and space. In this short time he completed eight drawings which gave him an opening into the world of book illustrating and began his long friendship with astronomer Patrick Moore.

with as many scientific reports as he can lay his hands on. In 1971 he travelled to America for the launch of Apollo 15 to get the feel of space hardware at first hand.

'I would like to be able to go to the moon myself for the practical experience of outer space but prefer to wait until you can go by the equivalent of a 707 jet rather than Apollo!'

He is also an sf short story writer although he says at present he does not have much time for this. Freelance art work in various forms takes up the majority of his day. In the nine years he has been working for himself he has, amongst other things, had a one man exhibition at the London Planetarium, worked on space stage sets for the Mermaid Theatre and the London Palladium, completed *Challenge of the Stars*, painted a 24-foot ultra-violet illuminated mural for a Dorset Motel, appeared on television and given a number of lectures.

The exhibition at the London Planetarium led in 1969 to the publication of *Stellar Radiance* as a fine art print. This painting of an imaginary planet of a red star became a best seller, reaching number six in the Top Ten Prints list, proving just how wide Hardy's

appeal is.

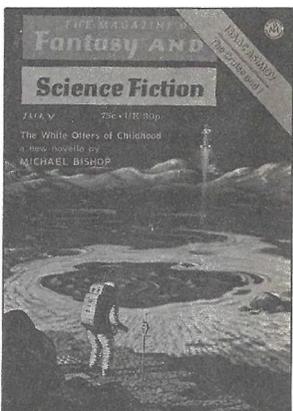
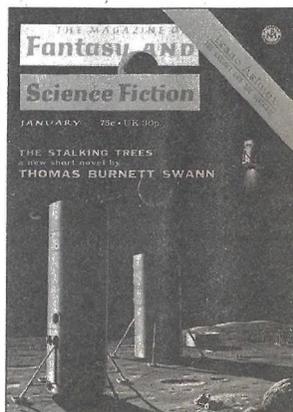
Although this print and another, *Galaxy*, and the book *Challenge of the Stars* have been well received in Britain, Hardy's work is still better known in America. He does, hope, however, to do more work, especially book covers, in this country in the future. At the moment he is working on a children's book because he feels there is a need for a simple, but entirely accurate, publication on space exploration:

'It's a surprise but I found the books available were not always correct. So I'm making sure that my work is as factual as possible. I am writing the text and doing illustrations for each page.'

The book, *The Solar System*, will be published by Worlds Work and will be on sale in the autumn of this year. One of Hardy's ambitions, not yet fulfilled, is to work on a space film.

He finds the whole idea of outer space fascinating:

'I think there might be life



"Fantasy and Science Fiction", January and July 1973 covers by David Hardy. Courtesy Mercury Press Inc.

similar to ours on other planets but you will have to get completely away from the planets in this system because we know there can be no support for life like ours on them. I think we need to find a star similar to our sun with a planet at the same sort of distance as earth; then we may find life very similar to ours – if they don't find us first.'

With space there is always something further out to explore, first the moon, then the planets, then the stars and beyond, so David Hardy has plenty of material for his imagination for at least the next 20 years.

**DAVID A. HARDY SPACE ART SPIN-OFF!** Full-size, true colour Art Reproductions: – **STELLAR RADIANCE** – planetary landscape illuminated by glowing red super giant Alpha Herculis: 20" x 36", £2.50. **GALAXY** – dramatic study of the "Black Eye Galaxy" from an imaginary planet: 22" x 36", £2.50; or ONLY £4.75 the pair. 2" x 2" **COLOUR SLIDES** – 3 sets of 12: – 1. **AFTER APOLLO – THE FUTURE**. 2. **PLANETS OF OUR SUN**. 3. **PLANETS OF OTHER SUNS**. Individually captioned: each set £2.25, or ONLY £6.25 for all 36. And the only book **FULL** of big Hardy colour illustrations – 36 of them – **CHALLENGE OF THE STARS**: £2.50 post-paid. Also other slides, and materials for Disco's etc.; trade terms; and all enquiries for Hardy artwork: **ASTRO ART, 75A COLLEGE ROAD, MOSELEY, BIRMINGHAM, B13 9LR**. Telephone: 021-777 4197. Send S.A.E. for List.

"END OF A WORLD". PAINTING BY DAVID A. HARDY.





**Y**ou lift-off in three months time,' said the General. 'Any more questions?'

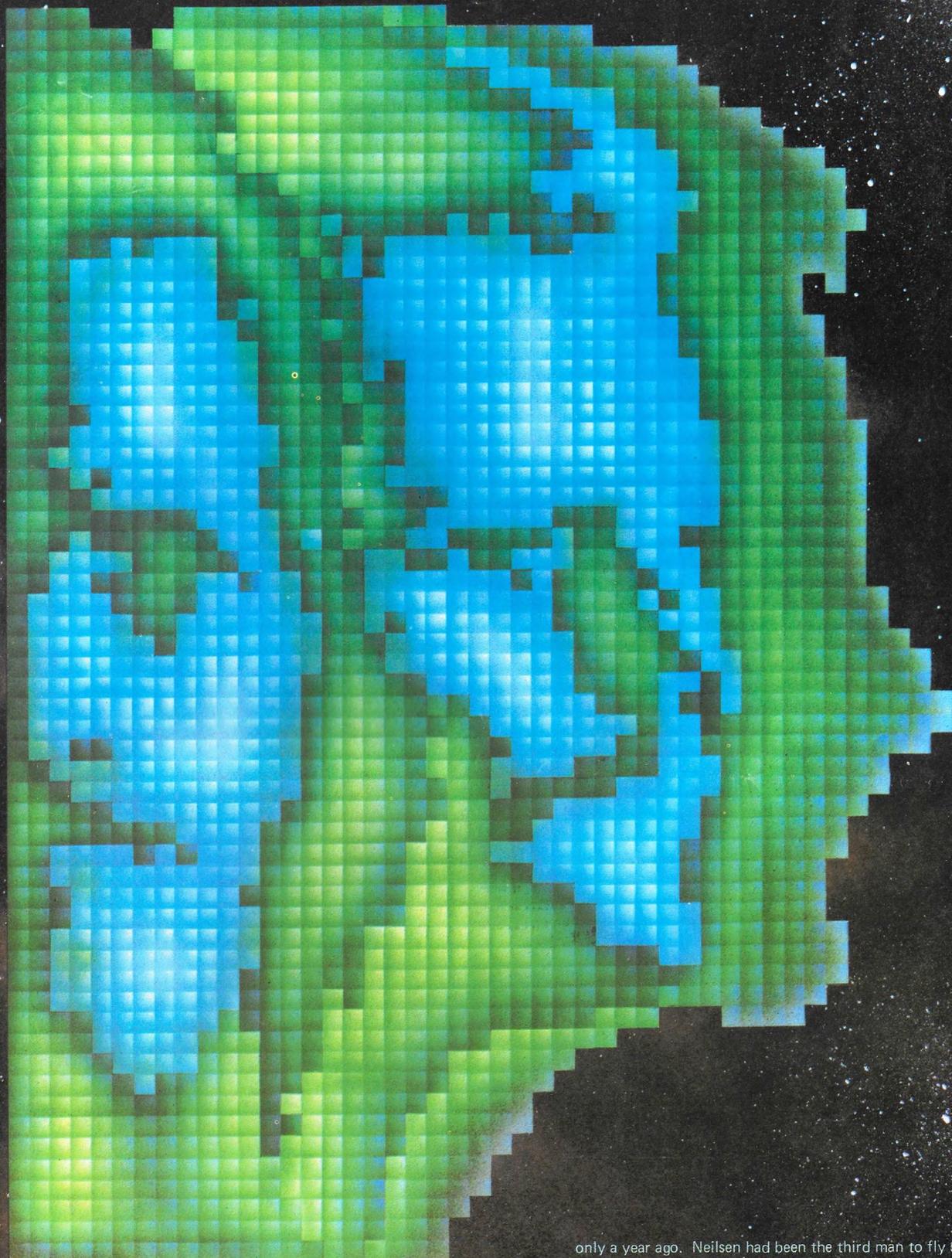
'Yes, sir,' Tanner looked doubtful. 'Two men doesn't seem many for the trip. I would've thought that three or even four—'

The General interrupted merely by raising his hand for silence. 'We're talking about an attempted landing on Jupiter, not a day-trip to the sea. Such an attempt, in a two-man vessel, is costing the nation more than many politicians think is justified. A three-man vessel would cost approximately twice as much, a four-man vessel five or six times as much, and so on. Money, Tanner, is the limiting factor. There's been no skimping on safety, so don't worry. But it's just that the country can only afford a one-man or a two-man effort. Obviously a one-man shot is out of the question.

'Obviously,' replied Tanner, remembering the incident with Neilsen,

**WILL**

**BY TERRY GREENHOUGH**



# BEAR

only a year ago. Neilsen had been the third man to fly solo as far as the orbit of Mars. He was also the third to come back insane. The boffins were still working on the problem, of course, but they were making slow progress. All they knew was that some factor caused a solitary man in deep space to lose his grip on sanity. Perhaps it was loneliness, or perhaps it was some undetected radiation-belt, or it might even have been a religious awe that drove a man past the brink and made him both more and less than human. But it was certainly something to guard against.

'One-man launches are outlawed,' said the General. 'At least until we've cracked the mystery. My own opinion is that there's something about deep space that makes a man feel terribly alone, so utterly cut off from his fellows that his mind snaps. Two man crews are now the minimum, Tanner.'

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

NOVEMBER



# SUPER SCIENCE

STORIES 20¢  
THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION



**WE GUARD THE BLACK PLANET!**  
*AN OUTSTANDING NOVELETTE*  
by **HENRY KUTTNER**

**THE REVOLT OF THE MACHINE MEN**  
by **CHARLES R. TANNER**

PEARSON • LEY • KUBILIUS • AND MANY OTHERS

# TO BOOM... AND WAR

## Fifty Years of sf Magazines

### Part 2 1936-1945 By Michael Ashley

#### I. HIATUS

WITH THE COMING of April 1936 and the tenth anniversary of AMAZING STORIES all was not well with the magazine world. The United States was emerging from the Depression years which, beginning in 1929, had sounded the death knell for many magazines.

That month of April 1936 which ten years earlier had seen the birth of AMAZING STORIES under Hugo Gernsback, saw the continued appearance of only two sf magazines and one weird-scientific magazine and none of these was guided by Gernsback. The previous month had seen the last issue of Gernsback's WONDER STORIES which was proving too costly to distribute over the newsstands. After six years and sixty-six issues under Managing Editor David Lasser, and later Charles Hornig, fandom's voice disappeared. WONDER STORIES had been the voice of the Science Fiction League which was instrumental in organising a hitherto somewhat nuclear fandom. Fortunately fandom was sufficiently organised by 1936 to be able to support itself and go from strength to strength.

The demise of Gernsback's magazine left ASTOUNDING STORIES undisputed leader of the field. Having been revived by Street & Smith Publications in 1933, ASTOUNDING STORIES, under the editorship of F Orlin Tremaine, had adopted a policy of radically inventive and provocative stories, 'thought variants' as they were termed. As a result authors such as Donald Wandrei, Nathan Schachner, John Russell Fearn and Raymond Gallun had transformed science fiction, and the magazine was visibly rising to a distant zenith of popularity.

On the other hand Gernsback's brainchild AMAZING STORIES, now in the hands of its original Assistant Editor, T O'Connor Sloane, was heading towards a nadir. No editorial attempt had been made to vitalise the magazine, its continued survival being due almost solely to the popularity of its authors and the loyalty of its readers. Since ASTOUNDING STORIES was paying its contributors twice as much as its competitor, it seems fairly certain that AMAZING was publishing rejected stories, plus ones that had been submitted several years before - Sloane was never one for hurrying.

