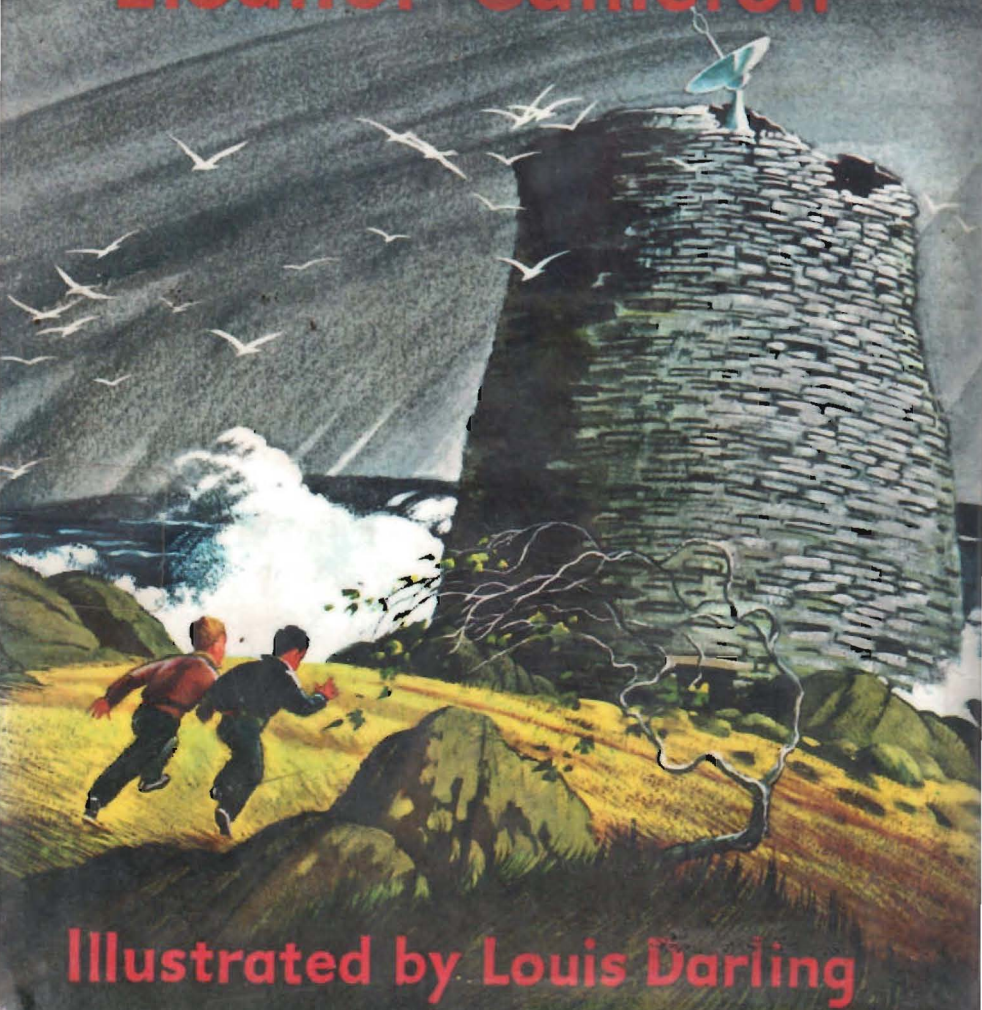


MR. BASS'S PLANETOID

Eleanor Cameron



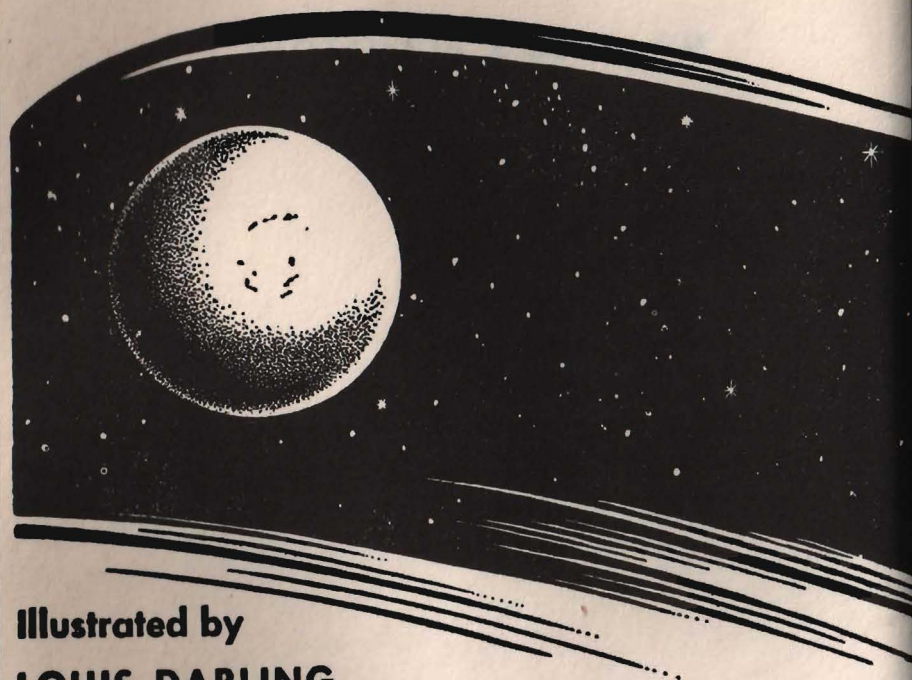
Illustrated by Louis Darling

MR. BASS'S

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

BOSTON • TORONTO



Illustrated by
LOUIS DARLING

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by Eleanor Cameron



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*This book is lovingly dedicated to you, Mother,
who asked me a long time ago
to write stories for children*

The Problem

The Phone Call

THEY WERE ALL sitting around the dining room table — Dr. and Mrs. Topman and David, and David's friend Chuck — talking about that extraordinary person whose name was Prewytt Brumblydge.

"Certainly," Mrs. Topman was saying, handing a plate of hot biscuits to Chuck and a bowl of chicken gravy to her husband, "it isn't for Prewytt Brumblydge to take the risk of unraveling the world. I certainly don't want to be unraveled — not yet, anyway. Oh, but," she said, unfolding her napkin, "a contraption no bigger than a washing machine to do *that* — what poppycock, isn't it? Then his name for it — Brumblitron!" and she burst out laughing.

However, just as she laughed, the phone rang.

They all remembered that, afterwards: how, the minute she laughed in amusement at Mr. Brumblydge's Brumblitron, the phone rang. And they all

said later, when everything began happening at once, that it had startled them and they couldn't have told why. After all, Dr. Topman, who was a family doctor, was used to being called at any hour of the day or night.

"I suppose it's for me," he sighed, and got up to answer.

The telephone was in the hall right outside the dining room so that it was easy to hear everything that was being said. And now what a very curious conversation began to take place!

"Hello," said Dr. Topman in his kind, quiet voice. And then in a rather more urgent tone: "Hello? Hello? . . . It's long distance," he said, turning and glancing in at them where they sat in a circle under the cone of light over the dining table. "There seems to be some mix-up." Then he turned back again. "No," he said, "no, this isn't Tyco Bass. This is Dr. Frank Topman. *Who*, did you say?" And he sounded as if he couldn't believe his ears. "Dr. Frobisher! Why, this *is* a surprise. We were just speaking about —"

"Dr. Frobisher!" cried Chuck in the most tremendous excitement, shoving back his chair so suddenly he almost knocked it over. "The director of San Julian Observatory! That's where Prewytt Brumblydge is!"



"Dad, could I —"

"David, be quiet! Sit down — your father won't be able to hear a word."

David sat, but looked as if he would burst, while Dr. Topman waved frantically for quiet and Chuck

stared at Dr. Topman's back as if he too would explode.

"Who, did you say?" Dr. Topman was asking. "I didn't quite . . . Oh, Prewytt Brumblydgel! You mean he's . . ." And then there was a long silence. And finally, when Dr. Topman spoke again, he sounded dazed. "But I'm afraid that's impossible, Dr. Frobisher — impossible. That is, right now." Another silence, and then: "Well yes," he said in the strangest tone imaginable. "Yes, there *is* someone who might be able to help you — in fact two people; but I can't promise anything. They're my son, David, and his friend, Chuck; but, as I said, I can't promise anything. . . . Yes, yes, I think so. . . . Well, he could try. Would you like to speak to him?" Another silence, and then: "All right, Dr. Frobisher, just a moment."

Now Dr. Topman put down the receiver, turned, and came slowly into the dining room. He studied them all for the fraction of a second with a puzzled look on his face as though he couldn't for the life of him think what was going to happen next.

"Dr. Frobisher wants to speak to you, David," he said. "He needs your help. He says he must get in touch with Tyco Bass at once, because Prewytt Brumblydgel has disappeared and taken all his papers with him — everything."

For a moment nobody moved or spoke.

Then David got up from the table, stumbling in his haste. And his hand, as he picked up the receiver, was cold.

"Hello, Dr. Frobisher?" he said in a rough, uncertain tone that startled even himself.

"Yes," said the firm voice at the other end. "Yes, I am very sorry to be calling you like this right at dinnertime, David, but I really did not know what else to do. You see, I absolutely *must* get in touch with Tyco Bass, and when I called his number, the one I used to call all the time, I was put onto your line when there was no answer there. What on earth has happened to him?"

