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QUICKSANDS OF YOUTHWARDNESS

by


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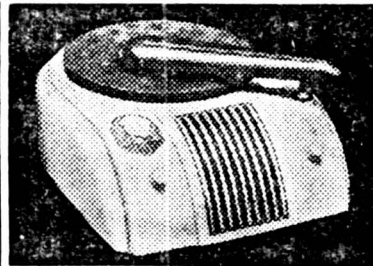
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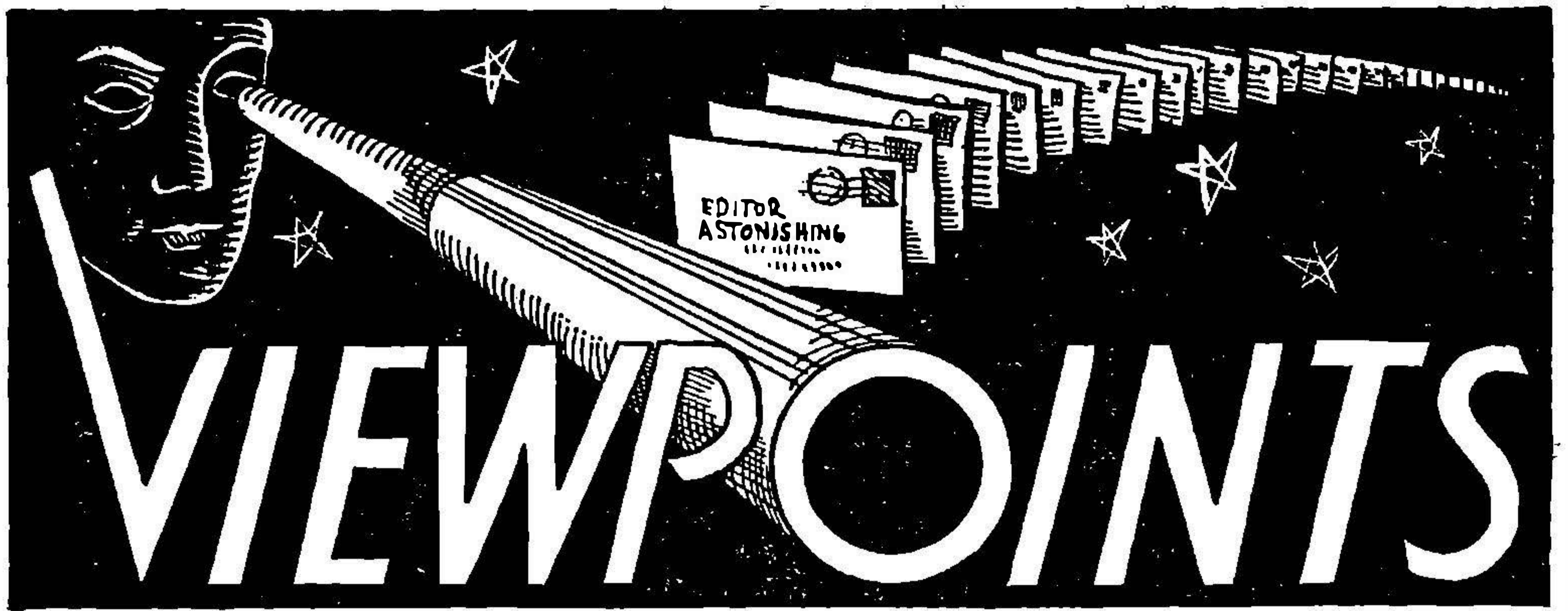
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“Great Improvement”

Dear Mr. Pohl:

I have just finished reading the August issue of *Astonishing Stories* and thought that I'd drop you a few lines of criticism.

First, I'd rate the stories in the following order: 1, “The Element of Logic,” one of the most interesting stories I have ever read; 2, “Bon Voyage!” in which the plot was a little obvious, but yet very good; 3, “The Deadly Swarm,” just about the oldest plot in stf., but still good for a few more stories; 4, “Wedding of the Moons,” not too much science fiction here: move the location and what would you have?; 5, “The Lodestone Core,” plenty, if not too much, science here; 6, “Woman Out of Time,” should have been printed in a weird mag, but it wasn't bad; 7, “The Cat-Man of Aemt,” just couldn't get much interest out of this story: it should have rated higher.

After comparing this month's issue with the last three I can see a great improvement, especially in the illustrations. The cover is slightly better, and the interior illustrations have improved greatly.

The departments, what there are of them, are very good. I would like to see more, though; the editorial was conspicuously missing, and the readers' “Viewpoints” could be enlarged. The Fantasy and Fan Magazine Reviews are still the best of any magazine on the market.

As a parting word I'd like to say, keep

up the good work, and let's have a few more departments.—Gerry de la Ree, Jr., Secretary, *The Solaroid Club*, Co-editor, *Sun-Spots*, 9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey.

Liked All But One

Dear Mr. Pohl:

I've just read my first copy of *Astonishing Stories*, and was pleasantly surprised. Frankly, I'd expected it to be just another of the mushroom growths that have been springing up lately in the science fiction field; but instead I found this issue, at least, to be the peer of any of its kind, and the superior of a lot of them.

I liked all of the stories except one. But having been a science fiction writer myself and knowing how ungodly hard it is sometimes to sell to you cantankerous editors in the first place, without having some dinwit of a reader tossing a few brick-bats, I shan't tell you which story that was. Instead, I'll point out the two I liked best. They were Fearn's “He conquered Venus” and Hardart's “The Devil's Pocket.” I'm particularly interested in Hardart's work, since this writer has been more or less of a protégée of mine, who I feel possesses rare qualities of creative imagination.

Your department, “Fantasy Reviews,” was exceedingly interesting, particularly Harry Warner's review of Zeisl's “Little

(Continued on page 109)

BILL, YOU SURE HAVE A SWELL BUILD! DID YOU TRAIN FOR A LONG TIME?

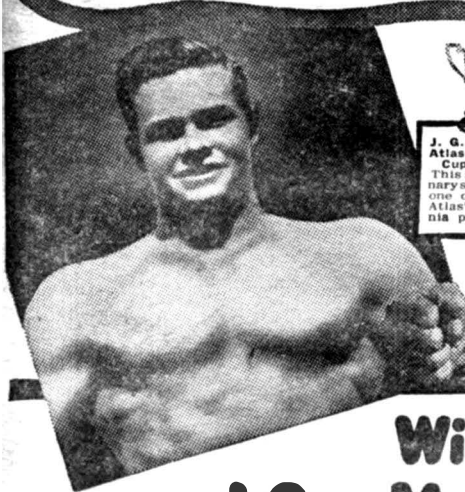


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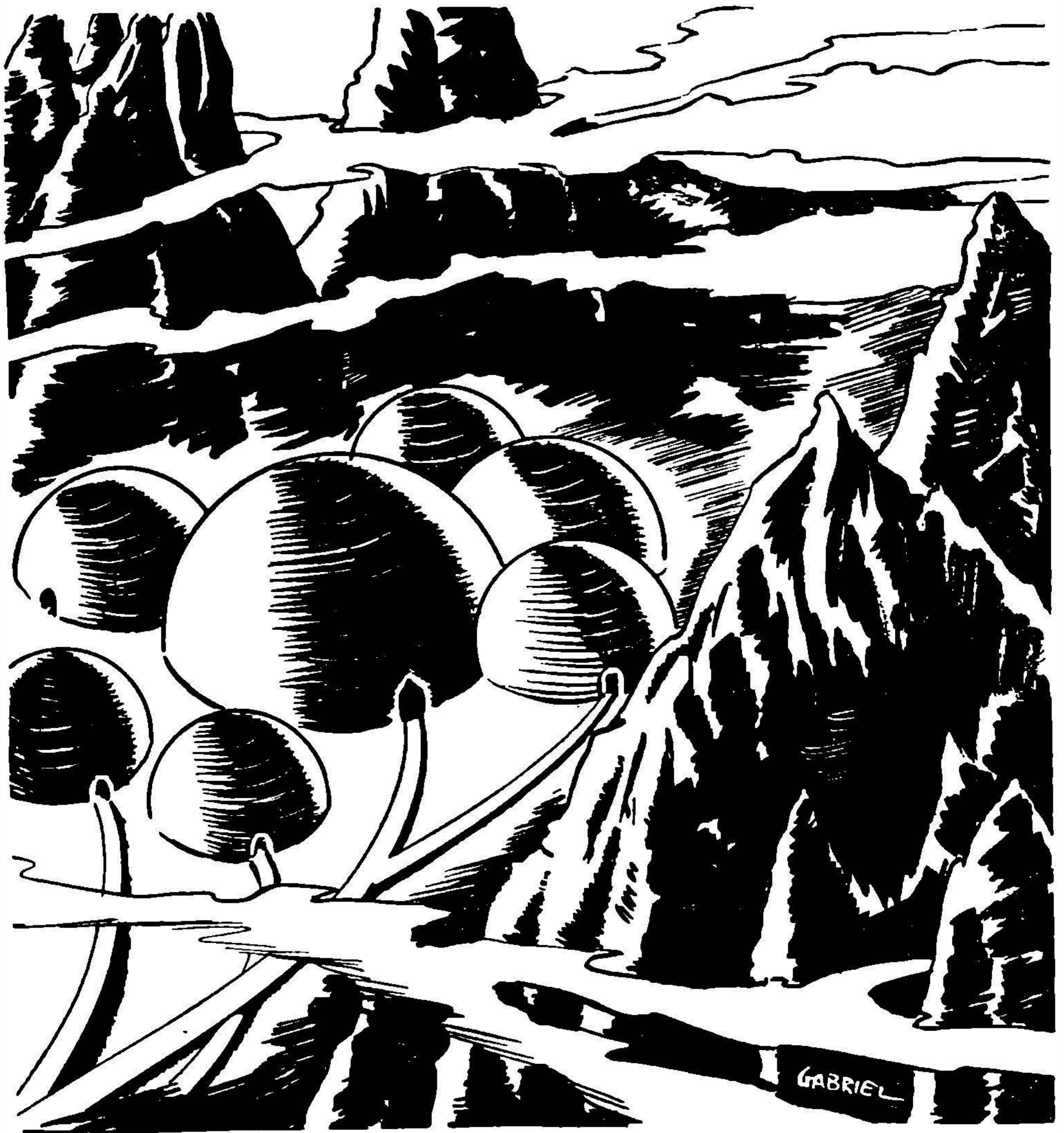
QUICKSANDS OF YOUTHWARDNESS

By Malcolm Jameson

A powerful serial novel of a planet where age reigned triumphant, and to be young was a fault which meant death!

Part One





CHAPTER ONE

The Thuban Blows

HIS FACE SET in lines as grim as granite, stocky old Captain Yphon sat slumped, strapped fast in the master control chair of the dizzily falling *Thuban*. Not once did his tired old eyes stray from the congested rows of gauges and indicators before him. There was no need of their wandering elsewhere, for every port and outlet was double-shuttered and screened against the beating rays of Sirius.

Except for the tough instruments that measured the invisible but all-pervading lines of magnetic force, the ship was blind. Long since that fierce radiation had vaporized the subchromatic plates in Ulber-son's special cameras, hooded though they were in protective turrets overhead. Cameras and periscopes alike had collapsed, their molten lenses dribbling away to spread like so much honey over the plates of the hull.

It was the gravimeter gauges that caused Yphon's grave concern. For seconds now their telltale gongs had been

tapping ominously—clamoring for attention. The reading of Absolute Field Strength was bad, unbelievably bad—double that against which the ship had been designed to operate. But far worse, the needle indicating the rate of acceleration was quivering hard against its final stop pin. The situation had passed being dangerous. It was desperate.

Captain Yphon, without turning his head, called quietly,

“Mr. Ronny. Step here please—quickly.”

The haggard chief engineer stumbled the few feet from his station and presented himself at the Captain’s side. The Captain did not speak at once. He was still scanning the warning instruments. Before issuing his drastic order, he must be very sure.

In that brief moment of hesitation, the other men in the room turned their heads toward him, dully anxious to catch the words of hope. There were Sid Daxon, the lanky Mate, clinging by straps to the control board, flanked by his four helpers. Beyond were Ronny’s men, another four, each tending a segment of the intricate switchboard. In the background the ship’s surgeon, the efficient and friendly Dr. Elgar, hung to a stanchion with one hand while he strove with the other to safeguard a trayful of hypodermics filled with the potent Angram Solution, that blessed specific against the tetany of excessive gravity.

PROFUSELY sweating and with startling eyes, panting laboriously, they awaited the Captain’s decision. Absent only was Ulberson—the great Ulberson, explorer—at whose insistence they had approached so close to Sirius. *He* lay in another room, whimpering in his bunk, imploring the air. “ . somebody do something, *do something*,” was the refrain. But he was unheard, or if heard, disregarded. Those others were too busy

doing that something. For those frantic appearing men in the control room were not frightened. Not one of them knew the meaning of the word “fear.” Their harried, anxious looks were due solely to the uncontrollable reflexes of straining muscles and tortured glands.

“Ronny,” said the Captain, “throw in your reserves—all of them. Cut over the auxiliaries—except the air-pump, we can’t spare that. Everything, mind you, to the last erg—even the lights.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” gasped Ronny. Then hesitantly he added, “for your information, sir, the Kinetogen is already carrying a hundred per cent overload. It’ll blow, sure as hell.”

“We’ll blow, then,” was all the Captain said, still looking at his meters. Better to be blasted than to be slowly crushed and roasted with it, was his thought, but he saw no need to voice it.

Ronny made a gesture to his men at the board, knowing they had heard and understood. Swiftly, silently, they pulled open switches—closed others. Warning buzzers sounded in the after corridors and passages of the ship. Men braced themselves for the inevitable shock. Ronny himself was back at the board by the time the change-over was complete. He grasped the main feed lever—pushed it firmly shut.

Abruptly the lights went out. Like dumb ghosts in the stifling room lit only by the eerie glow of the tiny battery fed lamps on the indicator panels, the sufferers waited. The hull trembled more, and then yet more, as increment after increment of powerful counterthrust was hurled out against the greedy grasp of Sirius. Even through the many feet of passages and the several safety doors that separated the engine room from them, they could hear the whine of the excited Kinetogen rising to a wild scream and feel it quiver, tearing at its bedplate.

“Thank you Ronny,” came the Captain’s steady voice, “if she’ll hang to-

gether ten minutes we'll be all right."

Neither Ronny nor anyone else in the room believed the Kinetogen could stand up two minutes, let alone ten. Nor did they think ten half enough, but they were grateful to the Captain for saying so. No one responded. There was nothing to say. They could only wait.

The vibration worsened, and throughout the room, matching the terrible crescendo of the runaway Kinetogen, rose an answering chattering chorus as metal screws, loose papers, furniture, everything—joined the mad dance.

Except for their heavy breathing, the throbbing, oppressed humans made no sound. Then, in a momentary lull in the wild cacophony of the hurtling ship's internal noises, as it rested, so to speak, before swelling into yet louder howls, a muffled wail penetrated to the control room. It came from the passage leading to the sleeping rooms, and plaintively stated a grievance. "My lights are out send a man.

Daxon struggled with his safety belt, freed himself. He staggered through the darkness until he found the passage door, slammed it shut and leaned against it. "What we can't help, we have to take," he muttered through clenched teeth, "but by G. . . ."

It was merciful in its abruptness. No one could know certainly when it happened or how. The Kinetogen, secluded in its wholly mechanical, remote controlled engine room, did all it could, and being a mere machine, could do no more. It blew up.

SID DAXON became vaguely conscious.

It was utter dark and the heavy air was foul with the fumes of volatilized metals. And it was hot—terribly hot. He eased a limp human form off his pinned legs and passed a trembling hand over his face and head. Hair? Yes. Hair yet, nose, eyes—everything. Stiffly he

rolled over and managed to move a little on his hands and knees. Crawling, he groped about the floor plates trying to orient himself. He encountered other bodies there, scattered about, and felt of them, listening. They were alive, all of them!

In time, he attained the pedestal of the master control chair. A swift exploration with cautious hands told him Captain Yphon lived, too, still firmly lashed to his post of duty. Now he remembered that in the base of the indicator panel stand there was a little locker. In there should be some portable hand lamps. He fumbled the smooth face of the door until he had it open. They were there—he had a light!

Before he made any attempt to arouse the others, he flashed the light across the faces of the gauges. As was to be expected, the engine room indicators were dead. There could be nothing left back there. But impulses from the outside void were still being received, appraised and reported. The gravimeters showed a field force of nearly zero, and that diminishing. They must be going away from Sirius at a stupendous pace—must already be a long way away! A glance at the ray-sorters and the spectograph confirmed it. That one desperate effort, the dumping of all their power concentrated into one colossal dose, had done the trick. They were free.

He found Dr. Elgar face down among the litter of his overturned tray and shattered tubes. He must wake Elgar first. He was the one who would know best what to do with the force-stunned victims. Furthermore, Elgar was his buddy—they made their liberties together whenever they hit a good planet.

In a moment, Dr. Elgar gasped and regained his senses. One by one, they revived the others, last of all the Captain. Other than simple bruises or cuts acquired in falling, none was hurt.

In a short while, Ronny found the breaks in the emergency lighting circuit

and had a few dim lights burning forward. As soon as he was unstrapped, stiff with age though he was and cramped from the untold hours spent tied to the hard saddle, Captain Yphon proceeded at once to the inspection of the damaged *Thuban*. His officers led the way, lighting the path with their hand lamps.

The wreckage of the engine room was complete. The inner bulkheads were torn and twisted like crumpled paper, and the intermediate ones pierced in many places by the hurtling splinters of the gigantic Kinetogen, but nowhere had the hull been breached. Ronny looked at the scattered fragments of his great force engine with a wry face. The auxiliaries he could repair or replace from the spare stores, but there was nothing to be done about their motive power unless somehow they could make a planetfall. And even if that unlikely feat could be accomplished, it would have to be on a civilized planet—a rare body in these parts.

Coldly and with a stern face, Captain Yphon took stock of the situation. When he had seen it all and realized how helpless they were, he slowly removed his glasses, and meticulously wiping them, said simply,

“I’m glad nobody was hurt. You are all good boys and behaved well.” He screwed up his bulldog face and spat, “But that bout with Sirius was only a skirmish—*now* the fun begins.”

In the first relief at finding themselves living and their ship intact, the last remark did not weigh heavily on the *Thuban*’s personnel. Anyhow, in the spaceways the motto “One thing at a time” is the only tolerable rule of life. They had got out of one jam, they would get out of the next.

All hands turned to cleaning up the wreckage aft and repairing the punctured and riven bulkheads. There were warped doors to straighten and rehang, ruptured pipe and severed conduit to underrun and

replace, and much else. As to the Kinetogen, there was nothing could be done about it except to sweep its parts together and stack them in bins, out of the way. In the meantime, the *Thuban*, with whatever residual velocity she had when she escaped the greedy embrace of the Dog Star, was drifting through space.

Observing the serene resumption of the routine, Ulberson, the charterer and nominal head of the expedition, easily regained his composure. “I knew you could pull out of there—I shouldn’t have advised going in otherwise,” he said blandly to Captain Yphon. “Too bad I lost my cameras. And it was too bad somebody got panicky and wrecked the main. ”

“Mr. Ulberson,” the Captain made not the least effort to conceal his disgust, “if and when we return to Earth, you are at liberty to make any charges you choose in regard to my handling of this vessel. In the meantime, I have resumed full command. Hereafter, you will be treated as a passenger, and as such I must ask you to refrain from interfering with my crew.”

As the Captain stalked out of the room, Ulberson began to sputter, but glimpsing the unsympathetic faces about him, he changed it to an airy whistle and sauntered away to his own room. Ulberson was one of those people who thought of himself as a “star,” an attitude that received scant respect from the tough old skipper of the *Thuban*. Old Yphon’s ideal was teamwork. On his ships it was “One for all, all for one.” There was no place in his scheme of things for the solo performer.

CHAPTER TWO

Fog of Amnesia

ANOTHER day came when Captain Yphon sat in the master control chair and gazed forward with set face and a hint of anxiety in his eyes. This time the screens were down and the ports uncov-

ered. Ahead lay the incomparably beautiful velvety black of the void with its untold billions of sparkling points of light. Far to the left were three cloudy patches—nebulae—gorgeously tinted in reds, greens and yellows, one of them studied with faintly glowing globules where its condensing gases were forming new flaming suns.

Those colorful nebulae, attractive enough to tourists' eyes, were not what fixed the attention of the Captain. It was the black spot dead ahead, that hole in the sky that kept on growing, eating the stars as it spread. In there was no color, not any. A month before it had been but a few degrees wide, now it was sixty—and growing. Its edge was marked by an irregular circle of ruddy stars, obliterated one by one as the *Thuban* approached. Yphon had been watching the occultation of those stars for many days. Always they would twinkle awhile, at first, then redden, to fade away finally to nothing as the great globular nebulae swelled up before them.

The *Thuban* was out of control—there was no blinking that fact. Propelled by the titanic kick of the expiring Kinetogen, she was hurtling onward at terrific speed, and must go on so forever, or until some impeding sun laid its gravitational tentacles on her and dragged her in to fiery destruction or else imprisoned her in an endless orbit. That murk before them could not be evaded, no matter what its nature. They must dive on into it and face what lay there.

IN THE control room behind, Yphon could hear the drone of a voice reading. It was Daxon, and the volume he held was that one of the "Space-pilot and Astragator" for this quadrant of the celestial hemisphere. The section he was reading dealt with the supposed nature of the dark nebula ahead, as compiled from reports of earlier voyagers. Elgar, Ronny and

Ulberson sat in various attitudes about the chart table, listening.

When Daxon came to the end of it, he tossed the book to the table.

"It's tough—but now you know what we're up against," he shrugged. "No ship that ever went into the middle of that was ever seen again. A few cut through near the edge and came out on the other side, all right, but the people in them didn't know what it was all about—they couldn't remember—not anything, either going in, or what it was like on the inside."

"So they went home and wrote accounts of it," sniffed Ulberson, with a trace of his characteristic supercilious smile.

Daxon, nettled, shot him a hard look, but for the benefit of the others, replied.

"Yes—and why not?" he snapped. "The dope was in their logs, entries showing when they sighted the cloud, their approach, the moment of entering—all about it. The chronometers and the other instruments kept on recording and there were all their cards, complete. It was only the human mind that failed. They remembered, some of them, seeing the cloud far ahead, and then, like a flash, it was just astern of them. When they were convinced of the lapse of time and saw their own handwritings in the logs, they knew their consciousness had played some kind of trick on them. They must have done all the usual things as they went along, yet none of it registered on their memories. It was something like being under an anaesthetic, I guess."

"So that's why they call it Amnesion?" remarked Dr. Elgar, in mock cheerfulness. "Fog of Forgetfulness—poetic, eh?"

"If you've got that kind of mind," admitted Daxon, with a quick grin. "But don't forget, it's near the center of that thing we're headed for, not the edge, and it's about as far through as our solar system is wide. If a touch of it wipes out

all you've learned for months, we're apt to be pretty doggone ignorant when we come out on the other side, if we come out."

"Must be a property of the gas," speculated Elgar, more seriously, "or ."

"Or rays," interposed the Captain, still staring ahead. "Mr. Daxon! Kindly have all outward openings closed off with ray-shields and rig the spare periscope. I don't like the looks of things ahead."

While the crew were scrambling to carry out the order, Dr. Elgar picked up the book thrown aside by Daxon. He thumbed through it to the chapter on Amnesion and read it for himself, foot-notes and all. Among the lost were the *Night Dragon* and the *Star Dust*, carrying more than a thousand passengers each—two of Rangimon's transports with whole families bound for Tellunova in Hydra. Then, a few decades later, about 2306, Sigrey took his *Procyon* in there with a relief expedition, but failed to return. In subsequent centuries several small freighters disappeared in the vicinity and were thought to have been swallowed up by the nebula.

ULBERSON, annoyed at the ill-concealed contempt of these hardboiled spacemen, felt he must make some gesture to reestablish his prestige.

"A bit of luck, I'd say. Since they make such a mystery of a little black gas, it may be worth looking into. As long as we're here, I might as well solve their puzzle for them." He yawned elaborately, as if getting at it was all there was to it.

"Oh, by all means," said Elgar, amiably, and threw a wink to Daxon, who had wheeled angrily at Ulberson's words, "if you can manage it. As for myself, speaking as a medical man, I anticipate some difficulties. Explorers may be above such considerations, but I was just thinking how astonished I am going to be, say, to observe the effects of some drug I've

given, having forgotten that I gave it, or what for. It is the sort of thing that is likely to make the practice of medicine uncertain. Given time, I daresay, I may develop a technique along those lines, but at the moment it looks to me as if trying to live with memory not functioning is as foggy a proposition as that smoky cloud itself."

Ulberson glared at him, faintly suspicious that Elgar was pulling his leg, but the doctor's face was a study in innocent seriousness. Then, as the full import of what had just been said began to dawn on him, Ulberson's self-assurance sagged a little. He *had* braved the perils of cold on dim lit planets, and fought their bizarre fauna, but never under the handicap of amnesia. What Elgar seemed to envisage was not the forgetting of things far past, but of things in the happening—the occurrences of a few minutes ago—an instant ago!

Ulberson twisted uneasily in his chair. The implications were not pleasant. Why, that might mean that he could not retain the memory of what he started out to do

he might wander around aimlessly, like an imbecile observing things, to be sure, but without linkage to their causes and then forgetting observations in the very moment of making them. That would be a horrible situation—unthinkable—intolerable.

Captain Yphon, having overheard, chuckled savagely within himself. "You hired us, my fine bucko," was his grim thought, "to take you into the Great Unknown. Well, by God, you'll get your money's worth."

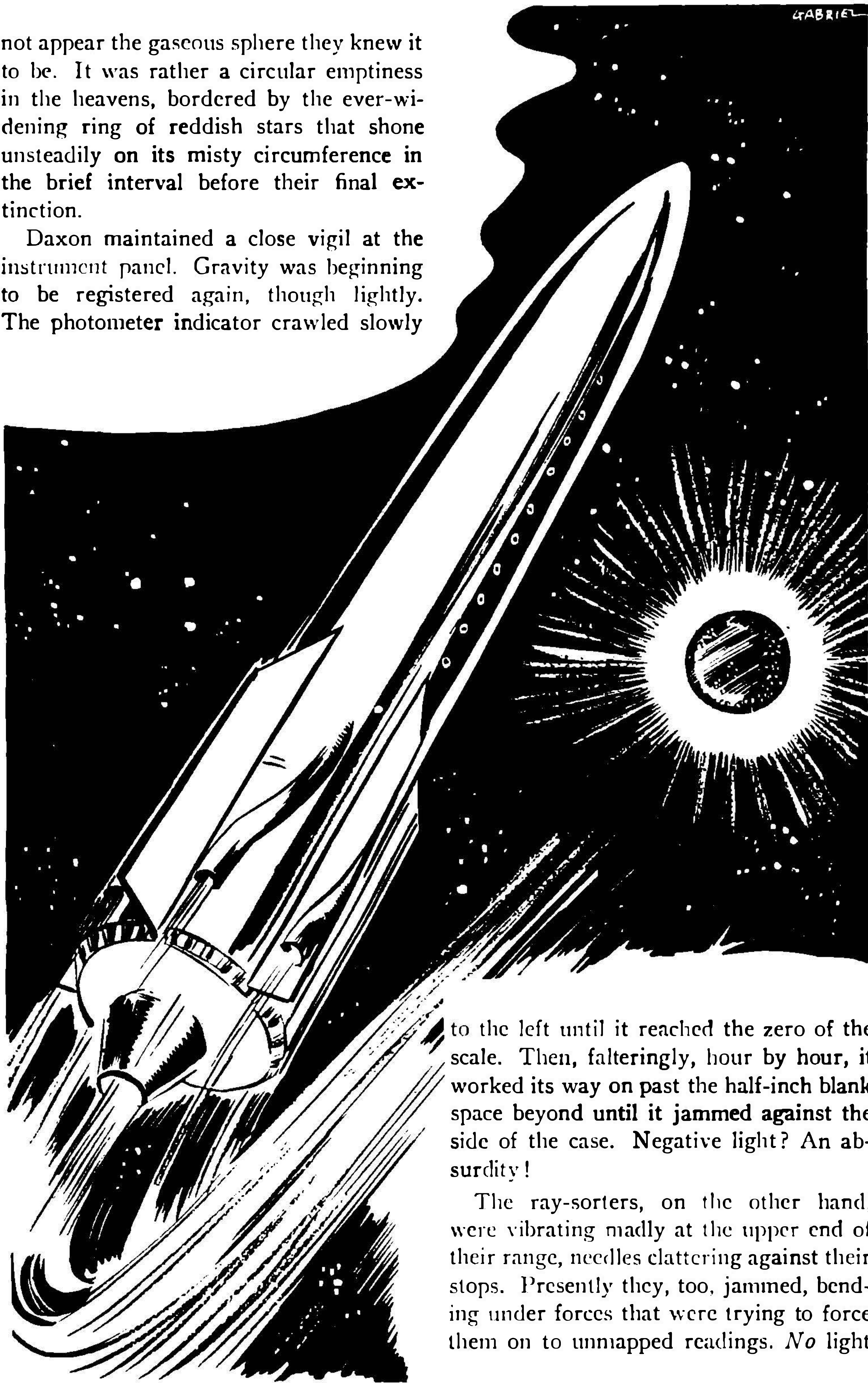
CHAPTER THREE

The Captain's Eye

IN ANOTHER week the whole sky ahead was devoid of light. Lacking any reflective power, the great nebula did

not appear the gaseous sphere they knew it to be. It was rather a circular emptiness in the heavens, bordered by the ever-widening ring of reddish stars that shone unsteadily on its misty circumference in the brief interval before their final extinction.

Daxon maintained a close vigil at the instrument panel. Gravity was beginning to be registered again, though lightly. The photometer indicator crawled slowly



to the left until it reached the zero of the scale. Then, falteringly, hour by hour, it worked its way on past the half-inch blank space beyond until it jammed against the side of the case. Negative light? An absurdity!

The ray-sorters, on the other hand, were vibrating madly at the upper end of their range, needles clattering against their stops. Presently they, too, jammed, bending under forces that were trying to force them on to unmapped readings. *No* light

—yet rays of terrific intensity impinging on the ray-detectors—and what rays! If they did fall beyond the range of the sorters, they must be of wave shapes and frequencies unheard of—theoretically nonexistent, impossible.

Dr. Elgar stood there, too, keenly interested. Whatever the emanations of the inky fog, he wanted to see and weigh them. Since steeping himself in the accounts of Amnesion, he had been alert for any symptom of forgetfulness, but as yet there had been no evidence of amnesia within the *Thuban*. Everybody had been instructed to keep a minute diary, and every day scraps from them were picked at random and read to their writers. If there was forgetting, it was of so subtle a type that neither victim nor physician could detect it, although Elgar was not unaware that the seeming ability to remember might itself be an illusion. Yet it might be, since they were forewarned and the ship made tight against gases and so well screened that no ray, unless of some unknown hull-piercing type, could enter, that they could pass through the cloud with immunity.

“We must be well inside now,” said the Captain, when he saw the gauges, “I’ll take a look around and see how dense this nebula really is.” He laid aside his glasses and seized the guiding bar of the periscope, intently watched by Dr. Elgar. If the peril lay in the rays, they might enter through the eye-piece of the periscope, and magnified by it to what would surely be a dangerous intensity at that.

Captain Yphon swung his gaze first astern, where the mist would be its thinnest. If stars could still be seen, it would be there. “All black,” he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, and began to swing forward, scanning as he went. “Not a glimmer anywhere,” he added, his left eye squeezed shut as he squinted with his right, “except there is a queer greenish luminosity

on the hull—faint, like from a glow-worm. I can only see it for about ten yards, then it fades out.”

As he spoke, a tiny glint of clear violet light began dancing on the surface of his staring eyeball. The astounded Dr. Elgar saw it brighten, then flare out into a semblance of flame—feathery sheaves of dazzling violet rays, jumping *from* the Captain’s eye into the periscope like the flame of an arc. “Still dark,” the Captain was saying, in the same ordinary tone, swinging the periscope from dead ahead on toward the port beam.

Elgar laid a restraining hand on Daxon, who was springing forward with the impulse to drag the Captain away from the periscope. “We *must* know,” he whispered. “It doesn’t seem to hurt him—he doesn’t even suspect it.”

Captain Yphon relinquished the periscope and picked up his glasses. He put them on and made an effort to adjust them, then snatched them off disgustedly. “What the Hell,” he growled, “the right lens has gone opaque—I can’t see a thing.”

“Let me look at your eye,” ordered Elgar, gently, “because nothing has happened to your lens.”

The Captain turned full toward him, amazement on his usually composed features, opening and shutting his eyes alternately and looking dazedly about the control room. Elgar halted him and peered into his face. The left eye was normal, the dull, faded, yellowed eye of age. But the other! The right eye glowed with the soft warmth of youth. Its cornea gleamed with the firm smooth whiteness of the very young; the crystalline lens was finely transparent; the iris magnificently colored. Hastily Elgar tested it for its visual qualities. It was perfect—according to the standard for a boy of twenty!

“Captain,” he said, huskily, for he felt the weight of his responsibility. “Look through the periscope again, but with the *left* eye this time.”

"The periscope?" echoed the Captain, vaguely, "Yes, yes—we must be well inside now. I must look around and see how dense it is."

ELGAR and Daxon exchanged significant glances. Yphon had forgotten having been at the periscope, yet he had been looking through it for a full seven minutes. The amnesia of the nebula was not a myth, and that reversed ray seemed to be its avenue of infection.

Again the Captain put his eye to the periscope and again there was the strange play of violet light from the eyeball. Daxon and Elgar stood close on either side and watched its dancing brilliance. It was unreal, immaterial, like the fire from a diamond manipulated in strong light. Spectacular though the display was, Yphon appeared unaware of it. He went on as before, making an occasional calm remark about the gloom outside. When the seven minutes were up, Elgar grasped him by the shoulders and pulled him away from the eye-piece.

"What's wrong? Why did you interrupt me, doctor?" demanded the Captain, "somebody hurt?"

Earnestly staring at the doctor from beneath shaggy white eyebrows and imbedded in the wrinkled, baggy pouches of an old, old man, were two vibrant, piercing eyes, the eyes of a strong-minded, vigorous adolescent. There was something almost terrifying in its incongruousness. Elgar's judgment had been confirmed, practically, but the fundamentals of the mystery were as elusive as ever.

"How do you see?" inquired Elgar, shakily. The Captain brushed his face with his hand, looked about him, then picked up a table of haversines and examined its tiny agate type. "Why, why, fine better than I have in years . . . better than I can remember *ever* seeing."

Dr. Elgar's relief was immense, but he

saw potential danger. "Sir," he urged, "You must not use the periscope any more, nor anybody else, unless through a strong filter and under my supervision. The rays of Amnesion *do* effect forgetfulness, and apparently rejuvenation as well. It may not be prudent to overdo it."

It was with some difficulty that the two younger officers convinced Yphon of his lapse of memory. By careful questioning they established that as far as his time sense was concerned, he had lost nearly an hour. It was not only that he failed to remember what had passed while he was at the periscope, but it was as if during the same time his previously stored memories began to unravel, unwind, as it were, and vanish.

After that the periscope was sparingly used, and then with filters. There was not much need of it, for outside nothing could be seen except the eerie fire-fly glow of the hull, ghostly in the smoky fog. Once, Elgar induced old Angus, the steward, to expose both his eyes for a brief period to the unfiltered rays, but otherwise the phenomenon of the eye-flame was not observed again. Angus, who was quite as old as the Captain, had begun to develop cataracts, and as in the case of the Captain, a few minutes of exposure had distinctly beneficial results. And like the Captain, Angus had to be told of the experience afterward, and of what had immediately preceded it.

ELGAR pondered the remarkable therapeutic power of the queer rays, dealing amnesia and rejuvenation with an equal hand. There was a connection, he did not doubt. He was beginning to formulate a theory, but that theory, although logical, was counter to all experience.

He knew that under the stimulus of light, living cells sometimes altered themselves, that light provoked chemical action—and, as in fireflies and the phos-

phorescent organisms of the sea, cells sometimes produced light. But in his experience, the cells of the human body did not produce light, and the changes produced by metabolism were invariably in the direction of greater specialization, the simple to the intricate—towards senility, in other words—and that that process was irreversible. Normally, as the cells become more and more specialized, they end by losing their adaptability, and old age and eventually death ensue. Geronomists, he knew, could sometimes retard those changes, but never arrest them, let alone reverse them.

Yet he had just seen it done—twice. And although the rays seemed to originate within the eyes, obviously the stimulus came from the nebular gas about, with its curious, invisible rays. Could it be that that black fog had unique refractive powers that twisted the light it so completely absorbed into inverted, even negative forms? Was its absorptive power so great that it reached out, so to speak, and *pulled* light into itself?

And if so, did the living 'cell, under the compulsion of giving back the light it had hitherto absorbed, readjust its structure to the simpler form it used to have? If so, the structures would appear younger. Perhaps it was the simplification of the cortex of the brain that caused the memories stored there to vanish. There was no precedent in physiology or mathematics for such assumptions, but neither was there a precedent for the amazing ocular rejuvenation he had twice witnessed.

Those other ships had plunged in here, unsuspecting, and therefore unprepared. Once in the grip of the amnesiac rays, they would be helpless, for they could not reason, since reason is a cumulative process. And equally as they forgot, did they grow younger? Under unlimited pressure in that direction, how far would they go?

Dr. Elgar saw no way to approach the answers to those questions without assum-

ing unwarranted risks. At least so far, the Thubanites appeared to be effectively insulated from the outside, and it would be reckless to invite forces within that were so unpredictable in their action.

CHAPTER FOUR

Planet!