The gap between the magazines was vast in more ways than one. Sloane was 85 years old, Tremaine 37. ASTOUNDING STORIES, monthly, contained 160 pages for twenty cents whereas AMAZING STORIES, bi-monthly, cost twenty-five cents for 144 pages: a big difference to the newsstand browser and evidence that ASTOUNDING had a larger circulation, as well as the backing of a larger publishing chain. Furthermore one of the major ingredients of a magazine is its serialized novels and here again ASTOUNDING STORIES had achieved greater things, having run concurrently in 1935 *The Mightiest Machine* by John W Campbell and *The Skylark of Valeron* by E E Smith, two of the biggest names in sf at that time, not to forget contributions by big name attractions such as Stanley G Weinbaum, Jack Williamson and John Taine.

On the weird-scientific front WEIRD TALES managed to hold its own with Farnsworth Wright at the helm. A magazine not to be forgotten during this period, it was publishing a considerable amount of sf, even though the

magazine was essentially a horror periodical. Foremost amongst its sf were the contributions by Edmond Hamilton and C L Moore, Jack Williamson and H P Lovecraft. It was published monthly, and although not devoted to sf, was often the harbinger of some truly inventive concepts.

Whilst Gernsback was no longer in the sf field he had not let WONDER STORIES die. The title was sold to Standard Magazines, whose Editorial Director, Leo Margulies, appointed a young fan to edit the new WONDER STORIES, now dubbed THRILLING WONDER STORIES. The new editor was 21 year-old Mort Weisinger, and the revitalized magazine hit the stands in August 1936 proudly including stories by Stanley G Weinbaum, A Merritt, Eando Binder, and Otis Adelbert Kline.

Leo Margulies and publisher Ned Pines had decided that THRILLING WONDER STORIES should be aimed at the juvenile audience thereby attracting the readers who did not follow ASTOUNDING STORIES. To this end Mort Weisinger commissioned Max Plaisted to produce a comic strip concerning the adventures of 'Zanark'. Whilst it was howled down by most of the readers and was faded out after eight episodes it was nevertheless an entirely new concept. It was not until January 1937 that DETECTIVE COMICS came out and it would not be until 1939 that the first sf comic-book would appear, Gernsback's SUPERWORLD COMICS.

THRILLING WONDER STORIES was bi-monthly and carried only 128 pages but its popularity was evident from the start, and what is more, Weisinger purchased cover artwork by



ASTOUNDING STORIES' popular artists Howard V Brown and Hans W Wessolowski. It was this magazine's covers that would carry the famous BEMs or Bug-Eyed Monsters with which sf was to be associated.

As a result, at the close of 1936 ASTOUND-

ING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES shared the field between them with AMAZING STORIES tagging along behind.

Mention must be made here of the appearance of two short-lived magazines, FLASH GORDON'S STRANGE ADVENTURE in December 1936, and WITCH'S TALES in November and December 1936. Issued as the results of a popular film hero and radio series respectively, their existence shows that publishers felt the US readership needed more sf. WITCH'S TALES is particularly important in this respect as it introduced US readers to stories that had originally appeared in the British STRAND and PEARSON'S magazines thirty years before.

1937 would see THRILLING WONDER STORIES cement its position, but it would also see ASTOUNDING STORIES begin to meander. Tremaine was only secondarily a science fiction editor, since he was responsible for five or six other magazines. Having put ASTOUNDING on its feet he was now having to let it make its own way and in the end he was forced to bring in someone else to edit the magazine. But before we see the effect upon the field, let us see what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic.

#### II BRITAIN

British fans were satisfied to regard the 1934 life and death of SCOOPS as a bad dream, and survive on the import of US magazines. But in 1937 Ilford fan Walter Gillings convinced Worlds Work, then issuing several horror/mystery magazines in their 'Master Thriller' series, to publish a science fiction magazine. With Gillings as editor TALES OF WONDER appeared on the newsstands in June 1937. For one shilling readers could buy 128 pages of the usual pulp-size magazine, boasting stories by several British authors who had achieved fame in the United States: John Russell Fearn, Festus Pragnell and John (Wyndham) Beynon Harris. The most popular story proved to be *The Pri-reet* by aspiring author Eric Frank Russell, then on the verge of a tremendous career.

The success of the first issue prompted publisher Chalmers Roberts to go ahead with a second and place the magazine on a regular quarterly schedule. Spring 1938 saw Number 2 on the stands, sales boosted by the inclusion of John Beynon Harris's new story *Sleepers of Mars*. A fair proportion of British material was again present, but the real scarcity of good fiction meant that Gillings was forced to include reprints from the US and this increased as issue followed issue.

Nevertheless the success of TALES OF WONDER jolted Newnes into action. As long ago as 1935 they had toyed with the idea of a science fiction magazine, and now, with T Stanhope Sprigg at the helm, FANTASY appeared in August 1938. Similarly priced at one shilling and with 128 pages, FANTASY was not unlike TALES OF WONDER in format. But with the backing of Newnes, Sprigg was able to pay more for his fiction and consequently attracted some big names in the field. This is evidenced by the appearance of two articles in the second and third issues by Willy Ley, a highly popular contributor to the US magazines who had so far eluded Gillings.

Sprigg also reprinted fiction, mostly from Newnes' own periodicals, such as *Menace of the Metal Men* by A Prestigiacom. As FANTASY boasted in its first issue, this story '... was written in English at the suggestion of a British admirer, Mr Compton Mackenzie'. (1) No mention is made that it had graded the pages of the English ARGOSY five years earlier.

The first FANTASY proved successful, although Newnes waited until March 1939 before issuing a second. The third appeared in June 1939 and there was every prospect of a regular quarterly publication. But in September 1939 World War II broke out and the magazine folded.

Every praise is to be given to Worlds Work and Walter Gillings for continuing TALES OF WONDER, but the effect of the war was obvious. With the Winter 1939 issue the page count dropped to 96, four issues later to 80 pages, and two issues after that to 72 pages. After sixteen issues, in Spring 1942, TALES OF WONDER disappeared forever.

Ironical as it may seem, at the very time that

an indigenous British magazine was feeling the pressure of war, several British editions of American magazines began to appear, notably *ASTOUNDING SF* in August 1939, a British edition being published regularly thereafter. But here we must return to the relative peace of the American magazine scene.

### III CAMPBELL

In October 1937 John W Campbell became editor of *ASTOUNDING STORIES*. He was 27 and had been a regular sf author since the appearance of *When the Atoms Failed* in the January 1930 *AMAZING STORIES*, but his real contributions to fiction were the stories published in *ASTOUNDING* under the pseudonym of Don A Stuart, beginning with *Twilight* in November 1934, and including such gems as *Night, Blindness, Forgetfulness* and *Who Goes There?* These 'mood' stories had done much to shape the character of the magazine.

Another facet of Campbell's talents resulted in the growth of the scientific article in the sf magazine. In the early years there was no necessity for scientific articles. Gernsback provided what he needed in his editorials, and the scientific content of the stories, proved by the *Science Knowledge Questionnaire*, negated the need for such articles. Besides, the *Science Question and Answer* column was enough. On rare occasions an article would appear, besides the small fillers, but only when of direct consequence to the magazine, such as Captain Hermann Noordung's *The Problems of Space Flying* in the second issue of *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES*, and Walter Burton's *A Test of Airplane Lightning Hazards* in *AIR WONDER STORIES*. *AIR WONDER STORIES* in fact included several such 'special' articles as did *AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES*.

The first variation on this came when Tremaine published Charles Fort's amazing work *Lo!* in eight parts starting in the April 1934 *ASTOUNDING STORIES*. Whilst reader reaction was favourable to begin with, the sheer length of the work and the quality of repetition soon told. Nevertheless it was a new departure for sf magazines. But then in June 1936 John Campbell appeared with a series of articles entitled *A Study of the Solar System*, which was in eighteen parts and proved immensely popular. It only finished when Campbell became editor, and he still appeared with articles under the pen-name of Arthur McCann. Other articles also began to appear in *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, by Harry D Parker, Thomas Calvert McClary, and, foremost, Willy Ley.

The popularity of the science article prompted Weisinger to follow suit, and the August 1937 *THRILLING WONDER STORIES* carried British scientist P E Cleator's *Spaceward*. The December issue saw the appearance of Willy Ley, more evidence of the tactics of Weisinger to attract a varied audience.

With Campbell firmly at the helm, the science fact article became a regular feature of *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, which he renamed *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION* from the March 1938 issue. The February issue had seen the first of a series of covers depicting astronomical scenes, painted by Howard Brown, and a further change on covers illustrated the maturing of sf art. A fine example is the December 1938 cover by Charles Schneeman, illustrating L Sprague de Camp's *The Merman*. Here was no gigantic space-ship or bug-eyed monster, nor unearthly cataclysm or rogue robot. It was a straightforward picture of reporters fighting to take a picture of a man capable of breathing in a tank. The picture was simple and down to earth. And that was something else original.



In *ASTOUNDING* between September 1937 and September 1939 the following authors made their debut: L Sprague de Camp with *The Isolinguals* (September 1937); Lester Del Rey *The Faithful* (April 1938), L Ron Hubbard *The Dangerous Dimension* (July 1938), Malcolm Jameson *Eviction by Isotherm* (August 1938); John Berryman *Special Flight* (May 1939), A E van Vogt *Black Destroyer* (July 1939), Robert A Heinlein *Lifeline* (August 1939), and Theodore Sturgeon with *Ether Breather* (September 1939).

Authors such as Horace Gold, Clifford Simak and Isaac Asimov, although having appeared elsewhere previously, also owe much to Campbell for really getting them underway.

Much has been written about Campbell and how under him science fiction matured. This is no idle boast. If Gernsback was the father of the sf magazine, then Campbell is the father of modern science fiction. Says Alva Rogers on this point:

'He diverted *ASTOUNDING* from the course it had been pursuing and guided it into relatively new and unexplored channels; discovered and developed new and exciting writers and encouraged the better older writers to update their viewpoints. . . . Campbell extended the horizons of science fiction, gave it a status in literature it had never enjoyed before, and raised it to a new level of maturity.' (2)

When one realizes that Campbell was still only in his late twenties, such accolades as these are even more forceful.

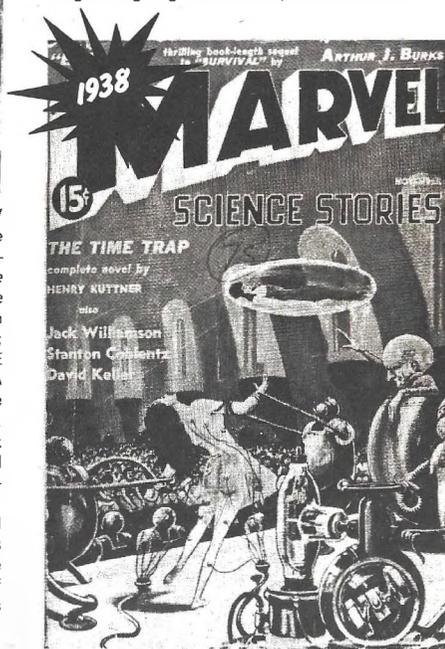
### IV BOOM

Campbell came into dominance at the right time. Perhaps one or two years later and things would have been very different.

At the start of 1938 only three publishers had a hand in the sf field in the United States, Teck Publications with *AMAZING STORIES*, Standard Magazines with *THRILLING WONDER*, and Street & Smith with *ASTOUNDING SF*. These also published other magazines, notably Standard who produced the pulp horror magazine *THRILLING MYSTERY*, and Street & Smith with *TOP-NOTCH*. Now Red Circle Magazines entered the field. During 1937 they had issued *MYSTERY TALES*, similar to *THRILLING MYSTERY*,

which had attracted work by that *WEIRD TALES*, Lovecraftian-protege, Henry Kuttner. Now in May 1938 *MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES* appeared on the stands (first issue dated August). The editor was Robert O Erisman, who, finding himself at the helm of the first new sf magazine since 1931, had to decide what track to take.