"Why, you see, Dr. Frobisher —" began David, his mind spinning, "you see Mr. Bass blew away — or that is, he — he —"

"He WHAT!" cried Dr. Frobisher, his voice rising in stunned amazement.

"I mean — it's just a way we had of talking," went on David in desperation. "Really, he's gone on an awfully long journey. And because he left his house and his observatory for us to take care of, the telephone company switches Mr. Bass's calls onto our line. And I just don't see, Dr. Frobisher, how we can possibly get in touch with him now —"

"You mean, David, that there is absolutely no way that you know of for Tyco Bass to be reached?"

"Well — I'm not just . . ." stumbled David. "Look, let me think a minute, will you, Dr. Frobisher?"

"Certainly. Perhaps that would be the best idea. But please try to think as quickly as possible. This is a long-distance call and the matter is urgent — most urgent!" Now Dr. Frobisher was silent, but David could positively feel the waiting going on at the other end of the line.

Mr. Bass, he thought — Mr. Bass, where are you? And he saw him: his dear friend Tyco, with his large, almost bald head, his small face and enormous, kindly eyes. He it was who had sent the two boys off on their first journey to Basidium, the Mushroom Planet, which Tyco Bass himself had discovered. Nobody else in the whole world had any knowledge of it besides its discoverer and Mr. Theo Bass (who now lived there), and Chuck and David and their families. Tyco had fixed up their space ship with everything it needed for the flight: a small rocket motor, an oxygen urn, tanks filled with a fuel into which he had put a remarkable creation of his, atomic tritetramethylbenzcarbonethylene, and had painted both the inside and outside of the ship

with a liquid silicon sealer and protector against the dangerous rays of the sun.

How am I to get in touch with him? David asked himself. How can I possibly . . . ? Then the word SIGNAL flashed into his mind. Of course! He and Chuck would have to signal Mr. Theo on Basidium, and ask him if *he* knew where Tyco was. They would have to go to Mr. Bass's house and signal at once.

"Dr. Frobisher, I'm going to try to get hold of the only person I know who may be able to tell us where Mr. Bass has gone. Now, as soon as I've —"

"Person? What person?" demanded Dr. Frobisher anxiously.

"Well, he's a cousin of Mr. Bass's, and his name's Theodosius. Chuck and I'll have to go over to Thallo Street and —"

"Fine! Please do! Now did Tyco Bass keep a diary, any sort of notebook in which he put down his doings, his observations, anything that might . . . ?"

"Yes, Dr. Frobisher, he had a notebook he called *Random Jottings*."

"NO!" hissed Chuck fiercely behind his back. "NO — *don't tell him!*"

"But it's in his own —"

"Good! Good!" cried Dr. Frobisher in triumph.

"Now, I feel we are getting somewhere. This notebook, now — these *Random Jottings* — I must see them. They may speak of his plans, of this trip he's taken. There may be some mention of a certain object which I absolutely must have — "

"Oh, but, Dr. Frobisher, it's not just a diary exactly. It's all about his inventions too. And *nobody* can read it; it's in his own private language — "

"*Nobody* can read it? Confound it, anyway! Well, we shall not lose heart. Now first of all, with your and your friend's permission, David, I really feel that the house must be searched from top to bottom for that object I mentioned. As it is quite necessary that I find it before anyone else can get hold of it, there is not a moment to be lost. So in that case — "

"But, Dr. Frobisher — "

"It is now," rolled on Dr. Frobisher's large, firm voice, "it is now, by my watch, twenty-five minutes of seven. If I leave immediately, I should arrive in Pacific Grove in about an hour and a half. Could I meet you at Tyco Bass's house?"

"Why, yes, Dr. Frobisher. Chuck and I'll be over there. We'll be trying to get hold of Mr. Bass's cousin, remember, and maybe Mother and Dad — "

"Fine, fine! Then I shall be seeing you shortly. You may expect me at eight. I have been at 5 Thallo

Street before, but if you could just leave the porch light on, that would be helpful. Good-by."

There was a click at the other end, and that was all.

A Ruined Dinner

DAVID, exhausted, hung up the receiver and went back into the dining room.

"Dr. Frobisher's coming to Pacific Grove right away. He's driving down from San Julian and he wants to meet us at Mr. Bass's house at eight — precisely."

"Why, then, it must be terribly important," exclaimed Mrs. Topman, her eyes shining.

"Yes, but he says he wants to search Mr. Bass's house!" wailed David. "He wants to search it from top to bottom for some sort of terribly important 'object' he needs. And he even wants to see the *Random Jottings!*"

"Well, what did you *tell* him about them for?" shouted Chuck angrily. "What a dumb thing to do!"

"But I couldn't *think* fast enough," shouted back David in a fury. "And you wouldn't have either, smarty, with Dr. Frobisher shooting questions at you one right after the other. But anyhow, if *we* can't

read Mr. Bass's jottings, then *he* won't be able to, either."

"Yes, but what about the safe up in Mr. Bass's observatory?" demanded Chuck, his eyes blazing. "We'll have to clear it out, that's what. Mr. Bass said *absolutely no one but us* was to know about the Stroboscopic Polarizing Filter, because then the whole world would find out about Basidium. And he said that was to be a dead secret. Why, if Dr. Frobisher ever sees the filter, he'll know enough right away to clamp it on the telescope, and then he'll spot Basidium, and we'll be sunk and all the Mushroom People'll be sunk — and it'll be your fault!"

David flopped miserably into his chair, feeling he couldn't possibly have been stupider. And yet Dr. Frobisher had overwhelmed him.

"Oh, Chuck, everything will straighten out," said Mrs. Topman. "We'll deal with all that when Dr. Frobisher gets here. But now about this Prewytt Brumblydge, Frank . . . what made Dr. Frobisher think his disappearance was anything to be worried about?"

"Well, Dr. Frobisher told me on the phone that he had asked Prewytt Brumblydge to give up the Brumblitron entirely. At first Brumblydge said this was a terrible thing to ask, but then after thinking

it over for a long time he finally promised that at least he would ask Tyco Bass's opinion first as to whether it was safe to go ahead or not.

"Then last night, quite late, Brumblydge just packed up his bags and took off. His landlady down in San Julian said he scrummaged around in his room at a terrible rate, packing up books and papers and clothing as if he were going to be away for a long time. And when she asked him what he was up to, all he said was that he would be back. But nobody knows where he's gone!"

"But, Dad, would Mr. Brumblydge run the risk of blowing up anybody but himself?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't — knowingly. No, the whole trouble is that Dr. Frobisher says there could be a chain reaction — and Prewytt Brumblydge, who has worked it all out on paper, says there could *not*. He says the only thing that could happen is that he himself might be blown up, and he's willing to take the risk."

"Think of that!" murmured Mrs. Topman.

David picked up the newspaper and stared at Prewytt Brumblydge's picture at the top of the column telling about his Brumblitron.

What large, bright eyes he had, and so cheerful did he appear that even his snub nose and small, upstanding ears seemed to express assurance. He

had a very high forehead, which was certainly to be expected. But then he had a round face and, under his chin, a little bow tie as neat as could be, which somehow offset that great forehead of his so that you weren't sure just what to make of him. He looked, said Mrs. Topman, like a small boy who has just thought up the most stupendous idea in the world, which perhaps he had.

"But what is this Brumblitron exactly, Dr. Topman?" asked Chuck.

"Well, it says here," answered Dr. Topman, running his finger down the column, "that when Mr. Brumblydge builds it, it will be a small black box, terribly heavy, sheathed with lead. And from this black box will go a great many wires, up to a huge saucer-shaped antenna netted like a cobweb. The cobweb will pluck certain rays out of the air and send them down into the black box to produce enormous quantities of energy."

"'B-rays,' it said, didn't it?"

"Yes, and they're rather like cosmic rays. At least, when cosmic rays smash into our atmosphere from outer space, they break up, and part of the breaking up results in B-rays. Nobody knows much about them but Mr. Brumblydge, which is why he believes Dr. Frobisher is wrong about the possibility of an explosion. Because the action of B-rays is en-

tirely different from any other kind of action. Brumblydge says, 'When I publish my findings, whole new realms of knowledge about light and energy will be opened up.' Then the article goes on to say that some scientists predict he will take his place beside Newton and Galileo and Einstein!"

"Gee-whillikers!" said Chuck.

"But, Dad, *why* does Dr. Frobisher think the Brumblitron will explode?"

"Because," replied Dr. Topman, "hidden away in the little black box will be an unknown metal, a mysterious new substance that the B-rays will work on to produce energy. And Dr. Frobisher thinks that, just as cadmium is necessary to control the energy in an atomic furnace, so some sort of control is necessary in the Brumblitron. Otherwise a chain reaction might be started which would instantly *unravel the world.*"

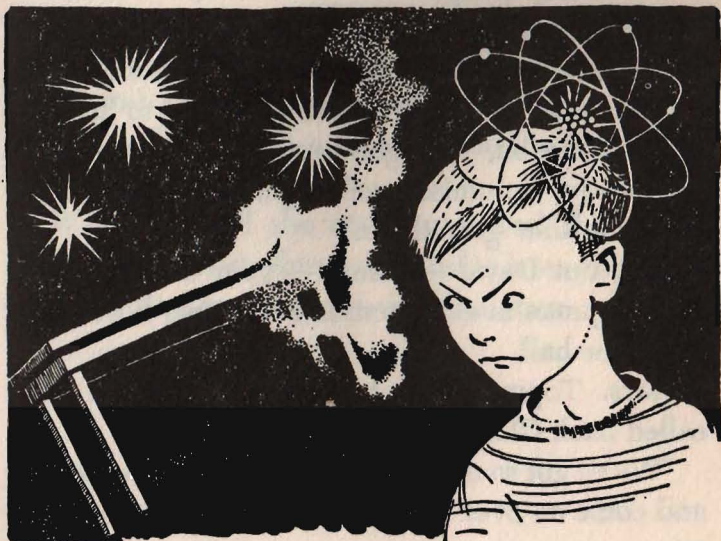
Now, at these words, David suddenly imagined a great burst of light between the orbits of Mars and Venus, and that was the earth disintegrating; and a medium-sized burst of light, which was the moon disintegrating; and a very tiny burst of light — and that was the end of Basidium!