FOR many months they plunged on through gloom-enshrouded space, guessing at their progress by dead reckoning. Yphon and Daxon had computed their most probable path. Allowing for some deceleration due to the friction of the enveloping gas, there were indications that they might have enough momentum to escape the nucleus, as their trajectory would pass about one-third of the way between it and the periphery of the nebula. There had been a steady increase in the gravity readings, but the total force indicated was not alarming. They might eventually escape the cloud entirely and emerge once more into the outer void.

This was not as heartening a hope as it might have been under other circumstances, for Ronny had reported that in spite of reclamation, there was less than a year's supply of oxygen left, and old Angus had already begun rationing out the food. Beyond Amnesion were many parsecs of empty space. Escape to it meant only the hollow advantage of dying outside in the clean clearness of inter-stellar vacuum, rather than in the depths of the dirty black mist.

Occasionally Daxon would sweep the darkness with the periscope. It had always been utter night outside, but one day he felt a thrill of surprise as he noted an unmistakable lightening of the gloom. Broad on the starboard bow, widely diffused but clearly distinguishable, was a lurid crimson glow. Hour by hour the red increased in intensity and lightened in hue, until in time it looked as if all that

part of the universe to starboard was in vast conflagration, half-smothered under a pall of smoke. Then the black mists seemed to be clearing, as a terrestrial fog lifts, and the initial glow came to be a well-defined circular patch of intense orange light which in a little while revealed its source—a sun! Here at the center of the globular nebula was a fiery yellow sun, lying unsuspected within the opaque shell of absorbent gases.

Once more the instruments recorded normal, positive light, and the spectrum of the inner sun proved to be much like that of Sol, except that it was somewhat richer in the violet band. Quick tests showed there was no further need of the elaborate system of screens. The bizarre properties of the nebular system were apparently to be encountered only in its outer husk.

But although they were no longer in the fog and were in the presence of a normal sun, their surroundings were no less uncanny. In place of the black backdrop of space, spangled with its myriads of glittering stars and glowing nebulae, everywhere was a dull, angry, smoky red. The starless heavens of inner Amnesion resembled the interior of some cosmic furnace. Either because the inner layers lacked the absorptive powers of the outer, or were saturated by reason of their proximity to the sun, they dully reflected a ruddy glare that gave the whole region the appearance of an inferno.

Puzzled over the existence of such an open space in the heart of the nebula, for Daxon had supposed its density would increase as they neared the nucleus, he asked the Captain about it.

“Young man,” said the Captain, turning his strangely youthful, burning eyes on the Mate, “when you are as old as I am and have wandered as widely in the southern void, you’ll accept things as you find them. But since you want an explanation, you are welcome to my guess.

“Presumably that sun represents the

condensation of what formerly occupied this space. After it became so compact that it was forced to radiate, its light pressure naturally forced the outer gases back. Those gases, caught between two forces—light pressure pushing out and gravity pulling in—necessarily were compressed, as we have seen, into a sort of shell, like the hull of a walnut, if you can think of stuff as thin as that in solid terms.” The old man grunted, and there was just the suggestion of a twinkle in his boyish eyes. “But then, *I* never was inside a globular nebula before—they may all be hollow, for all I know.”

Daxon had to accept the tentative explanation. He could think of no better. In any case, there they were, and there was now a sun to worry about. He began measuring its apparent diameter, at first twenty minutes, then more, forty, fifty, as they approached it. Then a day came when the diameter began to lessen. They had passed perihelion, but on what shaped trajectory he could not know with any certainty. If it were hyperbolic, now, if ever, was there chance of escape.

Dr. Elgar had his own reasons for being relieved at putting more distance between them and the energetic sun. Appetites had grown voracious, animal spirits high, but with it signs of rapid aging, as shown by the graying at the temples of even the younger members of the ship’s company. It was only by replacing the ray-screens that he could keep their rate of metabolism at normal. Amnesion seemed to be a region opposite extremes.

SHORTLY after perihelion, Daxon was casting about to port with the periscope, scanning the lurid walls of the nebular envelope. He was seeking some identifiable spot that he might use as a point of reference to determine the extent of their deflection by the inner sun. Suddenly the occupants of the control room were electrified by his cry of “Planet-ho!”

Ahead and a little to the left, was a brilliant point of light, much in appearance as Jupiter viewed from Earth. Officers and crew crowded to the forward ports to look at the find.

In a few more hours, Daxon was able to announce that the angle between it and the sun was steadily opening—the planet was heading for its aphelion. If a little bit of maneuvering were possible, the *Thuban* might be made to intercept it. Yphon came and looked at the figures. He examined the newfound planet, and scowled at the hot little sun and the sultry background all about. He thought of their failing oxygen supply, and the dwindling stocks in the pantry. He sent for Ronny.

“Here’s where we try out your jury-rigged auxiliaries, Ronny. Hook ’em up, and bring the juice up to the board here. I mean to land on that planet, if we can. We ought to be able to slow down a little, and the atmosphere there can do the rest—if there is an atmosphere.”

He did not need to say that if there was no atmosphere, it didn’t matter. Everybody understood the situation, it was a case of grasping at any straw.

What with the retarding effect of the millions of miles of gas they had traversed and Ronny’s skillful adaptation of his surviving machinery, the *Thuban*’s speed had been reduced to manageable proportions by the time they were in position for their planetfall. Coming in on a tangent about a hundred miles above the estimated surface, Yphon encircled the cloud-wrapped orb three times on a slowly tightening spiral, gliding swiftly through the tenuous stratosphere, braking as he went.

Elgar was quick to sample the clear gases outside. At first he found an equal mixture of hydrogen and nitrogen, but a little later there were traces of oxygen. When they were down to the level of the high cirrus, the proportion of oxygen had grown and the hydrogen content gone. One of their worries could be laid aside.

The planet not only had an atmosphere, but one that closely resembled air. It *was* a haven. They could go on down.

CHAPTER FIVE

World of Methuselabs

IT WAS not until they were below the level of the highest clouds that the milky, violet haze beneath thinned enough for them to see the details of the terrain. Lower were patches of other clouds, fleecy cumulus, and to the left the peaks of an extensive mountain range stuck up through them like the rocks of an offshore reef. Far ahead, glimpsed through rifts in the lower clouds, was the familiar blue of the sea, though tinged slightly toward purple.

As they drew closer to the ground, they could make out extensive stretches of vegetation, brown and yellow for the most part, indicating autumn. The Thubanites felt pangs of homesickness in looking down on the fair planet that was so much like their homeland. And the nostalgia was heightened by their first sight of what was unmistakably a town—then another, and they could see the threads of the highways between. Far ahead were the glittering domes of a great city just coming into visibility, a city lying by the side of an arm of the sea.

Wild excitement ran through the cabins of the *Thuban*. No one had forgotten the accounts of the disappearance in this region of Rangimon’s two ships. If the *Thuban* had found her way through the encircling nebula here, why not they? Perhaps the population below were descended from those earlier Earthmen. As the talk buzzed, the ship slid on down, ever slower.

The city looming before them was quite extensive and entirely covered by a system of crystal domes, like those used on the airless planets, except that these were

variously tinted in greens, ambers, pinks, yellows and blues. In the distance the aggregation looked like a mass of colossal soap-bubbles, iridescent in the noonday sun. Opposite, across the inlet, was a wide, barren patch of ground—probably a landing field, but at that distance they could not make out the characteristic slag flows of a rocket ship port.

But even as they were speculating as to the uses of the cleared area, small silvery objects could be seen rising from it into the air, hundreds of them. Through powerful glasses, Yphon and Daxon watched them take the air, wheeling and swirling like a flock of birds as the swarm headed for the oncoming *Thuban*. They were planes, planes of the primitive airborne type used so extensively on Earth in the pre-rocket days. A momentary apprehension that they might have hostile intent was quickly dissipated, for in a few minutes they were peaceably passing the ship on both sides, as well as above and below, and having passed, looped suddenly and turned to accompany her.

One, evidently a leader, swooped by the bow ports and as it did, a very old man leaned out over the side and made a gesture with his arm for the *Thuban* to follow him. The startled pilots of the space ship had only a glimpse of the steely blue eyes, the glistening bald head, and the whiskers flying flat in the hurricane of the propeller stream; but the ancient who

had hailed them, apparently to make sure he was understood, shot on well ahead, went into a vertical loop, and swooped by again, repeating his signal to follow.

"Holy Comets!" exclaimed Daxon, as his second glimpse confirmed the first, "Father Time himself come out to meet us!"

But when the Earthmen peered out the ports at the machines pounding along at their sides, every pilot they could see was the same bewhiskered, aged, venerable type as the patriarch who lead them.

"WHAT a planet!" said the amazed Daxon to Elgar, as they crouched, a half hour later, just within the open entry port of the grounded *Thuban*. "But one thing's certain—they're human."

"And another thing's certain," amended Elgar, dryly, "they've *been* human, from the looks of them, a darn sight longer than either you or I have."

The *Thuban* was lying where she had been led, in the midst of the great landing field opposite the city. Captain Yphon had slid open the entry port and was standing outside, ten paces in front of it, awaiting the representatives of the locality. The planes that had escorted them in were landing in successive waves all about, bouncing and rolling to stops. But unlike the custom of most friendly planets, where the natives rush to surround a newly landed ship, these people of Amnesion



had moved with exasperating slowness.

The two officers had watched them climb out of their planes. That, it appeared, was an exceedingly laborious operation, and, once on the ground, their progress toward the waiting *Thuban* was equally difficult. They came on, though, tottering and stumbling, supported by staffs or canes, and finally stopped, forming a ragged semi-circle facing Yphon, as if awaiting someone yet to come. Some, too decrepit to remain standing, unfolded little portable stools, and sat. It was the air of incredible age about them all, the universal senility, that had prompted Daxon's exclamation. Toothless, wrinkled, many of them woefully bent, that strangely homogenous crowd made an almost unbelievable picture.

Presently a number of small cars sped across the field, rolling to a screaming stop just behind the assembled octogenarians from the plane squadron. A lane was opened in their ranks, and after considerable delay, a wheel chair containing a venerable patriarch and attended by a small group who were scarcely younger, was haltingly pushed through it and brought up to where Captain Yphon was standing.

"That must be the grand-daddy of them all," whispered the irreverent Daxon, as the old man coughed, painfully cleared his throat, and began to speak. In a quavering, high cracked voice, he said, "Wall-kampt Athnaty."

The opening words were not at first understood, but as the old man continued, his auditors noticed that the language sounded strangely like English—English of an obsolete dialect, perhaps, but still English. They very quickly observed that its apparently garbled sounds were due to the queer cadences with which it was delivered. As soon as the knack of rhythm was had, understanding was easy.

"Welcome to Athanata," was what the patriarch had said, "the Planet of the Im-

mortals. Gladly we receive the noble Earthborn, for like you, our pioneers fell from out the sky." He went on to say that he himself was Tolva, captain of the *Star Dust*, and that he was proud of his earthly birth, having been born near New Denver, in the shadow of "Paekpik." The astonished Thubanites knew from their study of the records, that a Captain Taliaferro had commanded one of Rangimon's transports, but that had been a cool two thousand years earlier, yet.

"Well, he looks his age," was Daxon's grunted comment.

After offering citizenship and the freedom of the city to the newcomers, Captain Tolva, if such he was, said that a guide and mentor would be assigned to each pair of men in the ship's company and that they would at once proceed to the city where all would be made comfortable. Yphon's interruption to ask for information as to the availability of mechanics and machine tools for the repair of the *Kinetogen* was dismissed as of no moment. "Not now," was the substance of the reply, "we are on the eve of the Great Holidays. In the coming Era, all things will be taken care of."

Yphon, seeing he would have to bide his time, made a dignified response to the address of welcome, couching his words as best he could in the same odd rhythm the other had used. Then the old man bowed acknowledgment and clattered on the ground with his staff. At the signal, a dozen of the waiting centenarians tottered forward and saluted. Those were to be the companions and tutors of the Thubanites.

CHAPTER SIX

"Too Young!"

CAPTAIN YPHON, choosing old Angus to accompany him, was driven off toward the city in the official car of

Captain Tolva, leaving the others to pair off as they chose. Daxon and Elgar naturally fell together, leaving Ronny no choice but to team up with Ulberson. Two by two the crew fell in and met their guardians, grinning sheepishly as the testy old men ordered them about as though they were children.

The one told off to take care of Elgar and Daxon was somewhat spryer than the rest. He led them to one of the little cars, managing rather better than most as to locomotion, but his millions of wrinkles, sunken checks and knotted finger joints told plainly enough that he had been living a long, long time. The two officers got into the car, noting with amusement that its driver was, if anything, a couple of decades older than their guide.

"Say, Sid, if the girls in this town match the boys," laughed Elgar, "you're going to find night life pretty tame."

Any reply Daxon might have made was cut off with a grunt as his head hit the back of the seat. The driver had started the machine and it leaped ahead like a rowelled broncho. They were tearing across the landing field at dizzy speed, zig-zagging wildly among dozens of other such cars, each racing and jockeying for position, dodging parked planes with an agility that would be astonishing in any driver. In a very few minutes they were climbing the ramp that led across the elevated causeway over the lagoon that separated them from the crystal domed city. Elgar caught a glimpse of what probably was a park beneath, but at this season its grasses and trees were uniformly yellowed and sere.

Daxon, leaning back, gripped his hat with one hand and tried to fend off the whipping beard of their antediluvian jehu with the other. Once, he glimpsed the startled faces of Ronny and Ulberson as they were whisked by, gaining a lap in the race of toothless madmen. Daxon attempted a hail, but the others were too occu-

ried with hanging on to their own seats to notice.

"Phew!" whistled Elgar, as they eased through a great semi-circular opening in the first of the great crystalline domes. "These old dodos are rickety enough on their feet, but boy, how they cut loose when they have machines to carry them."

Once within the city, the ancient driver relaxed his pace, and it was well he did, for the streets were crowded with people, none of them agile enough to move faster than a walk. Like those at the landing field, all were unguessably old. Among them were many women, centenarians like the men. Some were skinny hags, others stupendously fat with multiple chins, and in between was every intermediate grade of crone and beldame. Dr. Elgar looked at them all in blanket astonishment—thousands of people, all senile. He wondered why there were no young, how the race was carried on.

The dome they were under was of a dull moss green hue, giving everything beneath it a sort of under water aspect. The buildings appeared to be of stone or brick and were reminiscent of old prints of Earth cities of several millenia before. Some houses were windowless, copies of the architectural monstrosities erected in America City during the first century or so of air-conditioning.

They had hardly become accustomed to the green lighting when they passed through another arch into a quarter of the city under a rose-colored dome, and after that into a third where the light was a mild amber. Their car turned a corner and pulled up in front of a building bearing the black-lettered sign, "Conservation Unit No. 3."

"FOR examination and registry," croaked their guide, laconically, "the branding will come later."

The latter phrase caused the two officers to exchange inquiring glances, but they

got out of the car and followed their tutor into the building. Passing down a wide and rather crowded corridor, they caught sight of Captain Yphon through an open door. He was protesting something earnestly to a smallish, bespectacled old man in white, and gesturing toward his eyes as he talked. Before the boys could see what the controversy was about or catch the Captain's eye, they were led on past and ushered into an office.

In what was evidently a sort of ante-room to more offices beyond, they found to their astonishment a railed off enclosure filled with benches upon which sat scores of old men and women. Over their heads was the incredible sign, "Newborn Assemble Here."

"Never mind those," said their guide, rather contemptuously, "being Earthborn you are in a favored class. Follow me, if you will."

In an inner office they were confronted by a huge desk behind which sat a jovial, fat old Santa Claus, presiding over a gigantic ledger. He greeted them with a twinkle of the eye, and at once began asking questions as to name, date and place of birth, and so on, writing all the answers down. When he found that both candidates had been living less than forty earth years, he banged a bell for his messenger, wagging his head sadly.

"I am afraid," he said, apologetically, "that we will have to postpone the rest of this until after the doctor has passed on you. Get Dr. Insun," he said, more sharply, to the messenger, an emaciated old gaffer of some hundred and ten years at the very least.

Presently the bespectacled little man whom they had seen arguing with Yphon came in. He wore the white smock of his profession, but he did not have the cheerful manner that many doctors maintain. His bearing was that of a man who expects the worst of human nature and

thinks there must be deception if he doesn't at once find it.

Quite briskly, for he seemed to have fewer disabilities than most, he proceeded with a cursory physical examination of the two Thubanites, pursing his lips and frowning all the while, giving vent as he went to mournful "Hm-m's" and "Tut-tut's." Finally he turned to the benign registrar and said rather jerkily, "not good specimens like the other two have to take it up with the High Priest" then he glowered at the two young men again as if to assure himself he was making no mistake "all wrong—everything. Now, that one called Angus was perfect, and the other—Captain Yphon—if we can get his eyes fixed up he will be a valuable addition to the community. But these two. . ." his voice trailed off into a mournful silence.

"Won't live through the Long Night, eh?" added the jovial one, with an air of commiseration. Then he suggested, "Why not put them under the big lens on No. 7?"

The doctor shook his head gloomily. "Not time enough—only forty-four more days, you know. Sorry, but they're hopeless. May as well turn them loose and let them enjoy themselves while they can. They can't possibly survive—why, they're barely mature, mere children, *too young!*" And with that cryptic pronouncement of unworthiness, the doctor left the room with the air of a man washing his hands of a bad business.

"Old Angus a perfect specimen!" muttered Daxon, looking blankly to Elgar, "but *we* are too young to survive. Say, what kind of screwy outfit is this, anyway?"

But Dr. Elgar was thoughtful. He suspected it was not the utter nonsense it sounded.

And yet—what else but nonsense could it be?

(End of Part I)

MISTER ISLAND

By
E. A. Grosser

This was an unusual island, thought Hugh Locke. For instance, it seemed odd that a gun should be in his hand, and that the girl should be able to speak English, simply because he willed it.



THE ship shuddered violently when it struck the derelict and heeled far to the starboard. Hugh Locke, standing near the rail with only a dressing-gown over his screaming pajamas and hoping that the breeze would dispel the alcoholic fog from his mind, catapulted over the rail. Down and down he

went, until it seemed that he would never cease falling through inky blackness. And that thought was emphatically not designed to ease a queasy stomach.

He slapped into a wave that seemed much too solid to be liquid, and a lightless darkness overwhelmed him. When he could see again, he knew that he had been unconscious for some minutes for the ship was a distant fairyland of lights. He knew that it was hopeless to shout, and besides he felt that he didn't possess any breath or strength to be spared. His slippers were gone, but the robe dragged at him. He shrugged it off and lay in the cool water clad only in his pajamas.

The overdose of ethyl was still effective. He wasn't worried, because he couldn't worry. The South Pacific water was pleasant. There was no discomfort. He was happy until the breeze strengthened and the waves became higher. The brine sloshed into his mouth and nose. Then he tried swimming.

After an hour's hard work, interrupted and intensified by recurrent periods of illness, he was in the depths of the morbid blues. He gloomily discounted death in advance of the fact and was too tired and sick to get excited about it. A delicious sense of well-being stole through his body and he allowed himself to slip beneath the waves. Abruptly, some force seized and propelled him through the water like a hooked fish as blackness closed around him.

HE WOKE on a warm, sandy beach, and stared drowsily at a blue sky where the sun had not yet reached the zenith. Somewhere close by a breeze rustled through trees and birds squawked raucously. He sat up and found himself looking out over a beautifully azure sea. But it had unpleasant connotations which caused him to turn away with a grimace.

The results were very satisfactory. There was a delightful vista of coco palms,

lush foliage, brightly colored birds—and a pretty girl. All that any man could ask of an island! She stood in the shade of the palms, watching him with an interest that made her dark eyes sparkle and allowed her coral lips to part and reveal brilliantly white teeth. Her face, immobile with surprise, was delicately oval and under arched brows were gentle dark eyes. Then she seemed to recall the proprieties and snatched a silken veil across her face.

Vaguely put out, Hugh climbed to his feet and brushed the sand from his pajamas. His back was still damp and he had to peel the cloth from his shoulder-blades. He shivered at the feeling, but the beauty of the girl banished the unpleasantness. The salt of the water made his face feel tight and drawn but his eyes never left her.

"Hello," he said with a cheerful voice, then added rather hopefully, "Do you live here?"

She stared at him uncomprehendingly. She was motionless except for her eyes, and as they roved over his bedraggled figure they sparkled with suppressed mirth. Hugh flushed with complete understanding and mentally cursed the day he had purchased the striped pajamas. He was very conscious of the poor figure he presented.

"Can't you speak English?" he asked irritably. "I want food. Food—understand?—something to eat!" He illustrated his desire graphically by inserting imaginary food in his mouth and chewing with exaggerated enjoyment. He desisted almost immediately when her tinkling laugh smote his ears. He reddened again.

"We're getting along fine," he commented dryly. "Where are your folks? Maybe I can make one of them understand me."

He forced a friendly smile to his lips and started toward her. But the sand dragged at his feet, making him lean forward and swing his body. He must have

appeared menacing to the girl for alarm flashed in her dark eyes and she turned and fled.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" he called, trying to run after her. The sand tripped him and as he went down he saw the silken flash of her disappearing among the trees.

He got to his feet, spitting sand, and glared resentfully after her. This was a devil of a way to treat a castaway! Then he started uphill, smug with the knowledge that if he climbed long enough he must eventually reach a vantage point from which he could survey the island.

He limped along on tender, unshod feet, and becoming increasingly nervous. There was a strangeness about his haven that made him peer frequently over his shoulder to search the brush with his eyes for a follower. But there was no one. And the strangeness wasn't the trees, or the flowers, or the birds, or anything he could identify positively. It was a sensed aliveness in the very air of the place; a brooding, somnolent amusement. Somehow it brought back the memory of that side-ward tug as he was sinking beneath the waves and the hair on the back of his neck prickled.

HE WAS still trying to force the uneasiness from his mind when he topped the last rise and found himself standing on a bare pinnacle. The island lay before him, a great verdure-encrusted coral ring a half mile in diameter, with only one narrow, reef-protected channel leading to the sea. On the coral sand of the lagoon, he saw a group of palm huts and directly across the lagoon, as distant as was possible, the dome of a temple-like building glittered metallically in the sunlight. The blue lagoon was waveless, as smooth as glass and almost as transparent except in the center. There the water was milkily opaque as though filled with a multitude of tiny air bubbles.

As he watched the milkiness boiled and churned to foam. Huge bubbles blistered the surface and burst to release a steamy yellow haze which rose slowly into the air. The strange atmosphere of the place was suddenly intensified and despite the warmth of the sun Hugh was chilled.

Behind him the brush rustled. He wheeled to face a gigantic, villainous-looking black man dressed as richly as the girl, who now came forward with regal confidence. But Hugh's eyes were fastened on the scimitar which the man held lightly in one huge paw. The sun glistened evilly on the sharp curve of the blade.

Hugh spared one quick glance full of reproach at the girl and saw a frown of indetermination on her ivory-skinned forehead. The giant lifted the blade and stepped closer. Hugh stepped back. The giant followed with a frown of irritation. And even in the danger of the moment Hugh could detect or feel the unreal strangeness of the island. Indeed, it was stronger and as though some unseen being were watching amusedly.

Hugh caught his heel on a stone and fell backward down the slope. A bush caught and held him. He untangled himself as quickly as possible while the mocking laughter of the girl tinkled in his ears. Again he flushed with anger, and then was additionally angry with himself for what seemed was rapidly becoming a bad habit.

"By God! I wish I had a gun," he exploded. "Then that big lug wouldn't be so free with that knife."

He halted, mouth agape. Around himself he felt a gathering of indefinable force, a focusing of the strangeness. An automatic pistol such as he had used many times on pistol ranges fell to the ground in front of him. He looked upward to see where it had come from. There was not the slightest speck to mar the sun-washed blueness of the sky.

The black sensed danger and bounded

forward, scimitar raised high. Hugh snatched up the pistol. What difference from where it came? It was here! And he knew how to use it!

He leveled it at the giant. The girl screamed and darted forward. She placed herself between the two of them and her frightened eyes met Hugh's. Her fear had made her forget her notions of modesty and her face was fully exposed to view. Hugh feasted his eyes. He felt that he had the situation well in hand, and also a nasty sense of satisfaction at having turned the tables on the pair.

She spoke quickly in a strange language, and her former imperious attitude was noticeably absent. Hugh greatly admired the softness of her speech, then saw that she was waiting for a reply. She must have asked a question.

"I don't understand you." He shrugged expressively.

The black mustn't have liked the gesture for he started purposefully forward. Hugh raised the pistol again, centered the muzzle on the hairy chest. The girl stopped the black angrily and turned to Hugh again. She spoke slowly, enunciating each syllable with laborious clearness.

"It's no go!" Hugh said when she had finished. "I don't even know what language you're speaking. I wish you could speak English!"

AGAIN there was that gathering of forces. It was as though time had hiccupped, Hugh thought. He saw a startled expression cross the girl's face, widening her eyes momentarily. He glanced quickly at the black and saw mingled surprise and fear on the fellow's face. Then the girl spoke:

"Why did you pursue me? Why do you threaten us?"

"You . . . you speak English?"

"I speak as I have always spoken," she returned impatiently. "If you understand me, why haven't you answered?"

"But you were speaking some goofy lingo . . . wait a minute! I have an idea." He searched his mind quickly for something he desired. But it was his stomach which settled the matter. "I wish I had a thick steak sandwich."

He had to grab quickly to catch the sandwich before it struck the ground. The black gasped with terror and paled to a pasty brown. "Mistress Leilah! It is the Strange One again! He has acted."

The girl paled and glanced affrightedly at the center of the lagoon. The white spot was quiescent and milkily smooth, though a faint haze drifted upward from the surface of the water.

"Are you one of the mutineers?" she asked Hugh with the air of a person who has come close to a forbidden subject and is afraid.

"Mutineers?" Hugh echoed stupidly, still staring at his sandwich. "Who are they?" He raised the sandwich to his mouth and sank his teeth in it cautiously. It tasted good. He chewed and swallowed and took another bite.

The girl watched him doubtfully. Hugh met her stare boldly and was pleased to see her flush lightly. She made a movement as though to cover her face with the veil, then desisted, evidently realizing the uselessness of the gesture. The black had recovered from his fright and now he spoke:

"Take care, Mistress Leilah! He is puny, and may be clever. I suggest we take him to our camp. Featherstone is a drunkard and defies the Prophet and is in league with the Strange One, but he will surely know if this is one of his mutinous crew."

She silenced him with a wave of her hand and looked at Hugh. Hugh fingered his pistol to see if it were still solid and substantial. It was.

"You aren't taking me anywhere," he declared. "I don't know who any of you are, and if there is a fight going on, I'm

not going to choose sides. All I know is that I'm hungry. I ran after you because I thought you would lead me to your home and there I might be able to get something to eat."

The girl's face had clouded angrily at his first words, but now it cleared magically. She turned to the black. "It is the Strange One, Hassan. He has brought another. And it seems we have nothing to fear from this one."

Hassan was doubtful and looked it as he muttered, "He may be clever." As though the Strange One were perversely interested in causing Hassan discomfort, the center of the lagoon became a boiling cauldron. The haze thickened and drifted into the air and gradually dispersed. They watched in silence for a moment.

The girl was the first to speak when the lagoon had quieted. "Come with us. I will get you food," she said with a quick smile.

HUGH went willingly. They went down the hill toward the lagoon and, to his surprise, turned toward the group of palm huts. When they were close he saw a man lying at ease in the doorway of one of the huts. There was a bottle in the fellow's hand and Hugh fitted it to the description of Featherstone given by Hassan, and was satisfied that he was correct. At the door of another hut squatted a black woman, busily grinding meal.

"Hi, Buddy!" the man called. "A new recruit to our little bit of heaven?"

Hassan snorted derisively. "Infidel! You wouldn't be permitted the smallest of glimpses into heaven."

"Well, this certainly ain't hell," Featherstone replied, glancing at the bottle in his hand. "It certainly ain't!" he repeated emphatically, then faced Hugh. "My name's Featherstone, former first mate of the *Seafoam*, which is also former. What's yours?"

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"Locke," Hugh said. "Hugh Locke."

"How did you get here?" Featherstone asked, but Hassan interrupted: "Is this one of the mutinous crew?"

"Course not," Featherstone replied wearily, then jerked his head around and looked at the black with astonishment. "How come you speak English?"

"Guess it's my fault," Hugh offered. "But don't ask me how it happened."

Featherstone gripped his hands over his temples and groaned with disgust. "The Strange One! Damn, why didn't I think of that? Here I been gettin' headaches trying to learn their talk." He looked up at Hugh and warned, "But don't try anything funny with Leilah. She's a good girl. I know! I tried. And besides that black swings a wicked knife, he does. The crew hates him."

He looked across the lagoon at the glittering temple-like building and grinned. Hugh looked at Leilah helping the old woman prepare food.

"Know what that is?" Featherstone asked, still grinning.

"Huh! Oh, what?"

Featherstone pointed out across the lagoon.

Hugh shook his head negatively and waited.

"Gold! All gold! They found out how to work this Strange One, whoever he is, and had him fix 'em up a gold house. The fools don't know gold's only good for what you can get with it." He gazed fondly at the bottle. "Direct action—that's me! When you want a thing, ask for it—and here you get it."

HE PAUSED to dampen his throat, then jumped back to his original question. "How did you get here?"

"Fell overboard when my ship hit a derelict," Hugh replied.

"Passenger, huh," Featherstone spat disgustedly. "Where did you go over the side?"

Hugh shrugged. "I don't know. We were six days out of Honolulu on the way to Auckland."

"You went down in the Pacific, then," Featherstone concluded. "Leilah's from Persia and went down in the Arabian Sea. And I piled the *Seafoam* on a reef in the China Sea after the crew mutinied and killed the captain. A select gathering, you might call it."

"Spawn of Satan!" came the black giant's voice. Hugh turned to defend himself, but saw that the black was speaking to the old woman. "Speak with a civilized tongue and leave off that monkey-gabbling."

"Quiet, Hassan," Leilah said. "Mr. Locke will help her to speak our new tongue as soon as he has finished talking with Mr. Featherstone." She looked up to meet Hugh's eyes and Hugh saw that hers held a twinkle that was like subdued laughter. "It would be better. . . ." she suggested.

The black woman was arguing rapidly in the language which Leilah and Hassan had formerly spoken. "Okay," Hugh said to Leilah and obligingly wished for the woman to speak English. Again there came that strange focusing of power and the woman completed her speech of rebuttal in English.

"—black ape. Go! And leave a woman in peace.

Hassan scratched his head puzzledly and looked from the woman to Hugh, and then at the white center of the lagoon. Then, muttering, he went into the hut.

Leilah smiled and with a wave of her hand, invited Hugh to eat the food she and the old woman had prepared. He started forward willingly. But the old woman leaped to her feet with a frightened yelp and seizing Leilah's hand started toward the trees. Hugh looked to see what had frightened her and the half dozen men who had been sneaking through the brush threw to the winds all attempts at

concealment and sped down on the little group.

Hugh lifted his pistol, aimed carefully at the nearest enemy and fired. The fellow stumbled and went down with a squall of pain. Hassan charged out of his hut with naked scimitar in hand and bellowing like an angry bull. For a moment Hugh thought the giant intended to cut him down.

Then a scream from Leilah jerked them both around like puppets on a single string and they saw her struggling in the arms of two of the mutineers who had stealthily outflanked the group of huts and had waited in the brush. The black woman clawed at them like an angry tigress until one struck her a heavy blow. The act seemed to drive Hassan mad. He bounded toward the affray like a black avenging angel of death.

Hugh snapped a quick shot back at the larger group and another man fell to the sand and the attack melted away. Then he turned back and stepping to one side to get Hassan out of line, drew a bead on one of the mutineers. His pistol barked and the fellow stiffened and collapsed bonelessly to the sand.

Leilah fought free of her captor's hands and fled toward Hugh. The fellow started in pursuit, then saw Hassan coming with swinging scimitar. He turned quickly and fled. Hassan kept after him with a grin that exposed his white teeth in a carnivorous snarl. A moment later the pleas of the mutineer were audible, then they were cut short.

Leilah threw herself hysterically into Hugh's arms. He held her close as he turned to face the rest. But the only mutineer in sight was the wounded man.

FEATHERSTONE still reclined comfortably in front of his hut. He grinned crookedly. "Know guns pretty well, don't you?" he inquired.

Hugh grunted an angry affirmative.



"Why didn't you help us?" he demanded.

Featherstone's grin widened. "I'm the only navigator on the island, so they won't harm me unless I get directly in their way . . . which I don't intend to do. As it is, nobody dares hurt me . . . it's a lot like being king.

"But now I suppose I'll have to share my throne with you. They have tried to make guns often enough, but the Strange One won't do anything unless you already know how. They got lumps of metal that looked like guns, but they were solid."

Leilah tugged at Hugh's sleeve. He looked at her, then lowered his head to hear her whisper, "Make him help us get away from here. He says he won't ever leave."

"It's hopeless, sweetheart," said Featherstone, divining her words. "I know heaven when I find it. I'm staying!"

Hassan returned, wiping blood from his blade with a ragged strip of cloth that hadn't come from his own clothes. He glared at Hugh, but there was an odd friendliness in the glare. "You are good to have at one's side in a fight, Little One. But next time leave the violators to me. My ministrations are more fitting to the crime."

Featherstone shuddered and Hugh suddenly knew he had the mate's number. He smiled confidently at Leilah, and she returned the smile.

"We'll go," he assured her, "and Featherstone will help us."

Featherstone barked a short, mocking laugh. "Don't count on it," he ridiculed.

Hugh laughed with him, then catching the mate's eyes directed them toward Hassan. Featherstone's laughter dwindled to an abrupt silence and he looked away quickly.

"Would you consider it amusing, Hassan, to—shall we say—prod Mr. Featherstone's memory and ambition with the tip of your blade?" Hugh asked the giant.

Hassan glanced quickly at Leilah, then

back to Hugh with a grin. "It would be a pleasure," he replied with a deep bow.

"No!" Leilah interrupted. "Hassan, don't you dare!"

"But, Mistress, I cannot refuse. He has a gun."

"I'm sure Hassan is a talented man," Hugh assured her, then glancing down at Featherstone to note the effect, added. "He will see that no permanent injury or death results, if he can possibly help it."

The effect was immediate. The mate's whisky-reddened face paled to a weak pink. His eyes darted about wildly for a way of escape. But Hassan's huge paw closed over his shoulder and yanked him to his feet. Hugh stepped between the pair and Leilah and offered his arm gallantly.

"To work, Infidel. A boat, a good boat, one fit to carry my mistress and the little sultan."

"A-alright! I will. I will! Leggo me! You're breaking my shoulder."

Hassan relaxed his brawny fingers and Featherstone started down the beach with a shout to the unseen mutineers. "Hey! Wait! Help me!"

HASSAN caught him in two bounds and slapped his stern with the flat of his scimitar. "Next time it will be a nick—an oh, so small one—a trickle," he threatened.

Leilah tried to run past Hugh, but he caught her. "We must be firm," he said with a smile.

She looked at him angrily and fought to free herself. Hassan looked at them doubtfully, then slammed Featherstone down to a squatting position on the sand. "A boat, my dove, a boat! That is all we desire. That and the pleasure of your inestimable companionship."

Hugh was having a difficult time of it and wasn't any too certain that Hassan would leave him alone. So he breathed a sigh of relief when Featherstone said,

"Okay—okay. Give a fellow a chance. I gotta think."

Leilah ceased struggling and Hugh released her cautiously. "You see," he said. "All that was needed was a little firmness. Come on, let's go for that walk."

She walked silently at his side. Hugh breathed deeply and drew the sleeve of his pajama coat over his forehead to mop up the moisture. "Whew! I was bluffing, but I don't think Hassan was. I'm glad he is a friend of mine now."

Featherstone was cogitating deeply. "Let's see—finest teak—gold sheathing—gold ballast." A trim hull shaped itself in the water of the lagoon. Featherstone grinned secretively. Hassan thought it was from satisfaction. "A beautiful beginning!" he approved. "Be sure to make it a worthy ship."

Featherstone nodded and continued: "Crew's quarters." That was quickly done. "Cabins." Quickly, but a little longer. "Captain's quarters," Featherstone sighed with genuine interest. "Real springs on the bed—a real bed. Mahogany desk—a big sideboard with plenty of room—all filled. Aaah!" The ship was coming along fine. "Best sails and diesel auxiliary."

When Hugh and Leilah returned, they halted to stare at the ship. It was a beauty! Suddenly the air about them seemed to warp with the presence of great forces. The white spot in the center of the lagoon

bubbled furiously, then a screaming column of yellow-white gas spewed skyward.

"Behold! Little Earthlings! You see the completion of twelve thousand years of labor."

It seemed to Hugh that the words had been whispered directly in his ears, but when he turned to the others he knew from their expressions that they too had heard. Leilah moved closer to him unconsciously for protection. Her fine dark eyes were wide with fright. Hassan gripped his scimitar nervously. Featherstone fumbled on the beach sand without looking, for a bottle which was for once out of reach.