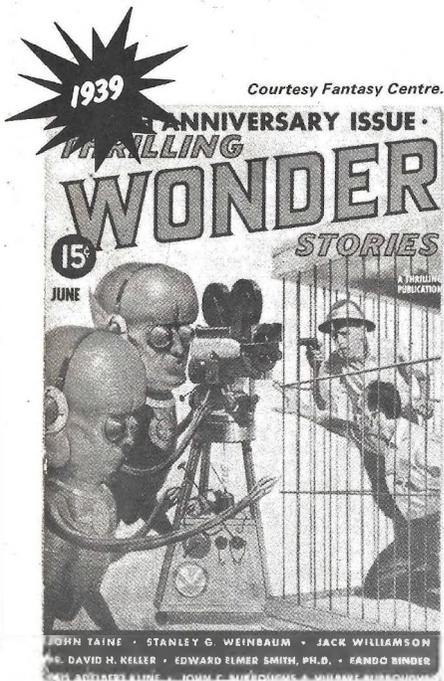
Since the companion magazine *MYSTERY TALES* was emulating the mid-30's sex/sadism magazines such as *HORROR STORIES* and *TERROR TALES*, Erisman decided that it was the right time to bring some spice into sf. Henry Kuttner, who had been tempted into science fiction by Weisinger with *When the Earth Lived* in the October 1937 *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, sent several stories to Erisman. Apparently Erisman told Kuttner that he would accept them if some sexy passages were written in. This was done with four stories, but the resultant hullabaloo from sf fandom meant that the sex content had to be dropped. Kuttner also had a lot to live down, albeit Erisman's doing. But that did not mean that *MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES* was unpopular. On the contrary, sales boomed with the result that other publishers thought twice about sf magazines. Red Circle in the meantime brought out another companion magazine, *DYNAMIC SCIENCE STORIES*, which concentrated on long novels. This first appeared in February 1939, but only lasted two issues. Despite its popularity *MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES* had a chequered schedule, and whilst it was labelled bi-monthly it only ever once maintained that. During 1939 and 1940 its appearances grew less and less. Nevertheless its many good stories by Jack Williamson and Edmond Hamilton, Arthur Burks and Stanton Coblentz kept the magazine going for several years to come.



In his 1953 book *SCIENCE-FICTION HANDBOOK* (Hermitage House), L Sprague de Camp suggests that one reason for the boom in sf popularity was Orson Welles's New York radio production of H G Wells's *War of the Worlds* broadcast on 30 October 1938. Whatever the reason, 1939 saw a tremendous upsurge in science fiction and fantasy magazines.

What is more, by the end of 1938, those at the helm of the older sf magazines had totally changed. Already Weisinger and Campbell had succeeded in their roles. Now a third newcomer took up the gauntlet. In 1938 Teck Publications finally sold *AMAZING STORIES*. The new publishers, Ziff-Davis, had their offices in Chicago, whilst Teck's had been in New York. Consequently Sloane was fired and *AMAZING STORIES* was put in the hands of 27 year old Raymond A Palmer. The fact that Palmer was 60 years younger than Sloane meant that the editorial policy changed radically. *AMAZING STORIES* under Sloane had been a greybeard publication, with a few loyal followers (about 27,000) and little else. Palmer aimed the magazine at the juvenile audience, even younger than Weisinger had attempted.





Palmer's first issue was in June 1938, carrying *The Space Pirate* by Eando Binder and stories by J R Fearn, Ross Rocklynnne, Robert Moore Williams and others. Although the first cover was a photograph, the new cover artist was Joe Tillison, working under the name of Robert Fuqua. He replaced Teck's mainstay Leo Morey. Palmer innovated the back cover illustration. June 1938 was H W McCauley's *This Amazing Universe*, but later this space was used mostly by Julian Krupa and Frank R Paul. Since these pictures were free of all the titles and logotype of the front cover they were often regarded as collectors' items.

AMAZING STORIES soared in popularity. Its circulation initially doubled, and within months it was back on a monthly schedule.

The first companion magazine to reappear was STARTLING STORIES. Back in the days of the quarterlies, the intention of the companion magazine had been to present full length novels which could only otherwise have been serialized in a monthly magazine. This was the idea behind STARTLING STORIES. Furthermore Margulies, having purchased the rights to WONDER STORIES, was now able to delve into its archives and produce the best of the past in what became a regular feature of the magazine, the 'Hall of Fame' Classics. The feature novel for the first January 1939 issue was Weinbaum's *The Black Flame*, and the reprint was D D Sharp's *The Eternal Mae*.

Initially bi-monthly, STARTLING STORIES was the perfect companion to THRILLING WONDER, and at times exceeded its elder brother in popularity. Margulies and Weisinger were not to be caught napping however. The following month another new title appeared, STRANGE STORIES. Here the emphasis was on the weird-science story and the magazine immediately attracted the stalwarts of WEIRD TALES, notably Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner and August Derleth. Also bi-monthly, this magazine was not to prove quite as popular as the rest, and when the paper shortage began to pinch it was the first of the Standard Magazines to go under after 13 issues in February 1941.

A further reason might have been the appearance of other fantasy orientated magazines contemporaneously. In May 1939 Ray Palmer, having brought AMAZING STORIES back into the lead in circulation with its basic, straightforward adventure sf, turned to fantasy and nurtured FANTASTIC ADVENTURES into the world. Unlike this magazine's elder brother, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was the old 'bedsheet' size of 8.5 x 11.5 inches, although it only contained one hundred such pages, selling for twenty cents. The magazine was really value for money. Full-colour front and back covers with artwork by Fuqua and Paul, carrying stories by Binder, Rocklynnne, Verrill and Vincent amongst them. A comic-strip even appeared, *Ray Holmes, Scientific Detective*. As Palmer boasts in his editorial:

'We have raised fantastic fiction to the level of the quality magazine, and yet retained the lusty appeal of the pulp field.' (3) Readers would soon see the name of F Orlin Tremaine gracing its pages with his fantasy stories, and better still the appearance of the by-line *Edgar Rice Burroughs*. The name was enough to clinch the certainty of the magazine. But one interesting point to note here, (and this is one up for Britain), Palmer adopted a story rating procedure in the magazine. Votes on the July 1939 issue, carrying Burroughs's *The Scientists Revolt* showed that Burroughs's story came second to *The Golden Amazon* by Thornton Ayre. Ayre was the pen-name of British author John Russell Fearn.

Palmer's editorial boast was somewhat premature. Actually he had been pipped at the post by John Campbell who in March 1939, not content with having revolutionized the sf field, brought out UNKNOWN, which was to prove the most popular magazine of its kind, even though it only lasted 39 issues before Campbell sacrificed it for ASTOUNDING in October 1945. Whilst UNKNOWN was essentially not an sf magazine, one can find in its pages the same mature treatment of fantasy elements as in ASTOUNDING. There was hardly any need for suspension of disbelief about the fiction - the stories seemed so natural. The first issue led with Eric Frank Russell's blockbuster, *Sinister Barrier*, the story, as legend has it, which prompted Campbell to issue the magazine. Since Russell was a British author, it's a good legend to believe. UNKNOWN also carried L Sprague de Camp's delightful stories, those of Fletcher Pratt and Theodore Sturgeon, and was also responsible for giving the name Henry Kuttner some decorum after the MARVEL incidents.

In the meantime the boom of 1939 was snowballing. March 1939 had seen the return of Charles D Hornig to the sf field with SCIENCE FICTION. Now a seasoned 22 years old, Hornig tried to revive some of the spirit of the old WONDER STORIES. The magazine's 132 pulp-sized pages sold for 15 cents, and boldly advertised covers by Frank Paul and stories by Binder, Fearn and Hamilton under a variety of pen names. The magazine was instantly accepted by

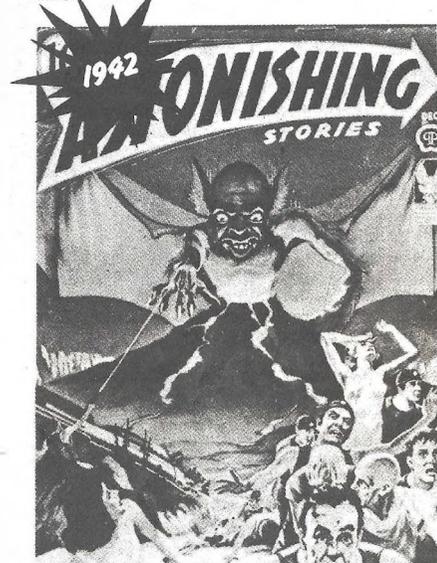


the readership, no less by young (18 years old) Californian fan, Ray Bradbury, who wrote '... don't let the mag ever degenerate to the kindergarten class - let it grow with the minds of the fans. If the other mags want to play up to children, let them forge blindly on - but they won't carve a place for themselves in the hall of science-fiction like you certainly will if you keep plugging with the ideas you hold in mind for the future.' (4)

Promise indeed, and Hornig's response ('I'm trying to give the magazine an appeal to mature minds... [4]) was certainly a poke in the eye for the readers of the Palmer magazines. Whether Hornig encompassed Weisinger in this 'immaturity' I do not know, but he obviously had his

ideals and kept to them. Later that year the publishers, Blue Ribbon Magazines, brought out a companion magazine, FUTURE FICTION, on a quarterly schedule. It did not have quite the same appeal as SCIENCE FICTION. It only carried 114 pages, although SCIENCE FICTION's page count dropped to 116 in March 1940. Many of its authors were unknown names, but on the whole the fiction was of good quality, on occasions better than that of its companion.

Two more magazines were yet to appear for Christmas 1939. September 1939 saw Munsey magazines publish FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES with editor Mary Gnaedinger. Here was a brilliant idea, with the publishers of ARGOSY, ALL-STORY and the other great adventure pulps cashing in on the fannish mania for collecting the unobtainable oldies. FFM, as it was termed, resurrected the best of the adventure stories from the romantic days, with such legendary names as Homer Eon Flint, Austin Hall, J U Giesy, Francis Stevens, and above all Abraham Merritt. The magazine was an instant success, its popularity warranting a sequel, FANTASTIC NOVELS, which appeared in July 1940 and published complete novels. What's more, the magazine was the ideal vehicle for the fantastic artwork of popular artist Virgil Finlay. FFM was often a circulation leader during its varied lifetime.



December 1939 saw the first issue of quarterly magazine PLANET STORIES, published by Love Romances Inc, selling for twenty cents and carrying 128 pulp-sized pages. Here was a novelty magazine. It was devoted entirely to interplanetary adventures, in later years cornering the cream of these stories. Scientific accuracy was secondary, provided the action and story were good. Here appeared all the big names in the field, Ray Cummings, Ross Rocklynnne, Nelson Bond, Neil R Jones, and unfailingly the magazine became another favourite amongst the juvenile readership.

Editor Malcolm Reiss did something quite unprecedented in the third (Summer 1940) issue when he admitted that the stories in that issue were not as good as they might be, but that they were the best they were able to get at present. Quite an admission to make but one that was applauded by many readers who commended Reiss on his frankness. Reiss was rewarded too when the quality of the magazine's stories began to increase sharply, particularly when the likes of Ray Bradbury and Leigh Brackett (Mrs Edmond Hamilton) began to appear.

During 1940 there was no slackening of pace in the appearance of magazines. In the US alone, 1939 had seen 83 issues of some 14 magazines and 1940 114 of 19 magazines. These new titles also included companion publications. Standard Magazines initiated CAPTAIN FUTURE on a quarterly schedule. The magazine, aimed at young teenagers, was to present a full length novel adventure of Captain Future, a superscientist hero, complete with robot and android aides, and the customary female assistant. CAPTAIN FUTURE had been dreamed up by Leo Margulies at the First World Science Fiction

Convention; held in New York in July 1939. The magazine survived seventeen issues when the war killed it in Spring 1944, the Captain Future adventures then spilling over into STARTLING STORIES. Virtually all the novels were the work of Edmond Hamilton, who created an extremely popular character. There was little difference, however, between this idea of a magazine based around a central character and the many magazines that had appeared in the mid-thirties such as THE SHADOW and more particularly DOC SAVAGE, both of which enjoyed a long and happy lifetime.