"But what a funny way to say it," put in Chuck. "How could the world *unravel?*"

David stared at the table. For it was turning, in

this instant, into a mass of dancing particles, as though insects hummed in a net. Those particles were atoms, tiny blurs of energy that were knit together into the wood of the table; there it was (David blinked), hard to the touch, yet really a collection of infinitely small spinning worlds of furious activity. Think of that! Everything — salt, sugar, vinegar, milk, metal, glass, wood or flesh — everything you could see or smell or touch was made of atoms, blurs of energy knit together into whatever you were seeing or smelling or touching.

And Mr. Brumblydge's Brumblitron — if it went



out of control — might unknit all this; energy would be released all over the place, and the world would light up like a nova, or new star, and then disappear completely.

"But *how*, Dad?" exclaimed David in wonder. "How could it — what would happen?"

"Well, atoms split, you see," explained Dr. Topman, "if you bombard them with enough force. And if you get one splitting atom to split another, which splits still another, and another, and so on, till billions of atoms go on splitting each other like strings of firecrackers — why, *then* you have a chain reaction."

David leaped up.

"Chuck, maybe everything depends on us — in a way. I mean, if Dr. Frobisher thinks nobody but Mr. Bass can help him, then it's up to us to find Mr. Bass. Come on, let's get over to the observatory right away. I promised we'd signal Mr. Theo before Dr. Frobisher gets there."

"Oh, but David — Chuck — your dinner!" cried Mrs. Topman in exasperation as the two boys raced down the hall.

"Mrs. Topman, we haven't got *time* to eat!" called back Chuck.

"We've got so much to do, Mom. And you be sure and come on over with Dad to Mr. Bass's the same

time as Dr. Frobisher. Eight o'clock, remember!" The front door banged.

"Oh, Frank," cried poor Mrs. Topman. "Really, it's just one thing after another. First, that foolish Horatio Q. Peabody crashing into the ocean only last night with the boys' space ship, then having to be rescued and dried off and loaned clothing and put on the train. And now — Prewytt Brumblydge. Of all the ridiculous names." But then she saw that her husband hadn't been listening to a single word.

"Annabelle," Dr. Topman said, getting up hastily from the table, "I'd better go too. I really ought to look in on old Mrs. Dunstable, and if I go now I can get through and be back by eight o'clock. So I might just as well run the boys over to Mr. Bass's." By this time he was out in the hall, and she heard him snatch up his doctor's bag. "I'll be back to pick you up —" Then for a second time the front door banged.

"Well" was all she could say. And she stared furiously at those three deserted plates with her delicious dinner going to waste on them.

SOS to Basidium

DR. TOPMAN saw two figures hurrying down the block through patches of darkness and street light. One was square and solid, and that was Chuck, and the other was taller and slimmer, and that was David. He picked them up, and while they drove along Chuck talked sixty to the dozen about how they were going to signal Mr. Theo and exactly how it must be done.

But David was thinking.

"You know, Chuck, the most important thing of all is to get our space ship fixed up —"

"That old Horatio," interrupted Chuck hotly. "If it hadn't been for him! He has to blast off in our ship, all by himself, not knowing a single thing about what vector to take or how to set the controls; then after being gone for a whole month, he plunges smack into the ocean with it —"

"All right, but it's *done*, Chuck. Now we've got to

get the space ship fixed — with your Gramp's help, of course. I only wish he could have started today."

"Well, he's got to earn a living just like anybody else!"

"Yes, but I don't see why fixing ships' compasses has to take so much time. Anyhow, Chuck, let's see if he can get down to the cave *first thing* tomorrow morning and get started on the space ship. Because I have a funny sort of feeling," David finished solemnly, "that we may need it."

"Do you mean to take off for Basidium?"

"Yep," said David, "and pick up Mr. Theo — or even Mr. Bass."

"You know," put in his father, "Dr. Frobisher mentioned to me that Prewytt Brumblydge just might have gone off to see his old aunt in Texas. He may have gotten a telegram that she was sick — " and now Dr. Topman turned along Thallo Street and stopped at Number 5.

"All right, Dad. But I'm only going by the way Dr. Frobisher sounded. Anyhow, we'll see. Go on, Chuck, get out — " and the two boys burst from the car, calling out to Dr. Topman as they ran up the walk that he must be sure to be back by eight o'clock.

Quickly Chuck unlocked the front door of the little house. They raced across the living room and up the steep stairs leading to the observatory, and turned on the lamp on Mr. Bass's desk. Then, while David went to the wall safe and began turning the dial back and forth, Chuck picked up a large lantern that stood over on one side of the room.

This lantern was about a foot and a half high and had a metal hood that could be pulled around it so that the light could shine out at any angle, in a narrow or full beam. It was beautifully made and looked rather like a ship's lantern, but certainly like no ship's lantern you might buy in an ordinary store. It had a touch of extreme oddity as though it had been put together by someone whose clever fingers did everything in a way all their own.

That someone was Mr. Tyco Bass. It bore the stamp of his unique personality just as surely as had the rocket motor and the oxygen urn, which he had made for the boys' first space ship, as well as the telescope which rose above their heads here in the observatory.

As a matter of fact, this observatory could have belonged to no one but Mr. Bass. Everything in it seemed small except the telescope. The safe in the wall was not as far up from the floor as a grown man would have put it; and the stool in front of

the telescope, like a long-stemmed mushroom because of its slender support and the fat, round pillow on top, was exactly the right height for the boys to hop onto. Because, you see, Mr. Bass was no taller than they, even though he was old enough to be a grandfather, and perhaps, if the truth were known, much, much older.

Then those paintings around the walls (and Mr. Bass had greatly enjoyed this talent of his, for there were many more downstairs) — no one but an extraordinary artist could have painted them! They were of the planets, and you felt you might touch those rocky worlds or put your hand right out into the freezing blackness of space and then bring it back icy with the nails turned blue. But they were only paintings, you found to your amazement on looking closer — done in water colors, perfectly flat.

Quickly Chuck put the strange lantern on the desk and turned it on. And then what an eery, silver-soft light began to flood the room! It was like bright moonlight, or soft sunlight. But no, not either of these — perhaps a mingling of both. Now Chuck turned off the electric lamp and everything in the little observatory was bathed in the glow of Mr. Bass's lantern. Chuck put his hand right on the lantern and had no need to draw it back, for this peculiar light gave no heat.

David had got the safe open and was now busy plugging a long cord into a wall socket. At the end of the cord was what looked like an ordinary piece of glass, flat on one side and convex on the other and set into a brass frame. But it was no ordinary piece of glass — it was Mr. Bass's Stroboscopic Polarizing Filter, by means of which the elusive little planet Basidium had been discovered hanging tiny and blue-green fifty thousand miles out in space. Why had no other astronomers discovered Basidium? Because they hadn't the filter, working on electrical impulses and affecting light rays in such a way that cloud layers could be pierced by the human eye as though they did not exist. The filter's metal frame fitted onto the eyepiece of the telescope, and now David slipped it into place, while Chuck got from the safe the paper on which Tyco Bass had listed the seasonal positions of Basidium.

"O.K., Dave, ready?"

"Ready," said David, and he turned on the motor which allowed the telescope to be swung into any desired position. Now he pressed a button and, from a slit in the domed ceiling of the observatory, the ceiling itself began to slide down on each side. The telescope swung upward, pointing like a finger into the sky. Chuck read out the numerals, David

adjusted the telescope exactly, and then presently he stopped turning the knobs and dials.

"Got it," he whispered. "There she is — Basidium, the Mushroom Planet."

"All right, Dave. Now that we know Basidium's out there opposite us in a good position to receive signals, let's turn up the lantern. What'll we say? D'you still think *SOS Tyco Bass* is the best?"

"Absolutely. That's all Mr. Theo has to know, and he'll send back instructions if there's any way to get hold of him. What a lucky, lucky thing Mr. Theo took one of the lanterns with him when he went to Basidium last!"

During the month that had just gone by, the boys had discovered the way Mr. Bass meant his lantern to be used.

Before this, they'd caught Mr. Theo's signals from Basidium only because they were watching the little planet through the telescope. But one evening they discovered that a lantern set on one side of the garden lighted up in response to the beam of a lantern on the other side. Astounded at what Mr. Bass had been able to invent, they tried the experiment using a lantern at each end of Cap'n Tom's beach. To their amazement, though the light of the signaling lantern which David held was turned to its lowest possible power, it caused Chuck's unlighted lantern

to respond, even though he was a great distance away.