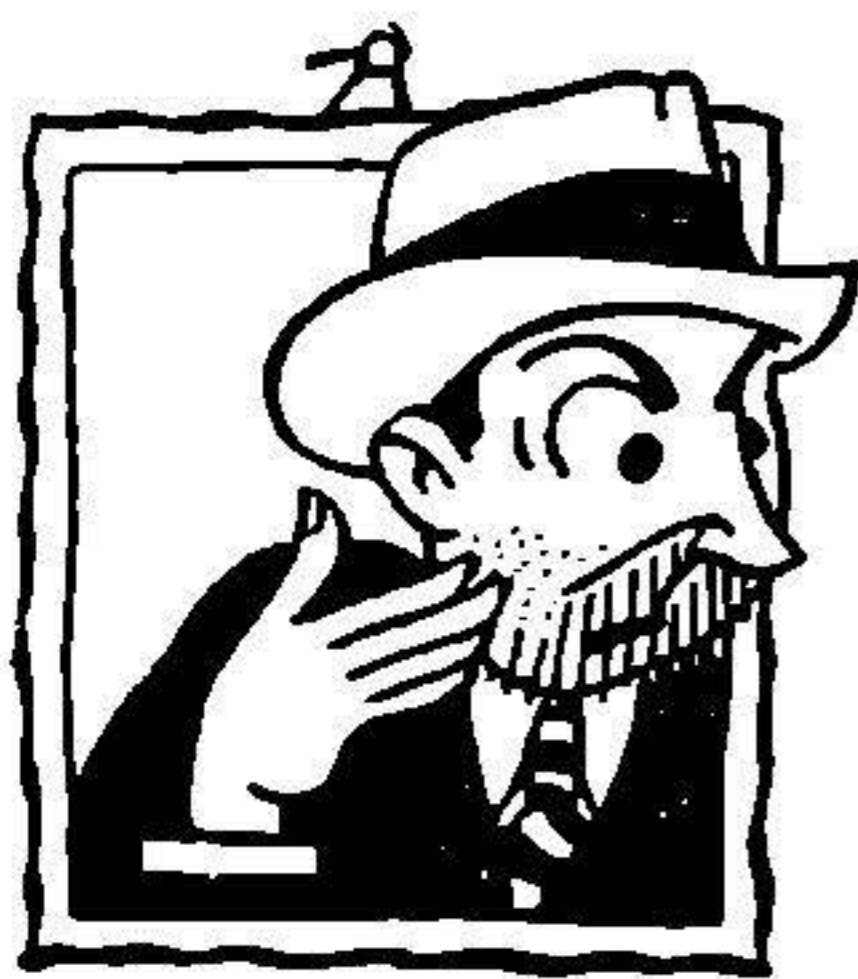
"Did—did you hear what I did?" he gulped.

"I guess so," Hugh replied, placing his arm unconsciously around Leilah's slim waist.

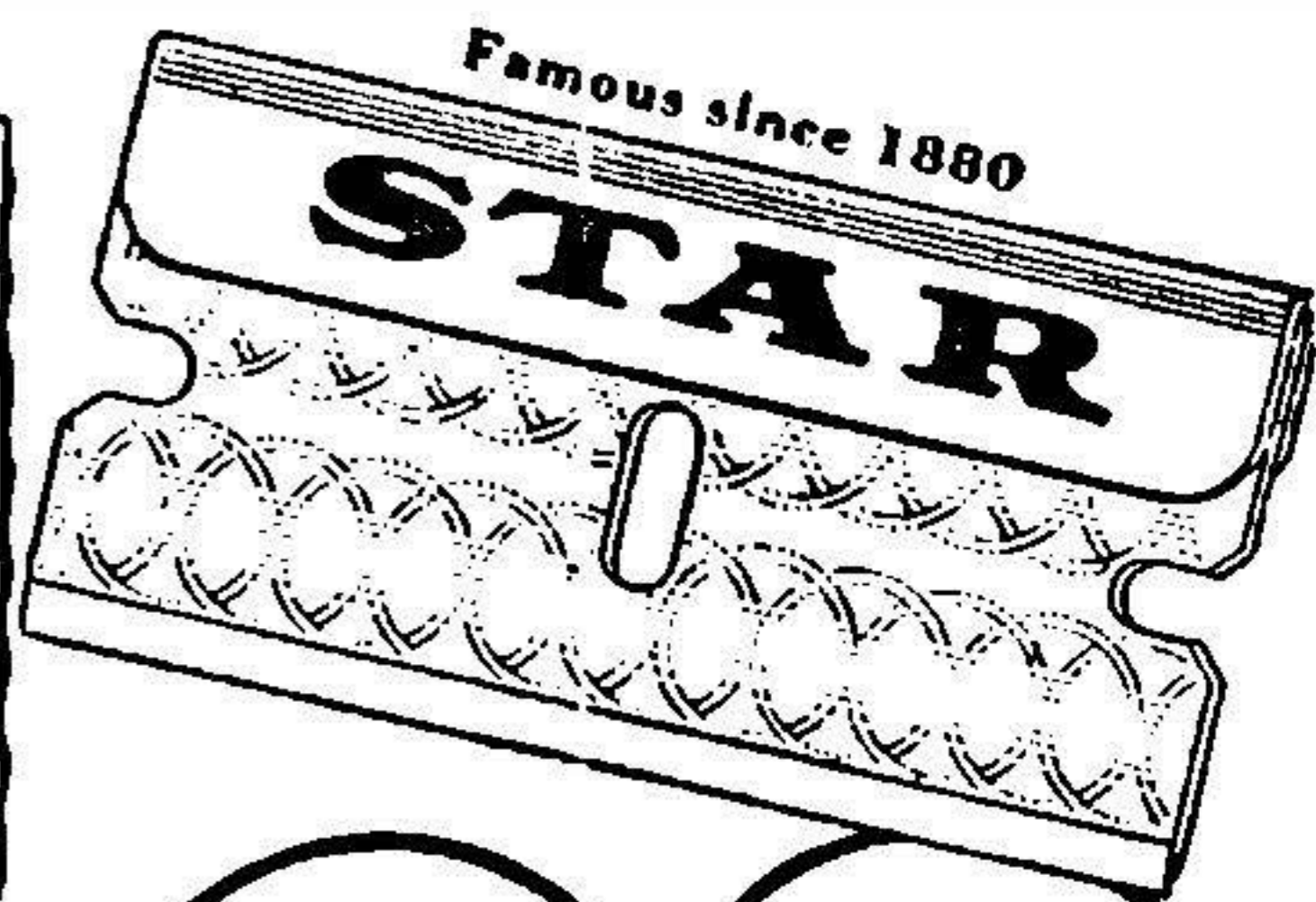
"What was it?" she asked fearfully.

"The Strange One!" Hassan chattered, terror-stricken. "He has awakened! Allah protect us!"

"Your fear does none of you credit," mused the 'voice,' "but it is what I should have expected. I shall leave you as soon as I have my moles stowed securely. Of course, that means you must also leave, as the island goes with me. So it is just as well that Mr. Featherstone has been thinking with one tricky eye to the future."



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“WHO the devil are you?” Hugh exploded. “How do we hear you when we can’t see you? And it isn’t like sound.”

“Speech is a barbaric mode of communication that is entirely unnecessary, except to comparatively unintelligent peoples. As for, who I am well, I have been called many things: devil, djinn, fiend but I prefer that you know me as I have made myself known to you—as ambition, will and inspiration. I have awakened wit in men the instinctive ideals, vague longings, a striving for something better. In one word—dissatisfaction.

“I am from another, more favored world and of a race totally unlike and far in advance of yours. I discovered valuable mineral deposits in this place and for twelve thousand years I have been guiding my moles throughout the earth, gathering this valuable element—of which your scientists, incidentally, know nothing. I had little to occupy my time, as my machinery is nearly automatic—so I found amusement.

“When I came man was little, if any, higher than the animals. He was satisfied if he had enough to eat and didn’t have to run too much. He was too satisfied. He had no urge to progress. I gave your race the blessing of dissatisfaction.

“It took many years before the dissatisfaction found channels and created a forward drive, but when that time came I assisted by influencing selected members of your race. As time passed the effect was cumulative and your forward rate of progress speeded with ever increasing acceleration. Now that I am leaving, you will be on your own, as you would say. It would possibly be worthy of a return at some time in the future to see whether you continue forward, degenerate, or become decadent.”

The whispering voice halted momentarily and Hugh thought he detected a vague determination to return. Then it

continued: “It may sound as though I’ve had a very uninteresting time, but that is not so. I have had some very amusing times by snatching drowning men and women from the oceans and transporting them here. Their lives were forfeit anyway, so my interference with the natural course of events wreaked no harm and sometimes did good. Fishing—I imagine you would call it, if you weren’t hampered by a definite bias in favor of the game.”

“What do you intend to do with us.” Hugh asked.

There was a pause.

“Turn you loose, as I have all others. And really you have been among the most uninteresting of the entire lot. I will always remember the Irishman who thought the little folk had enthralled him and insisted on being carried to his home in Ireland in the arms of three mermaids. Then there was Aladdin. He was hard to please! I had to convert this lagoon to a valley of diamonds for his pleasure and when it came time for him to leave, he insisted on traveling on a giant bird—just to be different.

“But now I am ready to leave, and the water here is deep, so you had better get on your ship while our Mr. Featherstone gathers the crew.”

“What if they won’t leave?” Hugh asked.

“I think they will, came the answer. “Especially when they discover that all their gold houses and jewels are merely imaginary.”

“Imaginary?” Hugh echoed the whisper.

“Naturally! Do you suppose I would make the effort necessary to form the atoms of the things any of you desire when it is so much easier to make you think and believe they were real? That gun of yours is in the same class. That *dead man*—look at him! He will help Featherstone gather the crew.”

THEY turned to look at the "dead" man who had been sprawled on the sand. The fellow was sitting up, yawning as though just awakening from a sleep.

"Mr. Featherstone!" whispered the voice. "Your companion already has his instructions, and so have you."

Featherstone joined the mutineer and they started down the beach. Hugh watched them, almost without seeing them. He was trying to grasp the full meaning of the Strange One's communication.

"Having been associated with your race for so long, I naturally know of your baser instincts. I can conceive no way in which you could possibly injure me, but I prefer to be absolutely certain. Though I have guided your race up from barbarity, I cannot be held accountable for the bloodshed and evils attendant on your progress. They were present before I came and are still repugnant to me. Though I console myself with the fact that as you make progress, the wars are becoming more humane for the combatants. Figuring from a percentage basis, fewer are killed or wounded now than were in the wars of yesterday—for instance, the Greek or Roman wars, or those of Assyria or Egypt. And as time goes on the theater of operations is extended and soon all will be combatants. I am well enough acquainted with your essential selfishness to be positive that as soon as you all know that whether you are rich or poor, young or old, man or woman, you will still be in danger of your lives—well, then war will cease to be.

"But, enough!" the Strange One whispered. "You must go. Here is a small-boat. Get in!"

A small boat lay in the water before them, bobbing gently in the miniature waves caused by the failing spout of gas in the center of the lagoon.

Suddenly the thought that had been hovering in the back of Hugh's mind came

to the fore. "But you say all you have done for us is in our minds—imaginary. This won't hold us. And the ship won't do any good. We can't use imaginary ships!"

"Have you ever tried?" the whisper mocked. "I assure you they will. While I maintain the temporary atoms in their present position, the ship will be seaworthy. Of course, when you reach safety, I shall withdraw and they will go also. That should take place about the time I reach the limits of your solar system. There will be a sufficient margin of safety."

Hugh had nothing to say. He helped Leilah into the boat and Hassan followed them unwillingly. No sooner had they seated themselves than the tiny craft moved swiftly toward the vessel which was the result of the Strange One's cooperation with Featherstone.

FROM the deck of the larger craft, they watched the golden dwellings of the mutineers melt away like butter in a hot sun. It was a sullen, angry crew that came aboard.

"Let's get under way," Hugh suggested.

Featherstone was most willing. He flung orders to the men and the craft moved toward the channel. Then Featherstone took one look at the narrow channel with its studding of reefs and turned to Hugh.

"We can't get her out" he groaned. "I wanted to stay here and counted on that when I was building her."

Hugh might have shot Featherstone if he had retained any faith in his pistol. Then he received an impression of immense disgust from the Strange One and the coral atoll moved crazily. Those parts near the channel slipped beneath the water while the opposite section rose high into the air.

Only the tips of the palms bordering

the channel still showed. The sea humped into a vast wave and flooded into the lagoon. The ship bobbed like a cork, then some power seized it and jerked them to the open sea.

Tremendous bow waves furrowed to each side of the ship. Hugh and Leilah clung to a stanchion and each other for support.

They looked back at the atoll. It leaped fifty feet into the air, exposing a smooth metallic curve as its base. A great wave lashed out at them, and the ship plunged madly though never slacking its speed.

When they could see again, the smooth metal curve had enlarged to a great hemisphere, atop which the atoll perched like a monk's tonsure. The lagoon waters cascaded out the channel and down the side in a constantly heightening waterfall.

At last the globe was clear of the water and Hugh was stricken dumb with its immensity. It was more than a quarter of a mile in diameter. It leaped upward into the blue sky. It shrank rapidly to a distant, dark moon then a small dot then it was gone.

HUGH became conscious of a terrible lack of purpose. He felt a contentment fill his being and hated it. The full realization of the constant unguided struggle in store for man descended on his mind in a crushing load.

He looked at Leilah and saw that she, too, felt the horrible animalistic content with things as they were; and he saw that she too, was distressed when it was to be expected that she would be happy. No more empty longing . . . no more reaching for the moon . . . no more progress! Unless man had developed sufficiently to proceed on his own.

And they both doubted. The doubt and the knowledge that of all the world they, alone, understood, brought them together. He wanted to take her into his arms, but

he knew that she with her exotic standards of conduct would not understand, here in front of others.

The ship sped through the water at a terrific speed. From the captain's cabin came the drunken voice of Featherstone. He was singing raucously.

The door of the cabin banged open and Featherstone reeled out onto the deck. He faced them with a sneer, swaying on his feet.

"As soon as the Strange One lets us go, we drop you at the first island." He shouted to the crew. They gathered, still sullenly angry. "This is the bunch that got us banished from our Fiddler's Green," he shouted at them, and a grumble answered his accusation. "I say, maroon 'em!"

"Aye!" was the chorus.

Almost immediately an island lifted over the horizon and the craft slackened speed. Hassan lifted his scimitar as though to argue the point with Featherstone, but Hugh spoke quickly to Leilah and she forbade any action.

They were taken ashore and then watched the ship move slowly away.

"Why did you not fight?" asked Leilah, troubled.

Hugh chuckled and started to answer, but the Strange One's whisper interrupted.

"Gather food," it said. "You will shortly be very hungry."

Abruptly Hassan grinned and they set about gathering such fruits as they could find. When they had finished and started eating, they sat on the sand watching the horizon. The ship was only a smudge.

Suddenly it disappeared and they were gripped with a gnawing hunger. The pile of fruits dwindled as though with the Strange One's aid.

They didn't even cease eating when the Strange One whispered, "There is a plantation across the island. Farewell."

THE END

FANTASY REVIEWS

Fantasy Books

THE MARSIAN by J. W. Gilbert. Fortuny's, New York. \$1.00

J. W. Gilbert writes a story of life on Mars reminiscent of the type written before 1910. We have read a number of those old books of Martian life such as "Daybreak" and "Zarlah the Martian" and this comes up to par.

The technique is simple. There is no involved plot or fast action such as the modern Mars tale calls for. Rather once the Terrestrial is transported across the void (this time by psychic control a la John Carter), he spends his time studying the Martian culture and civilization with Earthly comparisons. Essentially the literary classification is with the Utopias, for that is the intent. Mr. Gilbert's "Marsian" spends his time explaining the advanced society, agriculture, architecture, machinery, and power supplies of his planet and afforded this reader some entertaining discussion on possible developments of those fields. If you like the slow, old-style type of book, you'll find this book pleasant.

—Donald A. Wollheim

SOULS' JUDGMENT DAY by Judge M. W. Albano. Lorecraft Publishers, Paterson, N. J. \$2.00.

Subtitled "A Fantastic Novel," the most noteworthy fantasy to be found here

is a lengthy vision of the birth of the earth, the evolution of life and man, and the portrayal of a day of judgement for the men of earth. The author's concepts of the justice due the great characters of history is interesting even if his standards seem too much on the moral side.

The book otherwise is a sort of sermon on morals and religion, the characters being wooden and their actions consciously shamefaced. Somehow or other, in this day and age, sermonizing on the sins of mere sexual passion seems sort of old-fashioned and tame.

—Donald A. Wollheim

Book Notes

"The Great Prince Shan" by E. Phillips Oppenheim has been reprinted by Pocket Books for the price of 25c. Written several years ago, the story is a fantasy dealing with a future war and a strange peacemaker. . . H. G. Wells, science-fiction's most famous name, authors a Penguin book "The Rights of Man" setting forth his ideas on the reorganization of the world after the present war is over. (25c). . . Olaf Stapledon, author of the cosmic "Last and First Men," appears in the Penguin Book series with "Philosophy and Living" setting forth more of his views first popularized by his fiction.

ALL STAR OCTOBER ISSUE!



Four times already the people of that little mountain valley had heard a scream of agony—and had found only a hideous, bloated corpse! Had some mad criminal genius invaded their peaceful land; or had Damballa, the Snake God, come out of his jungle fastness to reap vengeance for a tragedy twenty years old? Don't miss THE WRATH OF DAMBALLA, a feature-length novel by Wayne Rogers.

Also in the same issue are stories and novelettes by some of your favorite writers, such as Stewart Sterling, William R. Cox, Dane Gregory, Russell Gray, and Donald G. Cormack.

10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

On Sale Sept. 10th!

STEPSON OF SPACE

It was just an eight-year-old boy's "invention"—a peach crate, tin cans, and mysterious, odd-looking wires. But it worked, and Andy Matthews feared for the safety of his son!

SCARED? That was hardly the word. Andy Matthews' bristly, dust-grimed cheeks felt stiff; and there was a sensation inside him as though his heart was trying to burst.

He couldn't get it all at once. To do so, fortunately, would have been impossible. He only knew that there was something fearfully and incomprehensibly wrong about his eight-year-old son, Jack!

Andy just stood there in the tool room over the granary, and stared, like a big, dumb ox, frightened, confused, pathetically grim, yet helpless. Oh, he would have died for his boy a hundred times over, if the danger was something he could really approach and fight. But this was different. It made him want to crawl into a dark corner with a loaded shotgun, and wait for a masked mystery to reveal itself. But he knew right away that this wouldn't be any good either!

The apparatus had looked so very harmless when he had first accidentally uncovered it. A peach box base. Tin cans nailed in a circle on top of it. A length of fine-gauge wire from an old radio set, was wrapped around each can, in a clumsy yet patiently involved design. The lengths of wire converged toward the center of the circle of cans, to form a kind of wheel-like net, each strand of which was stapled to a heavy central block of wood. The exposed upper surface of the latter, bore a deep, elongated indentation, as though some object had struck it with terrific force. Except for an old fashioned double-throw electric switch, nailed to the side of the box, that was all.

The thing looked like any of the various contraptions that kids pound together

while playing inventor. Andy had chuckled fondly when he'd dragged the rigamajig out of its place of concealment, and had begun to fuss with the switch; for he remembered the hammering he had heard here in the tool room every time he had come in from the fields. Jack had been working on his "invention" for almost a month.

So Andy had been entirely unwarned. But when he had closed that switch, he had received the surprise of his life. His fingers had been a little off the insulated handle, and had touched the metal. Blue sparks had snapped across Andy's calloused palm. His whole body had recoiled under the staggering blow of a high-tension shock. It might have killed him, had he not stumbled backward.

THAT was the point now—the reason for his fearful confusion—the focus of an incredibly incongruous mixture of facts. Jack was just eight. This rigamajig—peach-box, cans, and wires—was kid stuff. And yet the shock that had struck Andy, was like the wallop of a high-voltage line! Nor was there any source, within half a mile or more, from which the contraption might draw power!

The thought that he was perhaps the father of a child genius, got Andy nowhere. Jack was smart, all right; but certainly no eight-year-old, no matter how brilliant his mind might be, could ever invent a miracle like this.

The apparatus was still active there on the floor, for the switch was closed. A greenish fluorescence, like worms of turbid light, had crept along each of the radiating wire strands. In the brown shad-



ows of the tool room, that soft witchfire burned wickedly, to the accompaniment of a low murmur, that seemed to threaten and predict unguessable developments. In the dusty air, there was a slight odor of scorched insulation.

Moved by instinct, Andy Matthews picked up a small wooden splinter from

the floor, and tossed it toward the apparatus.

Even as the chip flew toward its goal, he regretted his impulsive act with a cold doubt as to its wisdom. He ducked and crouched back, as the splinter landed on those glowing wires.

The splinter seemed hardly to touch the

By Raymond Z. Gallun

wires at all. But the cold emerald light flashed around it. Instantly it seemed to rebound, as if from rubber. Whisking speed increased to a point beyond the range of living retinas. There was a twanging, almost melodious note, and the chip was gone. But in the low-raftered roof above, there was a little hole, as neatly punctured as if made by the passage of a bullet. The splinter had been hurled fast enough to make that hole.

Andy Matthews gulped with the strain of his tightened nerves. His big head, with its close-cropped black hair, swung this way and that, in bewildered belligerence. He hadn't been able to go to school much, but he'd read a lot, and he was shrewd. The kid had made the contraption, all right; but he couldn't have thought it out—alone! And who else was there?

From the back porch of the farmhouse, Jane, Andy's pretty wife, was calling for him to come in to supper. But he hardly heard her. He hardly heard anything at all, as his brain fought with a mystery far beyond the knowledge of any person that he knew.

But he wheeled about like a burglar, caught with the goods, when the door behind him opened.

Jack stood in the entrance. He just stood there, not saying anything, his face lighted up by the green glow. He looked petulant and startled, sure of punishment.

Andy had no idea at all what to say at first. But then love tangled with fear of the unknown to produce fury. Andy's teeth showed. His slitted eyes snapped. His voice, when he spoke, was a hoarse, unsteady growl.

"Come here, you!" he commanded.

JUST for a moment the kid hesitated, his grey eyes vague and clouded in the green flicker. Then he came forward timidly, his scuffed shoes scraping in the untidy litter on the floor. He looked so pathetically little in his soiled overalls.

Andy's heart longed to melt, as it always had, for his son. But this was no time to give way to sentiment.

Andy clutched a small shoulder, and shook it violently. "What's this thing, here?" he snarled, pointing to the miracle beside them. "Who showed you how to make it? Come on! Out with it! Or, so help me, I'll break every bone in your body! Hurry up! Who showed you?"

Again there was that timid hesitation, which required more violent shaking to dissipate; but the kid spoke at last:

"Mister Weefles— He showed me. . .

Whereat, Andy snorted in sheer, boiling exasperation. "Mister Weefles!" he growled. "Always Mister Weefles! That's no answer at all!" Andy swung a hard palm. With a sharp snap, it landed on the side of Jack's cheek.

"Now will you tell me?" Andy roared.

The kid didn't let out a whimper. That was maybe a little funny in itself. But then those grey eyes met Andy's levelly, and Andy felt a dim, deep consternation. There was something warning and hard and strange, looking out of those eyes. Something that wasn't his son!

"I said, Mister Weefles," the kid told his father quietly. "He hasn't got any name of his own, so I started calling him that long time ago."

Andy had released his grip on the boy, and had moved back a step. The answer seemed to be nothing but pure, childhood fantasy. But its tone, and that level, warning stare, told a much different story. So Andy's mind seemed to tumble swiftly back through the years, to the time when Jack had been little more than a baby.

Almost since he had first leaned to talk, it had been the same. Always there had existed that shadowy individual, Mister Weefles.

Andy remembered himself asking on many different occasions: "What did you do today, son?"

And Jack's answer had so often been

something like this: "Oh, I was thinking about Mister Weefles. I dreamed about him last night again. He's a nice old guy, but he's awful lonesome and awful funny looking, and he knows an awful lot. Only he lives all by himself. All his folks are dead. . . ."

A kid story, Andy had thought. Lots of imaginative youngsters made up dream worlds for themselves, and imaginary characters. So Andy had accepted the fanciful friend of his son as a matter of course, with tolerant humor.

But now? In that green-lit, flickering twilight of the dusty tool room, a kid's unimportant legend had suddenly assumed an aspect of real danger!

Andy Matthews began to sweat profusely. Mister Weefles was only a name his boy had given to something—true! Tin cans, wires, a peach box, an unknown source of terrific electric power; and the bullet-like flight of a splinter of wood, going—where? All this was plain evidence of its truth!

SUDDENLY Jack moved forward toward the busy contraption on the floor. Andy gave a choked exclamation of warning, and made a grab to stop him. But then he only watched, with the intentness of a cat watching a mouse. Because Jack's movements were so skillful, so practiced, showing that he'd somehow been taught, and knew how to do—everything.

His fingers touched the tip of the insulated handle of the switch. With an expert lightness of touch, he swung it open quickly. The turbid light that had enveloped the radial wires of the apparatus, died out. A completer darkness, alleviated only by the evening afterglow from the window, settled over the cluttered room.

But the sharp, muddled concern that screamed in Andy Matthews' heart, could not be extinguished so easily.

They faced each other again, then—father and son—as though across an abyss

which seemed to separate them forever. But Andy Matthews' anger was dissolved, now, by his overshadowing fear. He was ready to grope and plead, in the hope that thus he might find a loose end—a tangible means of approach to the sinister presence that had enmeshed itself with his child's personality. His blood throbbed with frustrated, fighting courage.

"Jack," he husked into the gloom. "I'm your dad, boy. Tell me—about this pal of yours. Where does he live?"

Once more there was a pause. Then, grudgingly and sullenly, the kid responded:

"I don't know exactly. . . Someplace a long way off. . . It's a terrible scary kind of place. . ."

"You only dream about it, and about Mister Weefles?" Andy persisted. "At night—when you're asleep?"

"No, Dad," Jack returned. "Sometimes him and all his stuff are there in the daytime, too. I just have to shut my eyes and I can almost see him. He's been getting plainer all the time because I've got more practice figuring out just what he thinks. And he's got a special kind of machine he uses, too. . . Mostly it's the practice I got, though. . . And he told me that there's something special about my brains, that makes them a lot easier to talk with than most folk's brains. He don't say anything to me out loud, really. He just thinks, and I think with him. . . But he's an awful nice old guy . . . sorta sad. I do what he wants. Just now he made me turn off—"

There the kid stopped, sullenly, as though somehow he'd been warned not to talk further.

Andy didn't press the point; but his quick, ragged breathing came still faster, and he took hold of the kid's shoulder again. He pointed to the now-inactive peach box apparatus at their feet. The thing was newly constructed—an outgrowth rather than a cause of a queer

mental contact. From what he had seen of its action, Andy concluded that its purpose had nothing to do with minds. It had catapulted that chip through the roof—

“What’s this rigamajig for, son?” Andy asked quietly. “What is it supposed to do?”

The question wasn’t much use. The kid just shook his head and began to whimper. Andy picked him up, then—a small, tight bundle of unrelaxed, resentful nerves and muscles. The barrier between himself and his boy seemed wider than ever.

“Hurry up and spit it out!” Andy snapped in fresh anger, shaking the kid furiously.

JACK didn’t respond; but suddenly there was a tinkling sound on the floor. Something had fallen out of Jack’s overall pocket. Instantly the boy became a squirming wildcat, almost impossible to hold. But Andy Matthews was far from feeble; and he was certainly determined, now, too.

Still hanging onto the kid with one arm, he bent down to search for the dropped object. It wasn’t hard to find, for it had fallen right by his shoe; and the bright metal of it glinted even in the semidarkness. He picked it up, and then set Jack on the floor. The boy immediately backed away, panting, his mop of yellow hair streaming down into his face. He seemed to wait for an opportunity to recover what he’d lost.

“Now!” Andy said grimly, with a sort of triumph. “Maybe we’ll find out something!”

He took the object close to the window. It was a three inch cylinder, almost like a short, thick metal pencil; for it was tapered at one end. A flaky, ashy stuff, which still covered part of its burnished surface, came away in his palms. It was as though the thing had once been accidentally thrown into a furnace, or burned by the friction of a meteoric flight through the atmosphere.

The tapered end of the cylinder could be detached, like a screw. Directly beneath this conical cap, there was a little spindle. Andy tugged at it avidly, drawing a tiny scroll from its tubular container. Carefully, but with shaking fingers, he unrolled it, sensing that here was a thing, the like of which he had never touched before. One side of the long, silky, metallic ribbon, was coated with a fine glaze. Holding the smooth strip up to the dying light of day at the window, he squinted at it. But this effort to see was unnecessary, for the smooth surface was phosphorescent. It was divided into three little rectangles, one above the other, as in a postcard folder. Each rectangle was a picture, a photograph. They were luminous, like colored lantern-slide images, cast on a screen.

Andy didn’t have to be told that these were pictures from another world. He was no fool, and he knew that no Earthly stars were as sharp as those pictured in the uppermost photograph. No Earthly mountains were ever so rough and clear and lifeless. Hell, everybody read about things like this, once in a while, in the scientific magazines!

But here it all was, now—true—an inescapable part of a mystery that had settled over his own life! The second picture revealed a shadowy cavern, full of machines and apparati, in which must course fearful power. There were globular tanks, glowing red with the fiery chemicals inside them. There was a squat, complicated lump of metal which looked like some weird kind of dynamo.

The third picture was of the interior of a great crystal sphere, or compartment, whose walls were rimed with patches of thin, lacy frost. Devices of various kinds crowded it too; but Andy scarcely noticed these at first, for at the center of its concave floor stood a shaggy, lonely figure, clad in white polar fur, which seemed a natural part of him. He was

quite a little like a man. Over his immense shoulders, wires were draped, originating from a boxlike apparatus, upon which his fur-tufted paws rested. The wires led to an odd metal helmet, which covered his head, just above his great, batlike ears.

THROUGH the transparent sides of the sphere, the same kind of terrain as that pictured in the first photograph, could be seen; for the strange structure was built in the open. Hard, devil-mountains, and frigid, steady stars.

Mounted on the sphere's top, and visible, too, through its crystalline substance, was a thing resembling the crude contraption that Jack had made, except that it was much larger, and of course far more finely made. And attached to it were heavy bars of coppery metal, which must carry a terrific load of current from somewhere below.

Andy Matthews, looking at those col-

ored, phosphorescent pictures, was a little dull just then, as far as feelings went. Wonder and fright had left him, momentarily—to be replaced by a semi-daze, which, however, seemed to sharpen and quicken his reason. Like a man in a death struggle, he had forgotten fear and wonder; he was devoting all his energies to understanding and defeating his enemy.

Scattered factors in the puzzle that confronted him, fell together coherently with amazing swiftness. The furry figure in the third photograph, was of course Jack's hidden friend. The helmet the being wore, and the wires and the dialed box attached to it, looked like advanced forms of radio equipment. Andy knew his radio. He'd been a ham when he was nineteen. . . . But this wasn't radio equipment. Jack had spoken of a special kind of machine for thought-transference. This must be it! The source of the weird dreams that Jack had experienced since his babyhood.

Bad Breath Travels Far!

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Nor was the question of how Jack had come to possess the metal tube with the pictures in it, so difficult to answer, now, either! With vivid, cold memory, Andy recalled what had happened to the splinter of wood he had tossed onto the glowing wires of Jack's contraption. Zip! And like a bullet it had gone through the roof! Doubtless it had continued on, up into the air, and away through the vacuum abyss—toward this similar wheel-like apparatus on top of the globular compartment in the picture.

There was that deep indentation in the upper surface of the wooden block at the center of Jack's rigamajig. Then there was that old-fashioned, double-throw switch. The power, acting across the void, could be turned around!

It would have been simple for the kid to carry his machine out into the open, where it could work freely, with no roof in the way.

Come to think of it, there were a lot of things missing around the place, now, Andy thought with a shudder. A new adjustable wrench. A spirit-level, a couple of radio tubes. And Jane had lost a tape-measure. Andy knew what had become of these things. The monster would be fondling them, now. Probably they were treasures to him—curiosities. Like a man getting stuff from—Mars!

BUT—God! What did the shaggy freak really want? What was he meddling with Jack for? What was his deeper purpose? How could anybody tell? Andy's cool, swift reasoning had taken on a new note now; for seeing what he faced emphasized his helplessness. He was up against a knowledge as old as a dead world, and as unreachable.

Dully he rolled up the scroll of pictures, and put it back into the tube. He screwed the cap into place, and dropped the thing into his hip pocket.

Andy wanted to act. But what was

there to try? For a second a wild idea blazed in his brain; then was submerged by its futility. And he couldn't leave Jack out of his sight for a moment now. But it wasn't enough just to watch. Those howling nerves of his yelled for movement—for a means to drain away some of their straining, fighting energy.

Andy's mind settled on just one thing—speed!

"Come on, you!" he snarled at the boy, who stared at him with that strange, watchful, guarded look in his eyes—a look that wasn't Earthly—that belonged, in part, to a being beyond men. Andy knew that if his own mind was not actually read, his every act, at least, was watched, through his own son's eyes.

Andy picked Jack up, and stumbled down the dark stair. The kid squirmed and fought; but Andy's own physical strength could win here, at least. He hurried to the garage. Working with his free hand, he got the door open. He got into the new car, dragging Jack after him. Jane was calling angrily from the house, again. Supper! Andy could almost have laughed mockingly at the triviality of such a thing as supper, now! As for Jane, he couldn't face her now. He had to protect her from what he knew. He couldn't tell her; he couldn't tell anyone! It wouldn't do any good anyway!

With a fury that was part of his dark secret, he stamped on the starter. A minute later the car tore out of the driveway. Once he had the car on the road, Andy's foot jammed more fiercely down on the accelerator. Speed. Faster. Faster. . . . Going toward town. Going toward nowhere, really, unless it was away from bewildering fact, and away from the brooding something that seemed to be in the air—that seemed to haunt the evening stars and the yellow harvest moon.

The whizzing motion wasn't much relief; but Andy's teeth were gritted together. His foot, pushing the accelerator,

was down as far as it would go, now. Sixty. Seventy. Eighty. Ninety miles an hour. . . .

Under the tense, drawn anguish of Andy's mind, the crash was almost inevi-

table. It came on the Hensler Curve, when another car's lights blazed into view. Andy had to take to the ditch at terrific speed. The car under him did a crazy squelching skip on the steep embankment, hurtled and wobbled around sideways, and landed on its top.

QUEER, maybe; but Andy only got a wrenched wrist out of the bargain. The kid wasn't so lucky.

Lost in a sort of mind-fog, Andy Matthews drove back to the farm in the milk



truck. That was about midnight. Jane had come into town with the truck, and she was at the hospital, now, with Jack.

Partly because he was dazed by what had happened, Andy had been able to ignore at first the almost hysterical accusations of his wife, and the veiled contempt under Doctor Weller's professional kindness:

"Your boy can't last more than a few hours, Mr. Matthews. We did our best. The emergency operation was the only chance. But now that it's over, the boy's system can't stand the shock. I'm sorry."

What the matter-of-fact old physician wanted to say, of course, was that Andy was just another damn-fool driver, who had as good as murdered his own son.

Still, Andy was able to ignore that accusation. They didn't know how he loved that kid of his. Or why the accident had happened. Andy had just one burning idea now—revenge. Revenge against that un-Earthly presence whom he felt was the author of all his misfortune.

Otherwise he was like a dead thing, impervious to all feeling. It wasn't anger, exactly, that gripped him now. He'd gone beyond that. It was just—fundamental need. Even grief seemed to have dissipated into a mist, against which was stamped the fiery blob that represented his scheme. He'd thought of it before—and had rejected it as hopeless. He still thought it was hopeless—as hopeless as trying to kill an elephant with a popgun. But—well—there wasn't any other way at all.

He got a couple of big thermos bottles from the kitchen pantry. Then he hurried outdoors, and to the woodshed. High up on the wall here, was a locked chest, where he kept special things. He'd expected to do some stump blasting in woodlot. Now he opened the chest, and took out a large bundle of cylindrical objects, wrapped in waxed paper.

By the beam of a flashlight, he ripped the paper from each of the objects. In-

side was an oily, yellowish, granulated stuff, that looked a little bit like pale brown sugar.

"Brown sugar, eh?" Andy thought craftily. Yeah, maybe it was a good idea to imagine it was something harmless, like brown sugar.

He packed the stuff in the thermos bottles. Then he went to the tool room over the granary to get the peach box apparatus. He took it out into the night, and set it down at the farther end of the garden.

THERE were streaky clouds in the sky, overcasting the moon. Andy was glad of that, at least. But—maybe his enemy knew his whole plan already. Andy was conscious of the gigantic learning he was pitted against. Maybe he'd be stricken dead in some strange way in the next moment. But he accepted this possibility without emotion.

He grasped the handle of the double-throw switch lightly in his fingers, and swung it over—to the same position in which he had accidentally placed it when he had first found his son's contraption and had learned of its strange properties. That sleepy murmur began, and those green worms of turbid light started to creep along the radiating wires of the apparatus.

He waited until the glow was on full—until the energy, groping across space, reached maximum. Meanwhile, as far as was possible, he kept his mind on things which didn't quite concern his present task. He'd made plans to send Jack to college, when the time came, for instance. But that was all over, now. . . .

His hand lifted one of the loaded thermos bottles. It was best to have the stuff it contained insulated against cold and heat and against electric shock. That was why he had used those vacuum flasks.

He tossed the thermos toward those glowing wires, while he stood defensively

back. There was a soft, ringing sound, and static prickles raced over Andy's body, as the flask bounced upward, amid a play of cold, troubled flame. In a twinkling the missile was gone—vanished away in the direction of those clouds over the moon. A swift, but comparatively shockless start.

Presently, the second thermos went the way of the first. Andy was dully surprised that he'd gotten away with it.

With the job over, now, Andy felt a wilted kind of relief. He got into the milk truck and drove back to town—to the hospital. There, with wide-eyed, tearless Jane beside him, he continued the vigil at Jack's bedside. . . . Jane didn't show any resentment now. She seemed glad to have Andy there with her. Jack belonged to them both; and though Andy hadn't told her anything about the dark mystery, she must have sensed how sorry he was.

There was a funny kind of strain in the room, that he felt right away, but couldn't

place. It was mental. It seemed to take hold of one's mind, powerfully, incomprehensibly, expressing an indomitable will that must not—could not—be denied. "Live! Live! Live!" it seemed to beat out in an incessant, wordless, telepathic rhythm.