CAPTAIN FUTURE was an all-sf magazine, and presented a further feature in reprinting novels from the early WONDER STORIES as serials. Thereby young fans were treated to such masterpieces as David Keller's *The Human Termites*, Laurence Manning's *The Man Who Awoke*, and Jack Williamson's *The Alien Intelligence*.

New York fan Frederik Pohl, eventually convinced Popular Publications to produce a science fiction magazine, and at the age of twenty found himself not editing one, but two. In February 1940 ASTONISHING STORIES appeared, followed in March by SUPER SCIENCE STORIES. Here again was a format similar to that of the Standard Magazines, ASTONISHING publishing the shorter fiction and SUPER SCIENCE the longer pieces. The magazines were bi-monthly and alternated. The biggest surprise about them was that they sold for ten cents per issue, and were thus the cheapest magazines on the market. Naturally the word rate was low, Popular Publications printing the magazines under a special house name, Fictioneers Inc, but nevertheless Pohl found himself editing two extremely competent magazines, printing stories often on a par with ASTOUNDING SF. In these magazines one first saw the fiction of Pohl, together with the debuts of Cyril Kornbluth, James Blish and Damon Knight.

Charles Hornig found himself editing a third magazine during 1940 with SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY. The return of the QUARTERLY with complete novels was by now not new, but was still readily accepted by fans. Like STARTLING STORIES, SF QUARTERLY included a reprint department, the first issue carrying R H Romans' novel *The Moon Conquerors*.

If F Orlin Tremaine had expected fandom to go into raptures at the knowledge of his return to sf editorship he would have been wrong. When December 1940 saw the first of COMET STORIES the reception was, by then, rather blasé. After all, there could be too much of a good thing. COMET STORIES was not even an exceptional magazine. Filled with medium-length stories by notable authors, and sporting covers by Leo Morey and Frank Paul, the magazine was not a notable success. With ASTOUNDING SF riding the crest of sf and so many capable magazines cruising in the surf, COMET STORIES was just another name. After five issues it disappeared.

## V DEFLATION

At this time the United States did not have a total monopoly on sf magazines. In Canada UNCANNY TALES appeared which, whilst not enjoying notable success, managed to survive for twenty-one issues. Far more startling was the appearance of a Swedish magazine. To start such a venture in wartime Europe (despite Swedish neutrality) was a sign of the determination of the Swedes to read science fiction in their own language. JULES VERNE MAGASINET was a weekly magazine first appearing in October 1940 and carrying a variety of reprints from US magazines. Its popularity carried it through over three hundred issues up to 1947.

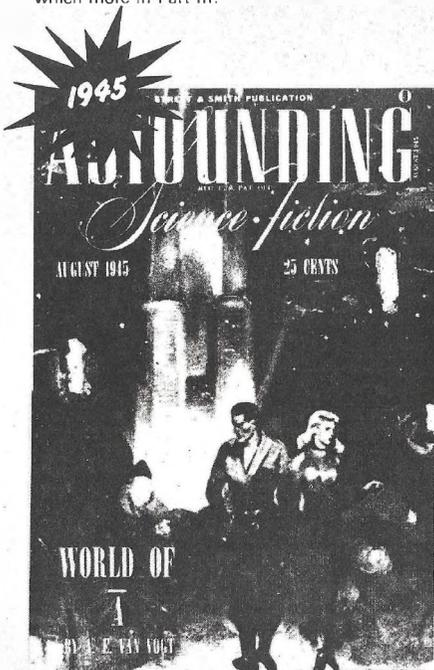
Sf fans may well have wondered where the sf boom was leading when yet more magazines appeared in 1941. Donald Wollheim, like Pohl, had been seeking the opportunity to edit a professional magazine, and eventually Albing Publications gave him the reins. In February 1941 STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES appeared, followed by COSMIC STORIES. Wollheim, leader of the fan clan known as the Futurians, was able to attract stories from other Futurians, which was a definite advantage since his publishers forced him to try and obtain fiction for next to nothing. The subsequent uproar did not help matters with the threatened boycott of the magazines. Some

issues were made up solely of short-short stories written by Cyril Kornbluth, Donald Wollheim, John Michel and Robert Lowndes under a nebulous assortment of pseudonyms.

What remains unique about STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES is that the title referred to only half the magazine. The other half, complete with its own departments and editorial, was called STIRRING FANTASY FICTION, thereby clearly separating the two genres.

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and President Roosevelt's isolation policy went by the board. The subsequent call to arms meant many publishers were forced to tighten the ropes, and magazines began to fold rapidly.

During 1941 Standard Magazines lost Weisinger to the comic book world. Oscar J Friend was now in charge and he found himself immediately minus STRANGE STORIES. THRILLING WONDER STORIES went bi-monthly. By 1943 this magazine and STARTLING STORIES went quarterly, page counts dropping as low as 100. CAPTAIN FUTURE disappeared completely and by the end of 1945 only the two magazines survived, but they were now in the hands of revolutionary editor, Samuel Merwin, of which more in Part III.



When the offices of Blue Ribbon magazines moved elsewhere Charles Hornig left them. As a conscientious objector the war did not treat him well and he dropped from the sf scene. The magazines were now in the hands of Robert Lowndes, who was Hornig's age. In October 1941 the two publications merged as FUTURE COMBINED WITH SCIENCE FICTION and remained as such for a year before being titled first FUTURE FICTION and then SCIENCE FICTION and being suspended in July 1943, SF QUARTERLY having followed the same route in April 1943.

The same period saw the death of ASTONISHING STORIES and SUPER SCIENCE STORIES. Frederik Pohl had also left the magazines in 1941 and they had passed to Alden H Norton, with Ejler Jakobssen as Managing Editor.

Early in 1941 Red Circle magazines had ceased publication of MARVEL STORIES, although they put out UNCANNY STORIES as a successor to DYNAMIC SCIENCE STORIES. After one issue it disappeared altogether. Wollheim's COSMIC STORIES lasted three issues, whilst STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES appeared with a fourth and final issue in March 1942.

FANTASTIC NOVELS was suspended in April 1941, but FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES remained ever popular and in fact for seven months during 1942 actually achieved a monthly schedule and increased its pages to 144. But suddenly in 1943 disaster struck and after the March 1943 issue hearts pounded until the September issue appeared, thereafter to be on a

quarterly schedule. Mary Gnaedinger was joined in her editorial duties by Alden H Norton.

At the start of 1941 UNKNOWN had gone bi-monthly. In October the title changed to UNKNOWN WORLDS and the size increased to 'bedsheet'. ASTOUNDING SF followed suit in January 1942, the page count dropping correspondingly. The change was not popular, and in mid-1943 both magazines returned to pulp format. UNKNOWN WORLDS died in October 1943, and in November the first digest-sized ASTOUNDING SF appeared: 8 x 5.5 inches with 180 pages.

This naturally saved paper and was a handy size for fitting in pockets. The fans readily accepted it, and once again Campbell had pulled off a first.

But this was not the surprise of the period. With paper shortages, editorial changes, and top authors (particularly Campbell's) being called into the war effort it was an exceptionally hard time for sf. But not for Ray Palmer. First with FANTASTIC ADVENTURES (April 1942) and four months later with AMAZING STORIES the number of pages shot up from 144 to 244. What is more, the magazines remained monthly. Palmer was therefore putting out twice, and in some cases four times as much sf as his competitors. Admittedly for the hard-core sf fan much of it was hackwork with the occasional gem. Here saw the growth of the humorous sf stories, particularly in the hands of Robert Bloch and his *Lefty Feep* series, and others such as David Wright O'Brien and William P McGivern.

The economics of the nation eventually caught up with Palmer in 1943 when the magazines were forced to go bi-monthly and then quarterly; but AMAZING STORIES remained the circulation leader, which had resounding repercussions after the appearance of a certain Richard S Shaver.

When World War II came to an end a fine pruning had taken place in the magazine field, and it is a reasonable assumption to regard the survivors as the most popular magazines, although the strength of the publishers owed much to a magazine's longevity.

Who were these survivors? ASTOUNDING SF, still monthly, still edited by John W Campbell, but now digest size and costing 25 cents led the field of mature sf. Campbell had had his paths crossed by US Intelligence during the war who tried to stop him publishing stories concerning atomic bombs, particularly after the appearance of Cleve Cartmill's *Deadline* (March 1944). Campbell hed told them what they could do.

Samuel Merwin was now trying to reshape the quarterly THRILLING WONDER and STARTLING STORIES. Palmer was about to launch the 'Shaver Theory' on the unsuspecting readers of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Alden Norton was similarly revitalizing FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. WEIRD TALES had suffered the loss of Farnsworth Wright in 1940, and now edited by Dorothy McIlwraith, its content virtually excludes it from our history. It continued publication until September 1954.

And what of PLANET STORIES? Regularly, four times a year, virtually unscathed, Malcolm Reiss had continued to produce this ever popular magazine. Even though it represented the other side of the spectrum it had been something solid for the warring fan to look forward to. PLANET STORIES could expect a few more happy years at least.

1945 would be the last nadir of sf publishing. With 1946 fans would start to see the ripples of Boom Number 2, but this boom would be beyond even their wildest dreams.

1. From the *Contributors to Fantasy* department in FANTASY No 1, edited by T Stanhope Sprigg and published by G Newnes Ltd, London (1938)
2. From *A Requiem For Astounding* by Alva Rogers (Advent Publishers, Chicago, 1964; March 1973 edition) from the Chapter *The Golden Age: 1941* (page 85)
3. From *The Editor's Notebook* (page 4) of the May issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES published by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Co, Chicago
4. From *The Telepath* letter column (page 126) of the June 1939 issue of SCIENCE FICTION published by Blue Ribbon Magazines Inc, Massachusetts



'I understand, sir. Neilsen was a close friend, once.' Tanner forced away the memory. 'Another thing, sir. I've studied plans of the vessel, and one peculiar thing comes to mind. There are two separate control sections, two separate living cubicles, and no contact between the quarters of one man and those of his companion. We're being kept apart, sir. I wondered why.'

The General frowned. 'A good question, Tanner. It was bound to be asked sooner or later. You're wrong, you know, when you say there's no contact between the two compartments. There's a radio. However, there's no connecting door, nor any other way of moving from one man's section to the other's. Each man is totally cut off.'

'I know, sir. Why?'

'Would it satisfy you if I told you that there are two sets of controls, one in each section, and that they're kept separate so that neither pilot can interfere in affairs which concern his partner?'

'No, sir, it wouldn't,' Tanner said stubbornly.

The General smiled grimly. 'I didn't think it would. But it's true, you know, up to a point. Your own controls run the ship out as far as Jupiter's orbit and back. Those of your companion cut in for the descent to the planet's surface. While you stay in orbit, he drops down to Jupiter in the landing-craft. This has been specially constructed, because the stresses it will have to undergo are almost unbelievable.'

'Yes, sir,' Tanner said patiently. 'But you still haven't told me why the other man and I are being kept apart.'

'No, I haven't.' There was a sharp edge on the General's voice. 'And it's not a thing I can tell you. It's essential to the success of the mission that the pilots are separated from one another. That's all I can tell you, Tanner.'

Tanner bit his lip. 'So I'm to spend a total of just over ten Earth-weeks shut up with another man, and I'm not going to get even a glimpse of his face. Right?'

'Right. I'm sorry about this, Tanner, but all you can possibly be told is that it is necessary for you to be separated. The rest you must learn for yourself.'

**T**he Jupiter Launch Platform was in orbit twenty-thousand miles above the Earth. There was no sound in space as the vessel kicked slowly away from the platform, then began to drift gently off into the starry darkness. Before long the thrust-unit came alive, and still there was no sound. Long fingers of coloured vapour licked from the base of the vessel, and it began steadily to build up speed until the launch platform was no longer visible. Then its nose started to swing round, aiming for a point in space which would eventually be filled by the bulk of Jupiter.