"Dave," Chuck shouted when the two boys raced over the sand toward each other, "you flashed two shorts and a long, and my lantern lighted up two shorts and a long. It worked! It worked! And we can use the code Mr. Bass left on that sheet of paper on his workbench, and signal anything we want to Mr. Theo on Basidium any time — so long as the earth isn't between us and the Mushroom Planet."

"Yes — and, Chuck, Mr. Theo doesn't *have* to be looking through the telescope, the way we thought. If he or somebody else just happens to be looking at his lantern, he'll know what we mean."

"Do you suppose he copied Mr. Bass's code, Dave? And d'you s'pose he took it with him?"

"Oh, golly, I hope so! It's much quicker than any other code, the way Mr. Bass makes just a few flashes mean several words at once. Anyway, Mr. Theo copied the *Random Jottings*, so I'll bet he copied that paper too."

Now David drew the metal hood right around the lantern as though the hood were a cape, and presently the merest slit of soft light was left. Next, filled with excitement, he turned the knob — and turned — and turned — and turned — until the

knob would go round no more. How his heart beat! Never before had they had need to turn the lantern to its fullest strength — a strength great enough to reach across fifty thousand miles of space!

At once they hooded the lantern completely, scarcely able to believe that for an instant the lantern's unearthly powerful beam had caused Mr. Theo's lantern on Basidium to speak its warning of a coming message to any watching eye. For the astonishing thing was that *the light had not grown one whit brighter!* If you had looked into it, you would not have been blinded for life. No, the only difference one could see at all was that the color had changed just slightly from its usual soft silvery gold to a strange silver just touched with green, as though it were fox fire.

"Now, Dave, it says here in this code that SOS or *Need help* is five short flashes, and — let's see — his name, Tyco Bass's, is two long flashes and a short one. All right," — and you could tell Chuck was tense — "now, begin."

Five times David closed and opened the metal hood — five short intervals of light shining out while the hood was pulled back. Then, after a longish interval of darkness to indicate a pause between one set of flashes and another, he let the light shine out for two long flashes; then, after a pause of dark-



ness, a short flash. And that was all. It seemed so simple — perhaps far too simple.

For, though the boys waited, with their lantern turned off so that it could “receive,” no answer came.

“Turn it up again, Dave, and send the signals once more.”

Again David sent, being very, very careful about the intervals of darkness between the flashes of one phrase, SOS, and between the flashes of the other, *Tyco Bass*.

But still there was no answer.

“Oh, Chuck,” David groaned suddenly, “how do we know Mr. Theo’ll *ever* get our message? He couldn’t possibly sit and look at that lantern all the time. Or maybe — who knows? — maybe he’s even got it locked up in a box, or maybe he’s —”

“Don’t you suppose Mr. Theo’s got any sense at all?” broke in Chuck impatiently. “What d’you s’pose he *took* the lantern for? He knew what it could do. If *he’s* not watching it, I’ll bet —” And then in the next instant David’s mouth fell open in astonishment, for Chuck suddenly let out such a wild Indian war-whoop of joy the whole neighborhood must have heard it.

“Dave, look — look — he’s answering. He *was* watching the lantern — and he’s answering!”

Mr. Theo Has a Hunch

THERE WAS NOT a moment to lose. Now David found that, in their excitement, they had not put paper or pencil anywhere near the lantern, so he had to rush over to the desk. And from there he could not see the flashing, that almost miraculous answer caused by a tiny beam sent over the void. With shaking fingers he held his pencil poised over a sheet of paper.

"Tell me the signals, Chuck!"

But Chuck was so anxious he got all mixed up and finally had to come to a confused halt.

"Keep telling — keep telling!" shouted David, almost beside himself. Then in desperation he rushed over to where he could see the flashes.

But they had stopped and Chuck was ready to explode with fury because he'd fumbled.

"You watch — he'll start over again the way we did. He wouldn't take a chance. All right now — wait. . . ." And there was a dead silence while

the boys watched for the signaling to commence once more. Then — there it was! And Chuck's voice began, monotonous and steady: "Short, short, short, wait; short, long, long, short, long, wait; long, short, long, short . . ." and on and on until he heaved a sigh of relief when the lantern ceased to light.

"But we must get it again, Chuck. We must be sure we're right!"

Three more times the signaling flashed across space. And each time David checked to be sure he was correct. Either he or Chuck had made two mistakes, but the last time Mr. Theo's signaling and David's written symbols checked . . .

"Pre-cise-ly!" exulted David.

Then the signaling stopped for good as though Mr. Theo felt they should have his message as he'd sent it.

"How about sending a *Thanks*, Dave?"

And so, as David called out the shorts and longs, Chuck sent their acknowledgment of Mr. Theo's message speeding to Basidium.

"N-O-W," cried David, "to translate!"

They settled at the desk and, with their heads together, began working out from Mr. Bass's code the words Mr. Theo had flashed. But when they were finished, they stared at one another in bewilderment. For this was how the message read:



"Can't reach. Hunch. See R.J."

"He can't reach Mr. Bass, that's one thing," mused David. "But *what* hunch? And who's R.J.?"

For a moment or two the boys looked all around that small, silent room, searching in mystification for some clue to Mr. Theo's message. Then a light dawned on Chuck's face.

"Dave! He's got a hunch—look in *R.J.* You know!" And a triumphant, teasing gleam came into Chuck's dark eyes. "You're smart—as smart as me, anyway. *R.J.*! There's only one *R.J.* we know of."

"Look in *R.J.*, you said. Look in—oh, *Random Jottings!*" At once David went to the little safe and

took out Mr. Bass's long, ledger-sized notebook which he had always kept as a diary where he jotted down ideas and new experiments as well as daily happenings. "But why do you suppose Mr. Theo didn't just say *Random Jottings*, Chuck? Oh, I know — look, Mr. Bass didn't give a code for that, and if Mr. Theo had tried to make it up out of other things, it might have mixed us up. So he had to use the initials because there *is* a code for the different letters of the alphabet."

Now the two of them sat down together and opened the notebook to the first page.

But what could Mr. Theo have meant? For Tyco Bass's incredible little pothooks had not changed by some miracle over night. Those minute scratchings, like the tracks of an energetic insect, were as puzzling as ever. When you looked at them, you felt you ought to understand, but after studying each word, nothing came through — no meaning at all.

"What's anyone supposed to make of it?" groaned Chuck in despair. "Mr. Theo knew we couldn't read Mr. Bass's language. We *told* him we couldn't — oh, golly, this is the worst, the stupidest — David, look at the time — ten minutes of eight! Come on, let's put everything away. Dr. Frobisher'll —"

"Listen, Mr. Theo said to look in *R.J.*, and I'm going to look."

Stubbornly David went on turning over the leaves of the notebook, and there, several pages along, they discovered the most surprising thing. Mr. Theo had done some writing of his own!

"Random Jottings on *Random Jottings*," breathed Chuck in amazement, for the little man had never said a word about it. "Why, it's kind of like a surprise present from him."

There, above each line of Mr. Bass's, carefully written in, in the smallest, neatest, clearest script you can imagine, were Mr. Theo's translations of what Mr. Bass had jotted down. Now, searching each page, Chuck and David went down, line by line, from top to bottom, for something that Mr. Theo must have thought would be important to them.

And then at last — near the very end of the book, where Mr. Bass had made an entry at the time of their first trip to the Mushroom Planet — they came to something that made them catch their breaths in astonishment. They stared into one another's faces, and then Chuck began to read aloud.

It is now five in the morning of a day long to be remembered, for at this moment the boys Chuck and David are on their way home from Basidium.

But it is not only for this reason that I say the time is memorable. Just over an hour ago I found at last what I have been searching for, on and off for several years: a tiny satellite of earth's which is nearer even than Basidium, far nearer — a small metallic chunk not even a mile across and only a thousand miles out.

This tiny body I have named "Lepton" for the Greek one-hundredth of a drachma, because it is such a mite.

One would imagine it should already have been discovered, and yet a satellite as small as Lepton is hard to spot. For a quarter of its journey round the earth, it is in earth's shadow, so that it reflects no light at all and is therefore not to be seen. The rest of the time it travels in sunlight, and appears no brighter than a star seen by day. But in the early morning, or at dusk, it shines brightly, and this was when I searched.

I knew that the tiny body, if it were only a thousand miles distant, must be whizzing around our planet in two hours or it would not have escaped the clutches of earth's gravity, so that its speed would offer another difficulty in finding it.

Therefore it seems to me that it was the purest good fortune that led to my discovery, for early this morning on only the 1420th plate of my star camera, Lepton revealed itself.

This is tremendously exciting. But what excites me most is that I have been able to figure the vector a space ship would have to take, setting off

from this particular spot on earth, to meet Lepton and land upon it. And so for the first time in the history of our planet, a satellite might become of use as a space station. However, the figures I am about to set down are for the little space ship the boys have built, which uses the fuel I, myself, have concocted. What vector a large, three-stage rocket ship would take, I do not know, as it would use a different fuel and would go at different successive speeds.

Whether I shall ever suggest this journey to the boys (and how their eyes would open!) or whether I myself shall ever take it, I do not know. But it would be a wondrous experience for them to land on this tiny space station years and years ahead of the time any other human being would ever set foot on it, when artificial satellites or space stations shall have come into constant use.

From Lepton Chuck and David could look out upon the great earth (and it would be huge from only a thousand miles away) and see the nations turning slowly before their gaze, the long mountain ranges and vast oceans, the forests and deserts and jungles. Brilliantly revealed, then hidden by drifting cloud, how beautiful the sight would be! . . .