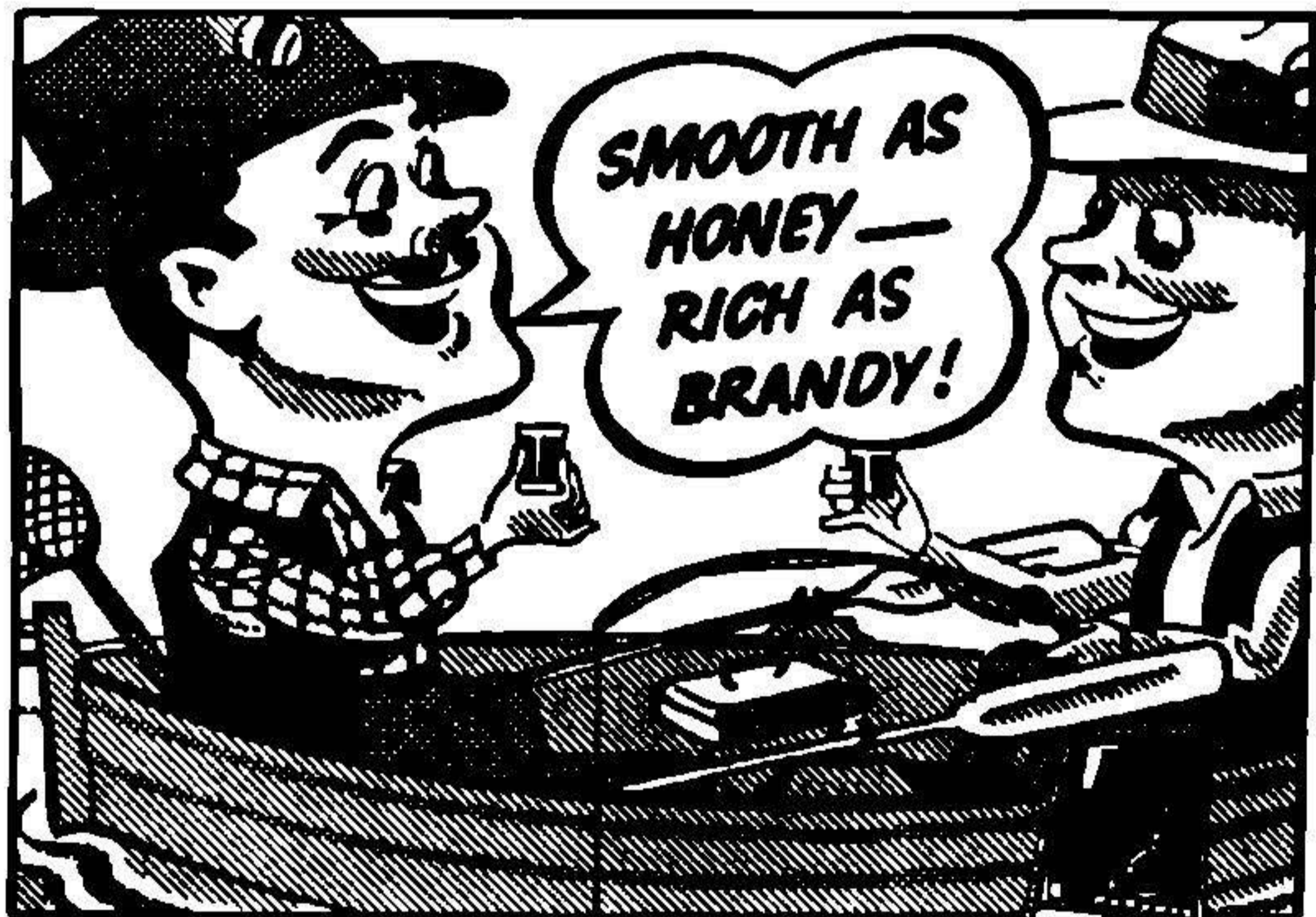
Andy decided at last that it was only an illusion of this own tired brain, hoping for the impossible—that Jack would pull through. And so, with Jane in his arms, he sat in a chair, watching through the night. Some time after dawn they both fell asleep.

DOCTOR WELLER didn't wake them till nine in the morning. He'd already examined Jack several times.

He looked quizzically at the child's parents, first one, then the other. His heavy brows knit in puzzlement.

"I hardly believe it," he said at last. "But the boy's better. His pulse is firm—"

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OLD MR. BOSTON APRICOT NECTAR

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er and more even, and not so fast. That rib we had to dig out of his lung, hasn't caused as much trouble as I thought."

He almost grinned, then. "You folks must be psychic," he went on conversationally. "Things like this happen once in a while, I've sometimes thought, though medical science never had enough evidence to back the idea up. But if you care a good deal for someone who is very sick, and insist in your mind that they *must* live, perhaps it helps. Maybe that's right. Maybe not. Anyway, keep on hoping, folks!"

After the physician was gone, Jane threw her arms around her husband's neck, and wept. Andy stroked her silky blonde hair, and patted her shoulder. But already, behind his narrowed eyes, a weird suspicion was beginning to form. Psychic, he and Jane? Perhaps. But Andy was beginning to doubt—not the miracle itself—but its source. He fumbled into the hip pocket of the overalls he was still wearing. The metal tube, reminder of a personality possessing psychic powers far beyond the Earthly, was still there.

Mister Weefles. Jack's dream pal. All his folks were dead, Jack had said. The last of a race, that must mean. A shaggy, lonely giant on a world that had perished. Lonesome.

Was that right? It *could* be right! Andy began to wonder if his first judgment hadn't been incorrect after all.

He was looking beyond the veil of suspicion, which one must inevitably feel for anything strange and alien. He had read about the theories of evolution—how men would change when the Earth got older. Long natural fur, to keep out the increasing cold. Big chests and big lungs to breathe the thinning atmosphere, before it became actually necessary to withdraw to airtight caverns and habitations. Then perhaps the slow decadence of boredom and sterility, leading to extinction.

And now, when the danger of death had

come to his small companion, the monster seemed to be doing his best. He was standing there, in that glass globe, sending out healing waves with his telepathic apparatus.

But those thermos bottles Andy Matthews had shot into space, were filled with stuff meant to kill.

But after a moment, Andy's suspicions and weariness were reawakened. Perhaps his second judgment was not so sure, either. The shaggy giant *could* be a true friend—yes. But couldn't he, just as well, have an ulterior motive in his efforts to save Jack? What if Jack happened to be an essential link in a chain of conquest—one that it had taken years to develop to the point of usefulness? Naturally, in that case, the furry enigma would want to preserve the boy's life, wouldn't he?

IT WAS almost a quandary, as dark as the myriad questions of the stars. But the clear truth was there in his pocket. The little tube of pictures. Oh, they scared a man when he first examined them—sure! Because they were so unfamiliar. But if you thought about them a little, you got a milder slant on their significance. They were like postcards sent to a kid nephew!

Andy's suspicions wilted when he saw their ridiculousness. He got a new grasp on the nature of the unknown. The shaggy thing out there had lost the aspect of omnipotence, created for Andy by the fantastic circumstances under which he had first glimpsed the mystery with which his boy was involved.

The monster was finite. And with all the rest of his kind gone, lonely. Maybe he'd worked and groped for years to find a companion—a means to reach another mind—one of the right form to receive and transmit thoughts readily. Jack hadn't been harmed through the years of contact—except by his own father!

Andy's original stark fear had left him,

to be replaced by a new worry. The aura of healing strain still clung in the room—evidence of terrific effort. And the monster was finite. Besides, he was bemused, now, by that tremendous concentration. Probably he would not be watching some of his instruments. While above his head, on the outside of the crystal sphere that enclosed him, was another apparatus. A wheel of rods. And across space were coming two thermos bottles intended to destroy.

Andy moved slowly, trying thus to hide the worry, and the driving need for haste that throbbed in his blood. He edged toward the door of the hospital room.

"Jane," he said, facing his wife briefly. "There's something I've got to look after. It's very important. I'll be back in an hour."

She looked at him with weary contempt for his desertion—now. She didn't know anything about the real depth of the situation. Nor could he try to explain.

He drove like blazes back to the farm. All the way he kept muttering: "Dynamite! Those flasks are full of dynamite! Look out!"

GETTING out of the truck, Andy slammed through the garden gate by the garage. At the farther end of the garden he stopped, staring.

The peach box apparatus he had left active there had ceased to function. No green flame coursed along its wires, though its switch remained closed.

There was no use now to shift the blade of that double-throw switch to its opposite pole to reverse the action of the machine, as he had intended. Andy bent down, touching the radial filaments. They were still a little warm. The power must have ended just a moment ago, its far-off source broken off.

There wasn't anything to do but go back to town and the hospital, now. Andy rea-

soned that there must have been corresponding developments there, too. Flushed with a confused excitement, he arrived, and hurried to Jack's room.

Jane was alone there with the boy, who looked just as before—asleep and breathing evenly. But Jane was smiling.

"What happened?" Andy snapped. "Something happened. I know it!"

Jane looked at him oddly. "You must be the psychic one," she said. "I was frightened at first. Jack had a kind of sudden convulsion. I called the doctor in. But he said nothing was wrong, except maybe a nightmare. He said he thought Jack was sure to recover now, and that he wouldn't be crippled. That it was

just the shock of the emergency operation that was so dangerous. Oh, Andy—I—hardly believe it; but I—I'm so glad—"

Andy Matthews took her in his arms then—briefly. He could surely not have denied his own happiness at that moment. But he was looking deep into the texture of a mystery, and feeling an odd ache of regret over something that could have driven his wife to hysteria, had she known.

Half an hour later, Andy took Jane out to a restaurant. A radio was going there, giving news-flashes; and Andy particularly wanted to listen.

"Take it or leave it, friends," the announcer was saying. "The moon's dead old volcanoes have still got a few kicks left in them, that make Vesuvius and Aetna look sick! A half-dozen observatories, in Australia and Asia, where of course it's still night, and where the moon is still above the horizon, have just reported some very interesting phenomena. Two small puffs of dust were observed in a lunar crater called Plato. These puffs were followed by a tremendous blast that demolished nearly a quarter of the old volcano. . . ."

THE FUTURE'S FAIR

Panic had to be forestalled somehow, when the huge Exposition-World vanished from normal space, so the Publicity Department spread the rumor that they were traveling in time—and then they found out how close they had been to the truth!

By **Vincent Reid**

CHAPTER ONE

All's Fair

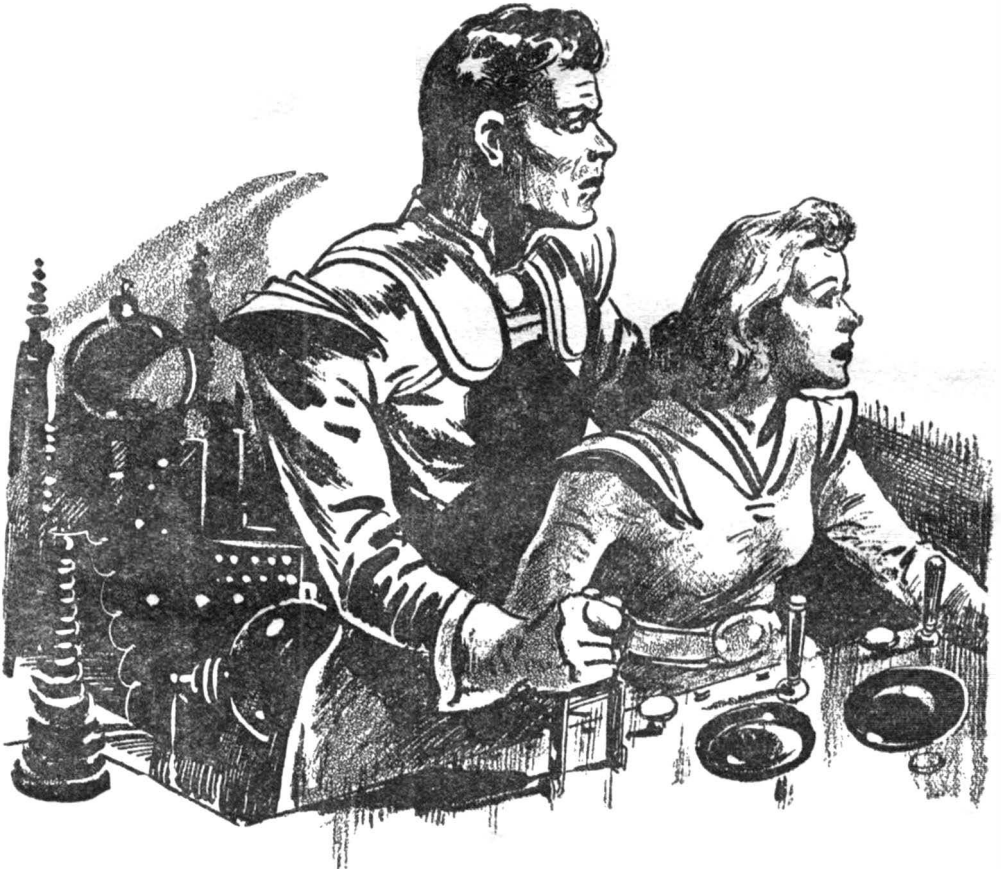
JACK HANSON, Administrator of Terra's Fair, looked down thoughtfully at the gaily colored scene below him.

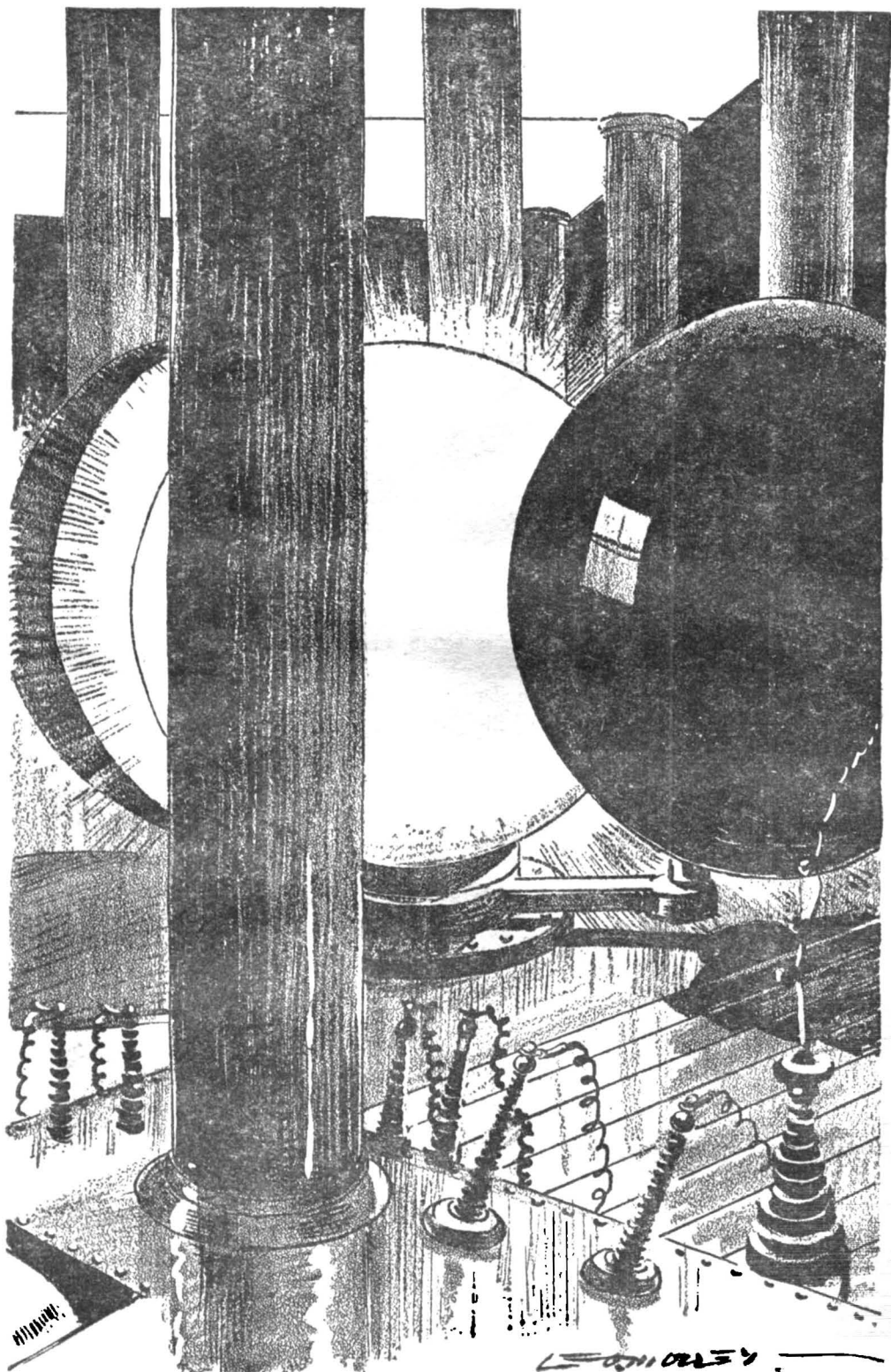
He turned as the door behind him opened and sighed wearily Phillips, his

secretary, ventured a smile as he entered the room.

Hanson looked at him incredulously, "What's wrong?" he asked.

The smile widened. "I've got about three dozen call-backs on the Visaphone," Phillips began, "and it's almost time for you to report to the Council. There's also a protest delegation from Earth, and the Martian Counsel wants to—"





WIPAC

LEONARD

Hanson groaned. "What sort of delegation?"

The secretary chuckled. "They think it's indecent for Mercurians to 'gad about unclad'. Those are their very words. They've got a huge banner—"

"What! Tell them to—oh my God!" He paused abruptly for a moment, then continued. "Send them to Doctor Alloway. And before they get there, phone the Doctor to assure these—these delegates—that Mercurians get cancer—a horrible, lingering kind of cancer—whenever they wear clothes—any kind of clothes."

Phillips looked at him startled. "Do they?" he asked fearfully.

"Do what!"

"Do Mercurians get cancer when they wear—?"

Hanson jumped to his feet as Phillips beat a hasty retreat to the door.

"Use your own judgment," Hanson called to him, "and feed me those callbacks in their order of importance."

Hanson shifted in his chair at the next call.

The Martian Consul-General couldn't understand how Terra had forgotten such things as Marriage Bureaus. "People still went through that formality on Earth—didn't they? Or had morality—?"

The Bureaus were promised, the Consul pacified, and the afternoon wore on with a maddening barrage of problems.

He was working on his report to the Council when the local Visaphone came to life with an abrupt, shrill clamor.

Sighing wearily, he flicked the switch, then smiled as he noticed his secretary's startled expression.

"What in blue blazes is up?" he grinned. "You look as though you've just seen a Plutonian for the first time."

The secretary shook his head dolefully. "Mr. Hanson," his voice faltered, "I think we've got an epidemic on our hands— Four hundred cases—"

Hanson jumped to his feet. "Four hundred cases of what?" he shouted.

"I don't know." The secretary continued shaking his head. "But Clinic 18 has just reported 400 Martian children in their Isolation Ward. And more coming in every hour."

Hanson roared into the plate. "Stop shaking your head like a constipated philosopher. What are the symptoms?"

"Well, their faces have turned all splotchy—all mottled like—like leaves in Autumn. And I can't get Doctor Alloway—his line's all cluttered up with Martian women—"

"You're in charge till I get back," Hanson snapped tersely—"and don't make any fool blunders while I'm gone."

HE PUSHED his way good naturedly through the milling, jostling crowds, then stopped abruptly as he gazed at the legend emblazoned in fifty-foot letters on the shimmering dome above him.

"Terra's Future's Fair," he repeated to himself. The enormity of his task suddenly struck him. Administrator of a little world of one hundred million people. He squared his shoulders and walked on.

About him lay spread in gay abandon, a riot of color: everywhere sounds of feckless, carefree laughter.

Here tall gaunt Venusians gaped in open-mouthed wonder at Earth's zoölogical display. Jovian crowds shrieked in terror, then laughed uproariously as they swung suspended in air above the Gravity Screens.

A group of Mercurians whistled in high glee as they crowded about a pop-corn stall.

And further off, talking quietly in the Pleasure Parks sat some guests from Pluto, aloof and austere, and watching with undisguised disapproval the antics of those about them.

Terra's Fair, dedicated to the Future, had just opened. And from all nine

planets millions had come. Jack Hanson sighed deeply as he entered the Clinic.

Suddenly in the main hallway he was surrounded by hundreds of shrieking Martian women, imploring him to save their children—crying hysterically as they moaned for help.

He tore himself loose from their grasp, pushed his way through the line of terrified nurses, and finding the House Physician, hurried him into the Isolation Ward.

An explosive oath burst from his lips as he opened the door. "Epidemic be damned," he roared. "These kids have just eaten some Uranian sugar. A little lemon juice or vinegar will fix them in a minute."

The House Physician nodded vehemently. "I know—that's why I couldn't understand your orders."

"My orders?" Hanson shouted—then stopped abruptly. "You spoke to my secretary?" he asked grimly.

The Physician nodded.

Hanson picked up one of the grinning, brilliantly-colored children and hurried him down the hallway. "Get me some vinegar," he said laconically.

He strode down the main hall, placed the child on a table before the screaming women and with a soft sponge gently rubbed the vinegar over its face.

They waited in silence—then shouted deliriously as the colors slowly faded and disappeared.

A few moments later Hanson was in the office of the House Physician.

"I inquired immediately," the Doctor said hurriedly, "because Uranian sugar is a forbidden drug, I found it was sold by a Plutonian Confectioner who called it Rainbow River. I got in touch with the police at once and they just missed him at Airlock Four. I'm sorry, I—"

Hanson broke in quietly. "You did a good job—no one could have done more—" He paused, "I wonder if I could use your Visaphone, Doctor?"

And the secretary's face had barely flashed on the screen when Hanson roared at him. "Who in the name of thundering asteroids gave you the authority to have those children locked up? This is the closest damn thing we've had to a panic yet!"

The secretary shifted uneasily. "You can't trust those doctors," he began hesitantly. "And contagious—"

Jack Hanson groaned. "We've got a hundred million people here," he shouted. "And because you don't trust doctors you damn near let Hell loose on us. A thing like this spreads like wildfire. Oh—never mind," he concluded abruptly. "I'll be back in a few minutes—don't set the place on fire."

GREGORY, the atmosphere technician, was pacing the room impatiently as Hanson entered his office.

He brandished a small, steel cylinder excitedly. "Found this in the main shaft," he yelled nervously. "I don't know where the hell I'm at, Hanson. It's the third one in two days. And if I had missed it—it would have been good-night Fair—"

"Same stuff?" Hanson asked briefly.

"Yes—powdered charcoal," Gregory moaned. "Enough in this tube to fill the whole dome in about half an hour."

Hanson looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. Well, that settles it," he said finally. He pointed to the cylinder. "You know where that thing comes from?"

The technician nodded his head dubiously. "It's marked Venus," he began—"but the pressure. . ."

Jack Hanson turned to the Visaphone. "Get in touch with all Directors and Power Heads," he called to his secretary. "Tell them to get here inside of fifteen minutes."

He looked up at the startled technician. "Those tubes came from Pluto," he said grimly. "So did that coil you found in your Analyser—and those rumours about

Venusian Plague on the day we opened—”

He lifted his head wearily. “That accident yesterday at the Main Airlock—oh—it’s an endless list,” he groaned. “But every move has been traced to Pluto—and our hands are tied.”

CHAPTER TWO

Sabotage

TWENTY thousand miles beyond Earth’s surface, a vast glittering sphere rotated slowly within its given orbit. Its Luxite shell reflected in clear hard brilliance a light, beside which Earth’s oldest satellite faded into insignificance.

Terra’s Fair was literally a world unto itself. From its Southern hemisphere came the low, unvarying surge of its mighty power plant, drawing its energy from the sun. And at the equator of this sphere lay the plane upon which was housed the Fair itself. Here, too, were the temporary homes of a hundred million guests. Here surrounded by the luxuriant plant life of nine planets, upon a man-made world, they lived and played.

Every hundred years, since times long past, the old customs had been revived. And so in the 30th century there still appeared in the Worlds’ Fairs, hot dogs and pop-corn and barkers and tricksters and always, gay, unstinted laughter. Repressions were forgotten. Banished for a few brief days the problems and cares of nine worlds, gone like a mist in the sun.

And while they played, an army of craftsmen gave thought to more mundane problems.

To Jack Hanson the amusements of the Fair retreated far into the background—and not only because of such matters as power, sewage, gravity, atmosphere and health—to mention only a few.

He faced his audience of technicians with a grim smile on his lips.

“What I have to say, boys,” he began slowly, “won’t take long. I’ll start by reminding you of President Alcott’s words, ‘It’s not your business to solve problems—you’ve got to see they don’t even happen.’”

“Well—we’ve had eight problems in two days. They were caused deliberately, cleverly, and with a clear knowledge of the consequences.”

He paused for emphasis. “What I’m going to say is in confidence. My orders were that this information was to be handed on to you alone—only in an emergency.”

“Briefly it is this: Plutonian Transport and Power has very good reason to profit by our failure. Pluto’s exhibition, subsidized by the Transport Company, opens next week. They have a fortune to lose if we are successful. And to really make this interesting we have found it expedient to offer free transportation to all visitors. Well. . . .”

An indignant, excited voice interrupted him. “Why don’t we keep Plutonians out? They’re not like the rest of us anyhow.”

Hanson paused briefly. “In the first place we are at peace with Pluto and the move you suggest would certainly be construed as an unfriendly act. The Plutonians as a people are not responsible for these outrages. Their council is a plaything of the Transport Company.”

A murmur of assent followed these words.

He looked at them quietly for a moment.

“Well, the question rises—what have we to fear? I can explain with one word—PANIC.

“Our vulnerable points are many. This sphere was built as a gesture of peace, not war. We have a limited, confined atmosphere. It can be polluted or destroyed. Our power plants are independent of Earth’s: they are highly complex. And regardless of the strictest examination and care there will always be the danger of disease and epidemic.”

Hanson smiled—a little grimly perhaps. “I don’t have to go on. Each one of you knows very well what precautions to take. Earth’s Council chose us with care and our responsibility is great.” He paused awkwardly. “I’m not used to making speeches, men, but I know we’ll all work like Hell to keep things going smoothly. That’s all.”

A spontaneous roar of assurance rose from two hundred throats.

PHILLIPS left at midnight after coding the report to the Terrestrial Council. But before he left, Hanson had stood by firmly while the moaning secretary made an appointment with a psychiatrist. “You’re a first class organizer,” Hanson had assured him, “but you can’t go in like this. I had a hell of a time explaining to the President what actually happened in that one-man epidemic of yours.”

But that was four hours ago. Jack Hanson worked on steadily until the solving of his problems became so simple he knew it was time to knock off.

He glanced at the work outlined for the next day and rose to his feet. Yawning deeply, he strode to the window and gazed down at the scene before him.

The streets were bare except for the clanners. The stalls dark and silent. A wisp of ribbon hung forlornly on a Centrifuge Car. Shadows mocked with fleeting whispers the by-bygone laughter of the day.

He switched off the lights, took the tube to the ground floor and was about to enter his car when a faint, high-pitched whine caught his attention. It came from the Science Museum just across the street.

He sighed sleepily. “Now what? Somebody’s forgotten to turn off the ventilator. And from the sound of it, those bearings are pretty hot.”

The doors of the Museum were unlocked. He pushed them open and entered. The lights were still on. He stifled a yawn

as he turned to the ventilator switch. Someone was moving there. He edged up noiselessly behind a pillar and waited.

He laughed quietly as a girl came into view. From the crest on her uniform he could see she was the Director. He must be pretty tired, he realized, to have become suspicious and jumpy for hardly any reason at all.

The girl walked past him, reached for the switch of the ventilator and was about to pull it down, when she saw him.

Beyond a faint gasp no sound came to her lips. Instinctively she raised her hands to her throat, staring at him.

“I noticed your ventilator was on,” he began.

They both became aware of the position of her hands at the same moment.

The sound of her laugh, he noticed, had a pleasing, unaffected ring, and there was a quiet, cool poise about her person that contrasted strangely with her fright of the moment before.

“You’re Dr. Hanson, aren’t you? I’m Alice Wentworth.” She sighed deeply and seated herself beside ‘Section of Internal Combustion Chamber.’ “I almost lost my voice today,” she continued, “trying to explain how these things used to work. I think half the population was in here.”

He seated himself beside her.

They laughed at the ‘Gad about Unclad’ delegates and it was not until an hour later that Jack Hanson realized with an abrupt start that another nerve-racking day lay before him.

Her eyes, he noticed as he left, were deep and dark.

CHAPTER THREE

Panic!

DISASTER came suddenly like a meteor from the void. And when it struck Jack Hanson realized he had almost been expecting it.

For weeks in the midst of a never-ending deluge of routine details that drove him to frenzied exasperation. Nights followed with enervating anticipation of disaster, days filled with its near realization. The laughter and color, the gay, joyous, unchanging background of a hundred million people at play began to fill him he realized with a fantastic nostalgia that could not be fought off.

It seemed ludicrous, a monstrous hoax, that the problems of simply directing a Fair, of keeping pleasure and gaiety alive could assume such immense and grave proportions.

But Terra's Fair went on, and although Jack Hanson scarcely realized it, to the crowds on the street—when they thought about it—it functioned with an unvarying, gay simplicity.

Alice Wentworth became an inchoate vision. He remembered, from time to time, a laugh with a liquid tinkle, a gracious unassuming smile.

He was on his way to the Main Airlock, where someone had been caught tampering with the valves, when it happened, abruptly, out of the void.

One minute they were in brilliant sunshine, the next a million lights were blazing beneath the Luxite dome.

The photo-contacts had tripped immediately.

From the crowds about him came a fierce, long drawn cry, then angry shouts and hysterical screaming. The music stopped suddenly.

Hanson fought his way back through a howling mob that was heading for the airlocks.

He looked up fearfully. There, tightly rimmed against their surface, pressed an ominous, engulfing nothingness.

An all pervading sense of distant foreboding flashed through his mind. For in the yawning horror that lay beyond, there remained not the faintest vestige of any familiar spacemark.

Something—he shuddered at the implications—had suddenly, overwhelmingly, wrenched them from their Galaxy.

He stopped, breathless and disheveled, before the administrative building, tore over to his private tube, and, in his office, clamped down fiercely on the Visaphone set to Terrestrial Council's wavelength.

A faint, high-pitched spluttering told the whole story. The waves were bouncing back.

He paused for a moment, in a cold sweat, then grabbed the local 'phone and clicked at the receiver with savage haste.

The panic raging on the streets below him, he knew only too well was caused by fear and uncertainty, a suspicion of the unknown; a stark, desperate need of familiar sights and sounds.

He yelled at the operator "Publicity—Publicity! Don't you understand?" He groaned as he heard her crying hysterically.

"Department 12A-4," he said quietly.

The girl looked up at him abruptly and nodded.

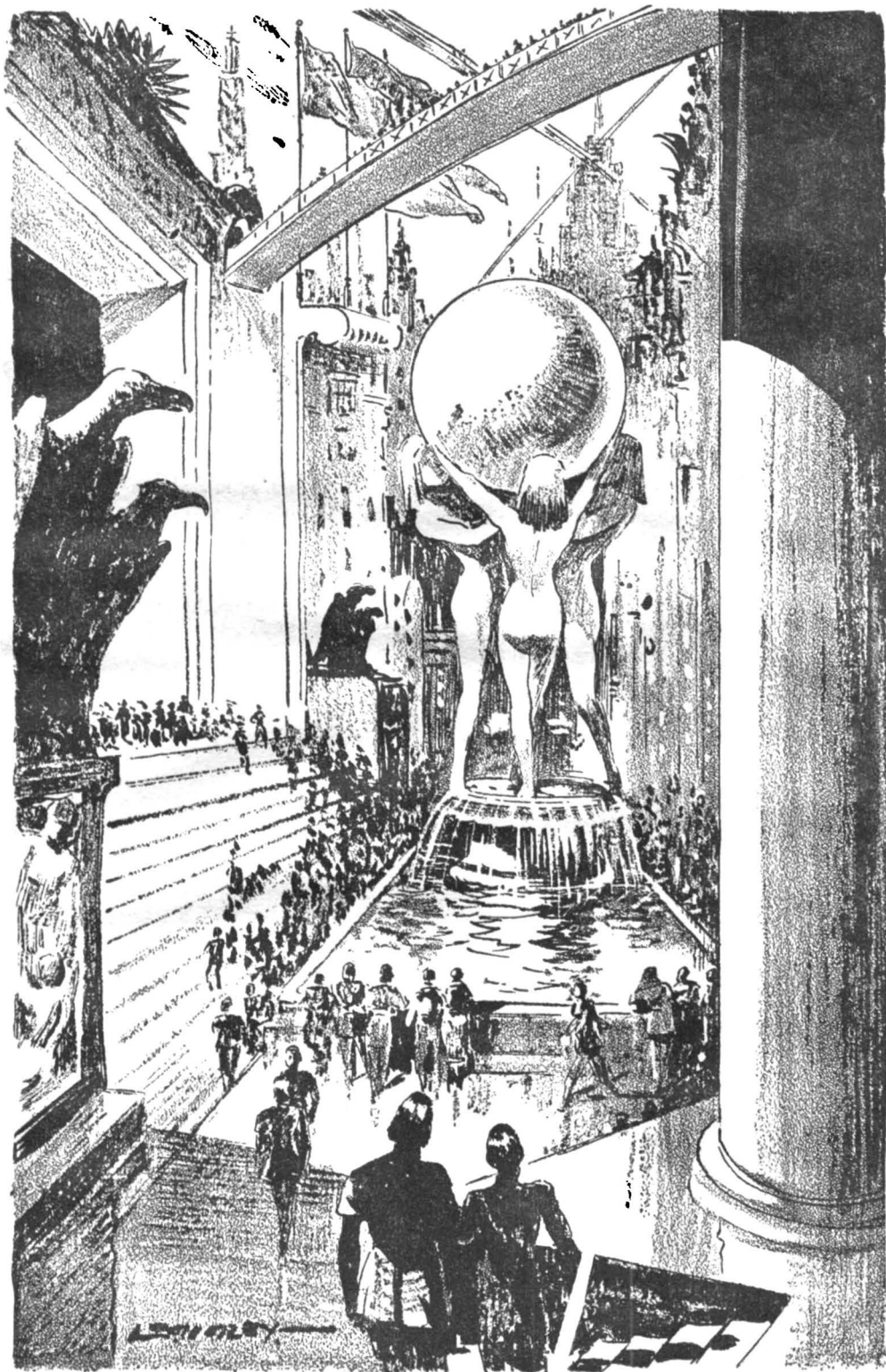
THE call took a long time coming through. He muttered impatiently, then reaching out, kicked open the office door with one foot and shouted for Phillips.

He burst into the room at once, "I've just come from outside," he cried. "There's a mob out there ready to tear ."

Hanson cut him short. "Never mind that now. Call Entertainment and get those hands and barkers into action pronto. Then send out a general call for all technicians. Get them here immediately."

After what seemed an eternity the Publicity Director's terror-wracked visage flashed on the screen.

Hanson gave him no time for questions. "How long will it take to change that sign on the dome?"



The Director looked at him in bewilderment. "Sign? It could be done in a few minutes. It's on a projected screen—just have to change the slide. But why?"

"Never mind why. But get a new slide printed as fast as you can. Get your copywriters busy laying out new posters. I haven't time to work it out right now, but here's the idea," he paused for a moment. "You've got to convince them that this thing that's happened to us was planned—planned for their special benefit and as an added feature of the Fair. Stress the fact that everything's under control. We'll figure out the rest afterwards."

The Director nodded in agreement then stopped. "But where are we? They'll want to know. And that black curtain around us—what is it? We'll have to say something."

Hanson wiped his forehead. "I've thought about that. We can't say it's a protection screen. They'll know better than that. And there's no use telling them we're moving in space. We've got no visible spacemarks and no means of locomotion. They know that too."

The Director looked at him in terror. "But then where are we? It scares hell out of me. I don't blame them. "

Jack Hanson looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. "I don't know," he said quietly. "That will have to wait. But one thing's certain. We've got one hundred million people out there, and if we don't stop them soon it won't matter where we are. Hell will be a picnic compared to what will happen here. And that's no figure of speech," he paused, then continued quickly.

"At any rate, here's the idea for your slogan. Tell them we're traveling into the Future. Link it up with the Future's Fair. Ask them if they ever stopped to consider why we chose that theme. Build it up."

The Director uttered an incredulous

gasp. "You can't do that," he yelled excitedly. "You can't. They'd never believe it. Never. It's preposterous."

He stopped short. A slow smile began to appear on his face.

He continued hurriedly. "I could link it up with those time experiments that were conducted last year. They got a lot of publicity. Everybody knows about them." He rubbed his hands together. "It's a cinch."

Hanson nodded. "That's the idea—and here's another thing. I'm putting you in charge of maintaining order. But let's forget all that. Get on the open loud-speaker circuit as fast as you can and talk to them. They haven't reached the Airlocks yet. Act as though you're surprised and indignant. Tell them—oh Hell—that's your job and you know it. But for God's sake hurry—We've wasted enough time already."

Phillips had been waiting. His hand shook as he motioned to the door. "They're on the way up now," he grinned nervously. "It'll be all right after we get them quiet, won't it? Or—" his voice trailed off slowly.

HANSON stood looking out the window, drumming his fingers apprehensively on the pane. He beckoned to Phillips absent mindedly then looked down at the scene on the streets below. Overturned stalls, hundreds of banners and little flags, clothes, lost in the mad terrifying rush. No damage-yet.

But would they believe this talk of the Future? It was true that only the most progressive had ventured to Terra's Fair, and Science had—

He turned to the secretary. "There's no use kidding you Phillips," he said quietly. Even if we do get them quiet we're still faced with something worse. Our power is drawn from the Sun and without it we'll have no water or air inside of a week."

A clamor of voices came from the scientists and technicians as they entered his office. Among them, he noticed, was Alice Wentworth. She smiled at him nervously, her face drawn and pale, then averted his glance.

Jack Hanson raised his voice. "I don't have to tell you. . ."

Abruptly, from the streets below came a smooth, persuasive voice, booming through the loudspeakers. ". . . and so Terra's Fair is speeding into the Future. And we have promised you, the Future's Fair. . ."

They rushed to the windows in bewildered haste and listened. A few among them nodded vigorously after a time, and gradually, under the influence of that deep, calm voice, the tension lifted, the streets began to fill again, the music to play once more.

They turned to Hanson with questioning eyes.