Inside the vessel, Tanner sat before the controls. Apart from a minor correction of course now and then, there was very little for him to do until they neared Jupiter. It worried him to think of the other pilot, only three or four feet away, sheltered by impenetrable steel. They could neither see nor touch each other, because that was the way the experts had arranged things. Tanner wondered why. For some reason he was not allowed to see his companion. He shook his head and reached for the radio, and he suddenly realised that he hadn't even been told the other man's name.

He flicked the switch, connecting the two control-sections by radio. 'Hello,' he began, then paused. 'Hello, friend. My name's Tanner. Phil Tanner. I don't know yours. Can you hear me?'

Tanner held his breath. This was a big moment for him. The only way he could know his companion was by means of his voice. He wondered if it would be possible to build up a mental picture of the man, having only heard his voice. 'Hello, Phil,' said the radio. The voice was deep, rich and resonant, and it pleased Tanner. He pictured a man to match the voice: large, powerful, amiable. The voice went on. 'My name is Wilbur.'

Tanner's mind raced. Wilbur? That didn't sound English. So was Wilbur foreign? Was this

some diplomatic game the brass-hats had dreamed up, to send two men of different nationalities into space together just to prove that they could co-exist without falling out over politics? If so, it wasn't such a bad idea. So what was Wilbur? The name could be German, Polish, Hungarian. Or it could even be Russian. Still, there had been no noticeable accent in Wilbur's voice.

Tanner asked hesitantly, 'Are you — are you English?'

'Oh yes. As English as the Tower of London. And you?'

'Yes, me too. Look here, Wilbur, what's this all about? Why the hell are we kept apart like rats in different traps?' Tanner's own choice of words chilled him.

Wilbur hesitated. 'I don't know. Ours not to reason why ...'

'Perhaps you're right,' Tanner shrugged. 'We've over ten weeks in which we'll be only a few feet apart, yet we can't see each other. That fact's going to worry me at times, you know.'

'Don't worry,' said Wilbur. 'There must be a valid reason for it.'

Tanner had plenty of time for thinking. The outward journey was scheduled to take almost seven-hundred hours, and this was little short of miraculous. Only three years or so beforehand the Jupiter-mission would have been impossible — or, at any rate, impracticable in terms of time. But then the Esselberg Drive had come along and revolutionised the whole concept of interplanetary velocities. The Esselberg Drive was an intricate combination of atomics, gravity-nullification, and the harnessing of a weird non-magnetic spatial Force which even Esselberg himself couldn't begin to understand. It allowed Tanner's vessel to build up gradually to a staggering maximum velocity of almost eight-hundred thousand miles per hour. This put Jupiter only a month away from the Earth.

And a month gave Tanner a lot of time for thought. Little by little he was making for himself a mental image of Wilbur, so that he could compare the imaginary with the actual when finally they returned to Earth. He pictured a tall, muscular man, with a shock of curly black hair and brown eyes. Wilbur had neither confirmed nor denied this image, for Tanner had pointed out that he wanted no clues at all as to Wilbur's physical appearance. He wanted to play a little game with himself, to pass the time. Tanner wondered if Wilbur might be engaged on a similar pastime.

Wilbur's character was taking shape, too. Tanner knew him as a pleasant, friendly man, always willing to talk for hours on end. They talked of their own lives, their memories, their likes and dislikes. Sometimes Wilbur recited tiny snatches of poetry or prose: Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Khayyam. Tanner was not a well-read man, and he found a new and exciting interest in the words of long dead men of letters, recited in Wilbur's rich, vibrant voice. Wilbur taught him a verse here and there. In return Tanner drew word-pictures of his own family — a blonde young woman, an infant boy and a baby girl, a swelling stomach which, he hoped, would be his second son by the time he returned from Jupiter. He promised to call the boy Wilbur. Wilbur chuckled, then said that he himself had no family.

Tanner enjoyed gardening back home. He told Wilbur about a new rockery he'd only just finished. He described a lawn he'd planted last summer, and a rose-bed where one of the blooms was practically black. Wilbur listened attentively, interrupting now and then to ask questions about a certain flower which Tanner had mentioned. Some of the names were completely new to him, and Tanner had to think hard to put into words the beauty of the flowers.

'You should see them,' he said, hearing the friendly, comfortable sounds that came to him over the radio — the creak as Wilbur moved in his seat, the whirr and shrill of the instruments, the bass of Wilbur's voice, humming tunelessly. 'Wilbur, you really should see that garden of mine. I've got roses that'd take your breath away. As soon as we get back to Earth, you must come and spend a few weeks with us. Margaret would love to meet you. I know — and the kids

would, too. You could be Godfather to little Wilbur eh? How about that?'

Wilbur sighed. 'I would like all those things, Phil. Thank you.'

'It's settled, then. Now recite that poem again, will you? The one I like.'

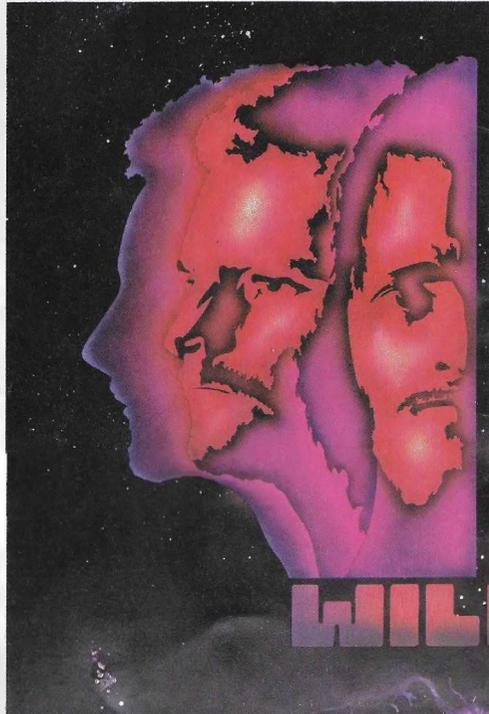
'Certainly, Phil. Which one are you thinking of?'

'It starts like this: "I dreamed that, as I wandered by the way, bare winter suddenly was changed to spring—" I think it's by Keats—'

'No, Phil,' Wilbur said pleasantly. 'It's Shelley.'

**M**ost of the time it was good. Tanner was enjoying the trip. There was hardly such a thing as work — a course adjustment every three hours, the six-hourly report to the tracking stations on Earth, a few photographs to be taken and meteor-sightings to be recorded, and that was all. He had hours of leisure time, during which he simply lay on the couch and talked to the unseen Wilbur over the radio.

But he had his bad moments, too. They mostly came to him while he was hanging on the verge



of sleep, feeling terribly alone, knowing that Wilbur was only a few feet away — a few feet that might as well be a million miles, for all the good one could do the other in the event of illness or accident. At such times as these, space seemed a lonely sort of place, where a man might easily go insane just thinking of the emptiness that lay on every side and above and below, stretching away to a fearful infinity.

Once it got so bad that he had to buzz Wilbur over the radio. 'Sorry if I woke you, pal—'

'Don't worry, Phil. What's wrong?'

'I'm ... lonely, I suppose. Sorry for disturbing you. It's just that space got on my nerves a bit, that's all. I want you to know that I'm ... well, I'm glad you're here to talk to. Otherwise I'd go mad. Thanks. And Good Night, Wilbur.'

'Good Night, Phil.'

After that he slept. But sleep was not always a good thing, for there were times when Tanner's mind could not rest. One screaming question was still troubling him: Why should he and Wilbur be separated, kept apart by a wall of steel, allowed only a radio contact?

His mind formulated several answers, some ridiculous, some almost sensible, some downright laughable. None of them seemed to fill the bill.

He wondered if Wilbur might be in some way insane, or at least unbalanced. Tanner didn't like

to think the thought, nor even to admit the possibility; but it had to be considered, along with all his other theories. Nothing about Wilbur sounded insane, of course. He was normal, friendly, well-educated. But was there some subtle, undetected, below-the-surface abnormality in his mind? Was Wilbur such an incredibly capable pilot that Space Command could see fit to send him on important missions, aberration and all? Or, even, was Wilbur's aberration – if he had one – an indispensable part of the plan? Was it in some way necessary, in order that the mission would be a success? Or again, had Space Command actually engineered Wilbur's insanity for reasons known only to themselves and the Almighty? Or was he, Tanner, himself going mad?

Sometimes he thought he was. He glanced now and then through the shaded observation slits, and he immediately felt sick. Outside hung miles and miles of nothingness, with here and there a pinprick of light, beckoning him to think and think and think about the unfathomable immensity of space, turning it over in his mind until he had no mind left at all. He bit his lip again, remembering the men whom space had sent out of their minds. Had they sat like this, staring at



the mockery of dark infinity, a deep blackness that sucked and probed at their minds, drawing out the last vestiges of sanity? Was he, like them, doomed to leave behind his soul, a wandering homeless thing in space?

He snatched frantically at the radio-switch, calling Wilbur. 'God, I'm jumpy! The thought of all that emptiness gives me the cold-shivers.' He depressed a button to blot out the window-slits. 'We're halfway there, Wilbur. Another fortnight and you'll be the first man to set foot on Jupiter. What an experience!'

'It should be,' answered Wilbur. 'I'm looking forward to it a lot.'

There was one major meteor-hit. It happened about one week before the vessel came into Jupiter's orbit. The meteor was about the size of a grape, which was quite enough to be unpleasant. It struck number 3 oxygen-reclamation plant, and Tanner had to put up with stale air for three hours whilst numbers 4 and 5 took on the excess work. Neither he nor Wilbur suffered any permanent harm, but the incident set Tanner thinking.

'Wilbur, if that meteor'd hit anything more important – say, one of the main fuel tanks, for instance, or even the Esselberg Drive Centre – or suppose it had holed the wall of your cabin or mine ... there's not much help we could give each other.'

'No, there isn't.'

'We're cut off from one another. Suppose one of us needs urgent help – say it was a matter of life and death ... what then?'

'We'd die,' said Wilbur.

It was the craziest thought Tanner had had so far. Was Wilbur a woman? Had they done something to her voice-box, or even installed in the cabin a machine that took her words and then sent through the radio an octave or two lower? It was a thought, if nothing else. At least it would account for the segregation. But it was more likely that a man, not a woman, would have been chosen to perform the final drop onto the surface of mighty Jupiter. A man would be physically stronger, and Jupiter was a tough place. But if Wilbur was a woman, why hadn't they come right out and told him? Why pretend?

Tanner tried to think of a testing question, one that might catch Wilbur out. But he couldn't think of one. All he could do was try to push the question of Wilbur's sex out of his mind, unanswered.

It wasn't always frightening when he looked out into space. Sometimes he prepared himself for the experience, taking deep breaths and telling himself in advance not to be afraid. At such times the view through the observation slits was incredibly beautiful. It made him think deeply about God, and eternity and infinity, and Time, and things he had seldom considered before. It seemed to make a better man of him. And sometimes he spoke about it with Wilbur.

'Wilbur, can you envisage infinity?'

'No, Phil. My mind is finite, as are all minds – I think.'

'Does space do anything to you? Does it seem to bring you nearer God?'

Tanner thought he heard Wilbur sigh, as if puzzled. 'I don't believe there is a God, Phil. I've considered the question deeply, and I can't bring myself to accept that there is an Almighty. It seems to me—'

Tanner interrupted. 'Then how do you account for all we can see, the stars, space, the Earth, the whole race of mankind? Surely these things must have a Creator.'

'Not necessarily. Tell me, who created the Creator?'

Tanner felt a flush of anger. It was an old and piercing question, and he had no answer to it. 'Well ... obviously there are things we can never answer adequately. I can't begin to understand many theological points, but that doesn't affect my faith. I can only believe, totally, in the existence of an essentially good God.'

'Then we must agree to differ.'