Now at this point Chuck could contain himself no longer. And just as he stopped reading, overcome by the excitement that had been rising inside him, David grasped his arm.

"Chuck, Chuck, d'you understand? D'you see what we could do?"

"We could go there — we could go to Lepton!"

"That's it! Listen to what it says here."

The return vector had to be quite carefully figured. Because of the way the earth turns on its axis, Lepton does not precisely retrace its path as it goes around the earth, but continually passes over changing territory. For instance, it would not for some time pass over Pacific Grove again, having passed over it once. *This would make it a wonderful viewing platform, because almost the whole earth would come under the eye of any watcher on Lepton.*

"Dave, if Prewytt Brumblydge has vanished, then we've got to find him before his experiment can start a chain reaction. And the only way —"

"Is to get up on Lepton and hunt for him!" finished David in triumph.

But now all at once the eagerness and excitement died from Chuck's face as though it had been wiped away by a hand.

"*Hunt for him! Hunt for Prewytt Brumblydge, a little tiny man, all over the world, from a thousand miles up?*" And Chuck pushed Mr. Bass's notebook away in angry frustration.

"But, Chuck, listen — I've thought of that. If Mr.

Brumblydge is going to make a Brumblitron and collect B-rays to break up atoms, he'll have to have an awfully huge antenna — what was it the paper said? — like an enormous saucer-shaped cobweb. Of course it'll be small from way out there in space, but look, we could — ”

“We could take the telescope!” shouted Chuck, shooting up out of his despair like a cork bobbing up in water. “Dave, I never thought of that. And we could take Mr. Bass’s filter and clamp it on — and — and — ” But here Chuck sank miserably again. “Dave,” he said in a flat voice, “what about our space ship? It’s got to be all taken apart, because of having landed in the ocean; then it’s got to be dried out and put back together again. And how do we know Grandpop can do it? And how’re we going to plug in the Stroboscopic Polarizing Filter up there on Lepton without an electric light socket to plug it in to?”

For just a second you might have thought David was defeated. The way had been so straight and clear. Mr. Theo had said *R.J.*, they’d followed his hunch — and here was the answer. But now it turned out it might not be the answer at all.

David bit his lip and stared down at Mr. Bass’s *Random Jottings*. Little Lepton could be the first space station in the history of the world, and if he

and Chuck only had their ship, there was nothing — nothing at all to keep them from landing on it.

“Chuck, when Cap’n Tom puts our space ship together again, we’ll have to ask him to put in an electric socket with power from a battery — or something. We’ll *have* to have it. All right now — let’s clear everything away.”

And then, just as they were about to put the *Random Jottings* back into the safe, they heard a car drive up along Thallo Street and come to a stop right down in front. Dr. Frobisher!

Chuck looked at his watch. It was well past eight, and so deep had they been in their discussion they’d forgotten completely to make any plans about what to do with the contents of the safe.

“It’s awful to hide things from him, Chuck,” protested David, his heart beginning to thump because he knew that at any minute the knocker on the front door would sound. “Even though we know there’s nothing about Mr. Bass’s journey in the notebook, nor about any mysterious object, even so it doesn’t seem right — ”

“Well, but we’ve just *got* to, Dave — that’s all, and the first place he’ll ask about is the safe.”

Then there went the knocker — *tock, tock, tock!* — and without another word Chuck snatched up the ledger, shoved it down behind some books

in the bookcase, slipped the filter off the telescope, and, with the cord wound round it, pushed it down into the dark along with the *Jottings*. Meanwhile David gathered up all the other objects having to do with Basidium and hid them away as well.

Just before they went downstairs, he turned to Chuck.

"It's funny — we didn't find any clue to where Mr. Bass is, and yet our problem's all solved."

". . . Because we've found a way to spot Mr. Brumblydge. You know, Dave, I'll bet Mr. Theo thinks there's an answer to everything in *Random Jottings*."

A Gift from Out of Space

TEN MINUTES LATER they were all of them — Chuck and David and Dr. and Mrs. Topman and Dr. Frobisher — gathered around a fine blaze in the fireplace down in Mr. Bass's living room.

"You see, the one person Prewytt would always listen to was Tyco Bass," Dr. Frobisher was saying while he paced up and down as if he were too wrought up to sit quietly. He was an imposing man with a broad, kindly face, a large nose and wide mouth. Impatient energy seemed to vibrate from him.

"Did they know each other well, sir?" asked David.

"Oh, indeed. Tyco came up to the observatory at San Julian quite often, and I always felt there was some sort of bond between Tyco and Prewytt, though I could never decide what it was. And you know, I have the strangest idea in the world that



Tyco knew what that bond was, but, for some mysterious reason of his own, chose not to tell."

"Goodness!" breathed Mrs. Topman, and David vowed to himself that the very next time he saw Mr. Bass he would ask him what this bond was and why he'd chosen not to tell.

"But this business of a little contraption smaller than a washing machine," put in Dr. Topman, "causing the earth to go up in a flash of light — surely that's not possible, Dr. Frobisher?"

"Wouldn't an awful lot of uranium be needed?" added Chuck.

At this, Dr. Frobisher gave Chuck a quick look through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Don't you remember what it said in the newspaper, Chuck? Or did you people see that? What if Prewytt Brumblydge had found some sort of metal — a metal that just suited his purposes and that he needed only a little of to start his experiment with? And what if he had some, but needed more in order to carry on the experiment for a satisfactory length of time?" Now there was a small silence in which Dr. Frobisher ran his hand through his thick, dark hair and thus got it into an even wilder state than it had been in before. "It might even be a new element he's found —"

"A new element!" repeated David in awe.

"Yes, David, and I will tell you something very strange about it: under spectroscopic analysis, its beam is infragreen."

"Infragreen!" exclaimed everyone, astounded, for who ever heard of any beam of energy from a substance revealing itself as infragreen?

"That doesn't make sense, does it?" laughed Dr. Frobisher. "But, as you know, there are infrared rays and ultraviolet rays, both of which are invisible to the naked eye. And when Prewytt tested the substance of his meteorite by burning a tiny bit of it and directing the light through the prism of a spectroscope — *no band of any color whatsoever appeared!*

"Well, he was completely mystified. But Prewytt had perfected a filter, and when he snapped this over the eyepiece of the spectroscope, lo and behold the color band of his meteorite proved to be the most beautiful shade of pure, brilliant blue-green you can ever imagine!"

Pure, brilliant blue-green! At once David said to himself: Basidium, the blue-green planet.

"And this filter he sees the band through, Dr. Frobisher?" he managed to get out, his throat tight with anxiety.

"V-e-ery, very interesting. For it is a filter in which Prewytt managed somehow to combine a

stroboscope with the polarization of light — ” but at the sound of a muffled cry, Dr. Frobisher stopped suddenly. “Pardon me, David?” he said, startled, turning his head.

“Strobo — ” began David in a hoarse voice, then was silent, while Chuck leaned over and examined the toe of his shoe very minutely in order to hide his flushed face.

“Well, now — as I was saying,” went on Dr. Frobisher intently, “only by the use of Prewytt’s filter together with the spectroscope were we able to view the curious blue-green band this substance sends forth.”

“And the name of this new substance?” questioned Mrs. Topman, trying not to look at Chuck and David.

For the first time Dr. Frobisher seemed embarrassed. He cleared his throat.

“I am afraid that you will laugh,” he replied, “and certainly I wouldn’t blame you. But if you laugh, it will all seem so ridiculous, when really the whole business is anything but ridiculous. You see, Prewytt has named it Brumblum.”

“Brumblum!” cried Mrs. Topman and let out a peal of delighted laughter, saying she thought it a perfect name.

“But now you said you saw it on his desk, Dr.

Frobisher?" said Dr. Topman, leaning forward in intense interest. "This piece of Brumblium?"

"Do you mean you can hold it in your hand," put in David, looking almost normal by this time, "the way you'd hold a little piece of gold or silver or sulfur? Would it burn your hand like a piece of phosphorus, or was it liquid and slide-y like mercury?"

"No, just rough and dull and iron-colored, a small lump sitting on his desk."

"And *did* you hold it in your hand?"

At this, a peculiar expression came over Dr. Frobisher's face.

"I tried to," he said, "but I couldn't."

"You couldn't!" cried Mrs. Topman. "Why, Dr. Frobisher, what do you mean?"

"I mean," he answered, "that I couldn't budge it. There it sat — and I went to pick it up — and it wouldn't move."

"Was it *stuck*?" asked David.

Dr. Frobisher smiled.

"Listen! You know that uranium is one of the heaviest metals in the world. A ten-inch cube weighs about a thousand pounds. Well, think of this: Brumblium is almost twice as heavy!"

"But where did Mr. Brumblydge get this piece of metal?" asked David.

Here Dr. Frobisher ceased walking about and came and sat down, staring into the fire for a moment or two.

"In a field one cold, gray day," he replied presently. "It was a very peculiar thing. You might almost say it was a gift flung at him out of space."

The Search

"TELL US, Dr. Frobisher."

"Please tell us how it happened."

"Well," said Dr. Frobisher, "late one afternoon, at the time Prewytt was just getting on the track of his B-rays but was puzzled to know how to continue, he went for a walk. It was a day of dark, lowering skies when the wind moaned in the trees and bent their tops all over in one direction. Well, there was Prewytt walking along with his head down and his arms behind his back, thinking, thinking, thinking."