He faced them squarely. "The responsibility for what you have just heard is mine," he continued with an effort. "I just want you to know that I hate demagoguery as much as you do. But there was no other way."

Wallace, the oldest man amongst them, and head of the Department of Astrophysics at International Research, interrupted him in a low voice. "There's no doubt that the first problem was to avoid panic. The only important thing to remember is that it was avoided," he paused. "I also want you to know—and I speak for all of us—that we are thankful, particularly now, that we have a scientist for Administrator and not a politician."

He sighed wearily. "But I believe you started to ask us if there was any answer—as to where we are, or what has happened. Well—there isn't any—yet. I've got instruments in my lab here that will register a fraction of a dyne on Vega. But those instruments, gentlemen, register nothing. They are dead."

CHAPTER FOUR

Cut Consumption!

THE days that followed were a hellish, fantastic nightmare. For the Fair went on. With laughter and carefree abandon they played their little games, got indigestion, made love in the shadows, aired their prejudices and looked forward to the Future, a future that promised at its best a quick and merciful death. And the horrible grim humor of it was there could be no stinting in their food, no saving in the enormous expenditure of their power.

Jack Hanson realized only too well that the first sign of such a move would spell disaster. The suspicion and fear of the day before still lay dormant, but the possibility of its awakening was a threat that was horrible and real.

He divided the technicians and scientists into two main groups, each divided into three eight hour shifts.

One section continued with the routine job of tending the machines, the other spent its days and nights in a frenzied maddening attempt to discover what had happened. But Plutonian Transport, if indeed it was responsible, had done its fiendish job well, for so far all rational answers eluded the scientists.

Forty-eight hours passed by. To Jack Hanson and those who worked with him each second dragged through an eternity, and yet the minutes passed all too quickly.

He smiled at those who recognized him in the crowds. Here and there, he noticed with satisfaction, a more elaborate mechanical game was inconspicuously labeled 'out of order'.

Overnight, suggestive, tempting illustrations had been removed from eating places.

The Publicity Director had done a good job. Slogans everywhere chided the visitor with good-natured severity for indulg-

ing in too much fun and play. And as a result the Museums were filled to capacity.

But the power saved in this way, he realized, was almost negligible.

He looked about him carefully, listening to chance remarks as he passed by.

Here, on the grass, groups of children playing gravo-gravo. And in the Ancestor Park a laughing, boisterous family from Neptune at mock war with each other, in their ludicrously shaped 'war rockets'.

Before the doors of the 'World of Tomorrow', eager, chattering crowds awaited their turn.

Everywhere—in the very air they breathed—was talk of the Future.

New games had been started featuring 'In Times to Come', and new posters designed, depicting 'Solarians of the Future, Here We Come'.

Hanson looked at them thoughtfully. Had he made a mistake after all? What was going to happen when—? He brushed the thought hurriedly from his mind.

He glanced at his watch as he entered Professor Wallace's laboratory. Another hour to go before the Fair closed.

THE old scientist looked at him anxiously. "You'd better try to get some sleep, Hanson. You can't keep this up much longer—and God knows you're needed here more than any one of us. Lie down for awhile."

Jack Hanson shook his head wearily. "Thanks Wallace—I can't." He paused. "Got any results yet?"

The old man cursed under his breath. "Not a thing. You know, it's damned funny about that stuff outside. I tried getting a reaction just a little while ago. Nothing affects it. I poked an instrument out at the end of a wire. Six inches from our surface that wire bent back—in a perfect ellipse—if that means anything.

"Next I tried temperature and pressure readings. There aren't any!"

Hanson looked at him in amazement.

"Aren't any—what do you mean?" he exclaimed.

Wallace began hesitantly. "The instruments come back with the same readings as when I send them out."

Hanson spoke slowly. "Yes—that fits perfectly. About four hours after it hit us, our temperature began to go up. We're not losing any heat—or getting any either," he broke off in perplexity.

"It's beyond us, Wallace. And that hurts."

"Damn Pluto and every blasted thing on it," Wallace shouted. "I wish to God their cursed world had never entered our system."

The old scientist pushed a few straggling hairs back from his forehead. "Guess I got excited," he muttered.

Hanson nodded in sympathy. "By the way, didn't somebody try to develop that 'Beyond Entropy' theory a few years ago? I've forgotten his name."

Wallace turned to him. "Yes—and its premises led to theoretical chaos. What co-ordinates can you. ?" he jumped to his feet in excitement. "But that's exactly what we're faced with," he shouted.

"But an interval," Hanson said slowly, "even when it's at equilibrium, can be influenced." He looked up at Wallace thoughtfully for a moment, then shook his head. "We can't even say that with any assurance."

"Why?"

Hanson shrugged his shoulders. "Well, in the first place any argument pro or con would have to be verbal. You can't apply maths to a system that has no co-ordinates. All you'd get is a statistical indeterminate knowledge—and that wouldn't lead to a scientific statement."

The old scientist groaned in agreement.

The Visaphone rang suddenly. Hanson rose to his feet. "I expect it's for me," he said wearily. "The damn thing plagues me wherever I go."

PHILLIPS' face was a study in contentment. He grinned as Hanson approached the screen. Jack Hanson looked at him incredulously for a moment then turned to Wallace. "Ever see anything like it? This guy's happy. Now I'm sure something's gone haywire." He turned back to the grinning Secretary.

"All right Cassandra, out with it," he said.

Phillips remarked casually. "Somebody just tried to leave Airlock Six." He paused dramatically.

Hanson roared at him. "Well, go on—go on, you—"

Phillips continued unruffled. "There isn't much to tell. They left with full power—shot out and were pushed back before the outer lock closed. The whole thing happened in no time at all. Trouble is, their rocket blast returned with them. They're in the hospital now. Just shock, the Doctor says—nothing particularly serious."

Hanson looked at him threateningly. "How come that Lock was unguarded?" he asked. "I left strict orders with you about that."

Phillips nodded. "It won't happen again. The guard wasn't strong enough. I've doubled it."

"Anything else?" Hanson then asked him.

The Secretary flicked a sheet of paper into view. "I've got the power consump-

tion statement you wanted. Shall I read it?" Hanson nodded.

It was a routine, normal reading. Jack Hanson listened, quietly for awhile then looked up suddenly. "What's that?" he asked, turning to the Plate.

Phillips repeated "Section 412—216,000,000 units." Wallace muttered under his breath. "That's about twice normal. What Section is it?"

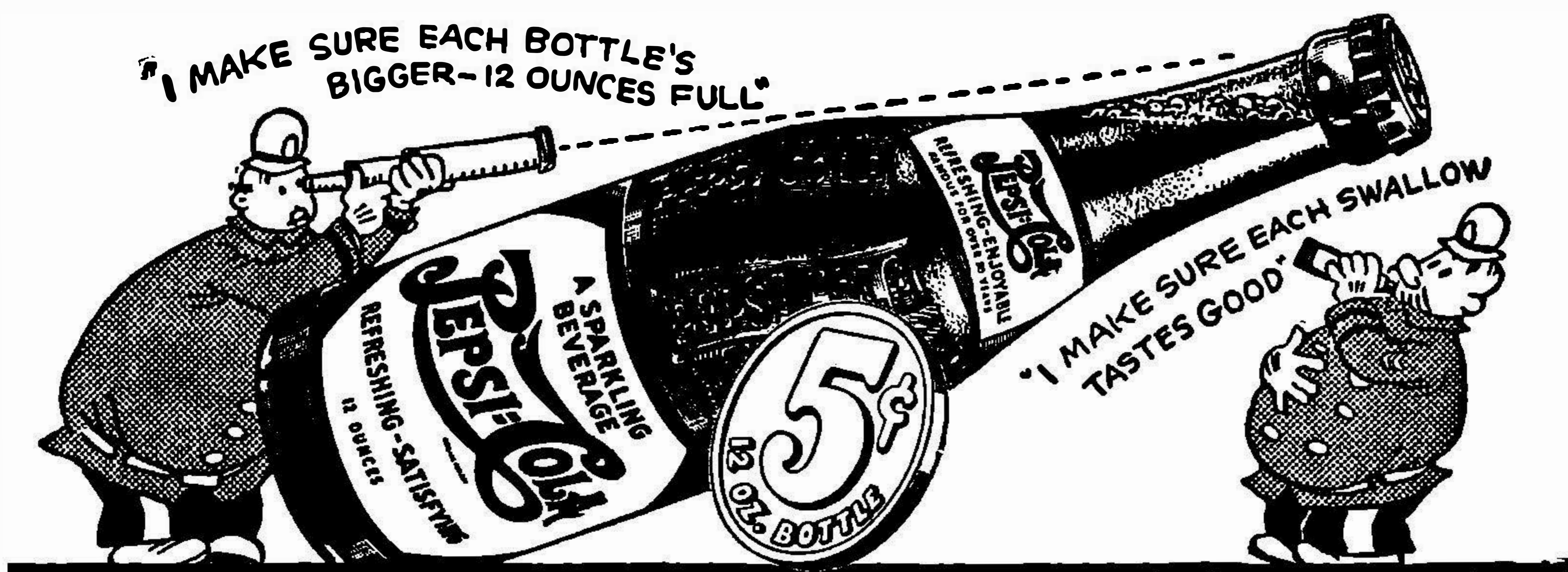
"Administrative mostly." Hanson said tersely, then turned to the Plate again. "Go on Phillips, finish it."

The other sections, with slight variations gave the normal, expected consumption.

Hanson switched off. "How much longer do you figure the power will hold out?" he asked Wallace.

The old scientist pushed a few straggling hairs back from his forehead. "About two days," he groaned. "I've called in all the ultra-violet radiators we've got. The shops are treating the zinc as fast as they can—but it's not enough. If only we could stop those confounded gadgets outside," he cried excitedly. "They're using up all the energy we've got just so they can amuse themselves. It's crazy, Jack. Crazy!"

Hanson nodded gloomily. "We daren't stop them," he said tersely, then paused for a long time. "But I'll have to go, Wallace," he said finally. "I've got something to do." His voice trailed off slowly.



CHAPTER FIVE

Section 412

HE WALKED with purposeful, hurried strides, breathing deeply the cool, washed air. The streets were deserted. His head began to clear a little and he remembered other nights—before—

But he forced them from his mind and compelled himself to concentrate.

Suddenly he stopped, snapped his fingers, then continued, running down the long empty streets, his footsteps echoing through the silent night.

He stopped before the Science Museum and nodded emphatically. And as on another night, the doors gave way to his touch.

He paused before a door at the end of the corridor and knocked softly. A narrow edge of light glimmered brightly above the casing.

The door opened and Alice Wentworth stood before him. Her eyes were red and swollen and even as she asked him to enter she cried softly.

She motioned him to a seat and began nervously. "I have something to tell you, Dr. Hanson. I've tried to over and over again, but I couldn't somehow—and I—"

Hanson nodded quietly. "I know what you're trying to say, Miss Wentworth. It's about your father—Professor Wentworth—isn't it?"

She looked at him with wide, glistening eyes. "You know?" she asked incredulously.

"I just found out," he said tersely. "When you add the author of 'Entropic Intervals' to the power consumption of this section, you get a suspicion. But when one of the Directors of that section is also called Wentworth—well, that's a pretty good basis for further assumption, isn't it?"

He paused briefly. "Where is your father, Miss Wentworth?"

For answer, the girl rose to her feet and opened the door.

"Come with me," she said softly.

She led him silently down the corridor to a door under the stair-case. She unlocked it and they descended another flight of stairs.

The lower basement was brilliantly lighted. In the open spaces between the massive pillars lay row upon row of Zincoïd dischargers. They continued past these to a vast central clearing.

Jack Hanson looked about him in amazement. "This isn't a lab," he muttered. "It's a power house. Where's your father?"

The girl choked a sob as she pointed to a shimmering, incandescent sphere in the center of the lab.

"In there," she cried bitterly.

Hanson checked his stride abruptly at what he saw. It rested securely on a massive, universal axis, rotating slowly as he watched it. His eyes wandered over the heavy cables, the vast cathode dischargers, the flickering zinc plates where the photons impinged.

He turned to the girl. "Let's begin at the beginning."

She nodded in silence. "Dad published the book you mentioned about 10 years ago. He was ridiculed and criticized so severely he lost his Chair at Research Center. We moved to the edge of a border town on Mars and Dad began his experiments.

"The day everything was ready Dad told me as emphatically as he could, not to touch anything while he was in the globe. There were two sets of co-ordinates, one controlled by the outside panel and the other, in the 'future'—inside the glo—"

"THE future!" Hanson shouted hoarsely. "The future! Good God!"

"I thought you knew," she said in surprise. "All those signs, and games and—"

He shook his head, compelling himself

to remain calm, to quell the tumult that roared in his ears.

"No. I did that to prevent a panic," he said slowly. "There was no other way. I should have known," he whispered, then looked up at her. "Please go on—and hurry if you can."

"The outside panel in the first globe," she continued "had no indicators. Dad was gone about twelve hours when I noticed that one of the standard coils in the main current was heating up. I knew what a short in that circuit would mean—so I tried to break contact."

She paused, her head in her hands. "The whole area for nearly a mile around simply disappeared. By some miracle I can't understand we weren't killed."

Her face flushed a deep red as she continued. "Dad was imprisoned for two years," she said slowly. "The fact that no lives were lost—and no property destroyed didn't help. Even when we pointed out that it was a standard coil—

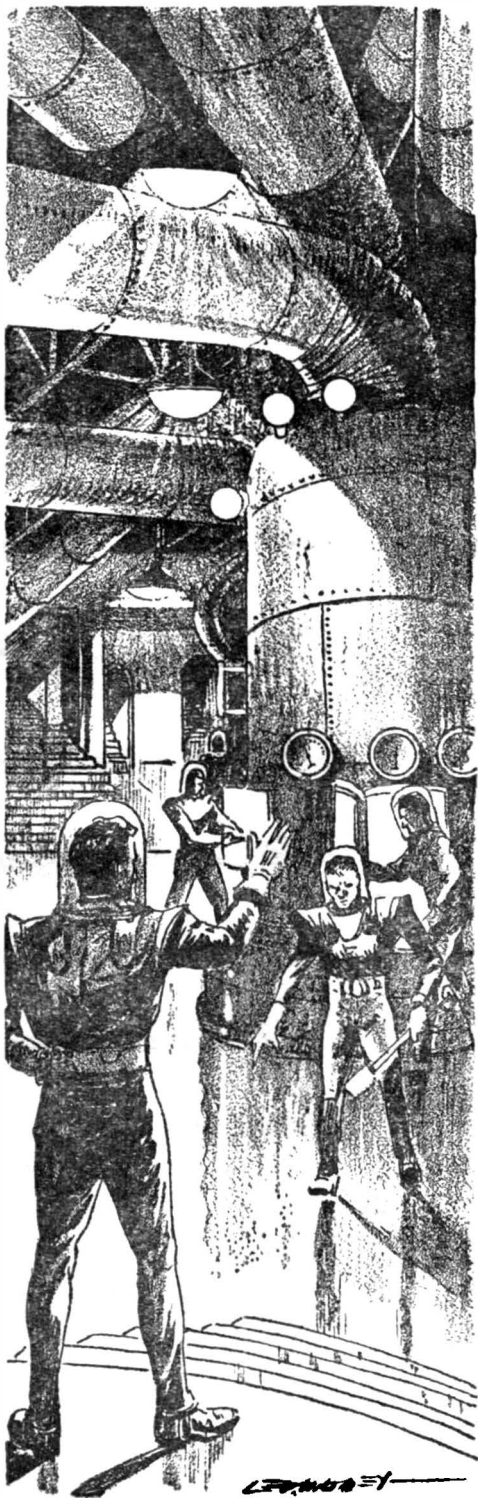
"I got this job," she concluded, "and with my earnings Dad bought some new equipment. We brought it here along with the other Museum pieces. Some of it is still upstairs. Dad started the night you came. He's been in there," she pointed a trembling hand at the shimmering globe—"ever since!"

Jack Hanson looked down at her as she finished. "Alice," he said quietly, "I'm sorry I—"

"I understand," she said softly. "It's all right."

TWO hours later Jack Hanson still remained baffled. "I can't see it," he said. "There's nothing to grip onto here." He stared at the huge pulsating sphere in front of him, turned to the panel and looked up thoughtfully at the relay of rheostats in the main circuit.

"One turn," he muttered savagely. "That's all it would take and our troubles would be over—one way or another."



How long was it since he had slept? Nostalgic visions of his bed—soft and billowy—rose before him. He got up and walked unsteadily through the silent Museum.

There it was again—that metallic, rhythmic chuckling. He realized now that he had been hearing it for a long time. Suddenly he stopped. What was it Alice had said about those Museum pieces?

He groped his way through the darkness, fumbled with the light switch, then turned it on and listened carefully.

Outside he could hear their tiny world coming to life for still another day. An early band had already struck up their theme song.

He shook his head gloomily then tensed himself. He heard it again—There! Between the '21st Century Dynamo' and the world's first Zincoïd plate stood a small metal cabinet!

He dropped down beside it, examined the dials on its panel and rose suddenly, with a wild, exultant shout.

He picked it up carefully and made for the stairs, staggering under its weight.

Alice came running down the corridor to meet him. "What is it, Jack?"

"Never mind now," he said tersely. "Just open that door for me."

They carried it downstairs and placed it beside the shimmering sphere in the center of the lab.

"We've got it, Alice. We've got it! Listen!"

From the interior of the cabinet came a series of sharp distinct clicks.

"Why, it's part of Dad's apparatus," she said.

"Look!" Jack Hanson pointed to the panel readings. "Accumulators—discharge plates—and here's the induced current. With the same reading as the one in the globe panel," he shouted abruptly.

"All we have to do is connect the leads to this," he opened the cabinet, "to

this coil which will absorb the charge. Don't you see—it's synchronized with the accumulators inside the sphere."

"It's so small," she objected. "Do you know what charge there is on that globe?"

Hanson nodded, "Yes." He measured the coil hurriedly and looked up at her. "But this coil contains nearly 500 miles of the best resistant material known," he said desperately. "It has to work."

"We'll drain the charge off the globe, then break contact," he continued as they coupled the heavy, massive leads to the grotesquely small cabinet.

It was the work of a few seconds. They looked at each other in silence as they stood before the slowly, revolving sphere.

Hanson turned a knob on the tiny panel. Alice clutched his arm tightly and closed her eyes.

FOR a moment nothing happened. Then abruptly, with an ear-splitting roar the two hemispheres clamped themselves on the surface of the sphere. Jack Hanson hurled himself at the main panel—gave the rheostat knob a full rapid turn.

He smiled grimly as he wiped his forehead. Alice Wentworth sat down weakly. "Thank God," she said fervently.

"We're not through yet," he reminded her quietly. She looked up at him, her eyes shining. "No—but soon," she murmured softly.

Together they opened the finely grooved valve in the center of the sphere. Hanson looked up in astonishment. "It's cold!" he exclaimed. "I expected—"

He opened the valve fully and was about to enter when Professor Wentworth tottered through the opening.

The old man looked about him in perplexity, then smiled, quietly as Alice Wentworth threw herself into his arms.

Hanson helped him to a chair and was about to speak when a sudden clamor of excited, frenzied voices burst in upon them.

He looked up for an instant, then turned abruptly and raced for the stairway.

CHAPTER SIX

The Future

THEY gazed with open-mouthed wonder at the Earth that lay beneath them. Every available telescope was in use. Long lines of excited, beseeching crowds clamored for 'just a look'.

Never-ending cries of astonishment filled the air as they watched with bated breath the thousands of powerful, mighty space ships of the future approach with unheard-of velocities, then tear past them silently, effortlessly.

Forgotten were their games and amusements. The Pleasure Parks were empty, the bands silent.

With impatient, jostling crowds behind them they looked long and arduously through the telescopes.

A scene of indescribable beauty unfolded itself. Vast cities, hundreds of miles across, lay spread before them. Shimmering, graceful spires mocked with quiet dignity the billowing clouds that lay beneath them.

And then it happened.

A long sleek spaceship appeared seemingly from nowhere, headed in their direction, continued unswervingly on its course.

A collision seemed inevitable.

And then, before they had time to cry out, it had 'struck' them, passed through and continued on its way!

On the whole of Terra's Fair for a few brief seconds there hung a heavy, ominous silence.

But someone had evidently expected this to happen for the very next moment the Publicity Director's deep, reassuring voice boomed from thousands of loudspeakers, calming and explaining in un-

ruffled tones, the reason for this outrage to their senses.

His greatest difficulty, however, lay in dissuading the more adventurous among them from paying a personal visit to the denizens of the Future.

He pleaded with them patiently and gradually the crowds about the airlocks began to dwindle. A few hours later and other interests had absorbed their energies.

It was the greatest day in the lives of a hundred million Solarians. A day whose events would be remembered. And for some strange reason the Administrators must have felt it too, for free rein was given to many activities usually frowned upon.

The answer to this newly found freedom lay with a small group of technicians gathered at that moment in Jack Hanson's office.

"It's all decided then," Hanson concluded briefly. "We all know our jobs. Sharp at 2:00 P. M." He looked at his watch. "That leaves half an hour."

A murmur of assent followed and they left in a body.

Professor Wentworth and his daughter remained behind.

The old man groaned deeply, his head in his hands. "I'm responsible for all this, Dr. Hanson." His voice faltered. "Are you sure there's no other way?"

Jack Hanson shook his head. "Figure it out for yourself Professor. It took us four days to get here. We've traveled a little more than a thousand years. And you say it will take about four days to get back."

Professor Wentworth nodded silently.

"All right," Hanson continued. "We've got a hundred million people here, and no food, water, or air left. There's nothing else we can do."

He looked at the old man intently. "But what about the initial energy used in getting to the Future?" he asked.

"There isn't any!" was the startling re-

ply. "If you measure the energy on the accumulators I used—before and after we got here—you'll find it's the same."

Hanson looked at him in amazement. "You mean to say it took no energy from the Present to reach the Future?"

Professor Wentworth nodded. "Simply the manifestation of that energy—something like a catalyst, acting on—well I don't know yet. But I'm sure of one thing. We drew nothing from the Present, and can draw nothing from the Future."

He was about to continue when Alice broke in quietly. "It's almost 2:00 o'clock," she said as she walked to the window. "They've been asleep for an hour."

THEY reached the Main Atmosphere Plant a few moments later. The Atmosphere Technician came forward to meet them. "Everything will be ready in a few minutes," he shouted above the roar of the machines.

Hanson nodded. "Where's the Health Director?"

The Technician pointed to a small group of workers at the far end of the building.

They made their way hurriedly past the gigantic Ventilation shafts. The Health Director approached them, smiling nervously.

"Have you got enough on hand?" Hanson asked him.

The Director nodded, "We've got four gallons—that's plenty," he paused awkwardly. "Are you sure it's necessary, Hanson? It's a big responsibility and—"

Hanson smiled grimly. "We have four days to go and nothing to eat, drink or breathe. I'll take the responsibility. Let's get going."

They fitted their Luxite helmets carefully and turned to the Technician whose voice came booming through the amplifiers. "Engage—to capacity."

The roar of the machines died down.

And only the faint vibration under their feet gave indication of the tremendous energy that was being consumed.

Hanson adjusted his helmet. "How long will it take?" he asked the Health Director.

"About half an hour. They'll 'go under' immediately. Keep right on sleeping until we replace with normal atmosphere."

He continued with professional pride. "They won't even know—there are no after effects. But they'll be pretty hungry when they wake up," he added as an afterthought.

Jack Hanson nodded thoughtfully.

AND as they slept, Terra's Fair plunged backward into Time. Sped homeward to the Present, through a thousand years of engulfing nothingness.

A skeleton crew of workers had been kept immune from the powerful anaesthetic. And in the 96 hours which followed they were not idle.

The moment they "arrived" food would be necessary, and power and air. And so a fleet of air ships was primed, ready to leave at a moment's notice; to speed to Earth, and tear back with necessary supplies.

Mile upon mile of Zincoïd plates were turned out by the shops, attached to their power units, and laid in place where the sun's rays would immediately strike them.

And through it all Jack Hanson worked feverishly. The dead silence, the dark streets, and above all the absence of the crowds, tormented him with a never-ending reminder of the stupendous tragedy that would result if anything went wrong now.

But Zero hour finally struck. Hanson was at the Visaphone on the Terrestrial Council's wave length. Alice and Professor Wallace stood by the slowly rotating time sphere, their eyes glued to the indicators.

The Atmosphere had been cleared, the

pilots were ready. Some of the guests were already on the streets headed for the cafes and restaurants of the Amusement Zone.

A few seconds later and they were in brilliant sunshine. Phillips shouted deliriously from the window, then turned back, grinning amiably.

Hanson held his breath until President Alcott's purple visage flicked on the screen.

Then he sighed deeply.

The old man spluttered and coughed unable to release the torrent of words that threatened to follow, unwilling to believe that Hanson actually was before him—and grinning impudently too—the young pup.

He recovered himself and roared into the plate until his image began to flicker. "What in the name of seven thundering asteroids happened to you? Where have you been—who's responsible for this—this—? Come on man, speak up! What are you waiting for? You've got nine planets in an uproar, yelling."

A significant, ominous pause ensued. "If this is your idea of a joke, Hanson, I'll."

Jack Hanson listened patiently, then abruptly, finding an opening proceeded to explain to the gaping President what really had happened.

"Well, how many deaths then?" the old man broke in with a groan. Or did the whole shebang go to pieces? Don't try to stall, Hanson. Out with it," he howled.

Hanson continued with the full story quietly.

"You mean you put them to sleep? The whole crowd?" President Alcott gasped incredulously.

Hanson nodded.

"Then everything's all right—There's nothing wrong. And this Professor Wentworth's responsible?"

Jack Hanson continued, nodding. "That's what I've been trying to. . ."

A rollicking guffaw of laughter followed. The old man roared and chuckled and howled until his sides ached with pain, and his face grew alarmingly congested. Several times he tried to speak, only to fall back weakly and repeat with buoyant, expressive mirth his performance of the minute before.

Finally, drying his eyes he began to speak.

"We thought Plutonian Transport was responsible," he chuckled weakly. "We ran them out of business. Transported all their small shareholders by the tens of thousands—to a general meeting. Opened their vaults and clamped the Directors in jail on enough criminal charges to hang the lot."

"Plutonian Council would have made a Civic Holiday if it hadn't been for your disappearance."

He paused, "I'm sending someone up to relieve you. And before the Council does it, I want to congratulate you, Hanson. You did one of the finest jobs I've ever—"

He noticed Jack Hanson's embarrassment and broke off, smiling. "Oh yes—And bring that Professor with you. I want to talk to him."

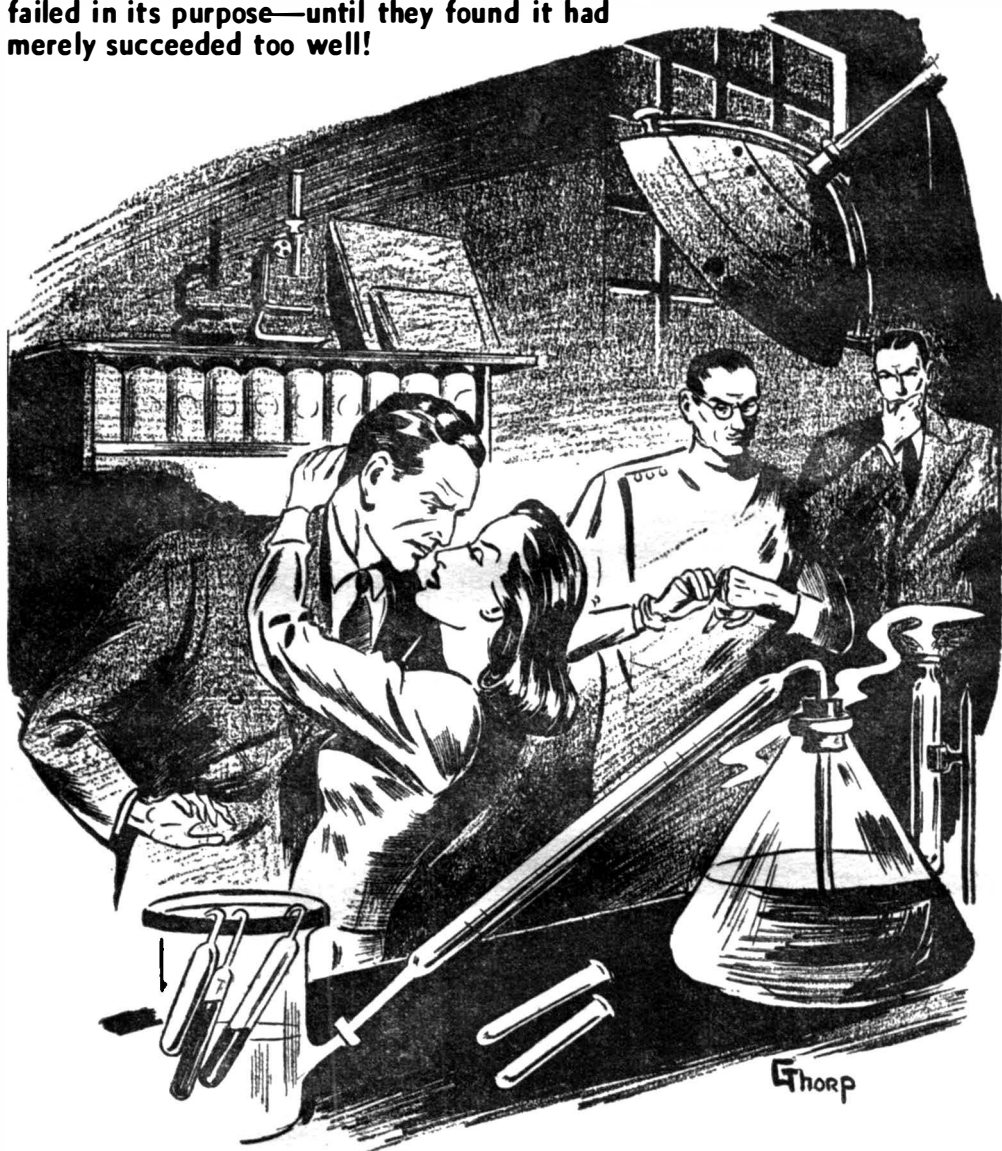
AND SO six weeks later another hundred million guests of Terra's Fair could see for themselves that Terra's Future was fair.

And in the Future, to a background of wild, carefree laughter and gay, feckless abandon a certain Martian Counsel joined together for better or for worse Alice Wentworth and Jack Hanson.

And of Phillips let it be said, that he grumbled fiercely with long drawn face, and moaned to himself, and in his own melancholic manner enjoyed himself tremendously—after the ceremony.

PERSONALITY PLUS

It seemed that Dr. Butterworth's machine had failed in its purpose—until they found it had merely succeeded too well!



By Ray Cummings

A NEWSCASTER who thought he was pretty clever put on a television act recently, based on me and the way I helped Dr. Butterworth with his scientific experiment. What we

did went wrong; I admit it. But this newscaster treated it as though it were something funny. I do assure you it wasn't. So I write this to make clear just what happened. You who read it very likely will

say that I got myself in for what happened to me, through my own greed. I guess that's right enough; I admit, I did let Georgie—who was the subject of our experiment—bribe me with five hundred gold-dollars. That isn't so much, now that we have the platinum standard; but still it was a good deal to me.

But just the same, I insist that I felt I was helping with important scientific research work. As Dr. Butterworth put it to me, our experimental development of Georgie's personality was a test case. If it had worked out properly, it could have been of immense benefit to all mankind. But unfortunately, as I have said, it didn't.

THE thing began that summer afternoon when I met Georgie on the third ramp, over Broadway where Forty-second Street crosses. I didn't know him then; I'd never laid eyes on him before. As a matter of fact, nobody in the world knew the Georgie whom he was at that instant—not even Georgie himself. I saw him standing at the edge of the pedestrian walk, gazing sort of blankly at a line of public little aircars as they landed and rolled down the ramp. He was a slim, extremely handsome fellow of maybe thirty. His wavy black hair, longish about the ears, had a little grey in it. His face had delicate, finely chiseled features, with eyelashes and a mouth almost girlish. But it wasn't an effeminate face. It was more masculinely poetic—refined, cultured and sensitive.

Not that I got all that out of my first glance at Georgie. I didn't. All I saw was this fellow standing as though he was dazed, or sick, or drunk. Anyway, I saw something was certainly the matter with him. So I grabbed him by the arm and asked him could I help.

"Oh—thanks," he said. His voice was soft, musical. It was a nice voice. He was trembling; timid and frightened; a man completely non-plussed. "There's something the matter with me," he said.

"Somehow I can't seem to remember how I got here, or who I am. Is this New York City? It looks like its pictures."

He wasn't nuts; and it didn't take me long to figure out what the trouble was. "I sort of remember," he said, "I just graduated from Secondary School and I'm going to college. Next September, that is, and if I don't flunk anything I'll graduate in 1992. That's four years from now, and—"

"This is 2000," I said. "You seem to have slipped twelve years."

That really frightened him. He went pale and clutched me. "Take it easy," I said. "Your trouble is amnesia. I'll take you to Government Mental Hospital. They'll straighten you out."

He was well dressed, but there wasn't a thing in his pocket except a lone gold-dollar bill. I was about to grab us a surface taxi when a little man came bustling up to us.

"Oh, there you are, Georgie," he greeted. "My stars and planets, I'm glad I found you. What do you mean by climbing out the window like that?"

He was a rotund, fussy-looking little fellow with a cherubic moon-face. He was Dr. Ezra Butterworth, he told us. He had been treating Georgie, he said, not ten minutes ago; and the minute he'd turned his back, Georgie had gone through the window.

"I'm your best friend, Georgie," he said. "Now if you'll just trust me—"

"I guess I'm in trouble," Georgie admitted. "I can't seem to remember—"

"No, my stars, of course you can't. But that's all right. Just be calm."

"What's my name?" Georgie demanded timidly.

"You're George Trent. But everybody always called you Georgie, and—"

It seemed to register. Georgie brightened. "That's right. I remember—"

Little Dr. Butterworth reached up hastily and gripped him by the shoulders.

"Stop that," he said sharply. "Never mind trying to remember. That's just the point. That's just what I don't want."

"That I just finished Secondary School," Georgie was saying dreamily. "But I can't remember the little town. I know I was eighteen last month, but—"

"You're thirty," Dr. Butterworth said. "Now don't get yourself all mixed up. I'll explain everything when I get you home."

WELL, the upshot was that Dr. Butterworth took him in a taxi, and he invited me to come along. It was only a few blocks—a small hotel apartment on the third ramp floor.

"I've got a confession to make," little Dr. Butterworth announced, when he had given Georgie a nib of brandy. He gave me one too; I guess he figured I'd need it by the time I'd heard what he had to say. "What's your name, young man?" he asked me.

"Jack Rance," I said. "I'm a tinned and synthetic food salesman."

"You look intelligent. Now that you're in this, I have no doubt you'll be able to help us. We're all working for Georgie's welfare."

"Am I—am I that bad?" Georgie murmured. He was frightened again.

Now I don't know how much Georgie got out of what Dr. Butterworth explained in his first talk. Georgie was trembling with a sort of frightened timidity. And he was still completely dazed, thoroughly mixed up by a twelve year blankness in his memory. And even previous to that, everything seemed pretty hazy to him. I wasn't any of those things; I was just stupefied. And I want to make clear right here and now, I'm no scientist. I don't know a thing about the mysteries of science, particularly weird psychological stuff like this. I'm only reporting what Dr. Butterworth said, and what happened.

It was Dr. Butterworth himself who had caused Georgie's amnesia. He had de-

liberately stricken Georgie with it, here in this hotel apartment only half an hour ago. He had done it, he assured us hastily, completely for Georgie's own good. Georgie was too dazed now to get angry; and I couldn't think of anything to say, so I didn't say anything. Dr. Butterworth showed us his apparatus, which was in the adjoining room.

It was partly dismantled now, but even if it hadn't been, it wouldn't have meant a thing to me. It was a complicated looking apparatus of dials and levers and wires, with a looped antenna connected to a sort of X-ray machine. There was a small metal chair, with wires hooked to its legs and a metal headpiece on top. It looked something like the old fashioned death chair at Sing Sing.

"Did I sit in that?" Georgie shuddered.

"I tricked you," Dr. Butterworth admitted deprecatingly. "You had a headache, and I told you my invention would cure it."

Then he gave us quite a lecture on the scientific phenomenon of Time—the psychological pseudo-aspect of Time, as it engraves itself on the human memory. I learned now that while the unrollment of real Time is unchangeable, Psychological Time isn't. A minute of violent activity impresses us as being very short; a minute of apprehensive waiting is very long. As the real Time passes, with unvarying speed, it engraves our memory like a series of jerks, or dots and dashes. It is an electrical engraving—a thing unstable. Psychological changes in our body and brain affect it.

I hope I make the thing at least decently clear. Dr. Butterworth, with all the enthusiasm of an inventive scientist, explained with warmth and at considerable length. But to put it in a nutshell, he had discovered a curious electrical vibration—a thing completely and tangibly physical—which, when applied to the human

brain cells, electrically deranged the electrical Time-field of the memory-scroll. A sort of short-circuiting, so to speak. In effect, the eight-year record of dots and dashes of Psychological Time in Georgie's mind were so compressed and distorted that now he could not use them. Like tuning a radio wave, only those most recent eight years were affected. Beyond that, Georgie's memories were a little jarred as it were, but otherwise undamaged.

WE CLOSED the door on that gruesome apparatus, and went back into Butterworth's living room. "Look here, why did you do that to me?" Georgie wanted to know

"For your own good, Georgie. My stars, you'll realize that in a minute. And for the good of all mankind. Why, don't you realize, with a thing like this I can remake human lives? I can control human behavior—remake humanity. Correct errors. Start human lives afresh. Why—"

"Something was seriously the matter with Georgie's life," I suggested. "So you had to wipe it away."