There were times when Tanner felt a burning need to see Wilbur in the flesh. The desire was a potent force within him, and it needed a great effort of will to deny it. Sometimes he wanted nothing more in the universe than one quick glimpse of Wilbur's face. He imagined the face and imagined it, building up the picture within his mind so often that it occasionally frightened him. He seemed so obsessed by it that it sometimes appeared to take on real, solid form, haunting him and unnerving him, coming at him in the night like some dismal spectre – deep brown eyes, black curly hair, a firm strong nose and jaw, full-lipped mouth. Tanner pictured a scattering of freckles high up on each cheek, and crinkled laughter-lines in the edges of the eyes ...

He wanted to bang and batter on the steel walls, vainly trying to knock them down, so that he could see the real live Wilbur. He wanted to cut or burn his way through into the adjoining cabin, in order to glimpse an unseen friend. And he knew that these wild thoughts were most likely the beginnings of a screaming madness born of the loneliness of deep space. He bit his tongue and swallowed the thoughts away. It was difficult.

The question still worried him: why were he and Wilbur segregated? According to the General, they were kept apart because the success of the mission depended on it. None of it made much sense to Tanner, and he tried to shrug the question away each time it came. He refused to think about it, because the alternative was a crazed brain.

They were in an elliptical orbit around Jupiter. Tanner stared into the viewscreen, seeing only one colossal object – the awe-inspiring, silver-grey orb of Jupiter. Most of the orb was covered in thick cloud, but here and there a dull tinge of brown or red showed through momentarily as the cloud-layer parted to reveal the planet's surface. A series of dark belts ran across the silvery cloud-masses, parallel to Jupiter's equator. The famous Red Spot was partially visible in the southern hemisphere, and Tanner could see two of Jupiter's closer moons hanging in space beside their immense parent.

The vessel had completed seven orbits. On the eighth orbit the descent to the surface would begin. All the last-minute checks and adjustments had been made, so that everything was ready for the drop. Tanner and Wilbur now faced twenty nerve-stretching minutes during which there was nothing to do but talk.

'What an incredibly beautiful sight, Wilbur! There has to be a God!'

'I don't see why, Phil. But I'll agree it's an unforgettable sight.'

Tanner glanced at the cabin clock. 'Eighteen minutes now. Nervous?'

'Not really. We've been well trained, and every detail's been checked and checked again. I'll be safe enough, don't worry.' Wilbur chuckled quietly. 'You just be sure and be in the right place at the right time when I come back up from the surface.'

'I'll be there,' Tanner promised, feeling somewhat frightened. The moment of truth was imminent – the testing time at which great stresses would be put upon both pilots and vessel. This was the time when a faulty instrument, a fractionally-slow action, an accidental touch on the wrong button at the wrong time, or even a tiny error of timing could all cause disaster and death. The greater danger was to Wilbur, Tanner realised with a chill. He had come to rely very much on Wilbur's presence – his friendliness, his companionship, his fascinating snatches of poetry, the occasional flash of humour that made space a less lonely place. If anything happened to Wilbur ...

Tanner choked the thought off, for it was ridiculous. But short-lived though the thought had been, it had at least emphasised the warmth and affection which Tanner felt for his unseen companion. They had grown to know and understand one another very well over the course of the past four weeks, and Tanner now counted Wilbur as one of his most intimate, most valued friends. Though it was odd, he mused, to feel such closeness with a man whose face he could only imagine. In a sense it was like being blind – painting a mind-picture of a man merely by the sound of his voice.

Tanner's thoughts drifted to the Earth, to the time after their return from Jupiter. He would arrange for Wilbur to come and stay for a few days, or even weeks. To pass the time they spoke of the Earth, of home and familiarity. A buzzer shrieked stridently to announce the time of the drop.

The descent passed like a dream, smoothly and faultlessly. After a while Tanner lay back in his seat, relaxing after the exertion of helping Wilbur with the talk-down onto Jupiter's surface. Tanner was now alone, and at first the sudden loneliness pressed down on him like a crushing weight. Emptiness surrounded him, and he had to face madness in a brooding silence and solitude more final than any before. He felt his nerves tense.

But then the thought of Wilbur came to him, sobering him and making the loneliness less intense and painful. He repeated Wilbur's name aloud several times, thrilling to the sound of his own voice. It was neither so clear nor so musical as Wilbur's voice, of course, but ...

He leaned towards the radio-speaker. 'How do you feel, Wilbur?'

'Fine, thanks.'

'Anything else you want before I start my rest-period?' Tanner asked.

Wilbur chuckled. 'Nothing, thank you. You get some sleep.' The radio went dead and Tanner lay back to rest. For a long while he couldn't sleep.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

**SCIENCE FICTION**  
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There were so many things to worry about, so many dangers to Wilbur, seventeen-thousand miles below on the surface. Firstly there was an enormous gravitational-force almost three times that of the Earth. A slight mischance – a malfunction in pressure-equalising equipment, for instance – and Jupiter would fall in on Wilbur, squashing him flat. Secondly the atmosphere of the planet caused Tanner to sit for hours worrying – a deadly atmosphere of hydrogen, helium and methane, punctuated in its deadliness by swirling clouds of crystallised ammonia. A minute puncture in the landing-craft's skin, a breakdown in the oxygen-purification system, a blockage in any one of a dozen delicate feed-pipes, all could force the breath from Wilbur's lungs and leave him gasping and merciless in the lethal grip of Jupiter.

True, everything had been checked and rechecked and then checked again. But that still left a very good chance of things going wrong. All Tanner could do was cross his fingers and bite his lip and occasionally pray to God.

Wilbur stayed on the surface for fifteen-and-a-quarter Jovian days, or a little over six Earth-days. He had more than enough to occupy his time – remote-controlled tests on a hundred different aspects of the local conditions, regular reports to the orbital vessel, a thousand tiny facts to be gathered and recorded. He set foot outside the landing-craft on three separate occasions, once for a period of two hours and twice for a more comprehensive six hour planet-walk.

Tanner was on constant radio-call for every minute of every day. Wilbur reported efficiently on a host of minute data, and every report was re-routed from the orbital vessel to the command-stations on Earth. Sometimes Wilbur came over the radio merely to pass the time of day. He and Tanner talked for hours about anything and everything.

'What's it like outside on the surface, Wilbur?'  
'Grey and grim and murky, Phil. Great banks of dense fog drifting about everywhere I look. Hardly any light at all. Sometimes, when the murk really clears, I can manage to catch sight of a line of crags about eighty yards away.'

Tanner mentally pictured Wilbur, far below on the surface, peering into the grey banks of low cloud – his brown eyes intense, his lips set tightly, a slight frown marring the smoothness of his features. Wilbur's voice went on. 'The ground's quite a mess – thousands of small sharp rocks scattered around, just waiting to rip the material of a walk-suit. I've seen no sign of life, and if anything does live here it has all my sympathy. Jupiter's a terrible hell-hole. I wouldn't wish it on anybody. I think, Phil, that if your God created this place, he made a damned bad job of it.' A small, irreverent laugh came across the radio. 'Or perhaps he just got angry for some reason and made it just to prove he could fashion the bad along with the good. Either way, Phil, it's a lousy piece of workmanship – Divine or not Divine.'

Tanner was momentarily hurt by the words. 'You didn't ought to talk like that, Wilbur.'

At times Tanner forced himself to gaze out into space. He slid the shutters wide and sat, wide-eyed, staring at the star-filled sky. Now and then a wave of sickness and panic clutched his heart, but these attacks never lasted long. The comparative closeness of Wilbur kept the demon of loneliness at bay effectively. Staring into the depths of universal infinity, Tanner tried to pin God down in his thoughts, equating all the terrestrial hatefulness with a deity whom he truly believed must be entirely beneficent. He couldn't do it, because the problem was far too complex for him. There were times when he thought that nothing could be greater than God's universe, and then there were other times when it seemed that his love for his own family – so many millions of miles away – must surely transcend even the splendour of the rest of the cosmos. Sometimes he felt very near enlightenment, and sometimes he felt very close to despair. And

sometimes he just didn't know what to think.

Wilbur's lift-off from Jupiter was a model of efficiency and planning. Nothing went wrong. Everything had been accomplished adequately and according to plan, and now Wilbur was on his way back to the orbiting vessel. Cold with excitement, Tanner sat watching the viewscreens. A tiny dot was creeping steadily across the gulf between Jupiter and his own vessel, a tiny dot which would grow and grow until it became Wilbur's landing-craft, hanging alongside in space while the docking manoeuvres were all carried out. Then Wilbur would be safe and Tanner could breathe again.

Soon the craft was within a few miles of the main vessel. Slowly the two drifted closer together, until Tanner could make out minor markings on the outer walls of the smaller land-bug. He felt a flash of resentment as he noticed that all the windows of Wilbur's craft were obscured, thus denying him any glimpse of the occupant. This fact upset him for a while, but the feeling soon passed. Tanner had too much to occupy his mind during the docking procedure. First it was necessary to align the two vessels correctly, then bring them together with maddening slowness so that the connecting-gear locked tightly. The manoeuvre completed, they had three more orbits of Jupiter to make, and then set out for home. Behind them, Jupiter gradually fell away, and Tanner allowed himself a moment of self-congratulation at the thought of another successful mission.

One more idea came to him on the way back. Had Wilbur been locked away in his separate air-tight compartment so that no germs picked up on Jupiter might transfer themselves to Tanner? This seemed hardly likely, because both men would automatically enter a lengthy quarantine-period on their return to Earth, anyway. And even if the theory were correct, it didn't explain the lack of visual contact between the pilots. Hermetically-sealed windows could easily have been built in, connecting the two compartments. Tanner shrugged his shoulders and tried to think of something else.

Time seemed to pass more swiftly going back, and Tanner spent hours thinking and dreaming of his family. He talked about them to Wilbur, luxuriating in every mention of each of their names. It made him feel good.

'Have you any plans after we get home, Wilbur?'

'Nothing definite, Phil.'

'You must come and stay with us, pal. We've plenty of room. Just wait until you see my roses; you've never seen roses like them! Young Phil will take to you, I know. He's a real live-wire, believe me. You sound like the athletic type, Wilbur, so you'll be able to keep up his pace.' Tanner chuckled quietly, dreaming of home. 'With any luck, little Wilbur will have been born. God willing, we'll both see him within a few weeks.'

On the journey back to Earth, Tanner worried less and less about the questions which had vexed him throughout the outward trip. Now and then he puzzled over Wilbur's true identity, or about the reason for their isolation from each other. But he knew that the answers would all come in good time, back on Earth. He could be patient. They talked together for days, Phil harping on the subject of his family, Wilbur quoting his inexhaustible supply of poetry and prose. Phil learned a lot. Sometimes they fell into light arguments about the existence of God, though it was friendly discussion and not hostile dissent. Not a single really sharp word passed between them.

Neither of them went mad through space-loneliness, because neither of them was lonely. They had companionship and diversions.

At last Earth swung below them, blue and green and home. The vessel docked with the Jupiter Launch Platform, where each separate control-section, complete with pilot, was detached from the mother-ship and ferried down to Earth. Radio contact between Phil and Wilbur continued all the way down, and Phil repeatedly wondered whether his unseen companion had also been playing the same guessing-game regarding his fellow-pilot's physical appearance and nature.

From the ferry-ship the control-sections were detached as single units, then the two pilots were transferred – without contact with the air of Earth – into adjoining decontamination-chambers. Here they would stay for at least three weeks, being tested by remote control. They still hadn't seen each other.

The chambers were large and comfortable, but there was no physical or visual contact, and they kept in touch by means of the radio. Technicians spoke to them, questioning them, checking them, testing their physiological and psychological states. No one answered any of their questions.

Finally, after an eternity of suspense, the last day came. Today they would be released into the world. Phil Tanner passed the final hours in pleasant anticipation. Very soon he would see Margaret and the children . . . and little Wilbur, no doubt. But supposing little Wilbur turned out to be a girl? . . . He laughed. He could hardly contain himself, hardly wait to see them again. Tanner paced the floor, to and fro, to and fro, almost insane with expectation—

And then it hit him. Good God! It was so obvious. All the hours of speculation, and he'd been miles off the mark all the time. He cursed himself for a blind fool. What an idiot he'd been not to see the glaring truth: Wilbur was a robot!