"And then all at once he heard a rumble, like a crash of thunder — and out of that gray, windy sky he saw descending toward him a greenish ball of fire. Right toward him it came, as though it were aimed at him, bent on destroying him! And he stood there, filled with an indescribable excitement, and watched it come down. Then it disappeared."

"He knew perfectly well that it is possible to think



you have seen a meteor fall and bury itself in the earth, when really it has vanished far below the horizon. But he had marked this one's exact path, the distance from the nearest tree where it had disappeared, and he knew, he said, that it had landed not far from him.

"He ran forward, hunting across that bare, pebbly expanse of hard clay. He was certain, he told me afterwards, that he would find it. And sure enough, he came after a short time to the hole this incredibly heavy little chunk of metal had dug for itself — a chunk not even as large as the one we were speaking of, but weighing, I should imagine, about seventy pounds."

"Of course he could hardly move it, and this stunned him. He couldn't believe such a small object could be so heavy. He was frightened for a moment, thinking perhaps he'd taken leave of his senses. Then he wondered if it might be magnetized, held there by some enormous piece of magnetic material buried beneath it. But now he remembered the weight of uranium and he suspected that he'd found a new element, or a combination of elements fused into a new substance.

"So then he ran back to the observatory, tremendously excited, and got a little black leather bag he owns, and a shovel, and a crowbar, and put these

into a wheelbarrow. Then back he went to his meteorite, pried it up with the crowbar, slipped the shovel underneath, hoisted the meteorite into the black bag and carted it up to his office.

"There it was on his desk when I first saw it, a small dark lump, but with the pitted surface typical of a meteorite, and there it remained until he started his experiments of bombarding it with B-rays."

"But not with a Brumblitron," said David.

"Oh, no — with a sort of makeshift apparatus, a testing apparatus that showed him what *could* be done in the way of producing energy." Now Dr. Frobisher frowned, sighed, and shook his head. Then he looked up at them. "Another mysterious thing. Tyco Bass came in one day and saw the meteorite on his desk. And when Prewytt began telling him about it, Tyco smiled and nodded as if he were hearing a story already known.

"So we asked him: why did he smile that way and nod? And he answered:

"'Because I, too, have a little blob of metal just like this at home, and because mine, too, tests infra-green under the spectroscope. I got my bit of metal from an old woman. She found it in her garden when she was digging one day, and she begged me to take it away because, she said, nothing so small had

any right to be so heavy.' Here Tyco eyed Prewytt in a way he'd done once or twice before. 'Out of the skies, twin pieces of the lost planet. And you and I, Prewytt, of all people on earth, have chanced on these two special fragments. Remarkable, isn't it?'

"We all of us up there at San Julian thought that it was — *very* remarkable. Many times since I have thought of Tyco's words and wondered what he could possibly have meant by them: 'You and I, Prewytt, of all people on earth, have chanced on these two special fragments.' Many times I've meant to ask Tyco what he has done with his meteorite. Have you boys ever seen it? Has Tyco ever mentioned it to you?"

"No," answered David. "Not once, Dr. Frobisher. Maybe it wasn't very important to him. Maybe he gave it away to a museum."

"Good heavens, no! I'm certain he wouldn't do that." Now Dr. Frobisher got up and commenced casting quick, sharp glances about the room as though the time had come to act. "No, no — and we must search for it; we must search for Tyco's bit of Brumblium at once — tonight, in case Prewytt plans to come here for the same purpose. First of all, have I your permission, boys, to carry through this search?"

"Oh yes, we've got to look for it," said David.

"Mr. Bass would want us to," agreed Chuck.

"Very well, then. Dr. Topman, would you and Mrs. Topman take the living room, bedroom and kitchen? And Chuck, will you take the observatory? As for you and me, David, we will go down into that chaos of incredible objects Tyco always called his workroom. Come now, we must begin."

But just then Chuck thought of something.

"Dr. Frobisher, maybe all we need is a Geiger counter — would that help?"

"Chuck, my boy," returned Dr. Frobisher, looking extremely discomfited, "you have hit me on a sensitive spot. I tried all the way here to find some place open where I could buy one, but no luck. I loaned the one I had at San Julian to a friend, who's gone off on a vacation. Naturally, if we fail, I shall get one tomorrow. But meanwhile I can't leave this house tonight without having made an effort to find Tyco's Brumblium."

And so the search began.

High and low they looked, in every drawer, in every corner, on every shelf. Mrs. Topman said she knew of all the possible places a woman might hide some precious object, but she could not begin to imagine where Tyco Bass might hide one. Chuck, upstairs, searched behind *all* the books in the bookcase, behind all the instruments of celestial

navigation, and in all the drawers of Mr. Bass's desk. Down in the cellar, Dr. Frobisher and David had an awful time. There were so many places to look, so much clutter to search under, around and through, so many places that bit of metal might have been, that they scarcely knew where to start.

Finally, with empty hands, they all gathered in the living room again.

"Don't be discouraged, Dr. Frobisher," comforted Mrs. Topman. "Perhaps Mr. Brumblydge has no intention of going ahead with his experiment. Or at the very worst he's probably endangering only himself."

"Yes, but he's much too valuable a man to lose. How I wish he'd stuck to his satellitel! The moon's not the only one, you know — at least according to Brumblydge." And with this appalling announcement, Dr. Frobisher huddled himself into his overcoat and started for the hall.

"*Not the only one!*" repeated David. For a second all four of them, Dr. Topman, Mrs. Topman and the boys, stared at one another with the same question in their eyes: Could Prewytt Brumblydge have discovered Basidium?

"You see, this filter he'd made," explained Dr. Frobisher, "the polarizing one with the stroboscopic

mechanism — you know, the one he used to spot the Brumblum band with — well, you could fit it over the eyepiece of a telescope. And he claimed he'd discovered a satellite with it."

"A satellitel" whispered Chuck in horror.

But David could not get out a single word.

"Fifty or sixty thousand miles away, Prewytt said it was," went on Dr. Frobisher, quite unaware of what he was doing to his listeners. "He described it to me — pale blue-green. He was terribly worked up over it, as you can imagine, and he was all ready to show it to us and then make his announcement to the newspapers — when he broke his filter, dropped it on the stone floor of the observatory and smashed it into a thousand pieces.

"Oh, he was wild! And he tried to make another, and he couldn't, and he told Tyco Bass about it — and you should have seen the look on Tyco's face. I never knew what to make of *that*. Anyway, Prewytt never could get the same results again, no matter how he tried."

For a moment, nobody said anything. Then at last Dr. Topman managed to find his manners.

"Surely you're not going all the way back to San Julian tonight, Dr. Frobisher? We should be very happy to have you stay."

"Please do," said Mrs. Topman. "We have plenty

of room, and then you could go on with your search first thing tomorrow morning."

But Dr. Frobisher shook his head.

"Thank you so much, but I promised Whipsnade, one of the men over at the College, that I'd come by. He's expecting me about ten and we have a great deal to talk about." Then as Dr. Topman opened the door, Dr. Frobisher turned. "Good night, Chuck and David. Perhaps, if you agree, we might have a try at Tyco's notebook even though it *is* in an unreadable shorthand. I was so hoping there'd be something in it to help."

There was, Dr. Frobisher — answered David silently, never speaking a word — *there was.*

Dr. Topman Speaks Too Soon

THE NEXT MORNING when Chuck got over bright and early, all ready to set off for Mr. Bass's and start hunting for the Brumblum again, he found David in the kitchen talking to his mother. But perhaps Mrs. Topman, putting on the coffee, whipping up an omelet, and seeing that the toast didn't burn, had not been listening closely enough.

"So you see, we've got to get up there, Mom — Chuck and I — now that Prewytt Brumblydge has disappeared. It's absolutely necessary."

"Get up where, dear?" she asked, pouring the omelet into a frying pan and turning the pan this way and that. "Oh, cheesel" she said. "I think I'll put some cheese in."

"Why, up to this tiny little planetoid Mr. Bass has discovered. It's not even a mile in diameter and it's only a thousand miles out, so it can be used as a space station. And you know what? Mr. Bass wrote

down the exact vector we have to use to get there."

"A space station!" gasped Mrs. Topman, all her interest in the omelet vanished. "And not even a mile in diameter? But how could you stay on without gravity? And why would you want to?"

"Because we have to hunt for Mr. Brumblydge, I told you!" explained David in a great, loud voice as though his mother were deaf.

And then, just as it had done the night before at mention of Mr. Brumblydge, the phone rang.

"Hello?" cried Dr. Topman, who had come along the hall just in time to answer and who seemed to suspect what the call might be about. "Yes — oh, Dr. Frobisher! Have you heard . . . ?" And then everyone could hear Dr. Frobisher's energetic voice answering on the other end, but they couldn't make out a single word he was saying, so that David and Chuck positively danced with impatience.

"What is it, Dad — what?" whispered David.

But Dr. Topman was listening intently.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean it! And so then he didn't really . . ." And again he was interrupted and Dr. Frobisher could be heard talking excitedly.

"Oh, *gee*," burst out Chuck, unable to restrain himself. "What in heck?"

"*Sssh — sh!*" said Mrs. Topman.

"Yes — yes," went on Dr. Topman. "Well, in that case — indeed we will. Good-by, then. Yes, we will." And Dr. Topman hung up, turned, and stared at them. "What do you suppose? Dr. Frobisher spent the night at the Whipsnades' — and they told him they'd had a note from Prewytt Brumblydge saying he was about to go south for a vacation and wondering if he might stop by for a few days' visit on his way back. He said he was going to work his whole experiment out on paper all over again and he's sure he'll have something very interesting to tell them."