"And give him a fresh start. Exactly so. You were wrecking your life, Georgie. Wrecking those who love you. I'm one of them, so that nothing could be more appropriate than using you to test out my great invention. You're a test case, for the benefit of all humanity. That's a tremendous responsibility, Georgie. My Heavens, you must be sure and realize—"

"How was I wrecking my life?" Georgie demanded mildly. "I can seem to remember I was all right in school."

Well, it seemed that when Georgie went to college things started going wrong with him. Dr. Butterworth didn't go into details, he just told us the net result. Maybe because Georgie was a handsome fellow and really intelligent, somehow he got a swelled head about it. An over-developed ego. The dominance of a superiority complex, rampant. In short,

Georgie was an egotistical braggart. A conceited megalomaniac. An insufferable, swaggering wind-bag. And a bully. He came out of college with everybody hating him.

He got a job selling airplane part. But he couldn't hold it. Not that or any other job. He not only told his boss how good he was, but how much better he was than the boss. What little money he could ever earn, unscrupulous girls took away from him, just by the simple process of helping him puff up his ego. And he had nearly killed himself half a dozen times, driving his winged roller on the theory that the other fellow is always wrong.

Georgie just sat and stared now, as Butterworth handed him all that in one gulp. You couldn't blame him for being shocked. "I grew up to be like that?" he murmured. "Are you sure people didn't lie about me?"

"They didn't," Butterworth declared. "That's what you were like. I've known you ever since you got out of college. You were wrecking your life, Georgie. Not a chance for you to come to anything but disaster. But I don't blame you. It wasn't your fault. My stars, it just goes to prove my theories of human personality—of human behaviour. You were all right when you left Secondary School. And then some little thing got your personality started on the wrong path."

Butterworth warmed up again to his science. "You see," he told us, "personality isn't something inherent in the individual. It is developed, moulded by environment, swayed by the chance winds of circumstance. Human behavior runs in grooves, standard patterns, differentiated only by slight details of individualism. The sins of circumstance make us this kind of a man, or that kind. A man is just a bundle of accidents. Why, a man's very existence is only the result of the accidental meeting of two humans. Your personality chanced to develop in truly

horrible fashion, Georgie. Heaven knows how your poor wife has had the courage to stand by you."

GEORGIE gulped. "I've got a wife?" "You have indeed. A very fine, brave little woman. She's my niece, so you see why I've wanted to start you fresh. She's here in the next room now, waiting to come to you."

Georgie just stared, and gulped, with his pale handsome face turning pink. "Oh," he said.

I can imagine it might make one feel peculiar, getting introduced to your wife like this. But I'll admit that the thing had gotten me enthused now. The romance of it. The inestimable benefit to all humanity. Here was Georgie who had gone off on a wrong track for years, given a chance to go back and try it over. Living over again.

I clapped him on the back. "Go with it, old man," I said. "You'll make good, this time. You're lucky."

Well, so far as his little wife was concerned, I could see at once that he was lucky. She was a small, brown-haired girl of maybe twenty-five. Quite pretty; and dove-like, with a sort of wistful timidity. She adored Georgie, that was evident. She flung him a quick, apprehensive glance, and then turned shyly, questioningly toward me.

"This is Mr. Rance—Jack Rance," Dr. Butterworth said. "He's going to help us." Then Butterworth took Georgie by the arm and drew him forward. "And this—here is your wife, Georgie."

I guess she would have taken him into her arms, but Georgie just stood gulping. Then he let her kiss him. "What—what's your name?" he stammered.

Romance? I'll say it was. They were a wonderful looking young couple.

It was Dr. Butterworth's plan to have me drop in on Georgie and Dot every few days, see how things were coming along,

and then report back to him. For himself, he didn't want to see Georgie too much. Nobody knew them here in the city; he had brought them here from the small town of Georgie's boyhood. He wanted to avoid having the past intrude upon Georgie; wanted him to have a fair start in developing his new personality.

But I didn't have any chance to do my part. The winds of circumstance which Butterworth talked about, got to work on me. My firm unexpectedly sent me out through the southwest and to the Pacific Coast on an extended trip. It was nearly eight months before I got back. I'd heard once or twice from Dr. Butterworth, and he wrote that so far as he could see Georgie was coming along just fine. Georgie had been a blank that day Butterworth struck him with amnesia. A nonentity. A man with no personality at all. You couldn't say what kind of man he was—he just wasn't any kind—nothing but dazed confusion and blurred, almost faded memories of his boyhood. And now his contact with life was developing him again.

It sounded very good indeed.

I DIDN'T get to see Dr. Butterworth the day I returned. And the next day I was back on my old route up in the Manhattan-west retail section; and in the late afternoon I bumped into Georgie. There was an airplane parts store next door to the synthetic food shop I'd just visited, and loud voices were floating out.

"Now listen mister, surely you've got the brains to understand what I'm talking about." That was Georgie's voice.

"But I can get them same aluminum brads half a cent a pound cheaper than what you're askin' me. For why should I change?"

"You don't seem to understand," Georgie said. I could see him now, gracefully lounging against the counter, blocking off a couple of women customers who



wanted to buy something. "By using my line you'll make it possible for me to come here every week or two. You don't want to keep on running a little dump like this all your life, do you? By having me here—the advice I can give you about expansion—what's half a cent a pound? Nothing at all. What you need is vision—"

I chased myself away and loafed around at the nearby ramp intersection. You can imagine my heart sort of sank. Anyway, in about thirty seconds Georgie came striding out. He looked angry; his handsome face was flushed. But when he saw me he smiled with genuine pleasure.

"Oh hello, Jack," he greeted. "Uncle

Ezra said you'd be getting back pretty soon. How are you?"

"I'm fine," I said. I didn't ask him how he was. Dr. Butterworth had cautioned me to avoid any mention of the past. I was to act like a normal friend, just as though nothing unusual had ever happened to Georgie. "Did you make that sale?" I asked casually.

Georgie laughed. "That old fossil doesn't know a brad from a transverse main-strut. I don't think I'll bother with him any more. Selling to a little dump like that doesn't get you anything. I'm going after the big ones. Choke my line down their throat."

"Good idea," I agreed. Maybe it was,

for the airplane business; I can't say as to that. But you can't choke ten or twenty cases of preserved Early June Peas at too high a price down any foodman's throat. He'll gag on it.

"It's wonderful meshing into you like this," Georgie was saying. "You're just in time—I've got something really important under way."

"In the airplane business?"

"Oh, *that*. Heavens no! This is something really good. I'll let you in on it. Maybe you can help me. Come on home—have dinner with me and the little woman. Then we'll get rid of her and I can tell you."

Uncle Ezra had gotten him the airplane job, he explained as we went along. He'd studied the technicalities of the business pretty intensively for a few months—Uncle Ezra arranged with a firm, who provided an old airplane parts salesman to teach him.

"I sopped up all he knew, pretty quick," Georgie was saying. "That was easy, though I guess Uncle Ezra thought it was maybe because I was a airplane-parts salesman, in the old days before—" He checked himself, and gave me his winning smile. "We'll omit that," he added. "You know, I promised Uncle Ezra—"

"I know," I agreed.

WHATEVER vague apprehension I had over Georgie's new personality was more than confirmed by the mute look his little wife gave me when Georgie enthusiastically ushered me in. It was a look of silent suffering, sort of edged with terror.

"Oh I'm so glad you came, Mr. Rance," she said in her soft, timid little voice. "Georgie's often mentioned you."

"Sure have," Georgie agreed as he kissed her. "Come on now, juggle up the dinner and then Jack and I have important things to talk over."

Why should I go into the details of this

brief sample I had of Georgie's home life? You can certainly see that all was not well with Dr. Butterworth's theories. Georgie's little wife undoubtedly still adored him. But there was a secret terror eating at her. I could understand that—what Georgie had been before, and what he was heading into now. You couldn't miss it if he wasn't the same old Georgie, he was already pretty far on the way. To me, all Butterworth's theories for the remolding of mankind were threatened with going blooie. Of what use to re-start a man if he's going to turn out the same way he did before?

"Now Jack and I need to be alone, Georgie said, when we had finished the meal. "Good dinner, Dot."

When she had gone into the kitchen, Georgie closed the door on us, offered me an expensive Havana cylinder and threw himself into a chair with his feet cocked up on the table. "Don't want the little woman in on this," he said with lowered voice. "What the femmes don't know can't hurt 'em. Now get your wits on this, Jack. It's complicated, but once you grasp it, it's good."

Well, I learned more in the next ten minutes about Georgie as he was now than I could have gotten with weeks of casual observation. Uncle Ezra, he said, knew nothing of this and I had to promise fervently that I wouldn't tell him. Georgie, it seemed, had met an heiress; and the heiress almost immediately had gone demented about him.

"That sounds bad," I said.

"Nonsense," he grinned. "You know how women are. What in the hell—to her I'm George Follansbee, dashing young bachelor. She's got the romantic soul. But she's harmless, Jack. Got a figure like an ironing board and wears thick-lensed spectacle glasses so what the hell."

"How did you happen to meet her?" I murmured.

A couple of girls from a girl-body

show—no-clothes artists—had introduced Georgie to the heiress. I raised my eyebrows. “How did it come they knew the heiress?” I demanded.

That was simple enough, though unusual. It seems this unattractive heiress with the romantic soul was yearning to go on the stage—to realize herself, or something like that. So she wandered into this girl show by the stage door and wound up by getting turned over to Georgie.

“Now here’s where the good part comes in,” Georgie grinned. “Get your mind on this, Jack. I’ve got it all worked out. You and I are going to abduct Miss Livingston. Her adoring admirer—that’s me. And his friend—that’s you.”

“Abduct the heiress?”

“Sure. Tomorrow night. I’ve made every arrangement. We carry her off at the point of a Banning heat-gun. I’m frantic with love of her, see? Then the S.S. men chase us, rescue her but we escape. Grand newscasting publicity for her, so she’ll get a stage job. She certainly ought to. A blue-blood heiress in a girl-body show, preceded by publicity like that.”

“And she’s agreed to this, Georgie?”

“Of course she’s agreed to it. She’s frantic over the scheme. To tell you the truth, Jack, she’s not so very heavy mentally.”

I COULD see how that might be. “Now listen, Jack,” he added, “here’s how you and I work it. Tomorrow night we—”

“Not me,” I said. “No sir. You don’t get me into anything like that.”

“Don’t be an nill-wit,” he retorted. He seemed to feel sorry for me that I didn’t understand. “How can anything go wrong with me engineering it? I’ve got a friend on the Shadow Squad. I spent an hour drumming into his head just what he’s got to do.”

Well, Georgie finally talked me into it.

I haven’t the scientific knowledge to describe technically the kind of personality Georgie had developed since the amnesia started him back over again. You didn’t like him, and then again you did, sort of in spite of yourself. Personality plus, I’d call it. Anyway, the clincher he used on me—I admit it—was that he suddenly shoved five hundred gold-dollars into my hand.

“The heiress gave it to me,” he grinned. “Expense money. A thousand gold-dollars. I told her they should have been platinum, but what the hell. I bought Dot an animal coat with the other half. Go on, take it. What the hell—”

Please believe me, he had a lot of good arguments as to why I should take it. To a synthetic-food salesman, a sudden five hundred can come in mighty handy. And anyway, didn’t I have to stick close to Georgie and see this scientific experiment through to its finish? I had promised Dr. Butterworth I would. I realized the bigness of the thing—the welfare of all mankind depending on it; depending, to some extent, upon me.

I went straight from Georgie to Dr. Butterworth that evening. I was bound by steel-clad promises to Georgie. I couldn’t say much. “I’ve just come from seeing him,” I said. I told him my general impressions. “Seems to me,” I said, “now I may be wrong, doctor, but it seems to me he’s slipping back into the same old groove. You said human behavior runs in grooves, remember? It’s cut to standard patterns, differentiated only by slight details of individualism. Remember? Now I won’t pretend to be certain,” I said cautiously, “but the way you described Georgie as he was before—somehow it kept coming up to me when I was with him tonight. There’s danger here, Dr. Butterworth.”

A scientist can be very optimistic. They cling to their theories sometimes in spite of all hell. I could see that Butterworth

might be secretly worried, but his cherubic face only bore a faint tolerant smile.

"My stars, I guess you exaggerate, Jack. A scientist never should do that. With a given set of postulates, he should be very careful how he interprets the resulting facts which are presented to him."

Exaggerate? I hadn't told him one percent!

"You're taking now the opposite school of thought on the nature of man's personality," he told me.

"Opposite from yours?" I said. "I didn't know there was any opposite school of thought."

"Indeed there is, Jack. It contends that personality is not developed by the chance winds of circumstance but is inherent to the individual. A thing developed only by time, the inevitable maturing growth of latent character-enzymes, formed during the growth of the embryo. A biological thing — protoplasmic — unchangeable pre-natal factors, leading always to a result inevitable. In other words," Dr. Butterworth said, "it contends that personality is an historical fruit, the result of a man's lineage."

To me, that seemed very neatly put indeed. Butterworth was warmly assuring me that the proponents of this school of thought were all wrong. But I certainly didn't think so tonight. Not with memory of Georgie. I didn't say so to Butterworth. The thing was too tragic. If Georgie as a test case should turn out irrevocably the same old Georgie, it made Dr. Butterworth's amnesia machine of completely no benefit to mankind—just a lot of wires, dials and levers ready for the junk-pile.

YOU can imagine that my heart was pretty heavy when I left Dr. Butterworth that night. And all that next day I was queerly apprehensive; not even the five hundred, which I had banked, could

cheer me. But Georgie, when we met and flew out to the lavish suburban home of the heiress, was chipper and cocksure of himself. It was now nearly midnight—one of those black, apprehensive, ominous nights.

"I've got every detail arranged," Georgie assured me. "My friend the Shadow-Squad man audiphoned me a while ago. Why he'd choose this particular night to get himself fogged with alcoholite I can't imagine. But he has. So he audicalls like a damfool to tell me he isn't feeling very well so he's put two other S.S. snoopers—friends of his—on the job. Says he gave them full instructions. That shouldn't've been too much strain on his mentality." Georgie chuckled. "I worked an hour getting the thing through that fool snooper's head."

That should have warned me. As a matter of fact, it did. But what could I do? Georgie beat down everything I tried to say, tossed it off as unworthy of his consideration. And I had to stand by him; I couldn't very well run out on him now, not with that five hundred in the bank.

The heiress' home was dark and silent. We came vertically down into the garden. Georgie had verified that there wouldn't be any dogs, and there apparently weren't. Miss Livingston had a dim light in her second floor bedroom, where I could picture her sitting on the bed, all a-twitter to be abducted.

"Come on, we'll get the ladder," Georgie whispered, when we had parked our lightless wing-roller under the trees at the end of the driveway.

The ladder was behind a line of box hedge, where Georgie had hidden it. "Here's where you come in," he chuckled. "You hold the bottom of the ladder steady while I climb up. Watch yourself now, Jack. Don't let it wobble. Grasp the idea?"

"I do," I agreed. Georgie went up that ladder like a climbing monkey, and

pretty soon he appeared with the heiress. My heart was in my throat that one of them, or both, would fall; but they didn't. And when Georgie had her on the ground, we ran triumphantly for the car.

"Come on now, jump in, you two. I'll drive," Georgie whispered. "Make it swift."

"Oh Mr. Togglethorp, isn't Georgie just wonderful," the heiress murmured to me. The three of us jammed into the seat. She was flustered. She snuggled up against me, and then she realized her error and snuggled up against Georgie. He put his arm around her. That made my heart sink; I'm not exactly a coward, but I don't like one-armed drivers.

We started at a pretty good clip, rolling along the dark ground-road. Georgie said he had agreed with the S.S. Man that we wouldn't take to the air. We'd just pretend that our wing-unfolding mechanism had gotten stuck. Georgie started right off, rolling fast; and he wasn't using any headlights.

"Might be a good idea just to use the polarized dimmers?" I suggested.

"Just what I was going to do," Georgie agreed. He switched them on. "Want the S.S. men to see us coming, though they won't be able to identify us 'till we get pretty well past 'em. I'd have arranged a signal, but that fool friend of mine is so dumb he'd have forgotten it anyway."

The heiress was adjusting her spectacle-glasses so she could see the dim swaying road as we plunged along it. "Isn't Georgie just wonderful," she murmured. "He thinks of everything."

The S.S. snoopers were to be at a ramp intersection about two miles ahead. We speeded up as we approached it; and I had a glimpse of their dark wing-roller off to one side. What those Government snoopers were supposed to do, Georgie had never bothered to tell me in complete detail. It isn't important anyway. What they did actually do is all that counts. We

hit the intersection ramp at maybe seventy miles an hour. When we came abreast of them, they had a chance to recognize us, and quite obviously they did. The darkness was split by silent stabs of violent heat-bolts. The heiress screamed slightly and clutched at Georgie's driving arm. Those shots weren't just for show. They were aimed at our roller-tires, though fortunately they only seemed to have hit the steel car-body with a shower of sparks.

"What in the hell," Georgie muttered. "No reason to be so damned realistic."

We were doing about eighty by now; and when a bolt splashed with red, yellow and green sparks on our rear glassite bulls-eye pane, Georgie couldn't help but reach the conclusion that something was radically wrong. It was indeed. You've guessed it; nobody would have to be a professional crime-deducer to figure that the S.S. man who'd gotten himself befuddled with alcoholite had neglected to tell his friends the one vital detail that this abduction was a fake. These snoopers chasing us now were out to get a medal from the S.S. Chief, and they were going at it with vim and enthusiasm.

THEN Georgie decided that it was time to take to the air. I tried to stop it. I did my best to hiss at him that the air in any kind of a fight is more dangerous than the ground. But you couldn't tell Georgie anything. He pressed the button to slide out our little folded wings. We took to the air all right; but whether those heat bolts had damaged our wing mechanism or not, I don't know. I don't really care, either. It is results that count. Our wings only came half out; just enough to lift us to an altitude of maybe ten feet, and drop us down again. We kept on doing that at intervals, because the wings got half out and wouldn't seem to fold back again.

Now I have no doubt that the big S.S. car behind us had more power than our

little one seater and thus, on paper, theoretically more speed. And us going up and down into the air like a wounded insect, was also a handicap to us. But this road wasn't any too good; it was ruddy from recent heavy rains; and it wound up and down hill and around dark sharp curves. The intrinsic speed of that S.S. car was nullified by the recklessness of Georgie's driving. We went like a one-winged dragonfly that had gone crazy with fright.

And in a mile or two we had pulled quite a bit ahead.

"Silly fools," Georgie was muttering. "How can I let 'em rescue Miss Livingston when they shoot heat-bolts at me?"

Obviously he couldn't. I wasn't interested in that now; all I wanted to do was stay approximately on the road and make a get-away. And then, without any warning, a car coming at us from the opposite direction hove around a curve close ahead. It was the first car we'd passed on this lonely road. I haven't mentioned that it was a narrow road. It was.

I didn't dare say anything to caution Georgie; that might have distracted him. I could only sit and pray.

"Crazy idiot," Georgie muttered. "Why doesn't he give me room? Or take to the air. Can't he realize I'm in a hurry?"

So far as I could see in all that chaos, the oncoming driver did his best. But it wasn't quite good enough. We were accelerating. Georgie was one of those drivers—you've probably met some—who steps on the gas when the brake would be much better, on the theory that when trouble looms ahead, the sooner you get past it, the better. We almost got past or over that car; we just tipped its roof with our rear mudguard. All I can remember is that Georgie was fervently cursing the driver of the other car as we flipped off the road, miraculously staying right side up for quite a ways into the woods until we whanged into a tree.

I THOUGHT I was knocked unconscious, but I wasn't, quite. The heiress was screaming, which was a good sign, and Georgie was still cursing the other driver. How we got out of that wrecked car I don't know. Everywhere we moved there seemed to be twisted metal and broken glass. When we got out, I found that my head was cut and my left arm didn't seem to work. Georgie and the heiress were all right, except that her glasses were back in the wreck. From out by the tree I took a look at the road. The car we'd hit had stayed on it, but was now slued crosswise. The S.S. car was approaching, coming to a stop.

"You lie here," Georgie hissed at the heiress. "Pretend you're nearly killed so they'll attend to you instead of chasing us." He chuckled. "Everything worked out fine, didn't it?" He stooped and kissed her goodbye. "Snap steady, Kid—you'll be a no-clothes artist yet. Wait and see the publicity you get out of this."

He and I decamped into the woods. My cracked head was oozing blood down the back of my neck, and some of it was coming off my forehead into my eyes. And my left arm hurt pretty badly. It was hard, plunging at full speed through the underbrush in that black patch of woods. Georgie had to keep waiting for me.

"Come on, for Heaven's sake, Jack," he urged. How we finally got separated, I don't know. Georgie was doing his best with me; but for a while a snooper seemed to be chasing us, and with bolts stabbing around it was hard to stay together. When the snooper finally gave up the chase, I found myself alone. I didn't dare shout to locate Georgie—I just had to escape the best way I could, without him.

It was the next evening before I dared take a chance of going out from where I'd been hiding in my room. I went to see Butterworth. I'd patched up my head myself; too dangerous to call a doctor. The news, I found, was pretty full of our

heiress. She was evidently sticking to her guns. Two fellows named Follansbee and Toggletorp had abducted her, and that was that. I could only hope she hadn't given too careful a description of us.

I sneaked in to Butterworth, pulled down his shades, locked his doors and made a clean breast of everything. He was very grave.

He listened silently.

"Well my stars," he said that at last. "I couldn't imagine what this radiogram meant."

He had received a 'gram collect from Georgie about an hour ago. "Read it," he urged.

I read it.

DEAR UNCLE EZRA SEMICOLON
AM ON PLANE HEADED WEST
STOP HOW IS JACK QUESTION
MARK THE LITTLE WOMAN SENDS
LOVE BUT SAYS TELL YOU SHE
IS WORRIED ABOUT ME STOP
THAT IS SILLY BECAUSE I AM ALL
RIGHT STOP DO NOT WORRY I
HAVE GOOD IDEAS BUT MAY
NEED A THOUSAND TO TIDE ME
OVER STOP WILL LET YOU KNOW
LOVE

GEORGIE

I handed it silently back. What could I say? Dr. Butterworth was sighing gravely.

"Too bad," he murmured.

"Yes," I agreed. "That other school of thought must be right, doctor. This is the same old Georgie, isn't it? His inherent personality certainly came out again, didn't it?"

FOR some unfathomable reason that seemed to annoy Butterworth. "Not at all," he declared sharply. "You see, Jack, I couldn't let you and Georgie know the real truth. Before I struck him with amnesia, he wasn't an egotistical braggart. Quite the reverse."

I listened, numbed. Georgie I learned

now, in reality had always been a shy, timid, poetic fellow. And when he got to college he got worse.

A bad case of overdeveloped inferiority complex, rampant.

"The other boys called him a sissy," Butterworth was saying. "He wasn't that, he was just shy. And then, by the time they got through pounding the idea into him, he was afraid of his own shadow. Why my goodness, he got so he couldn't drive a wing-roller, he was too afraid he'd hurt somebody. When he married my niece, I got him a job but he couldn't hold it. You can't get anywhere in business being a worm. And he was just miserable over it."

I could only stare, completely numbed. "Don't you see?" little Butterworth said. "I worked the power of suggestion on him. I thought, if he believed he had been a reckless, bragging egotist, that the power of instinctive suggestive thought would make him strike about a normal personality level."

I began to see.

The power of suggestion. It had certainly worked. It worked too damn well. And suddenly now Dr. Butterworth was sitting up and beaming at me. "Why Jack, all I need now is some method of controlling the power of suggestion. Applying it, pro and con, in the right proportions to suit the individual need. My goodness, I've got something there. Why that, in conjunction with my amnesia machine—think what it'll mean in the remolding of human personalities which have gone astray. We'll have to find another subject, Jack. We'll work things still more scientifically, next time."

I didn't say so, but with my broken head and the Shadow-Squad looking for me, I'd had enough. I'm not a scientist. I don't want to do any more toying with weird stuff like that.

I'm not fitted for it.

OTHER WORLD

Rand Bartlett's repetition of an ancient experiment hurled him out of his own world, into a new and different one—though not quite as different as he thought.

SNOW-BLANKETED, the rooftop of twenty-third century New York glistened in the December moonlight, its continuous surface as scintillant as the placid Hudson, along which the hundred-level bulwark sprawled its twenty mile length. Underneath the great roof with its crystal domes, landing stages and penthouses, murmured the throbbing life of the greatest of the eleven City-States of United North America.

Housing fifty million humans, it was the western world's center of science, art, literature, industry and indolence. Its people comprised a polyglot mixture of types ranging from the purple-clad plutocrats of the top levels, through the mid-level workers in gray, to the sketchily clad, skulking parasites of the lowest levels. This was New York, a pot simmering, bubbling merrily at times, but occasionally boiling suddenly to a point where its mixture was in danger of spilling over. Symbol of a jaded civilization.

Rand Bartlett was thinking solemnly of these things as he looked out over the river toward the forbidding outlines of the Palisades, the rim of the wastelands. He had forgotten the existence of the girl standing beside him at the parapet.

"Rand!" she exclaimed at length, petulantly. "Are you going to come down out of this ghastly cold night and go with me?"

"Cold?" Astonished, coming slowly out of his reverie, Bartlett looked down at the huddled-up little figure at his side. "Why, this is a wonderful night out—wonderful."

"Out! Always out. Nobody else goes on the rooftop. Why must you always be different? Besides we're due at the reception in an hour."

"Reception? What reception?"—blankly.

"Rand Bartlett, do you mean to tell me you haven't looked at your engagement book? You don't know we're going to the Ormsley's ball?"

"Engagement book! I never look at it."

"Your secretary does."

"The family secretary, you mean."

The girl's voice took on something of the crisp chill of the clear winter night. "You're not coming with me, then?"

"Listen, Rhoda; you know how I hate those affairs. Besides, I'm working on something I want to finish tonight."

Rhoda Waring's perfect oval of a face was white and set in the moonlight. "That's final?" she asked ominously.

"Of course. I'm sorry if—"

"Sorry!"—scornfully. "Then everything's over between us, Rand."

"Over? Was there anything between us?"

"Oh, you—you—you're everything my friends tell me and worse. Our families arranged years ago for our marriage, and you know it. Well, it's off now. I'll never, never marry a—a killjoy, a savage. You're a throwback, just like they said. And I'm through."

Energetically, the girl stalked off toward the nearest lift shaft, her spiked heels crunching a swift tattoo on the snow as she fled.

By Harl Vincent



Young Bartlett watched her go without emotion. When her heavily cloaked figure had vanished from view, he shrugged and moved away from the parapet in loose-jointed, leisurely fashion. An ironic smile briefly twisted the tall young man's lips.

SUPPOSEDLY a superior product of the advanced upper-level culture of the day, young Bartlett was looked upon by his family and most of his would-be highbrow associates as an atavism. He sedulously avoided the perpetual round of indolent gayety indulged in by his socially prominent mother and sisters. Had he attended but a fifth of the functions and a tenth of the resorts they prescribed, he might well have been the lion of the past several seasons. But he was a noted decliner of invitations and so forgetful of engagements forced upon him or made for him by others that society was beginning to look upon him with mistrust and disfavor. All of which was highly gratifying to him; Rand Bartlett had other ideas and ambitions.

Though a young giant in stature and of robust health, he was an egregious student. He had a passion for ancient history and for experimentation in the rudiments of science, especially the science of an older day. Although he lived in a world of utter dependence upon scientific advance, a world that could only survive through its discoveries and use of atomic power, transmutation of elements and synthesization of foods and other necessities of life, he liked to delve into the fundamentals of the sciences which had brought about these things rather than to attempt discoveries or further improvements of his own. It did not occur to him that his very heedlessness of the possibilities might well lead to something of stupendous importance. Luckily, his inheritance was such that he was able to indulge his unusual passion.

He went now to his odd but completely equipped penthouse laboratory, only a short distance from where he had stood with Rhoda. He proceeded at once to a cyclotron of the vintage of the middle twentieth century, a museum piece really. Bartlett derived much satisfaction from duplicating the elemental investigations originally made possible by this most interesting machine. He never tired of them.

Tonight he was trying one of the earliest atom-smashing experiments. The records he had of it were incomplete, but he thought he had the thing worked out correctly. He had already made up the mixture of uranium oxide and nitrogen iodide. Though not quite clear as to the proportions used in the early experiment, he was sure this was not important. Any untoward result could easily be controlled and quenched out as he had done in numerous other tests.

He set his mixture in place at the target focus of the cyclotron and went to the control panel, where he switched on the power. The hum of its enormous energy answered. He knew that within the powerful magnetic field in the vacuum chamber atomic particles were whirling with ever-increasing speed and would quickly start the neutron bombardment. There should follow the progressive explosions of uranium atoms and the resultant detonation of released nitrogen.

The result was not as anticipated. True, there was a detonation, a sharp one at first, then a brilliant blue-white radiation from the target of the apparatus. A second detonation shook the floor. Hastily, Bartlett switched off his power. He must have erred in making up the mixture. Something besides the uranium oxide and nitrogen iodide must be involved. But he had no time now to consider these possibilities. He had made a mistake, that was all.

The laboratory was thrumming to a

note of intense energy that came from a machine whose power was shut off. And the blinding light grew in brilliance. It was *cold*, that light. Ghastly, blue-white like no light Bartlett had ever seen. He dived into a drawer for dark glasses.

And then he saw it—a ball of scintillating matter, or pure energy, or whatever it was, drifting out from the cyclotron. The temperature in the laboratory was lowering perceptibly. And every object near which the weird ball of gelid light drifted seemed to evaporate and be drawn into the mass, increasing its size rapidly as it floated in midair.

Bartlett again switched the current into the coils of the powerful magnet of the cyclotron. Perhaps the eerie fireball would be drawn in where it could do no harm. He had seen a pair of pliers torn through a workman's clothes to that magnet, ripping out the strongest of pocket material. But this uncanny thing of cold light flung swiftly away from the magnetic field. It was negative matter or energy, the reverse in behavior of any known physical phenomenon. Gravity-defying, repellent magnetically. It was coming speedily toward the control panel.

One of the huge cables dissolved in a swirl of pyrotechnics that was absorbed into the rapacious maw of the drifting incredibility. The thing was now a foot in diameter. Bartlett shivered with numbing cold as he raised a steel bar from beside

the control cabinet and flung it with all his might at the approaching, all-devouring creation of his error.

Crash! The universe was rent asunder with such a burst of light and ear-splitting sound and utter frigidity as no man could bear.

Abruptly, the experimenter knew no more.

WHEN consciousness returned it came as suddenly as it had left him. Bartlett experienced no pain or discomfort of any kind. He was alive and well, normal. But there was no wrecked cyclotron, no laboratory, no snow-covered rooftop, no moon or stars overhead. And still he was in the open, standing on a carpetlike surface in soft, sweetly scented night air. The rippling waters of a lake were at his feet. Across the body of water, almost on a level with his eyes, there were a myriad ordered rows of twinkling lights. He saw his shadow faintly on the ripples before him; there was light at his back. He wheeled about.

He faced a scene from one of the old twentieth century history reels. A broad, smoothly paved avenue, flanked by tall leafy growths such as they had called trees in those ancient days. Beyond the trees were rows of lights along a second pavement from which branch pavements led to steps that were attached to separate dwelling places. Houses, they had called these.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 48 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the

invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 11, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 11, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

Homes!

It was a far cry from the cubicles of the upper levels of New York, from the speedy lifts and moving catwalks and angling belt conveyors. Here there was peace and quiet. Before him were homes, homes with squares of cozily lighted transparency that faced him welcomingly. Each house had a broad railed-in platform surrounding its front and one side. The sound of multitudinous night insect life was wafted on the aromatic breeze.

Bartlett felt as if he had awakened from one dream into another. In the light of the street lamps he looked down and saw with a start of amazement that he was attired in strange clothing. Instead of his usual purple doublet, shorts and sandals, he wore an outlandish two-piece garb of coarse, neutral-hued material. Long cylinders of the stuff, pressed to a knife-edge in front, encased his lower limbs. A loose jacket, with sleeves, covered his upper portion. Beneath this there was a soft white shirt with a comfortable open neck. On his feet were heavy-soled shoes that covered them entirely.

It came to him now that his experiment which had gone wrong somehow had served to hurl him back some three hundred years in time. He was in a suburb of one of the twentieth century cities. And a distinctly high class suburb. Only recently he had seen and listened to one of the old videovocal reels of life during this period. But how had his experiment accomplished what scientists for centuries had despaired of—travel in time? And how was it that his own clothing had been replaced by the bulky and impractical garments of this early age?

While contemplating the bizarre possibilities, he was dazzled by a double beam of light that swept around a nearby corner and focussed down the avenue before him. He saw that the twin lights were mounted on a four-wheeled vehicle that rolled noiselessly to the front of the house

directly across from him and came to a stop. It was what had been called an automobile in the days to which he had been so mysteriously transported.

A GIRL was getting out of the vehicle, a girl in a flowing garment that fitted her slender figure only about the waist and breasts, its skirted portion rather voluminous and extending below the knees. The girl wore a small, pert head covering that shadowed her features from the glare of the street lamps, but Bartlett saw that her face was turned his way as she stepped to the pavement.

"Why, Rand!" she called out, and ran to where he stood.

"You—you know my name?" he asked wonderingly.

"Of course. Don't be silly, Rand." The girl hooked a smooth white arm through his and looked up into his face laughingly. She was breath-taking in a fresh beauty the like of which Bartlett had never seen. Her nearness, the faint breath of her perfume, were intoxicating. "You must come in," she continued naturally. "You'll catch cold."

Something mighty queer here. Bartlett felt like pinching himself to make sure he was awake. She thought she knew him, this swell girl. Was he a reincarnation of someone living in the period? Or was this something psychic? Was his coming expected? Or was he just screwy?

Nothing loath, he squeezed the arm and found it soft and warm; he followed willingly as the girl dragged him up the steps and across the porch to the door. The automobile was being driven away by the man Rand had seen at the wheel and who had not gotten out.

The girl inserted a metal object into a slot of the door and it clicked open; it was not voice-operated like the doors to which he was accustomed. But it worked, and it opened into the coziest, most homey series of rooms that Bartlett had ever seen.

They were strange and new to him, yet somehow dimly familiar. A stair was on his right; this too was somehow familiar. Down the stair drifted a feminine voice, gentle and smooth—caressing, almost.

"Is that you, Betty?" it called.

"Yes, Mother," the girl replied. "And Rand's with me."

"Oh, I wondered where he was," the voice came back. "I haven't seen him for more than an hour. Are you all right, Rand?"

Bartlett gulped. "Y-yes. All right." These people cared something about him. More than ever mystified, he knew he would have to play up to whatever this was he had stumbled into.

The girl had removed her hat and was arranging the soft waves of her golden hair before a mirror. Laughing, rosy-cheeked reflection, girl herself; both were beautiful. Her name was Betty! Unconsciously, Bartlett rolled the syllables over his tongue. He must have done it aloud, for the girl turned her great eyes on him questioningly. What she saw in his gaze caused her flush to deepen.

"What is it, Rand?" she asked softly.

That completed his captivation.

"I—I'd just like to sit somewhere with you and talk," he said.

She came very close now and grasped the lapels of his jacket, looking up into his eyes searchingly. An almost irresistible impulse to kiss those upturned red lips came to Rand Bartlett, who rarely before had been seized with such an impulse. Certainly Betty was different from the calculating, pleasure-mad girls of his own sphere.

Something flamed in her blue eyes as they regarded him. "Why, Rand!" she exclaimed delightedly. "You've changed. I—I believe you're yourself again. You bet we'll talk. Come on."

Gaily she led him by the hand. Down the hall, a turn to the right, through a door and out on the side porch. All of

which was, strangely, familiar to Bartlett. He was more and more puzzled.

THEY were seated then in a wide seat that depended from chains. This, too, was in Bartlett's memory as a thing he had done before. But something inexplicable still held him back; he would have to be very careful what he said. He had sat there before at Betty's side; this was not the first time he had thrilled to her nearness. But when? How?

"Betty," he asked, holding the soft hand which, miraculously, was still there, "if I ask strange questions, please try and understand?"

"Why, of course." The girl looked up wide-eyed in the light of the street lamps. "I understand more than you know."

"You—you do? Well, tell me then: how long have you known me?"

"Let me see." She counted prettily on her fingers. "Ten days."

"What is the date?"

"Oh, I know what you're driving at. Why, it's December twentieth, 2247, Rand."

So he had *not* gone back in time! But he had no memory whatever of the past ten days. Ten days since the night his experiment went haywire, yet he was in a replica of the twentieth century. What had happened? How could it be that there was a place on earth where conditions such as had existed then still maintained in the twenty-third century? There could be only one explanation.

Bartlett had heard the theory that there were worlds and worlds possible of existence simultaneously and occupying the same space. Worlds that might be likened to other dimensions, worlds in which planes of vibration differed or where atomic structures were along quite different lines or where the motion of electrons about their nuclei were in dissimilar directions. That was what had happened to him. Unknowingly, unintentionally, he

had in his experiment so altered his own atomic structure that he had slipped into this other world coëxistent with his own. Strangely it was at the stage of development of his own world of three centuries gone. Strangely, too, the language here was his own—English. There must be a way of explaining even that. He would proceed cautiously until he learned more of his surroundings. Certainly he wanted nothing to transpire which would remove Betty from those surrounding or himself from her vicinity. He feared even to close his eyes lest he might find her gone when he opened them. Her eyes were starry in the dim light; they were laughing at him now, he saw.

Why don't you say something?" she asked mischievously.

"I was thinking,"—gravely.

"I'll say you were. Of what?"

"Of my—what would you call it?—lapse of memory."

"Oh, Rand, I'm glad you know. Amnesia, father says it was. Do you remember now, remember anything at all?" Betty was obviously much pleased over this development.

"I remember everything up to December tenth. All is a blank after that until I came to myself on the shore out in front a half hour ago."

Betty sounded disappointed. "Then you recall nothing of the past ten days, of your stay here?"

"Dimly only. The place is slightly familiar; your mother's voice as it came down the stairs had a familiar ring. You, Betty, I feel as if I had known forever."