Christ, it was obvious! It had all been a gigantic experiment, with very high stakes – Tanner's own sanity, no less. A man needed companionship in space, even if that companionship were artificial. No wonder they hadn't let him see Wilbur! It explained all the isolation, all the seclusion, the separate compartments. Holy Mary, Wilbur was probably nothing more than a jumble of wires and circuits, not even human in shape! Of course, he was fitted with an artificial brain and personality – but it was a personality so utterly different to Tanner's own . . . a bachelor, not like Phil Tanner the family man; a well-read man of letters, brim-full of poetry, unlike Phil Tanner the practical gardener . . . a conglomeration of eloquent electronic gadgets had kept Tanner sane throughout the journey – sane and sensible, despite the lack of human company . . . Wilbur's pseudo-brain had been specifically manufactured as that of an atheist, in contrast to Tanner's belief in God . . . naturally all these differences in character would stimulate constructive conversation, a never-ending flow of subjects to talk about, argue about, discuss, dissect, compare – all the time keeping at bay the terrible soul-destroying loneliness of deep space . . . God, what a brilliant idea! Also, considering Jupiter's hostile environment, it was more logical to send a robot down onto the surface rather than a man. Once again Tanner cursed at himself for failing to spot the obvious . . .

It was quiet in the decontamination-chamber. Suddenly the door began to open and Tanner sprang to his feet in excitement. Would this be Margaret and the kids? He'd still call the new arrival Wilbur, provided it was a boy . . . if robots could have feelings, Wilbur would appreciate that show of respect. It would be nice to set eyes on Wilbur, he reflected – just once, so that he could see exactly what unsightly monstrosity had kept him sane and called up his friendship.

The door opened and the General stood there. Tanner felt mildly disappointed. Smiling, the General came to him and shook his hand warmly. 'A successful mission, Phil. Congratulations . . . now, I suppose you've plenty of questions to ask?'

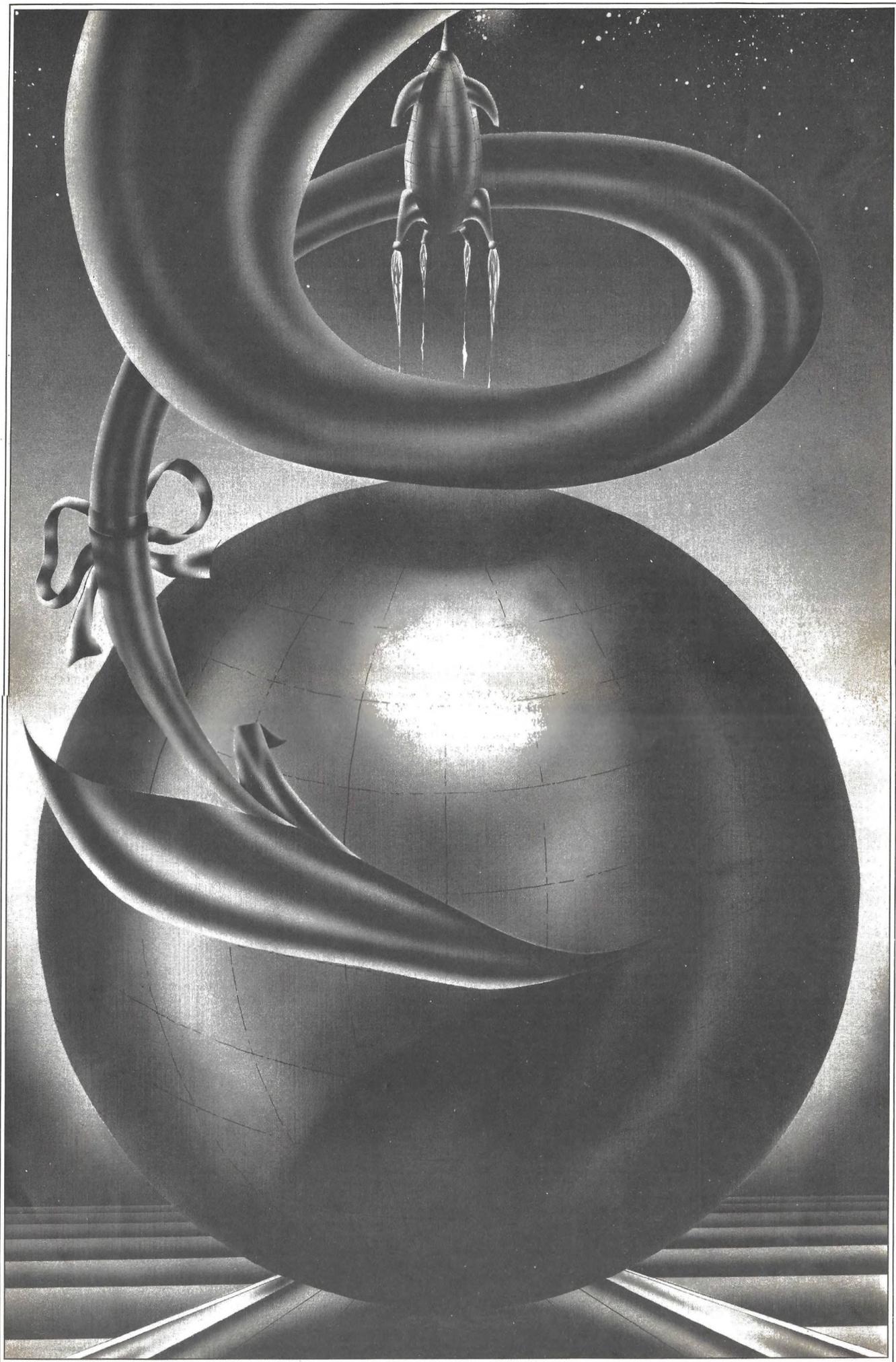
'None,' Tanner replied. 'I know all the answers, now. It was a wonderful idea, sir, to send a man and a robot into space together. At least we've settled the loneliness-factor.'

'Indeed we have.' The General indicated a chair. 'Well, Phil, if you've got all the answers, we may as well just talk about the trip. How did it go, son?'

Tanner sat down. 'Fine, sir. I enjoyed it, thanks.'

'Good,' said the General affably. 'You did a great job.' He patted Phil gently and amicably on the shoulder, smiling his gratitude.

Then he switched him off.



MIKE LITTLE

# WATCH-CHAIN OF AJJER BY RON OWEN

JUST AS soon as the acceleration stops I'm personally, with my own hands, these honest, dirt-scraped, hard-working hands, going to ram ball-bearings into every orifice possessed by that wretched Latherton. Hard!

He who has lost us all our cargo, our flight bonus, our jobs and very nearly our immortal souls. Contract wrecking is a serious business with any company, and unless we can pick up an asteroid or two of uranium to placate the clients, I give little for our chances of future employment.

I'll have him spitting steel out of his ears!

Why am I this annoyed? I'll tell you why!

This job was offered us, see, just to fly a load of crates of earthworms to a new colony that was having a bit of trouble with the local desert. Pick up some Hawah weed from a close neighbour and drift back home with lots of credits in the bank and a month's vacation to make good use of them. So we have everything set like a grain of sand in an oyster and all we have to do is wait, when Blatherton-Latherton slips a suggestion into the casual talk of the homeward-floating-pleasure-seekers, me and my innocent crew:

'Why not stop off at Ajjer? I know the locals – we might get a laugh.'

All right, it was up to me to decide, but we were well ahead of schedule, and laughs are few enough on a tramp cruiser. I should have known better – we all knew he studied for his Spaceman's Badge off the backs of corn-flake packets.

'Tell us about the natives – are they a) pretty and b) friendly?' says Grigg, whose idea of fun is a waltz around the local pyramids with a sun-loving, fun-loving, well-endowed exhibitionist, of any sex. (You may think 'either sex' is better grammar, but if so you haven't been to the furry hells of Plummer's Elbow.)

Oh, Latherton obliged: 'The Ajerites are great people – you'll love them. They have a lot of very picturesque ceremonies and joyous festivals, and life is one long happy holiday. But apart from the commercials, they are marvellous. They'd give their last credit to a smiling spaceman just for a zip off his vacuum suit.'

He laughed! The fool actually laughed!

He told us a lot more stuff, and it sounded really nice – a laugh a parsec. He knew everything about them, except the one thing we found out for ourselves.

They are tall, beautiful people, lean but immensely strong, happy-go-lucky and gay, with a thousand charming habits that delight the lonely traveller, but they do not like insults about their tails.

The colour of their head-feathers, that's fair game.

The texture of their scales, fine.

Mention the smell of their oil-secretory ducts, they laugh with you.

But say the word 'tail' with anything but the ultimate in obsequious, heartfelt reverence, and you are in trouble!

The reason may go right back to the survival antics of their tree-dwelling ancestors, I don't know – but why didn't that creeping cretin Latherton know about it?

'Well,' he says as we back up to the cruiser before a crowd of angry – but glowing! – Ajerites on the eve of our second glorious day after landing, 'well, I've never insulted their tails before, have I?'

This time he had, and with effect! What he must have suggested I hate to think, but his pretty, green-headed escort had flashed fire from her pearly-grey eyes, and the message had spread, fast!

So with our backs against the tail-fins we decide to stop, and twenty or thirty natives approach to within stepping distance on my twitching toes. Then the tallest of the war-party steps forward, holding his splendid tail proudly in his hand, the tip erect and impressive in luminous blue, flashing-fire fur.

'Don't worry,' says Flatherton, 'they have a code of ethics. They are scrupulously fair.'

'We have a code of ethics,' spouts St Elmo the Flame-tail. 'You have violated it. In order to satisfy our honour, a contest will be arranged. If you lose, your cargo will be confiscated. Your lives may be forfeit, also, if we catch you. Do you agree?'

He gives a short bellow of merriment, baring his short, sharp teeth. Before I can open my mouth, Blatherton nudges me and hisses:

'Let me handle this. I've heard all about these little tiffs – they are a bit touchy about some things, it appears. Never heard about tails setting one off, though.'

Aloud he calls out, as if gibberish comes naturally to him:

'The shortest distance between two points is a straight line!'

Well, all Flame-tail does is nod, and the crowd disperses.

There's me and two of the communications crew looking as if we had never communicated in our lives, despite our gaping mouths. The unspoken question in our trusting eyes causes Splatherton to nod as well – 'I told you, I know about these people.'

Apparently it's a long-standing custom for the aggressor to nominate the terms of the contest, and for the suffering tail-waggers to devise a contest on this basis. The fisticuffs are subsequent. So with the first part completed to everyone's satisfaction – everyone that appeared to count, that is – we all fall into the ship for a strong coffee.

We don't have long to wait. Latherton refuses to tell us anything about his choice of terms, but informs us grandly that the Ajerites pride themselves on their understanding of alien cultures – me, an alien! – and on their own ingenuity and speed. It is a matter of honour that they set up the contest in two hours flat, and we have to be ready in twenty-four hours from that time. Roughly this means that they allow us the rotation period of our home planet, while they are ready in one-twelfth of the time – they have six digits on each hand.

In 118 minutes plus or minus a milli-second from the time I eased the crease in my backside off the tail-fin, a deputation of three proud stalkers takes us to the contest ground, and as this involved negotiating entry to the ship, waiting for us to finish our coffee, arranging us spatio-dynamically in their little machine – to nullify force-plane vectors, would you believe? – and transporting us a distance of about 25 miles, you can guess they ain't slow.

The contest area is on a flat, empty plain, which has odd props jutting up like derelict sets from a film studio, and goes away into the distance for ever. We are shown a large, circular pit

some 200 metres across and all of 50 metres deep. At the centre is a post of shiny metal sprouting about 3 metres from the floor. From a point on the circumference of the pit near where we are standing, a dead straight metal channel runs to within six centimetres of the base of the post, supported on slender pillars, and looking like a madman's motorway, or an enormous ruler welded by an idiot giant into his wife's cake-tin.