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Topman.

"Yes, and he apparently thinks he told Dr. Frobisher he was going. He has six weeks' vacation coming, three from last year which he was too busy to take, and three this year — and he's on his way to Texas."

"Oh, so then after all . . ."

"Yes, so his old aunt *does* come into the picture, because she's the one he's going to visit — a very rich old lady by the name of Matilda —"

"Aunt Matilda Brumblydge!" cried Mrs. Topman. "Thank heaven, Frank — what a relief!" She clasped her hands together as though she could scarcely believe the good news and then turned and hurried out into the kitchen. "Come on, chil-

dren," she called, "how about a nice, peaceful breakfast and then maybe a picnic at Big Sur?"

But there wasn't a single word out of Chuck or David.

Silently they trailed after her and sat down, one on each side of the breakfast table. For the truth of the matter was (David stared at the cream pitcher and felt black and ashamed of himself), the whole truth of the matter was — he was horribly disappointed. Imagine that! Here came the news that Mr. Brumblydge wasn't going away for the purpose of building his Brumblitron after all, but was only starting off on a pleasant six weeks' vacation — and David wasn't a bit happy; he wasn't filled with relief. He had only an awful, depressed, let-down sort of feeling. He turned to look at Chuck to see how he was taking it, and there was Chuck staring glumly at the tablecloth and tracing designs on it with the end of a spoon.

"*Heck!*" said Chuck, tossing the spoon down. "Now everything's finished and spoiled and there's no need to go to Mr. Bass's planetoid after all."

Yes, that was it. He and Chuck had been going to save the world — and now there was no need.

"Well," said Dr. Topman, sitting down beside them and beaming at everybody, "at least we're all

through worrying about Prewytt Brumblydge."

But he couldn't possibly have been more mistaken.

Prewytt Brumblydge Begins

AT THAT VERY MOMENT a little man in a small foreign car was buzzing along the highway that leads from Monterey into Pacific Grove. In Pacific Grove he stopped off and made several purchases which he stowed away in the trunk. Next he asked the direction to Thallo Street, was greatly puzzled that no one he spoke to, not even the service station attendant, could tell him how to get there, and so set out to find it for himself.

He recalled that Tyco had once said he lived at 5 Thallo Street and that Thallo was not far from Frigate, which ran straight down to the ocean. Well, now, here was Frigate, observed Prewytt, peering out of the car, so that it ought not to take long to find Tyco's place.

As a matter of fact it did not. What a nice, quiet neighborhood. Not a soul about. And here was Number 5, as neat as you please. SOCIETY OF YOUNG ASTRONOMERS AND STUDENTS OF SPACE TRAVEL, read

the notice posted up on the white picket fence. Space travel! What in the name of goodness would Tyco be up to next? But then he always had been interested in space travel for some incredible reason, but surely one would imagine he'd have enough to do without forming societies. Now Prewytt looked eagerly for his friend, who had always been extremely fond of working in his garden. But there was not a person in sight, not a sound to be heard except a crow cawing from the round roof of Tyco Bass's observatory. So Prewytt, having parked his car, took up a small, sturdy leather bag from the seat beside him and hurried along the path to the house.

Filled with anticipation, he ran up the front steps, rang the bell, got no answer, and rang again — a good, long ring — with an exclamation of impatience. But still no one came. Prewytt put his finger to his head and thought; then said aloud, "Cellar!" Yes, that was Tyco's workroom, the place in which he spent the greater part of his time. All around the house Prewytt went, and came at length to the cellar door, found it unlocked, and put his head in.

"Tyco?"

Still no answer.

"Is there anything so forlorn in the world," mur-

mured Prewytt, gazing all about, "as the house of a friend who has gone away?"

Ah, but what a splendid assortment of tools and materials and contraptions! Prewytt's heart warmed and his fingers ached to start work on some creation of his own just for the pure fun of it. But no, for one of the reasons he had come was to ask if he might borrow that "blob of metal" Tyco had spoken of not three months ago, and which he had said Prewytt might have. "Blob of metal," indeed. Of course he'd investigated, Tyco had told them up at San Julian, and he had come to the conclusion that it must certainly be an unknown substance, no doubt containing endless possibilities for experiment. But he'd left the blob sitting about in his workroom somewhere, being far too busy with other fascinating discoveries (what could they have been?) to trouble any further.

"Take it away anytime, Prewytt," Tyco had said, when Prewytt had told him something of the experiment he himself had in mind. "I should be happy to let you have it. It's in my workroom."

"Yes, but now *where* in his workroom, on which shelf," mused Prewytt aloud, "or even, worse luck, in which drawer?"

And he stood in the middle of the cellar and looked up and down and all around. Then, as the

light in the cellar was a bit dim, he went over and turned on the switch, whereupon Tyco's mysterious bubbles of light began to glow and to spread their radiance into every corner in a way which caused Mr. Brumblydge to exclaim aloud in wonder.

Then, without further waste of time, and in a very methodical fashion, he commenced his search.



It's in the Bag

CHUCK AND DAVID were by this time down on the beach in Cap'n Tom's cave, watching Cap'n Tom examine their space ship.

How fortunate they had been! When they had rowed out that foggy morning after Horatio Peabody's rescue from the sea the night before, they could hardly believe their luck when they actually spied the silvery nose of their ship riding up one side of a long, low swell. It had taken them two hours to find her — but there she was. They maneuvered close to her with their oars, laced a rope through the big blades of her tail and towed her in.

Then they saw that the space ship seemed not to be damaged in the least. They could discover no dent or break in her surface, and even the big window across the front was as smooth as it had been before.

"Do you think you can fix her up, Grandpop?"

asked Chuck anxiously. "I mean just as good as new so's we can take off for Basidium again right away?"

"We'd just bust, Cap'n Tom, if we thought we were never going to see Basidium, or Ta, or Mr. Theodosius and all the Mushroom People any more," said David.

"And it'll have to be fixed up *pre-cise-ly* right in every detail," went on Chuck, "or David's Mom and Pop'll never let us take off again. At least they'll never let David."

"And neither would you let Chuck, would you, Cap'n Tom?" demanded David jealously.

"Not b'my barnacles 'n scuppers, I wouldn't," replied Cap'n Tom firmly. "Now let me see here." And he opened up a little door on the side of the space ship near the tail and peered in at the rocket motor. "Yep, got to be taken apart, every bolt and nut and screw," he muttered.

"But, why, Grandpop? Why? Why not let the whole ship just dry out? If we took off in her, she'd dry out quick enough!"

"Don't be any more foolish than you can help, Chucky, my boy," returned Cap'n Tom briefly. "She won't even start up — I tried this morning. Not a peep out of her." And he continued frowning and muttering to himself.

"Well, then, if we *do* take her apart," said David, impulsively reaching out a hand to take hold of one of the wires leading to the rocket motor, "we can label everything so's it'll go back in right. Chuck and I could start labeling right now."

But Cap'n Tom deftly flicked his hand away and then peered up at the two boys from under his bushy white eyebrows.

"Y'know, it seems to me it'd be a fine idea," he observed gravely, "if you two young scall-wags would find it both convenient and agreeable to take off and leave me alone for a bit so that I could have a little peace and quiet. That's all I ask: *just a little peace and quiet!* Besides, I need Tyco Bass's directions for putting this infernal maze of pipes and wires back together again —"

"C'mon, Dave — let's go!" yelled Chuck, about to burst with impatience over his grandfather's slow, careful deliberations. How he hated waiting while people thought. He never could understand why they just didn't start in doing something.

In another ten minutes they were pounding up onto Mr. Bass's porch. Then David turned around suddenly and took a good look at the small foreign car parked out in front.

"That's funny — I've never seen that car before. Wonder whose it is?"

"Never seen it before either. Come on, Dave. Gee, I hope Mr. Theo translated that part about putting the space ship together. I can't remember whether he did or not."

In they went, after unlocking the door, and raced up the steep stairs to the observatory. Then they got Mr. Bass's *Random Jottings* out of the safe and were about to flip over its pages in search of that particular part which told of the working of the space ship (it had to be there somewhere, for Mr. Theo had said he'd used it himself), when David caught back Chuck's hand.

"Listen, Chuck!"

They listened. But there wasn't a sound except the harsh "ca-a-ar, ca-a-r!" of a crow down the street, a cry that kept on and on, now far, now near.

"Wonder what that old crow's all worked up about?"

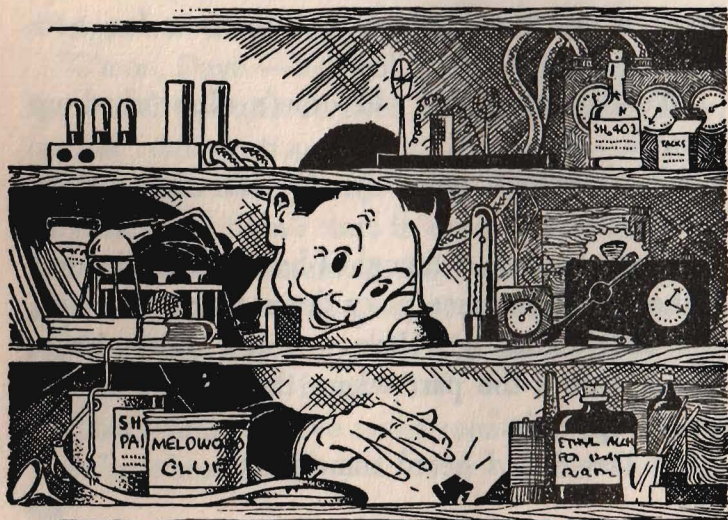
"Oh, nothing, probably. What's the matter, Dave?"