The girl brightened. "I'm glad you've not forgotten—everything," she breathed.

"I'll never forget again," vowed Bartlett. "But, tell me: how did I get here?" He was treading on dangerous ground now, he feared.

Betty's brow clouded. "I'd rather not tell you about that. In fact, I don't know very much myself, except that you were

badly dazed and in terribly soiled and torn purple clothes—"

Bartlett looked down at the clothing he wore. The girl laughed. "Dad gave you the change of clothing," she explained. "And we've kept you here ever since. Dad'll be in soon; he's putting the car away. He can tell you much more than I can."

Steps could be heard at the rear of the house; there was the slam of a door back there. "Betty," Bartlett said. "Betty."

"What?"—softly in the half-light.

"I—I told you I felt as if I'd known you always."

"Yes. You did."

"I do feel that way. Betty, would it make a great deal of difference to you if you knew I came from a different world, a world so much unlike yours—"

"Why, Rand, I do know. You don't have to tell me that. Of course it doesn't make any difference."

"Betty!" It was not Bartlett who spoke her name, though he had been on the point of doing so—in a different tone. Her father had called from inside the house.

Betty sighed regretfully. "Yes, Dad," she sang out.

"Is Rand with you?"

"Yes, Dad, on the porch."

"Send him in; I want to talk to him."

There was an ominous sound to those words. Bartlett sensed it; he knew that Betty had reacted to it, too—he could tell from the trembling of her soft hand in his fingers, from the protective little way she drew closer to him, from the quiver of her upturned lips. Impulsively, he bent down and kissed those lips, thrilled to their glad response.

Then: "Coming, Sir," he called, and was on his feet. Betty squeezed his fingers as he entered the house.

RAND BARTLETT remembered vaguely the features of the husky, gray-haired man who faced him in the

hall. And in this dim memory of the man there was a feeling of antagonism, slight but nevertheless there.

"Hello, Rand," boomed the man.

"Hello, Doctor." Somehow he recalled even that they had termed him doctor; what the last name was still eluded him.

"Come into my office." The doctor led the way into an inner room that Bartlett definitely had seen before. This memory was unpleasant. "Sit down, Rand."

The younger man sat across the desk from Betty's father, who peered intently at him, then suddenly leaned forward and waved a capable square hand before his eyes.

Bartlett blinked.

"Ah!" The older man leaned back in his chair and tapped the desk top thoughtfully. "So you've come out of it," he commented. "Rand, do you recall anything of the past ten days?"

"A little, Sir—not much."

"Recall what you were doing before you—er—came here?"

"Yes, experimenting in my own laboratory back—there."

"Know where you are?"

"Only that I'm in another world. A different one from my own."

The doctor smiled grimly. "Yes, quite a different world."

"But not so different, after all, the younger man said eagerly.

"Very different, I should say. The doctor's tone was uncompromising, his eyes suddenly hard. "Rand, the time has come for you to return."

"Go back—now?"

"Yes, now. No one can say that Harvey Denis ever failed to take proper care of a patient or that he ever turned a human being out of his home. But you'll have to return to your own world."

"But—"

"Listen, boy." Doctor Denis set his jaw firmly. "I know what's in your mind; it's Betty. You think you love her. Well,

you can't have her. No man from your God-forsaken world can ever have her. And you're to go back before she falls in love with you."

"But, Doctor, I can't help it if originally my atomic structure was different, if my vibrations were on another plane; whatever was different about me is now altered. When I came into this plane it was by accident, but I couldn't have come if there wasn't the change to adapt me to this plane of existence, could I?"

The doctor stared. "What in hell are you talking about? Planes, vibrations, atomic structure; God knows what. Are you completely crazy? I thought it was only a touch of amnesia; perhaps I was wrong."

"I'm *not* crazy. You know very well that two objects can not occupy the same place at the same time unless on differing vibrational planes or unless these bodies have different atomic arrangement so that there will be no collisions nor interference between the swiftly moving constituent particles."

IT SEEMED that the black eyes of Doctor Denis were about to pop out through his horn-rimmed spectacles. He stared with lower jaw hanging.

"Anyway, how are you going to send me back?" Bartlett asked him triumphantly. "The process is irreversible. And no one knows how it's done in the first place. I don't even know how I got here."

Suddenly the doctor's laugh rang loud and long. He laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks; he laughed until young Bartlett reddened to the ears. He could feel the flush spreading and, as his embarrassment increased, his anger rose.

"I don't know what you think is so incredibly funny," he shouted finally. "But if it's something about me I wish you'd tell me."

Betty's father sobered instantly. "Why, you young idiot," he snapped. "If you

had lived three centuries ago I'd say you'd been reading fantastic fiction. Other planes, other dimensions! You're on good old mother earth, not in another plane of vibrations or any such fool impossible place. And you're going back where you belong before I laugh myself sick in bed."

"I'm on earth?"

"Well, in it, then. Listen, boy, you're not going to know just where you are. I'll tell you this much: you're in an under-surface world in an enormous cavern that lies beneath what used to be northern Canada. We who people it are descended from those who escaped the great madness and destruction of the middle twentieth century and decided to remain forever apart from the warring races of the outer world. We've prospered and multiplied and we've kept peace. And we haven't penned ourselves in huge cities where fifty million people live by the efforts of twice as many robots and where they eat synthetic food and live synthetic lives. Where *your* class, those of the purple, browbeat those of the gray and where there is forever strife and greed and lust and debilitating pleasure-seeking. We're what remains of the upper middle class of three centuries ago; their product, rather. Product of the class squeezed out of surface existence between the upper and nether millstones of plutocracy and labor. We've been happy down here for three hundred years and we intend to stay that way."

Chagrined, Bartlett sat through this long speech of the doctor's. There were many things he still did not understand. And the ridicule of the older man had not contributed to an improved state of his mind.

"How does it happen," he asked meekly enough, "that this place is unknown to the outside world? How did I get here?"

"I'll answer your last question first." The doctor pointed to a television receiver. "We keep in touch with your world

even though it does not suspect the existence of ours. Through their telecasts up there we learned of your interrupted experiment. They're still hunting for you. You staggered to the camouflaged entrance to our domain in a daze, hurt and ragged, the first man of the outside to stumble upon the spot in three centuries. What led you here, God alone knows. At any rate, the lone sentry took you in and we learned later through the telecasts who you were and what occurred."

Bartlett shook his head. "I still don't get it," he admitted. He could not yet disabuse himself of the coexistent worlds idea.

"When you were reported missing there was an investigation. They found your skyplane gone and your laboratory upset. Experts deduced that you had been experimenting with neutron bombardment of nitrogen iodide and that, through an error in compounding, you had produced not the detonation you sought but a large volume of nitrous oxide. You were overcome with laughing gas, that was all. Evidently you were under a mental strain. Amnesia came with your return to consciousness and you set off in your skyplane, just starting anywhere at all. By accident you landed here and we were fools enough to take you in. That's all."

YOUNG BARTLETT thought long and deeply over this. His ideas of the ball of cold fire then had been only figments of his imagination. And his subsequent thoughts of travel backward in time or from one dimension to another still more ridiculous imaginings. There was but one thing real, one thing important in the entire experience—Betty Denis. He would not give her up without a fight.

"Do you insist that I go back, Doctor?" he asked.

"Absolutely. It's a risk to us, of course.

Naturally, you'll talk. But we'll blindfold you and you'll not know the location of our retreat. It must be kept inviolate and it shall be."

"But I don't want to go back." Rand Bartlett stood up with sudden decision. "You're right; I love Betty. And I hate the very things you've criticised about my world, the strife, the hypocrisy, the madness of the upper levels, the despair and poverty of the lower ones. You have an Utopia here that's what I've dreamed of ever since I can remember. I'll be a good citizen if you allow me to remain. And I'll be good to Betty if I can win her."

"Rand!" Betty rushed in like a miniature whirlwind and was in Bartlett's arms. Together they bravely faced the doctor.

"If he goes back, I go with him," she stormed at her father. "I'd like to do something for the mid-level wearers of the gray anyway." She turned and buried her head in young Bartlett's shirt front. "Oh, Rand," she whispered, "I know you'd want to stay."

Doctor Denis looked quizzically over his daughter's shoulder at the interloper

whose arms now held her so tightly. His cheeks puffed out as if he were about to explode and he heaved up in his chair as if to hurdle his desk and tear the two apart.

Then he sank back with a chuckle.

"I guess you'll do, young man," he approved. "Though I still think you're a damn fool. We can use a good scientist here. There's the daylight and nighttime illumination to improve, the weather simulating apparatus, the subterranean farming, a host of things that will keep you busy—including Betty. But we've easier and less disturbing ways of producing nitrous oxide than yours."

"You leave him alone," Betty whispered in a voice that was muffled in the hollow of young Bartlett's neck. "He's—" The rest was lost in a call that echoed down from the upper regions of the cozy house.

"Harvey!"

Doctor Denis chuckled once more as he rose to answer. "Which reminds me," he told the unheeding couple, "that I owe mother a box of candy. She made a bet it would turn out this way."

THE END



THE SHADOW OVER OUR NEXT PRESIDENT

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He will ??????????

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FLIGHT TO GALILEO

CHAPTER ONE

Emergency Call

“THERE is a large block of sentiment in favor of sending out a force to quiet the disturbances among the asteroids, to return the lost colonies to the control of Earth, where they belong,” said the radio.

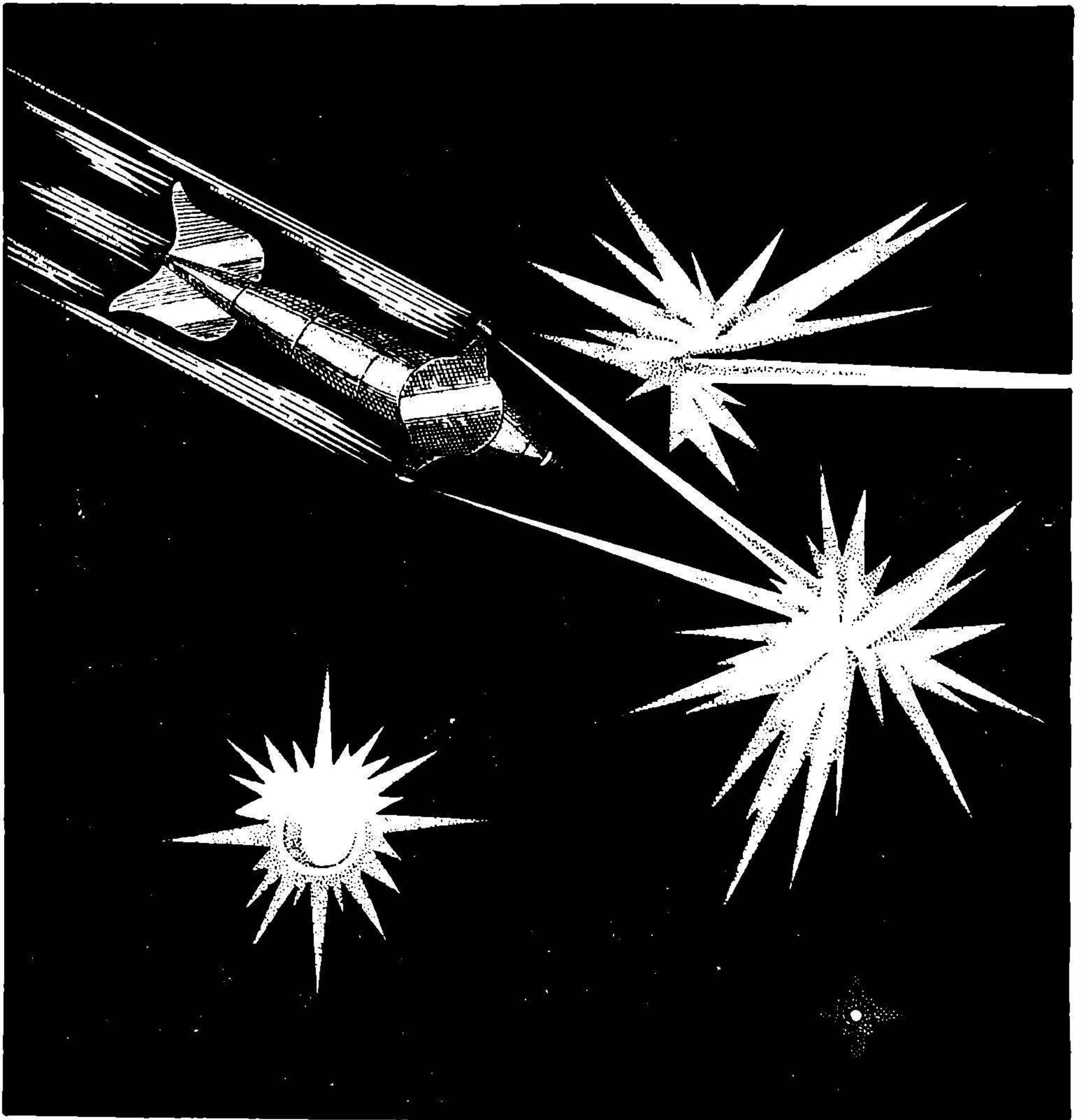
“Rubbish!” snapped Bern Ryder, silencing the unseen speaker by flicking in another station. “They’d get their noses

bitten off. The asteroids are tough.”

“It was a mistake to let them go in the first place.” Richard Flemming’s voice drifted out from behind the complex switchboard. The upper part of his body was buried in the machinery while he worked with pliers and welding tools.

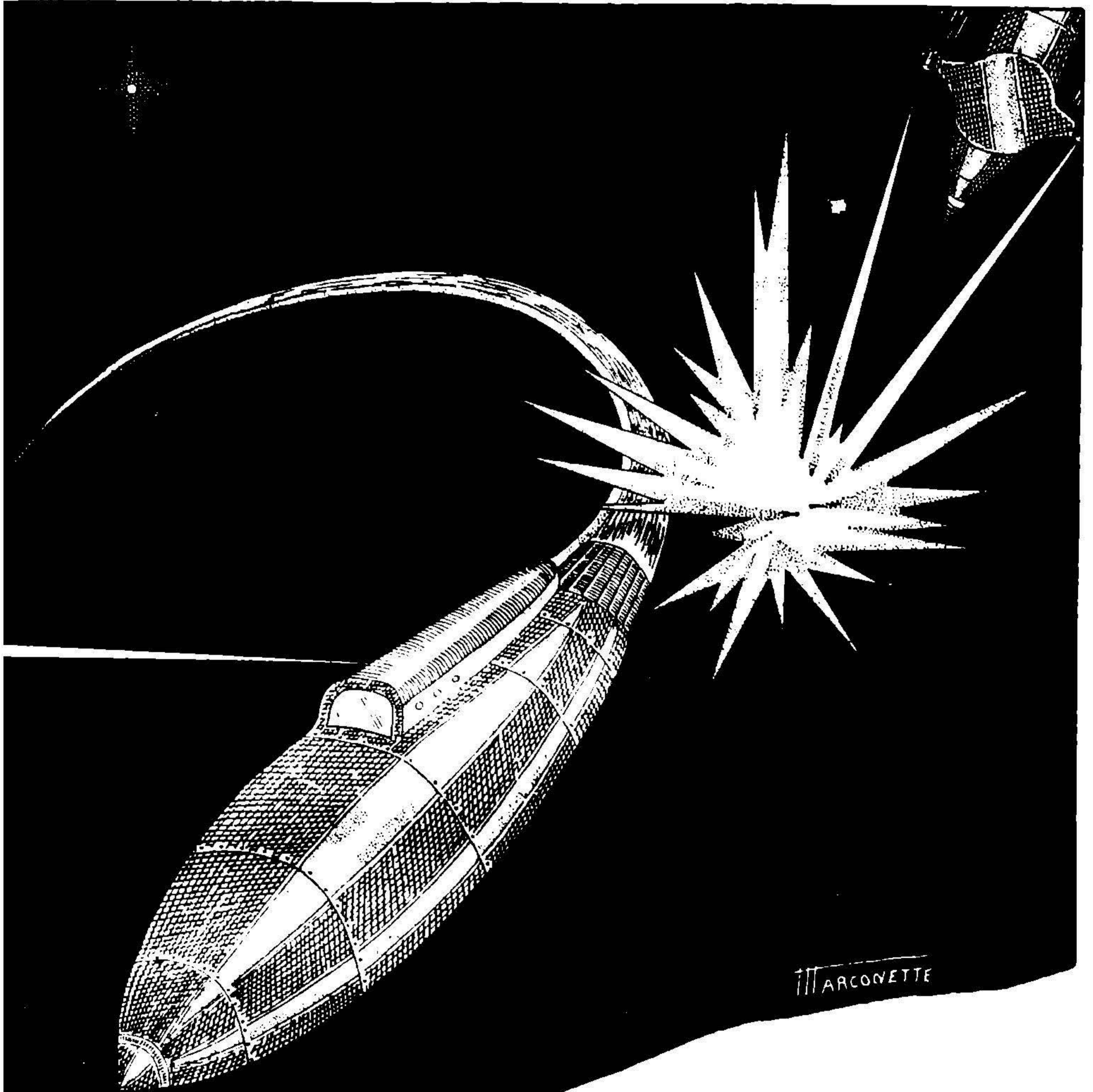
“Ridiculous!” Ryder seemed to give each sentence a push with the first outspat word. “They couldn’t do anything else.”

“Consider the condition that existed at



the time of the colonization of the asteroids." The voice from the radio came in as if it had been rehearsed. "There was a group of tiny worlds, each with its little settlement of the most intelligent and hardy men in the system, each with its

own artificial gravity and atmosphere. At the beginning, a ship would set out from Earth or Mars perhaps once a month; each colony was lucky if it was visited once in six months. These men were too intelligent and too individualistic to allow a dis-



Bern Ryder was a *little* man to think of trying to save the Science Colony on Galileo—but a scientist, whatever his physical size, is really as big as his biggest creation.

By Lee Gregor

tant government to keep control over them; they simply allowed the bonds to slide loose, and set up whatever system happened to be most convenient to them at the time.

"No one could do anything about it. A ship coming up there once a half year—in that time so much could happen on the asteroids that control from the earth was impossible. And even if someone wanted to do something about it, there were no battleships with which to apply force. The space ships then were too delicately organized to allow the extra weight of weapons and armor.

"And now that war craft are available, the colonies have grown from the status of colonies. They are independent states, each with its own economic system and form of government. And what they do is no business of . . ." Click, the radio was off.

"The asteroids! We hear nothing except the asteroids." That came from Flemming, behind the big oil switch, a little below the rack of oscillator tubes. "Squabbling little upstart states. Capitalistic Sandrona at sword-points with Communistic Leninovdra, presumably for reasons of principle. Regimentation of souls, and all that sort of thing. When it's really because Leninovdra has beryllium that Sandrona wants. Christiana on the warpath against pagan, feudalistic DeVoybus—but really because DeVoybus has uranium. And Adriana wants the fantastic crystals of Christiana for the jewelry they're nutty about. The whole bunch working at cross purposes, because they all want, want, want, and the others won't give. They should be united. We should do it."

"Just like that." Ryder snapped his fingers. "When each one of those settlements has arms and protection that a space ship couldn't possibly beat down. A ship just can't carry enough power or armor. And you know they won't listen to conciliation. They are each too intense-

ly nationalistic. It will take a long time, or something very big, to make them get together."

"Let's forget it, then, and get on with the final testing." Flemming squirmed out of the switchboard, stood up straight. He towered a full two heads above Ryder. Not that Flemming was particularly tall. Ryder was small and compact, with hands that were delicately muscled like a musician's; black, curly hair that persisted in hanging over his right eye.

FLEMMING flicked over a tiny tumbler switch that was answered by the thud of a relay somewhere behind the panel. Three pilot lights went on.

Ryder ran his hands over the metal form that stood in the center of the room. Gently, caressingly. His hands knew every centimeter of the surface, for they had made the machine. The skillful hands had fashioned the delicacy of the finger joints, the complexity of the electro-neural system, the multitude of motors and mechanisms that gave the machine motion. The ingenious eyes that surpassed human optics. The mouth that spoke when impulses came through a wire from somewhere. The ears that heard sound and sent impulses through a wire to go somewhere. Somewhere. That was the main thing. It wasn't a brain. It wasn't a mind. But there was going to be a mind in it later.

"You don't have a mind yet, old thing, but you will have soon," Ryder spoke to the mechanical body. For it was a robot, you know,—tall, of shiny black metal. "A mind will be pushed into you. Not a brain; not the mushy piece of protoplasm that's the storage battery for the mess of forces known as the human mind. But the forces themselves will go into the artificial battery; then you'll be the person—whatever it is."

"Stop talking to yourself, little one." Flemming hardly wasted a glance on Ryder. "Let's get some work done."

“Okay.” Ryder said it so that it was hardly audible. If Flemming had looked at Ryder when he had spoken, he might have seen the dark little man wince when his size had been so lightly and thoughtlessly mentioned. Ryder moved back from the robot to the testing instruments, and the manner in which his eyes pointed towards Flemming was not right for one who was a friendly fellow-worker in research.

The big oil switch gave a sudden thump; a bank of meters surged in unison. The laboratory was silent, except for the faint clicking of the recording instruments and the sharp signals that Flemming whispered at each move. The circuits to be tested were of a complexity difficult to imagine. The two spent a long time in that room of gleaming metal and glass and flowing energy. Their work could not be merely a matter of conceiving and making a machine, and then trying it to see if it would work. A human mind was the stake in the gamble, and it was test, test, test, before they were satisfied.

Wa-a-a-. The buzzer was shrill. Flemming looked up irritably; Ryder gave a curt exclamation. Ryder was all sharpness and bluster again, and he didn't look like the little man who had flinched and shrank at a word from Flemming a moment ago.

They'd cut out the regular door signal; they didn't want to be disturbed, but a spot of light burned a steady red now. It was an emergency.

Flemming walked over and pulled the door open. A battery of feet clattering down the hall suddenly crescendoed. “What's up?” Flemming and Ryder found themselves in the crowd making for the escalators. How they'd gotten mixed in the mob was rather confusing. There they'd been, perfectly innocent bystanders, until tubby Rubinstein and heroically statured Nicotera had surged by, and they'd been lost in the wake. Rubinstein and Nicotera looked less like physicists

than almost anyone you could mention, but they were a pair you couldn't beat.

No, you would have to look pretty far to find a pair that knew more about their field of work than they did, and you'd have to look still farther to find an assortment of brains equal to that bunch in the Research Building. In fact, you would have to go clear out to the asteroids—to the Science Colony on Galileo.

CHAPTER TWO

“Can You Help Us?”

“WHAT'S up? What's up?” Nobody knew, and everybody asked everyone else, until the crowd of erudite intelligences streamed into the assembly hall as wondering as a bunch of freshmen on their first day in school.

The Chief of the association—he was called Chief, but all he seemed to do was to call meetings to order and read announcements that came every once in a while—the Chief was rather breathless, and the miniature crowd that weighted the platform was white of face.

“Gentlemen, please be seated. All right, then, stand if you will.” He waved the paper in his hand as if he weren't quite sure whether it was a Japanese fan or a handkerchief with which to bid someone farewell. He mopped his brow, which was a libel on the perfectly functioning air-conditioning. He suddenly emitted a gasp and sat down, himself.

Reuning, the big, pompous biologist, moved impatiently. His eyes were red. He'd been at the microscope for five hours, and the sudden grate of the emergency buzzer had caused him to ruin a slide, in addition to giving his nerves a bad jolt.

An elevator load of men flowed into the room. Some irritated by the interruption, some vaguely amused. They all wanted to know what it was about. What was going on, and when they could get back to work.

They never could take that emergency signal seriously since the last time it had been used. That was the time a little pine snake had sneaked out of one of the biology labs, into Johnson's chemistry lab. Out of all the labs in the building the critter had to pick that one—and Johnson mortally afraid of snakes of any size and color. When the mob found where the signal was coming from and sped to the rescue, they found Johnson atop a table, besieged by the reptile amid the wreckage of broken glass and overturned bottles. Johnson still has a murderous dislike for certain organic chemicals, flasks of which he brilliantly chose to overturn at that moment.

Johnson didn't think it was very funny, but thereafter, when the signal went off and fond memories were evoked, the atmosphere did not contain as much tense expectancy as would have been proper.

"Millard, you read them. I'm too jittery." Smitty, the Chief, handed a bundle of paper to Millard, the famous engineering research man. They'd elected Smitty Chief because he could say "The meeting will please come to order," more beautifully than any of the others. They hadn't really expected him to do anything, so when something had to be done they found themselves in a hole. Afterwards, the group who had supported Ross for Chief, said I told you so, that they shouldn't make jokes out of such serious things as elections. But try to tell a bunch of scientists not to make jokes out of anything that is outside science.

MILLARD cleared his throat. He was an engineer; the pure scientists purported to despise him, but he was able to make things. That was more than some of the others could do.

"Three radio messages have come from the Asteroids. Two are general news broadcasts. The third is directed to us, and is the reason for this special meeting.

No messages have come since. None can come, and none can leave, for the ether is blocked with interference." Millard paused and looked steadily at the faces before him. He was a good orator even when not speaking; in a few moments the group began to catch on that the emergency buzzers hadn't joked this time.

"The first," Millard read, "from Cardwell City on Ceres, about half a million miles from Brenn. Quote: 'A spaceship of unusual size was seen to take off from Brenn. From its direction, and from rumors that have been traveling about the asteroids, it is believed that the ship is heading for the science colony at Galileo. Its purpose is officially unknown.' Unquote. The second," Millard ran on with hardly a pause, "From Kleerol, about a million miles from Brenn, more in the direction of Galileo. Quote: 'A large spaceship left Brenn at hour zero with constant acceleration of one gravity in the direction of Galileo. Rumors indicate that the ship is up to no good—for Galileo.' Unquote. And now the message from Galileo itself."

Nobody seemed to have moved, but where there had been a bunch of annoyed, amused, growling, laughing men lounging about the four corners of the room, was now a compact group of grim scientists clustered silently at the foot of the platform.

"This came on our own private, tight-beam, scrambled phone hook-up, just before the interference broke it up. Quote: 'Report just received of take-off from Brenn. Brenn is after our ore deposits. Also unconfirmed rumors that Brenn is after consolidation of asteroids under Brenn. We believe that plans for the electron-proton projector discussed last month with Rubinstein and Nicotera have been copied by agent from Brenn, and, since only we two asteroids know the weapon, Brenn is out to see that only one

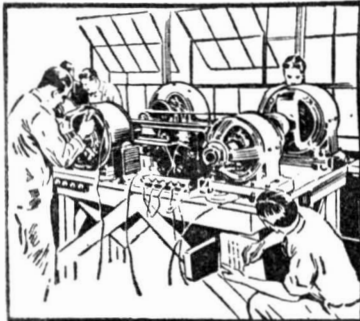
(Continued on page 94)

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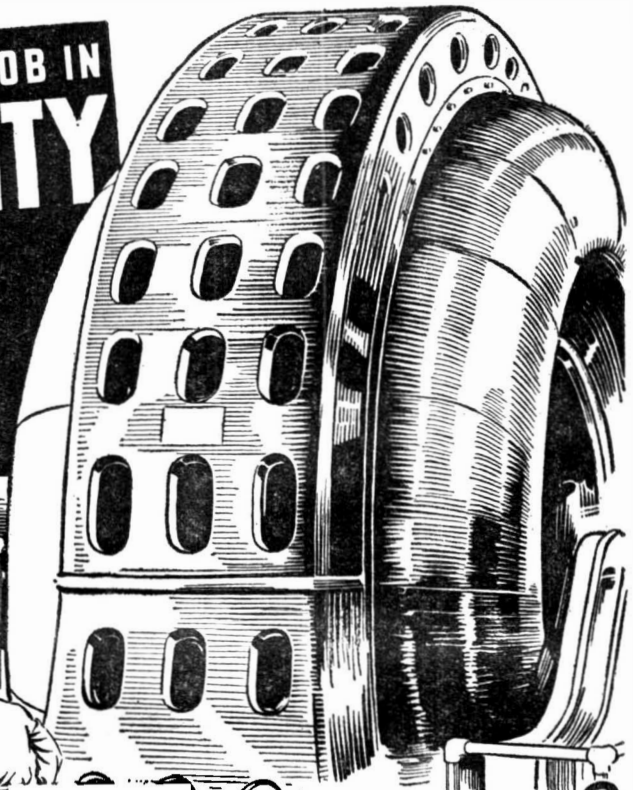
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(Continued from page 92)

asteroid remains with the weapon. We are building an opposing field generator, but have no time to manufacture special tubes; the ones on hand will give way after five hours. Can you help us?' Unquote."

Can you help us? The Terrestrial Institute of Science and the Galileo Science Colony. Mock rivals, squabbling at every turn—on the surface. But no knowledge one learned was a secret from the other. And when one needed help it knew who to ask.

Can you help us? A cluster of great domed buildings surrounded by a fairyland of parks: the science colony. Not a fortress of war. The power they had gushed through instruments of science, not fighting machines.

The best brains in the system were working out there on that little world at tasks that were unfamiliar to them: defense. Even the best brains can be conquered by lesser brains when the lesser brains are out to get what they want. Perhaps with—this is the joke—forces that the best brains have invented.

MILLARD spoke flatly and decisively. "Our own government washes its hands clean. It will not spend any ships of its own to help a group with which it has nothing to do. Anyway, the asteroids are too far away to get help there in time. Moreover, Brenn is conducting a trade treaty with our own government. Which means that anything we do will have to be done by ourselves on our own hook.

"I propose that we immediately organize ourselves into a committee to declare war upon Brenn and combat them with all the scientific means at our disposal. Does anyone object to my acting as chairman of the committee?" No one did. Millard was hitting on all cylinders, and he could get the facts straight better than any other.

"Rubinstein, what weapon is this that the message mentions?"

"We didn't think of it as a weapon," Rubinstein lamely began. Scientists rarely think of that. "It's got plenty of power. Ten times more than a neutron or ion blast. You disintegrate piles of matter to get piles of energy to separate electrons from protons of matter. You shoot them off in parallel beams, and you keep them from coalescing by means of a force field. That's the rub to the situation. When the thing hits something the electrons and protons come together, and where you would have neutrons formed you get cosmic rays. And all the energy of all the matter disintegrated comes out at once. Wow!" The last was either descriptive, or a result of saying the entire speech with one breath.

"And the defense?" Millard had to think of everything.

"Oppose the field of force that holds the two beams apart, let them come together before they reach the target. Takes loads of power. No wonder their tubes won't hold up. Ten times more powerful than any neutron or ion blast. Oh, lots more powerful."

No wonder a lone ship could hope to defeat an asteroid.

"Aren't Brenn, Ceres, and Kleerol rather close together? Half a million miles isn't much." That came from Richard Flemming, and the group stared.

Bern Ryder began to look interested. When Flemming started asking questions that apparently had nothing to do with what was going on, it meant that Flemming was starting to dribble bubbles from his think-tank.

"They're part of a group. Ceres, Brenn, Kleerol, Astor, and two others I can't remember. But what does that have to do with anything?" Millard demanded.

"How far is Galileo from Brenn?" Flemming persisted, this began to be getting more to the point.

"Twenty million miles, about," Millard answered.

Flemming had the inevitable slide rule out of his coat pocket and was working away, mumbling to himself. "At one gravity, or 32 feet per second per second, that means approximately thirty two hours for the trip. The enemy has been en route one hour, which leaves thirty one. Gentlemen, do any of you know how we can reach Galileo, which at this season is approximately two hundred million miles away, in thirty one hours?"

They had all suspected that, but Flemming needn't have rubbed it in.

"If we don't get to Galileo in time we'll get to Brenn later on." The promise came from the middle of the room and remained unidentified. It meant one thing: that each person in the group was slowly and gradually getting mad. Those men didn't do things suddenly. It took them time. But when they did get mad the results wouldn't be nice at all. Those men knew a thing or two, even though they were merely scientists; and they had a few toys lying about the labs that no one had thought of putting to practical use. Killing people isn't practical, but—Constantine, Galileo's chief astronomer had been a roommate of Fisher, chemist at the Institute. Hummel, the lanky chemist up on the asteroid, had been pals with Flemming way back when. They'd all gone to school together, and the sounds of Ray for Dear Old Tech could still quicken a pulse and moisten an eye.

So when Brenn marched in on Galileo she also declared war on the Terrestrial Institute of Science.

CHAPTER THREE

Robot

AT THE moment, however, the thirty one hours and two hundred million miles seemed an insurmountable obstacle.

Flemming continued his cross-examination. "What ship available will take the

highest acceleration, and what acceleration?"

Millard began to be irritated by Flemming's air of mystery. "Our own *Bluebird's* as good as any. She'll do over fifteen gravities. Past that, delicate parts begin to be overstrained. And I suppose, my dear superman, that you are going to fly to Galileo under fifteen gravities and do a one man rescue. As a messy pulp you wouldn't get much rescuing done."

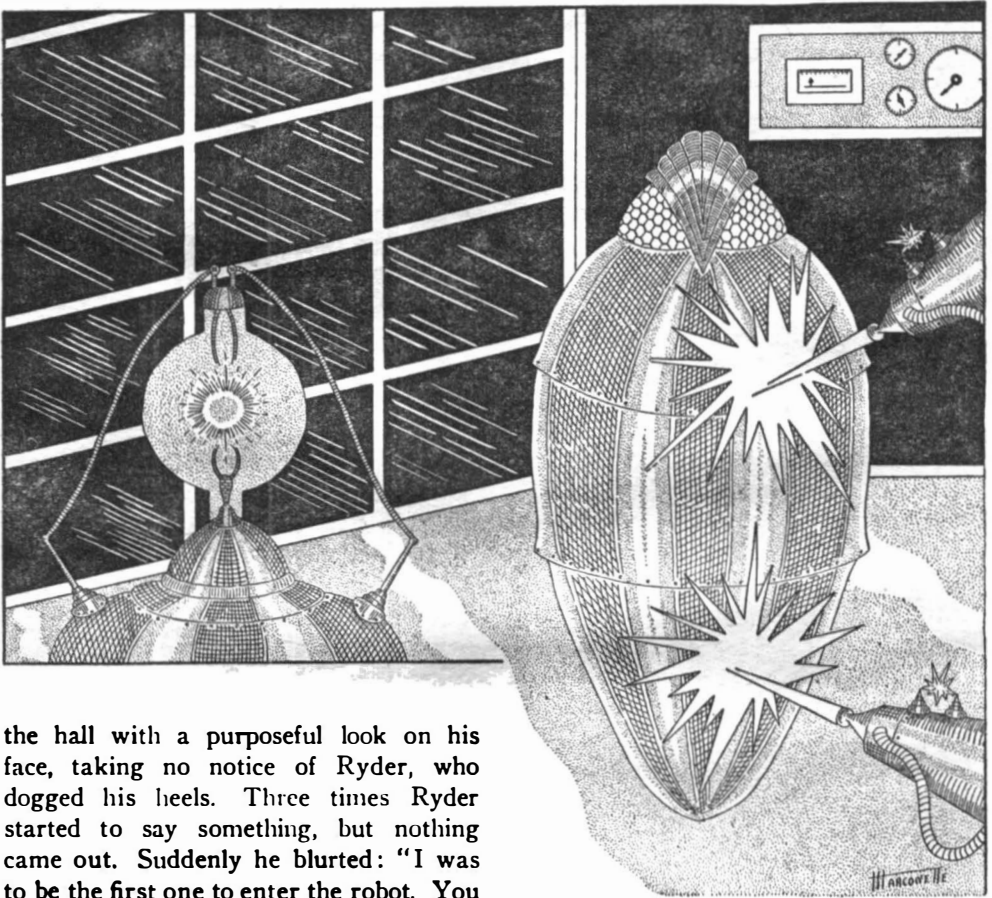
Flemming continued to mumble over his slipstick. "Fifteen gravities will do very nicely. Two hundred million miles in twenty six hours, very approximately. Giving a five hour difference, and adding another four or five hours for their defense to hold up, means that we've got to get under way in less than nine hours, that we've got to work fast. Ryder, get out own stuff ready. Rubinstein and Nicotera make your weapon. Millard, prepare the *Bluebird*; I'll race the enemy to Galileo and get there in time to lick them with their own weapon."

"Wait a second, Flemming," Millard objected violently. "I'm only chairman of this outfit, but I would like to know what's going on. If you know what you're doing, that is. Perhaps you don't."

"It's like two and two, Millard. We have to get help to Galileo. We have a ship that will do it, and we have a weapon to use; but a man can't do it without being crushed to a pulp. Ryder and I have a robot. A metal body that will contain a mind and that will take the fifteen gravity acceleration without a murmur. What could be simpler?"

Millard rapped for order. "All right, then. Since no other plan of action is forthcoming, we will proceed immediately. All of you who have anything to do know it. The rest will keep out of the way." Millard stepped off the platform and strode away.

Flemming and Ryder left the crowded room. Flemming walked swiftly down



the hall with a purposeful look on his face, taking no notice of Ryder, who dogged his heels. Three times Ryder started to say something, but nothing came out. Suddenly he blurted: "I was to be the first one to enter the robot. You promised me. You can't break your promise just like that."

Flemming didn't look around. "You're awfully anxious to take on a lot of danger. What do you know about space navigation? You'd never come back. I've got little enough chance myself."

"You've got plenty of excuses," Ryder persisted. "But you only want to be a hero and pull it off single handed."

"My God, shrimp!" Flemming stopped short and turned upon Ryder, who seemed to shrivel at the words. "The way you can act like a baby is nauseating."

AND that ended that. What could Ryder say? How could he tell Flemming that the reason he wanted to use the robot was because he had always been so

little, and everything about his nature was warped because he had always been so little, and now he wanted to be big. That's why he had loved making the robot so much: it was so big and strong. And when the time came that it would be finished and ready for his habitation, then *he* would be big, and he wouldn't be stopped by anything.

Ryder absently stared at the brain case that lay complete on one of the tables as they entered the lab. It was bare and unadorned; the contact wires stuck out like tentacles. The two arms were neatly ranged beside it, with the torso still a skeleton of metal.