We don't have to wonder long what it's all about, as Flame-tail the Faithful points to two metal spheres, each one metre in diameter. 'This one,' he says, 'is ours, and that one is yours. Whichever reaches the post first will cause the other to explode. The one that explodes indicates the losers. You have twenty-four hours to construct your channel. The spheres will be set free from their retaining cradles simultaneously, by the closing of a simple relay device. The spheres are already set, so that it is obvious where you must erect your channel.'

We stare at the thingummy, but good old you-know-who gives a chuckle and sets off at a brisk pace back to the transporter. At a run – his legs are twice as long as mine – I ask him what is going on. He motions me to be quiet, and I am, but back at the ship we grab him and threaten to bash him senseless. This amuses him very much and he grins: 'They're fair – I know, I tell you. They'd always give you a chance!'

So we start unloading the cargo into the sunlight ready for confiscation while his lordship disappears into his own little room with a collection of tools and spares from the emergency repairs locker. A lot of sweat later he calls to us, and we crush into his room where he has two gadgets lined up on his table. So how is he going to save our lives with a few bits of wood and steel, we ask, full of reason? He winks his little dam-blasted eye at us and proceeds with the lecture. He explains how his gadgets save our lives.

'The problem,' he says, like we're monkeys and he's the banana-man, 'is to get our sphere to the centre post before theirs.'

We interrupt: 'But they have a perfectly straight channel to roll their sphere down. You and your shortest distance between two points! How can we beat that? If they'd made their channel in a spiral shape, we'd have stood a chance . . .'

'Do not fluster yourselves, good space-mates. I hoped for something like this – I have a little hobby . . .'

'We know that!' from Grigg.

' . . . called Geometry, and as well as outwitting the natives I shall demonstrate to my friend with the underfed brain here the virtues of study in one's childhood as opposed to the various un-savoury pursuits in which that good person so obviously indulged.'

Latherton is enjoying himself. He points to the table:

'Observe Model A, a scaled-down pit with a perfectly placed ball-bearing at the start of a perfectly straight channel leading down to this pin at the centre.'

He moves a lever and the bearing rolls down the channel to strike the pin. It doesn't take long. We look where he points.

'The shortest distance between two points may be a straight line,' he warbles, 'but the time taken to go from point A to point B is nothing to

do with it. They have slipped up, my friends, not knowing what a powerful adversary they have! Beware the dangers of under-estimation!

To stop his horrible gloating I jump in with both feet: 'So you are going to fit rockets to our sphere?'

'A look of pain crosses my face,' he grimaces to prove it. 'No, no, that wouldn't be playing the game. And it is quite unnecessary. I have constructed here a channel which will get the sphere to the centre post quicker than the channel of Model A. Observe Model B.'

So we look at Model B. The channel is sort of droopy. We look at Latherton. He sort of puffs up.

'It is designed as a catenary – the curve a telegraph wire takes, or the shape of a watch-chain worn on your great-great-grand-daddy's waist-coat.'

'Perfectly pretty,' says Grigg. I thump him to be quiet.

'Of course, this channel is only half of such a curve – from the watch down to the waist-coat button, before the chain starts going up again, so to speak.'

I'm a bit uneasy, so I tell him my great-great-grand-daddy never did get into the habit of sticking metal pins in his navel and trying to knock them out again by rolling ball-bearings down his watch-chain. Latherton tries again.

'Imagine a child's slide in a park . . . do you think a straight slide would work better?'

'Dawn is breaking.' Another contribution from Grigg.

Latherton is muttering to himself: ' . . . course a cycloidal curve would be better still, but with the gear we've got, and to get a quick job plotting from a model, I think it's best if . . .'

I cut him short, we know he can meander on for light-years with his technical jiggerings. I nudge him back to reality.

'You really think this will work?'

'Of course. The sphere is rolling under the influence of gravity. It so happens it will get to the bottom of the curved channel before it would get to the bottom of the straight channel.'

He prods a lever on Model B, and a ball-bearing rolls down the channel to hit the pin. Like a child (hypothetical) on the slide (hypothetical) it picks up speed quickly at first, then its acceleration lessens, but it's already going at a fair turn when that happens. It looks as if it might just be a bit quicker than the other model. A jabber of voices is about to take over so I shout above it, 'So although the sphere travels further, it travels faster, eh?'

Latherton nods and beams and jigs up and down.

We shake our heads doubtfully. He produces a stop-watch. We time the run on Model A, then Model B, then Model A again, then again. There just might be something in it, if Grigg's finger is reliable on the stop-starter button. We try letting the bearings go simultaneously on both models – it looks very close, very close indeed.

'Ah,' says the maestro of the balls, 'but these are such small models. With the measurements in the pit out there, the difference will be quite clear. About two hundred times clearer, in fact.' And he leans back on the table, as if he has all the beans in the can.

'All you have to do now,' he tells us, 'is build the channel to the correct size.'

Well, what can we do but try? The crew get busy and in a few hours we have a channel rigged up from scrambled materials pirated from the ship, and ready to be slotted into position before the contest, when its own weight will make it assume just the shape of my unknown great-great-grandfather's watch-chain, high-point to low-point, thus making supports unnecessary, and making allowance for the fact that the ground-contact at the centre-post will offset the distortion to the curve caused by the rigidities and inadequacies of our construction, and if nothing goes wrong . . . we might yet save the cargo by winning.

We don't, of course – it's lying there in the sun right now while we suffer the maximum acceleration this can will take, but at least while I lie here tapping this I suppose I can be grateful that no bits of human flesh got torn off my crew by alien fangs – they gave us just enough time to get clear. I'm forced to admit.

Anyway, when the channel was built – in neat

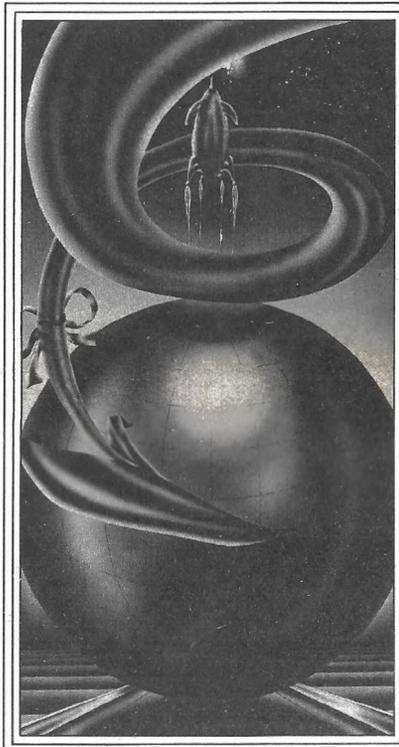
sections, ready for transporting and slotting together on site – 'Brilliant,' says Latherton – and the ship had lost all of its non-essential bits of metal plate, and much that really should have stayed where it was – we spend the rest of the day playing with ball-bearings and stop-watches till we're dizzy.

Let them both go at exactly the same time, and the one rolls down the straight slope, getting faster all the time, while the other seems to slow down after a fast start, but . . . it's very close. We decide we just have the edge, and go to sleep congratulating the limp-witted Latherton on rescuing us from the mess he got us into.

Next day the time for the contest approaches, and we leave the ship in ready state, just in case, which is lucky for us. A referee is watching over our cargo, not that valuable crates of Hawah weed walk around much by themselves.

Flame-tail and his cronies are waiting for us, punctilious as hell.

We drag out our channel from the transporter and set it up with a lot of grunting and swearing – it isn't too easy hauling over 130 metres of flexible channelling into position with all your fingers crossed. We finally lock it into position. It looks good.



The spheres are all tricked out in their cradles, the radio-controls and explosives checked and set, and a little crystal peg inserted into a small hole in front of each sphere to prevent it from rolling. An electronic device is set to blow the two crystals to atoms at exactly the same instant.

We know it will be a close thing, but we stand our ground, proud and haughty and pissing ourselves like humans in danger all over the galaxy, trembling and trusting in the all-powerful Latherton.

He nods reassuringly: 'I know these people. They're all right.'

I wonder if we haven't forgotten anything.

I wonder why the Ajjerites look so pleased with our efforts.

They incline their heads in attitudes of congratulation, as though at a game well-fought, and they click something that is not visible, loudly. The seconds tick away and I glance nervously around. The sun is glinting on the sharp, shining teeth of the tail-wavers as they smile over at us.

What those dental devices could do to my succulent flesh I shudder to contemplate: 'You may forfeit your cargo, and your lives too, if you catch you!' Flame-tail had kidded us. My adrenalin production is into top gear, I can tell you!

But we are sure that the split-second timing

will allow our floppy channel to do its best. Yet everything may still depend on the tension of the cables, the quality of the lubricants, the number of bumps we could not iron out . . . the margin of victory is so slight that even the smallest mistake, the tiniest imperfection, the least error in our calculations could lose us the race . . . but given a fair chance, we'd show what true-born Earthmen could do! Did they give us a fair chance with their subtle code of ethics? You tell me if they gave us a fair chance!

As the time for Nemesis to knock nears, we stiffen our collective upper lip. My knees are twitching as the second-hand sweeps around towards zero. The preparations are impeccable.

We hold our breath – I'll swear the sun itself slowed a fraction as the pointer touched its mark.

Our breath is released in a gasp as the explosives detonate the crystals, the two spheres start their journeys simultaneously – and yes, over the first few metres ours is gaining, even in the apparent slow-motion engendered by the greater scale of things, ours is definitely gaining

Then a howl and we all break and run like the clappers for the transporter. I'll never run faster . . . the door is open, and the engine has been left running! What luck! No point in watching the performance of our beautiful channel now! No point in watching the spheres or waiting for the explosion! They won't catch us! No brutes will bite our buttocks! The engine screams as we force the machine way past its natural limits, and we make it back to the ship, right past the precious cargo, leave the transporter before it finishes shuddering, on to the couches and blast-off like a grasshopper sat on a glowing cigarette-end!

To my dying dribble I shall not forget the laughter – the loud, happy, mocking laughter that chased us from the contest ground and which still reverberates round my skull.

We'd committed ourselves to the contest all right – well, we were in the wrong, weren't we? – and tried our terrestrial technological best, but just as our sphere was establishing its precarious lead, we all saw – we were all meant to see! – the flash of sunlight from the tip of Flame-tail's four-metre length of prehensile treachery as he snaked it out to give his sphere a last, helpful, loving push!

We certainly didn't wait around for the explosive verdict! The way they were laughing we couldn't have heard it anyway! And it is only when they laugh that you realise just how razor-sharp those teeth are, and just how many of them are packed into each imminent mouth!

But bless their great furry behinds, I might even have seen the funny side of it myself, soon, if Flather-Blather hadn't let loose that insane giggle of his own shortly after blast-off.

'They've Ajjer,' he snorted, 'they've Ajjerite enough! I always wondered how they made a living!'

He's right for once, of course! It's my bet they make a damn good living out of picking fights with scary, space-worn crews unfortunate enough to land there. And the irony is that we shall help them! Of course I shall never let this tape loose while I'm alive, for fear of being ridiculed out of the galaxy! But the story will get around – some of it at least – I've no doubt the Ajjerites will see to that: and in any case, you can't lose a whole cargo with nobody hearing of it!

'Been to Ajjer, then, have you?' my friends will be asking.

'Oh yes, had a great time.' I'll tell them with a smile, while my guts tie granny-knots in themselves. You don't think I'd tell the truth, do you?

And I'll place ten to one last time Latherton was on Ajjer his ship was on an empty run! So they use him – and other imbeciles like him – as a bait for the next catch: fancy playing a lump of Cheddar to attract mice to a planetload of prickly pussy-cats?

Oh, you can be sure we'll cover up their fraudulent, feline felonies somehow, even if we can't find that asteroid, but there has to be some token of remembrance.

That will be my own contribution to the affair, my own personal little IN MEMORIAM.

Like I say, I'm going to make that ass Latherton into the grave-yard of all ball-bearings, any second now!



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