Flemming was shedding his clothes. There was a body to be taken care of

when the mind was in the robot. That little detail had cost them almost as much trouble as the robot itself. The biology staff at the Institute had finally taken charge, and built them a suspended animation freezing chamber.

So Flemming got frozen. That was pretty routine, and Ryder had nothing to do but watch dials and push buttons, while the other nine-tenths of his mind was elsewhere. About the time the mind transportation had to be carried out, Ryder was decided on what he, himself, was going to do. Then he was ready to give all his attention to the big job.

It was unspectacular. The things that went on were hidden among shielded wires and tubes; all that you could see was the flickering of the meter needles. When it was all over, what had been Flemming was without a mind, and the metal thing *should* have had Flemming's mind, Ryder was wiping the perspiration from his face with a shaky hand. Mark, now, Flemming—that is, the body that had had Flemming's mind wasn't dead. There was no sharp line of demarcation; the involuntary motions went on as per usual, and metabolism went on as much, or as little, as the suspended animation process normally allowed.

But the robot had Flemming's mind.

The robot moved its right hand across its goggling eyes.

"My God," Flemming's voice came out of the face. "I feel awful."

"How?" Ryder didn't let his face show the excitement he felt.

"I don't feel. That's the trouble. Lord, it's awful."

The robot moved forward; a hum from within rose sharply as the gyroscope kept balance. It—Flemming, we'll have to call it now—staggered and went partly down to the floor. Ryder was quick and grasped the machine's arms. Flemming gripped Ryder's shoulder, who gasped, and twisted away.

"Be careful!" he bit out. "Those claws of yours are strong."

"You should know. You made them."

"Yeah. I made them." Ryder turned away and picked up his coat which he had thrown across the back of a chair. He'd mask his disappointment, but the last laugh would be his.

FLEMMING finally learned how to use the machine that was himself. He made a sight walking down the hall, big and strong and black, with a kind of polished grace that came from the perfect functioning of the intricate joints Ryder had designed and made.

This that was Flemming created a greater disturbance in the Terrestrial Institute of Science than had the news of the attack on Galileo. Things worked that way. It was a shock and a horror to hear of the things that was happening far away, but good grief, look at this tall metal thing walking through the building calling itself Dick Flemming, the physicist. The big room at the top, where the Institute ships and planes were kept, rapidly filled with scientists and assistants—everyone down to the boy who ran the bottle washing machine.

Mechanics swarmed over the *Bluebird*, the swank little boat that was the pride and joy of the Institute. Its fifty foot length of blue was filled with all the power and gadgets that the personnel of the Institute could devise. There was only one thing it had lacked before; something to fight. This was being supplied now, in the shape of a bulk of machinery that was being installed in the cavity of one of the forward rocket exhausts.

Rubinstein and Nicotera were directing the installation, arguing with each other, as usual. They argued not only with their voices, but with vivid motions of the arms and their entire bodies. Then Flemming and Ryder marched in, pied pipers at the head of a flock of gaping ones.

"You worked fast," Flemming remarked.

"We had the things built already," Rubinstein explained. "All you have to do is to fix it onto something solid enough so that the back blast won't push the projector clear back to the next galaxy."

"Strong, eh?"

"Plenty strong. And works like a dream."

"More like a nightmare, I'd say," Ryder, the cynical, broke in. "That the only one you made?"

"No. This one is the biggest of three. Sends out a pair of three inch beams. The force field itself uses over a million kilowatts."

"Oh, oh, hit a snag somewhere." This from Flemming, as a mechanic gesticulated wildly from a porthole. Something had broken, had to be welded together again. The ion generator wouldn't fit into the narrow part of the rocket exhaust. So the exhaust had to be pulled apart and the machinery jammed into there somehow, then the whole business welded together again. It was the worst makeshift job ever seen; by the time it was complete, seven hours were done.

He gravely shook hands with Ryder, with Rubinstein, with Nicotera, and with Millard, and with the mechanics; he would have shaken hands with everyone in the crowd, but Ryder prodded him into the ship.

"Go on, you tin can, and let the neutrons fly. The battle will have been on for three hours by the time you get there, so you'd better not waste any time if you don't want to miss the fun."

CHAPTER FOUR

Margin of Safety

THE ports shut and locked themselves. The antigravity droned, and the ship slowly rose through the back-flung ceiling

of the room. Air props shoved out and spun, keeping the hulk on the straight and narrow, because it wouldn't do to use the big rockets so close to the Institute. There would be little left of the building and immediate vicinity if he forgot that.

Bern Ryder suddenly put his head back and laughed. It was the first good laugh he had had in a long time, and he took pains to extract a great deal of pleasure out of it.

"What's so funny?" Millard wanted to know.

Ryder cut off like somebody had pulled a switch. "Flemming thinks he's going to a rescue," he snickered. "but he'll never get there in time."

Millard looked startled. "What makes you say that? What do you know is going to happen?"

"Oh, nothing is going to happen to Flemming—that I know of, anyway. Don't worry, I haven't sabotaged him. No dirty secrets in my closet. It's just that I'm going to get there ahead of him; when he arrives, there will be nothing left but congratulations. Won't I enjoy that, though?"

Millard raised his eyebrows. "So, more tricks up sleeves. Everybody has tricks up their sleeves. The genius running rampant in this Institute overwhelms me. I suppose you are going to go Flemming one better, and make the trip at fifty gravities instead of fifteen."

"Precisely. At fifty gravities I'll get there in fourteen hours, and that gives me twelve hours advantage over Flemming, which is none too much for what I am going to do. Let's get to work."

"Not so fast, there. Not so fast. Flemming is fixed up pretty well. What makes you think he can't do the job by himself, without you putting us to a lot of work just to get a lot of glory for yourself?"

"Maybe he can do it himself, and maybe he can't. He's got an ordinary ship. Fifteen gravities is a lot of pull, and if some

weak little thing breaks down, that might be the end. It's not an armored warship. The enemy has the big weapon too, and Flemming doesn't have a shield. Flemming might be able to do the job, but he doesn't have a strong enough punch to be sure."

"I give up." Millard threw up his hands. "Give the orders and your wishes will be law. The resources of the Institute are at your command."

"Thanks, bud," Ryder drawled, sarcastically, and was off to the nearest mechanic, who made a completion of his state of near-collapse when he heard what Ryder wanted.

"You can't kill my men that way," the head mechanic protested. "They've been working eight hours straight already, and now you want them to work ten hours more. It's against all principles. It's unethical. The Union won't stand for it. What the hell do you want us to do?"

IT WAS a crazy thing that Ryder wanted to make. He didn't have any plans or calculations, or anything to go by, except the idea that was in his head. He had half a robot. Less than half. He found some tons of scrap iron. Somebody went flying to the shipyard and came back with a load of rocket motors. Just motors. Plain, bare, unadorned motors. The biggest they could find.

Somebody else discovered a generator and an anti-gravity machine, and fuel tanks. Nicotera and Rubinstein stalked and waddled down to their laboratory, and came back on a truck loaded with one of their remaining double blast machines. The one that worked most of the time.

They threw all the junk together with a big flare of the welding machines, and when the smoke cleared away, an egg had been laid. It looked like an egg. At the center, the very innermost center, was the brain from the robot.

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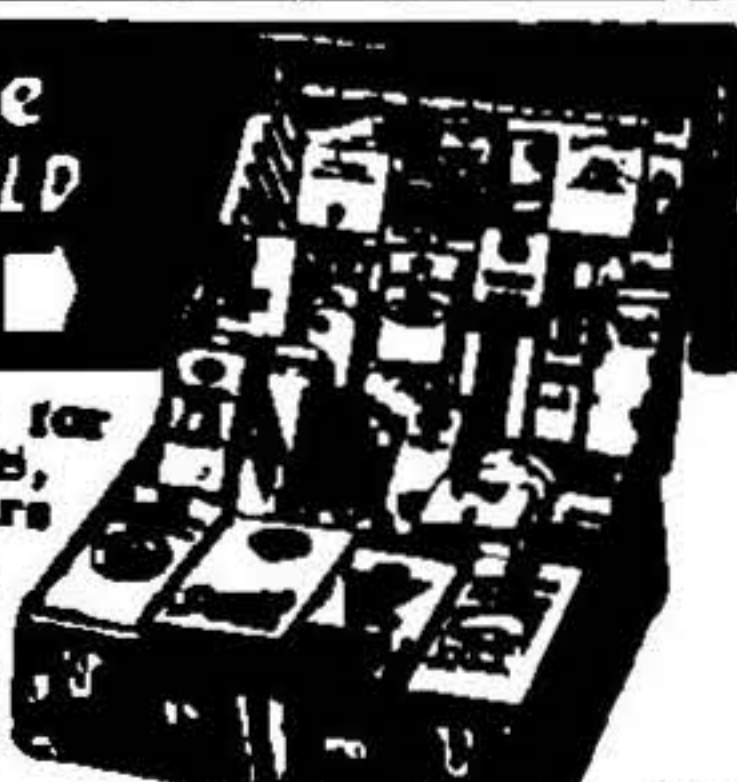
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ASTONISHING STORIES

Then came course after course of tough, laminated metal that made an impenetrable shield for the vital delicacy of the "brain." The two biggest motors had been laid end to end, and welded immovably together with heavy beams. Smaller motors had been stuck judiciously over the body at the proper angles for steering. Fuel tanks had been inserted where they would fit; the all-important generator had been tied down with beams and plates welded to a solid mass. Eyes from the robot protruded heavily protected. Fingers from the metal hands connected to the brain and operated the controls. And sheath after sheath of thick metal smoothed the surface.

The thirty foot egg was far from being a fragile little thing. It was heavy—nearly a solid mass of metal, and the antigravity had been turned on before it had been half completed, to keep the floor from collapsing. A floor that supported half a dozen ordinary boats.

It was a monstrous thing, and its surface was dull in the glare of the lights. It was not pretty, but there was something about it—perhaps the bareness of the metal and the crudity of the finish that made it look strong and slightly irresistible. It looked like you could just throw it right through any armor, like a projectile.

Ryder moved with a smouldering spark of vitality that had kept him going for eighteen hours. He knew that if he stopped he wouldn't be able to start again. Millard had long been curled up in the most remote corner of the room; Ryder kicked him to wake him.

"Up! We're on the last lap, and you have to run the mind pump. Just punch a button or two, and that's all. You'll learn."

"I think my mentality is equal to the task," Millard countered.

Ryder suddenly stopped before the

monster. "We haven't named it. What'll we call it?"

"A thing like that doesn't deserve a name."

"Oh, but it must have one. What does it most resemble? An egg. Then its name is the *Egg*. Short and sweet."

And so down to the laboratory.

"Oh, Lord," Ryder wailed. "We can't move the stuff, and we can't bring the robot down here, because we can't move the robot without moving the entire *Egg*, and we can't—"

"String a cable," Millard broke in, but already Ryder was rooting through the cabinets looking for one long enough. It took several of them, and an hour. But they finally got a sufficiently shielded connection between the machinery in the laboratory, and the mechanical brain in the *Egg*. Work commenced.

STEVE DORSEY made as if he were going to tear up the papers, but Mike Kunsak put out a fist that was as big as a melon and took them away from him.

"Now, now," Mike—his full name was Michael Vladistovitch Kunsak, Ph. D.—said. "You can't go throwing your work away like that."

"There's not much else to do," Dorsey slumped in his chair. "I spend my years planning and building all this, making thousands of drawings and blueprints, and now that I'm just about ready to put a complete shell around Galileo, everything goes bust."

"It hasn't yet," Kunsak said, his face in the papers. "This is some stuff you have here. You didn't tell us."

"Surprise, surprise," Dorsey muttered, tonelessly.

"You're taking this entirely too hard," Kunsak rose. "We'll have to put you to work."

"Ha. I've been working for the last fifteen hours. What do you think an engineer's for?"

"Then go to sleep. I've got my own work to do."

Kunsak went in to confer with MacPherson, temporary Chief of operations. "How goes the field generator?"

"Smoothly. Fifteen hours now, and fifteen more to go. We'll make it, and to spare. Then to set it up on the trips, and let it go at the first squeak from the magnetic detectors."

"I wish we had some offensive weapons," Kunsak said.

"I do, too. But every way we figure, we can't work it. Our own new double blast won't go through our screen. If we could hit the attacking ship first try, that will be fine. But we'd probably miss."

"You know what we can do, don't you." That came from a young fellow with the beginnings of a mustache, dressed in a soiled leather jacket. Reeves had been quite an airman in his school days, and he was finding difficulty in settling down to his job as a chemist. "We can hook the double blast machine onto the nose of our fastest boat, and I can go out and wipe up the Brenn ship."

"Listen, Reeves. You've asked me that a dozen times, and I still say no. You would make a fine picture going out there in your little tincan, waiting until the attackers came. They would float in with lights and most power out, everything shielded so that we couldn't detect them. You might smack into them. You might not, but they would detect you first; and they would make hash out of you."

Thunder came from the machine that worked madly to cover the domes with thick layers of the latest product of the metallurgists. It was an incredibly tough metal after being cooled within certain fields of force, and certain other fields of force gave its molecules a tendency to cease motion, so that the metal stayed cool, though being bombarded with a practically solid blast of high speed particles. It took power and power and yet it wouldn't last

for an instant under the new double blast. That had to be fended by the screen of force, which would still allow the straight neutron and ion beams to come through as if there weren't any screen there. It was just because of the way the thing worked. But the screen wouldn't stay up more than five hours, and then what would they do?

At the bowels of the asteroid were the power generators and the gravity field machines. Men labored there, for power was needed for many things—and the scientist knew things about the gravity machines they hadn't told yet.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mad Race

SPACE is curves and motions and velocities and accelerations. Navigation of space is something not to be done with impunity unless you have power to waste measured in the tons. There is no such thing as traveling in a straight line to a destination. The most efficient route is a highly complex series of curves. The more power you can spend the flatter your curve can be.

The ship from Brenn made a compromise, navigating a pretty fair sweep, but well on line for Galileo, twenty million miles away. It started at an hour—call it zero. It kept a steady acceleration of one gravity: thirty two feet per second per second. Every second its velocity increased by thirty two feet per second. Every minute its velocity curve soared upward, and its navigation curve flattened out.

At the end of nine hours well over three million miles had been covered; the mighty warship was speeding at a rate of two hundred miles per second.

That was when Flemming started.

Flemming, the tall, black robot, whose body of metal was strapped into the con-

trolling chair of a ship otherwise empty of life. Life? Was Flemming living? Was there life in the ship at all? But Flemming was there, too busy to ponder philosophy. He was easing through the atmosphere, and spinning around the earth for precious minutes to attain the proper angle to set acceleration. And an *acceleration!* Not a piddling single gravity, but a force that a ship with organic life in it had never attempted. Life was not in this ship, only Flemming. And Flemming was pushed down into his chair with a weight fifteen times the weight he was accustomed to handling. Even the robot was in trouble.

The ship did not increase its velocity by thirty-two feet per second per second, as the warship from Brenn was doing. Every second saw it boring along four hundred and eighty feet per second faster than it had gone the previous second. It added up. In only one hour it was going 330 miles per second, very nearly the highest velocity the ship from Brenn was to make in its entire trip.

But Flemming had farther to go. Two hundred million miles of vastness, empty and black, lay ahead. Grimly he pounded through it, rehearsing in his mind the action that would come upon his arrival, keenly ferreting out each possibility of events he might meet, and planning ways to meet them. And all the time his body chained down by the irresistible force that the comet-tail of the rocket blast pressed on him.

On and on, among the whirling motion and curves of the solar system, the two vessels sped to their meeting place on the heads of the shrieking swords of radiance that were the rockets.

At hour sixteen the ship of Brenn reached the halfway mark. Ten million miles it had gone, while Flemming's slender little vessel was already looking back upon twenty-nine million. Ten million miles, and reaching out over 350 new miles each second.

Whirling gyroscopes hummed; the battleship slowly turned to present its tail to the fore. Then again the blasts lashed out, and again the force of one gravity applied itself to the ship, but in the opposite direction. Its speed decreased.

Hour twenty-one; the race was nearing its finality. The ship from Brenn had accomplished three quarters of its trip, Flemming would be halfway in another hour. Something, then, happened, which was the one possibility that Flemming, in his planning, had not given the slightest thought.

RYDER entered his ship.

Ryder, now, was not the body that had been called by that combination of syllables. He was not a robot, like Flemming was. He was a complex network of vibrations and forces in space conducted along a cable from the protoplasmic battery which had contained it, to a new metal battery that was to be its habitat. In the exact center of the Egg the little mechanism rested, hidden by layer after layer of metal, surrounded by generators and motors that consumed power of a magnitude very nearly to warp the immediate space.

Ryder opened his eyes. That is—the metal spheroid down below emitted an impulse that flowed through wires to a mechanism that opened the shields covering the optic instruments sunk into the armor of the Egg.

Ryder felt—well, he could not feel; there was an absence of sensation that went beyond the ordinary meaning of the phrase. He could not even feel ill at the lack of sensation; there were no bodily organs to cooperate with a production of the sensation of feeling ill. So—he did not feel.

He saw, and he heard, when there was air; he had orientation by virtue of the tiny gyroscope within the shell.



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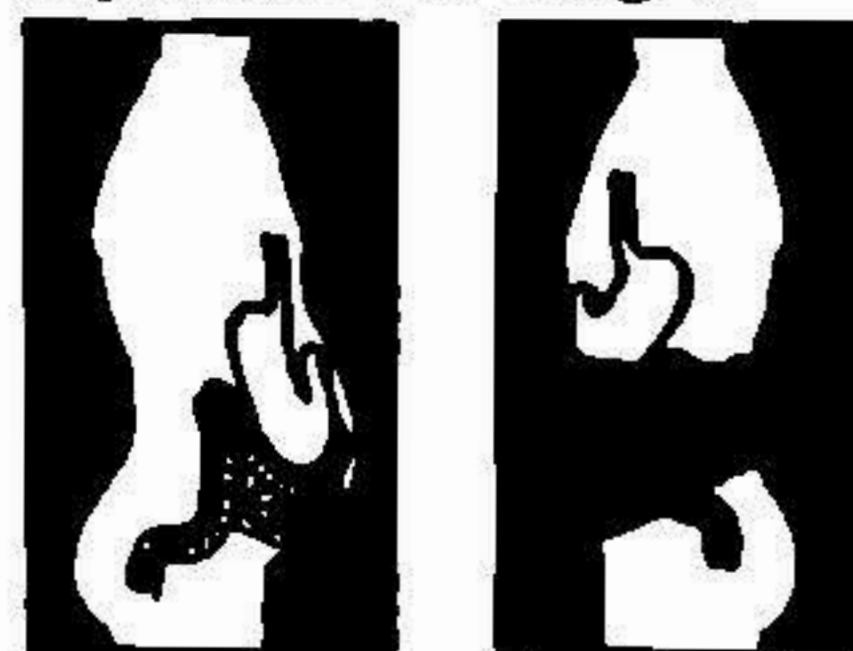
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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25	34x4	3.25	1.50	32x5	3.75
29x5.00-19	2.55	1.25	32x4 1/2	3.35	1.45	35x5	3.95
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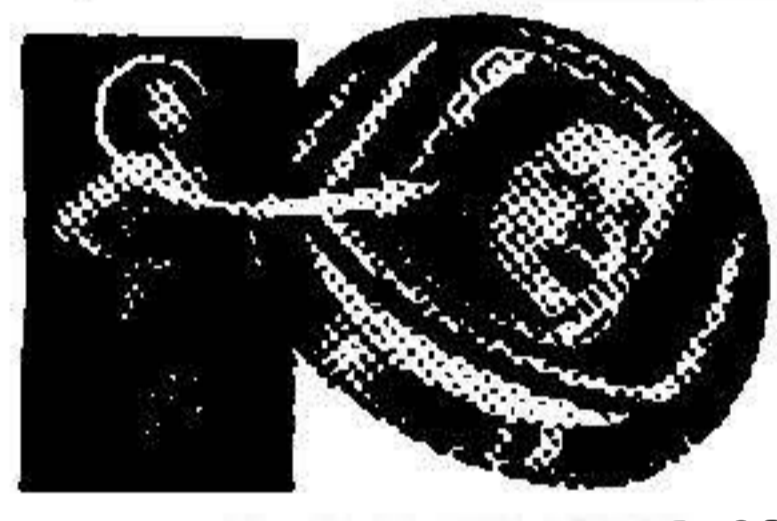


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His hands, hidden somewhere among the machinery, wriggled their fingers, and touched the buttons that were the controls. A motor spun; the pair of eyes slowly protruded themselves from their recesses.

This was joy for Ryder. Looking down from the twenty foot height, he at last felt big. He at last felt as though he had the power to do something, instead of bluffing and being caustic as a defense against being little. The grey metal looked so strong.

The fingers moved, pressed buttons. The eyes retracted and became domed with protective transparent sheathing. The antigravity hummed; the *Egg* rose, slowly, then with increasing velocity. The roof of the chamber spread wide, and then was below; the people gathered in there became tiny, then were gone in the distance that pulled the city together in a ragged splotch interrupting the earth's curve.

The heavy gyrowheels roared; slowly the *Egg* responded, turning its nose away from the sun that was going down in the west. Then the rockets—quickly building up from a thin sliver of incandescence to a fervent flame that stretched part way across a continent—blasted.

Flemming was halfway to his destination; Brenn three-quarters gone, but Ryder was going under fifty gravities of acceleration. He was all metal, and the ship was as nearly solid as any ship had ever been made before. It held.

For seven hours he bored on through the blackness, pushed by that spear of light. And for seven more hours he continued on, with the spear of light grinding him to a stop.

"**D**AMN Reeves!" MacPherson exclaimed. "Who let him out the airlock?"

Reeves was gone, and with him one of the experimental double-blast projectors. He had disappeared from sight for several hours; MacPherson had thought he was

sitting in a corner moping. But all the time he had been installing the projector in his little ship; now he and the ship were gone.

Up in the sky was the tiny streak that marked his distant rocket trail; it snapped out as he began his silent vigil, hanging up there in an orbit, watching for something to come.

"He wins," MacPherson sighed. "We'll send him the signal as soon as we know something. Jones!" he called. "Are the torpedoes ready?"

"Two of them. No time for more. They're devilish things to make. Lord, I'm sleepy."

"Okay, shoot them out and sign off. You'll know when things begin to bust. Get some sleep in the meantime."

The torpedoes, hastily built things, were sent up into their orbits, where they would spin until the glare of the enemy's rocket would set off the photo-cells; relays would guide the torpedoes relentlessly to the source of that glare. The double-blast would flame out ahead. If, of course, there was anything left of the torpedo by that time. A body moving head-on in an unswerving line is a lovely target.

CHAPTER SIX

For the Freedom of Science

"PILOT!" spoke the commander of the battle ship from Brenn. "Report on position and velocity."

"Position now one thousand miles from Galileo, at velocity of one mile per second. We have been on a straight line from Galileo for the past fifty thousand miles."

Fine work. From that distance and position the rocket exhaust would not be a comet tail, but a tiny star not to be told with casual glance from the other thousands of stars.

"Good," the commander said. "Cut rockets and drift until fifty miles from

Galileo. Then decelerate at rate sufficient to bring us to rest within that distance." To the power room: "Cut all power as per plan." To the gun stations: "Commence firing immediately at fifty mile range with the double-blast projector. Neutron and ion blasts handle defense."

The lights winked out; the ship became a dark wraith floating undetectable, except to the magnetic and gravity instruments, which were in pretty bad shape among the complex fields of the asteroids.

A mile a second. In fifteen minutes the detectors blared out their warning down on Galileo. The big double blast screamed out of its projector towards the estimated point of disturbance, but the spotting was vague, with an error of plus and minus one degree; at a hundred mile range the beam might be off one and three quarter miles on either side. According to the laws of chance they *could* have hit the ship with the two foot beam. But of course they didn't.

Nearly a minute fled by, and suddenly all of the detectors on Galileo went wild; the electron-tube relays reacted with the speed of light, throwing the power screen through the already warmed-up tubes at almost the same instant that the enemy's double blast reached the asteroid.

Almost the same instant. That beam was a pencil of fire impaling upon its tip a fragment that might have been from the very center of the sun. It darted down to the surface of the asteroid, lingered there for a time too small for human senses to realize, then quailed back as the screen set up its repulsive power. In that instant Galileo shook, and the rock that had been touched disappeared in a blaze of power.

The defensive shield fought the beam, and where the electrons and protons came together was that little center of radiation that was like the sun.

The battleship's rockets were on full. The two torpedoes that had been drifting above, went into action. Their propulsion

blazed; the double beams fingered ahead. These were little beams. They had not the hundred mile range of the battleship's. But their power was intense.

From two different directions they sped. Their mechanical controls knew one lesson. Aim for the ship and hit it. From opposite sides of the battleship spat ion blasts, caressing the simple targets of the torpedoes for an easy moment. And then the glare and the debris scattered.

A comet zoomed from the other side of the asteroid. Reeves, in his little boat, groaned against his chair straps. He'd been far away; it took time to get where he wanted at a speed low enough to be of any use.

His weapon was fixed. He had to aim the ship; to do that he had to get the ship pointing directly at the Conqueror. The ion blasts were spitting around him; the mechanical sighters were getting on to his orbit. He cut out of the gyrations, tried to shift his path, but at a thousand miles an hour the blood spurted out of his nose; before he had time to lose consciousness from the pressure the blaze of his rockets coalesced with the incandescence of the ion blasts, and space was filled with little droplets of molten metal

THE battleship went into an orbit about Galileo, spraying the big double-blast over the asteroid. But the blast never quite hit, because the screen made the two beams come together in that fierce fireball. The ion blasts poured downward, but the soil merely melted and ran, while the protected domes absorbed them without a murmur.

An immense neutron beam speared out of the base of one of the domes. The skin of the battleship began to glow. Five powerful blasts concentrated their fury upon the projector down there, and suddenly it snapped off.

Galileo was without offense.

"Prepare for landing," the commander

ordered. Rockets thundered, and the ship spiraled inward.

Then it was that the generators at the center of Galileo, heretofore comparatively silent, began to hum and groan.

"Acceleration failing!" the pilot called, a frown marking his face.

The commander glanced over the meters and gasped. "Report!" he shouted as he flipped a connection to a room at the bowels of the ship.

The man with the detectors and analyzers was on his toes with the information—and excited.

"The gravity field opposing us is of a type predicted recently by the Science Colony, probably just created by them. Its effect is identical to that of the field about an atomic nucleus. The ion blasts have sufficient momentum to penetrate, but we do not."

The commander irately snapped the connection. A most lovely force screen that was, repelling all that came from without, but not affecting that which was on the surface of the asteroid.

Siege commenced. The question that hung in the balance was whether the ship could hold the beam longer than the asteroid could hold the shield.

When Bern Ryder—the *Egg*—that scarred little metal ovoid came streaking upon the scene, the status quo still held.

During that long voyage he had practiced target shooting. He thought he knew a way to hit a thing without heading straight for it and making a beautiful target himself. It made the enemy almost as hard to hit as himself, but the enemy was bigger, so maybe he had a chance.

If he'd had perhaps ten years to practice the maneuver he might have done it successfully. It was mad.

RYDER'S rockets pounded him to a momentary stop, then he leaped again towards the enemy. But in that instant of rest, and in the moments required to gain

FLIGHT TO GALILEO

speed, even at the fiercest acceleration at his command, the forces came beating upon him with devastation. He sheered off from their grip, but his forward motor was gone, and with it the blast projector. His *Egg* was lopsided.

It took tiny moments of time, where the fleeting thoughts raced, and Ryder, the wreck, went sixteen hundred feet per second, thirty two hundred feet per second, forty eight hundred feet per second, up and up every second; the metal fingers of Ryder made the slight turn in the flight of the *Egg* that sent it shrieking for the Conqueror. Ions and neutrons pounded him. The nose of the *Egg* ran incandescent from its concentrated force of many projectors, but all the mass was still there, and the space between the two ships narrowed swiftly.

Ryder's eyes went out when the projectile that was him made the plunge through the armor of the Conqueror in a sweep of devastation that left garbage of the immediate vicinity; he could not tell what he had done. But the beam that came up from below left nothing remaining of the battleship to be seen.

Ryder, incredibly retaining the thread of connection to the metal brain that hid below sheaths of armor at the center of the broken *Egg* could not tell how or where he moved, nor could he tell that Flemming was just then flaming in upon the wings of his rockets.

But he had faith; he knew that Flemming would find him. And in that utter darkness he lived for a time that was unmeasurable to him, thinking of what he would say to Flemming when the light would strike his human eyes, and when he would have a voice to speak:

"Maybe I was a little man, Flemming, but with the hands that created the robot I made myself big. Don't ever call me little any more."

THE END

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Editoramblings

IF YOU get this issue the day it appears on your newsstands, you will have just about enough time left to make arrangements to attend the *Chicon*. ("Chicon:" Fan argot for "Chicago Science Fiction Convention of 1940.") The Chicago confab promises to set a new high in interest for science fiction conventions—and that will be no easy feat, for of the dozen or more national and regional conventions held so far, there has never been a dull one. Among the special events already scheduled will be a banquet in honor of E. E. Smith, Ph. D., premiere science fiction author; a science fiction masquerade ball, where prizes will be awarded for the best costumes representing science fiction characters; showing of a science fiction motion picture, "Monsters of the Moon," parts of which have never before been released; and many other events. For further information, contact Erle Korshak, Convention Secretary, 3156 Cambridge Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The date is September 1st, 2nd, and 3rd—and make a date to be there!

"Quicksands of Youthwardness," beginning in this issue, is our first serial. We want your opinions on it—not only of the quality of the story, but as to whether or not we should continue with serials.

What do you think?

Reporting on the stories in the August issue: Your letters have placed Arthur G. Stangland's "Bon Voyage!" and "The Cat-Men of Aemt" by Neil R. Jones in a neck-and-neck tie for first place. Second place was also a tie, splitting between "Wedding of the Moons" by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., and R. R. Winterbotham's "The Element of Logic." The only story not liked by the majority was "Woman Out of Time," which most characterized as a readable weird story, but out of place in a science fiction magazine.

—THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 4)

Symphony." The idea of including other phases of fantasy besides drama is good.

Here's wishing *Astonishing Stories* continued success; which, of course, is just another way of looking forward to my own future reading pleasure.—Amelia Reynolds Long, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Registers Kick

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

I just finished the August issue of your magazine, and I want to register a kick right now, while it's still hot in my mind. Your "Tales to Come" department says you are going to start a three-part serial in the next issue.

Now, see here, Ed., how would you feel if you were a poor deluded reader who had to wait two months between each part—four months in all—to see whether Boy really Gets Girl at the end of the story? 'Tain't fair! Really, you should show more consideration—the least you can do is to make the magazine a monthly.

If you can't do that, *please* don't print serials!—H. K. Harrigan, St. Albans, New York.

Morey Illustrates Next

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Although a trifle late, I wish to compliment you on your latest issue of *Astonishing Stories*. To you I give my profound thanks for bringing back Professor Jameson and his metal comrades. The stories in your magazine are as a rule fair, with a large amount of poor ones. The departments are slanted more toward the fan side than most magazines, which is very good: keep it up.

I am overjoyed to learn that a three-part serial of 21MM392 is coming up—more power to you! I was slightly disappointed when I saw that Morey didn't

illustrate "The Cat-Man of Aemt," but you got the best substitute in the illustrating field. I'm not implying that Morey is better than Bok, for he isn't, not anywhere near, but I have been so used to seeing Morey illustrate them that it didn't seem like old times. Please have Bok do more illustrating, for he is the best one on your staff—in fact, the only *artist*. Give him some covers; I think you have the worst covers in the pro field, with all crumby air-gun effects. Please give more fan artists a chance like you have been doing. You don't know what it means to them. I would like to see Roy Hunt do some work for you, for he is one of the best fan artists illustrating.

Well, that's all for now. Please, oh please don't cut any of the Jameson yarns, and don't let me hear of it if you do—for you'll receive a dozen assorted good old Rocky Mountain Rattlers in my next letter.—Lew Martin, Co-editor, *The Alchemist*, 1258 Race Street, Denver, Colorado.

"Every Poor Story"

Dear Mr. Pohl:

I have until now been a silent but appreciative reader of both your mags, preferring to accept the occasional poor yarn with philosophic calm. But, having just finished the June issue of *Astonishing*, I no longer can remain silent. With the exception of two, you seem to have gathered together every poor story you could lay your hands upon, and jammed them into this issue. "He Conquered Venus," by Fearn, is particularly obnoxious, pointless, plotless, and amateurishly written; Fearn must have thrown it together in a half hour. The others are slightly better—at least readable.

The two exceptions I mentioned are "Children of Zeus," by Grosser, and "A Miracle in Time," by Hasse. Grosser is new, isn't he? But good! Hasse at least

shows some faint signs of a writing style, something which 90% of your writers have not yet done. I still remember his "He Who Shrank" of a few years ago, which I consider the greatest sub-atomic story yet written.

Less interplanetary yarns, please, and more of anything by Grosser, Hasse, and Gregor—his "Asteroid" was the best you've printed, yet—and you may yet make something of these mags, for I think you're trying. Meanwhile, I shall remain silent until you print another tripey conglomeration of words like "He Conquered Venus," and then you'll hear from me—but good!—Richard DeVries, Memphis, Tennessee.

Wants Sequel

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Have just finished reading "A Miracle in Time," by H. Hasse in the June issue of *Astonishing Stories*.

This story, a human interest science fiction story, calls for many sequels.

Do not leave "Mech" die by any means. This would make an excellent series of stories.—A fantasy fan, Carl Motz, Jr., Woodward, Pennsylvania.

Cut Departments?

Dear Editor:

After giving a good deal of thought to the subject, I have come to a conclusion in regard to *Astonishing* that ought to be of interest to you.

It is: That you are trying too hard.

You are trying to please everyone; everyone, that is, who writes you and yells loud enough about what he wants. Consequently, *Astonishing* becomes meat to A, poison to B—because B, like your scribe, is the quiet, unarguing type (note that this is only my second letter to you so far—which means my second letter to any magazine.) I am not a career science fictionist, as most of your readers—the

ones that write letters—seem to be; I read science fiction for relaxation. And *all* I read—believe this if you can—is the stories!

And I'm willing to bet that 99 44/100% of your readers do likewise.

Concrete proposals: Cut out all departments except the letter column; insert in their stead a page of poetry and a good, well-drawn cartoon strip.

And don't pay too much attention to what's said by the readers—not even by me!—M. Smith, 329 N. Chapel Street, Catasauqua, Pennsylvania.

Sequel Coming!

Dear Editor:

For August *Astonishing Stories*, my fancy dictates thusly:

1. "The Element of Logic." I'll wager that not many others make *that* selection!
2. "The Cat-Men of Aemt." Not the best of the series, but still good.
3. "Bon Voyage!" Well done, although Flando's identity was rather obvious.
4. "Wedding of the Moons." Good mainly because of the interesting and realistic "tradition;" also because a Martian was the hero.
5. Asimov's letter, for the marvelous way in which he "corrected" the discrepancy in "Callistan Menace." (Who says I can't rate a letter with the stories?)
6. "The Lodestone Core." Seemed rather cock-eyed; just why, I don't know.
7. "Woman Out of Time." Astonishing, perhaps; but not science fiction.
8. "The Deadly Swarm." Ho-hum. Eighth place—when there are only seven stories! Just another adventure.

Why tantalize with those Fan Magazine comments? I can't afford them.

Bok's anthropomorphic monstrosities, such as the Aemt and the Moep, are always worthy of careful study. Let's have more of them.

Seems as though the characters on the covers ought to have their hair mussed or

VIEWPOINTS

a wrinkle or two in their clothing. Not so?

Bring on the sequel to "Half-Breed. It doesn't need to be quite as good as the first story to be very welcome.—D. B. Thompson, 3136 Q Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Didn't Like Cover

Dear Editor:

Tut tut, and again tut tut. Is this an stf magazine or "Dick Carston Fights the 7th Column" bi-monthly? I refer to Mayorga's streamlined turkey on the August issue. Were I a new fan, I never would have noticed that the interior illustrations had improved as of this issue; the frontispiece would have been sufficient.

More of same: unless my eyes have gone back on me, the majority of published letters expressed a co-desire with mine for two-way readers' columns in the two magazines. Further: I'm sure you, yourself could sketch up a more attractive-looking cut for Viewpoints than the thing you have there now.


And really, something *should* be done to correct that little line which tells us that *Astonishing* is published bi-monthly. With a hearty second to Bradbury's plea for more Bok, I close.—Robert W. Lowndes, 2574 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

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The stream of Terrestrial colonization was penetrating farther into Venus!

The leaders surveyed the prospect and one spoke in clipped syllables: "Almost through, Jem. We're out among the foothills now."

And the other replied slowly, "And there's good new growing-land ahead. We can stake out farms and settle down."

From the ridge ahead—the last ridge before the valley—two Tweenies, father and son, unseen dots in the distance, watched the newcomers with heavy hearts.

"The one thing we cannot fight!" said Max Scanlon. "We fled the pure-blood hordes on Earth, but they follow us even here on Venus."

Words came from Arthur Scanlon reluctantly. "They are few and unarmed. We can drive them out in an hour. Venus is *ours!*"

Max Scanlon smiled mournfully. "Surely, we can drive them out in an hour—in ten minutes. But they would return in thousands, and armed. We're not ready to fight all Earth." His voice quavered and age sat heavy on him. "We tried, Arthur, but I think—I think we have failed. . . ."

"Half-Breeds on Venus," Isaac Asimov's continuation of the story of a brand-new race of humans seeking respite from the persecution of the old race they are replacing, will appear in the December issue of *Astonishing Stories*, out October 23rd.

Classified Advertising

(Continued)

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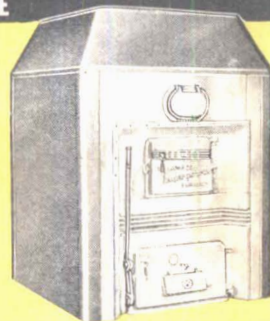
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