"I don't know — I thought I heard something out in the garden or some place down there. Oh, well, let's keep hunting. Here — what's this? Look, Chuck, this is the part where the jottings on the space ship begin."

But David *had* heard something.

What he'd heard was little Mr. Brumblydge down in the cellar exclaiming aloud in the most terrible agony when he'd dropped a hammer on his toe.

"Ow-w-wr!" howled Prewytt Brumblydge, dancing around on one foot while he clutched the other in both hands. Then he sank down on the ground and took off his shoe, rubbing and rubbing his burning toe and moaning softly to himself. Gradually the pain ebbed away and then, as he leaned over to tie up his shoelace, he happened to glance sideways. He stared, his gaze focused unbelievably upon a small, dark object, quite far



back and sitting behind a number of cans and boxes on a low shelf just opposite him at eye-level.

In a second his pain was forgotten. "Ah," he breathed in delight, and reached out to touch the lumpy little thing, slightly smaller than the one he had found, dark iron-colored, and with one side cut and polished smooth until it shone. But not grayish-silver as do most cut and polished meteorites, he saw when he had got the cans and boxes out of the way. No, this strange metal gleamed a warm, coppery gold with a hint of green in it, the same as his own piece of Brumblum. And traced across its face were those mysterious hieroglyphs which are the visible memories of every meteorite's early life in the molten heart of an ancient planet — a planet that cooled slowly for millions of years and then exploded in some catastrophic collision that sent its debris drifting forever about our solar system.

Now, hieroglyphs on ordinary meteorites are called the Widmanstätten pattern. But Mr. Widmanstätten would never have recognized the curious figures on the face of this bit of Brumblum. Prewytt thought he might call them Brumbligen lines, as they could only occur under great pressure during the slow cooling of Brumblum.

Chuckling and exclaiming to himself, Prewytt

now got his leather bag and opened it to receive the treasure. He put it on the ground beneath the edge of the shelf and began tugging on the Brumblum. But it would not budge. Whereupon Prewytt got a strap, placed it around the Brumblum, pulled on both ends of the strap, and in another moment had the Brumblum in the bag.

"Ah-ha, there you are, my beauty!" he exclaimed aloud in triumph. Then he took a deep breath, got a firm hold on the handles, decided they might give way, got the bag up into his arms and trotted with small, quick steps over to the door of the cellar. Next, after catching his breath, he dumped the bag onto a wheelbarrow, opened the door and trundled the wheelbarrow to his car.

Now while he was out there, out of sight and doubled over, trying to get the little black bag up onto the seat, who should come out of the house but Chuck and David. But as Prewytt was around on the street side with the wheelbarrow, they did not see him.

"I don't know what you're fussing about," grumbled Chuck, scratching his head.

"Well, I don't either. But I'm sure I heard something — a squeaking sound as if someone were rolling a wheelbarrow right down here in the garden. Listen to that stupid old crow — what's the matter

with him? Come on, Chuck, let's go around in the back."

Off they went.

And at that moment Prewytt stood up, locked the car door, put the wheelbarrow away, and ran up onto the front porch to give the bell one more ring. To his great surprise and mystification, the door was slightly ajar.

"Why, I could have wagered it was closed," he declared aloud in wonderment. "So then Tyco *is* at home!" And he slipped in. "Tyco! Tyco! It's me — Prewytt." Then he listened, but there came no answer.

Completely puzzled, Prewytt looked all around the comfortable little living room. Opposite, he caught a glimpse of Tyco's bedroom with the bed neatly made and his slippers sitting underneath; and just beyond the bedroom, a corner of the very small kitchen. "How very snug," he said to himself. "How I should enjoy a good long visit with Tyco sometime, so that we could sit in front of the fire and talk. But perhaps he's up in the observatory."

A moment or two later Prewytt pushed back the door.

"What in tarnation . . . ? Where is everybody? And why is everything lying out like this?"

For there — there on the desk lay Tyco Bass's

Random Jottings, and as a breeze swept through the open door, it fluttered the pages over one by one. The door of the wall safe was swung wide, and inside, lying quite defenseless under Prewytt's searching eye was the necklace which Ta, the king of the Mushroom People, had given the boys on their first visit to Basidium. There also was the notebook, blurred and crumpled, which Horatio Peabody had kept on the second trip. And beside it was the handful of precious stones he had picked up on the Mushroom Planet and then thrown away — not realizing, after his rescue from the sea, what they were.

But these objects did not hold Prewytt's gaze for a moment. No; because above all, there was the Stroboscopic Polarizing Filter with its cord wound around it.

For a moment Mr. Brumblydge was speechless. He picked it up and examined it closely.

"Why, so Tyco Bass has been working on it too. Tyco! Tyco!" he shouted, running to the door. Then, filled with the most tremendous excitement, he darted back again. "I had the strangest feeling I should never be able to get ahead of him. Now I wonder — could it work on the same principle as the one I broke? What was his formula? The same as mine?" He stood staring at the filter in silence for

a moment while a terrible battle against temptation took place inside him. "Tyco," he said at last, "forgive me, but I must know — I *must* know. Surely you can understand my feelings. Will the filter be polarizing as mine was? Will it be stroboscopic? And finally, will it reveal . . . ?"

Now with a trembling hand, Prewytt, having plugged in the cord, fitted the filter over the eyepiece of the telescope and turned on the motor that swung it into position. Tensely he put an eye to the eyepiece, turned the dials this way and that, and then — gazed in silence.

"Yes, there you are," he murmured in almost incredulous happiness. "There you are, my little planet. Aren't you a lovely sight! I had almost begun to believe I'd dreamed it — that you weren't really there at all. But I didn't dream it, and yet no one would believe that you were out there — pale blue-green and about thirty or forty miles in diameter. Not so very far away either, say roughly sixty thousand miles. To think I discovered you, and then the filter slipped out of my hand and was smashed to bits! I, a man, felt the tears come to my eyes! Why, I believe that, if it weren't for my project, I would bend every effort toward putting some sort of space ship together so that I could reach you and prove to the world the truth of your existence."

Here Prewytt tore himself away from the contemplation of Basidium swimming out there in space and began walking rapidly up and down. Several times he passed near Tyco Bass's desk and at last, as he came to it, he glanced down at the open notebook and happened to catch sight of what he thought were these words: "Why is the blue-green planet invisible? Because it does not shine by reflected light as ordinary planets do. And what can it be composed of, that its beam should test infra-green?"

Prewytt peered closer and then looked up, his eyes widening. Next he slowly put both hands to his head as though he were shaken — absolutely shaken to his foundations.

Now a whole string of small, separate details came together and gave him the final, the only answer to the one troublesome problem in his project of the B-ray.

"Brumblium — and the satellitel" he cried. "The invisible satellite, whose beam tests infragreen and which can be seen *only* with the filter — and Brumblium, my mysterious metal, whose infragreen band is also seen *only* with the filter. There you are, Prewytt Brumblydge! There you are! And so, then, what is the thing I must do next?"

"I know! I know!"



"It's as plain as it can possibly be. Oh, Tyco, why aren't you here?"

His face all aglow with triumph, Mr. Brumblydge, this solid, neatly dressed little man, slapped Tyco's notebook closed, clasped it to his chest, kicked up his heels and commenced to dance. Right there in the midst of Mr. Bass's solemn array of astronomical books and instruments, he did a Welsh jig, *la-de-de-da-ing* away to himself as though he were the happiest man on earth — as, right at that moment, he probably was.

"Ah, Tyco, you rascal!" he triumphed, doing his jig round and round the room. "Thought you got there ahead of me, did you? Made the filter and discovered the satellite — and never said a single word!"

At this, Prewytt put back his head and laughed and laughed — and then stopped.

For the next thing he knew, there was a scuffle on the stairs, the door was thrown open behind him, he whipped around, there was a moment of absolute silence, and then . . .

"Thief!" exploded two furious voices in unison, and Prewytt Brumblydge stood there confronted by the enraged and appalled faces of Chuck and David.

The Enemy within the Gates

DAVID knew at once who this was. For Mr. Brumblydge perfectly resembled his picture, and the rest of him, seen now for the first time, finished off exactly as David had built him up in his imagination.

A bit over five feet he was, no taller than the boys, very neatly made, rather stoutish, but strong-looking as though he could have been an acrobat had he chosen. His head was round, slightly large for the size of him — “But not overly large considering he is probably a genius,” flashed into David’s mind. His bright brown eyes were shining and alert. His snub nose, his small ears, his whole body seemed alert and brimming with energy. He hadn’t a single hair out of place, the wings of his bow tie were as shapely as a butterfly’s, his vest was buttoned just so, his jacket fitted to perfection, and his trousers had a beautiful crease. His small black shoes shone.

Still clasping Tyco Bass's notebook, he looked at them in amazement.

"But I am not a thief," he said.

"You are too, Mr. Brumblydge!" said David in an awful voice, which nevertheless shook just a little.

"Why, you know who I am!" he exclaimed in surprise. "But I don't know who you are."

To this the boys made no answer, but David heard Chuck say, as if to himself, that he *knew* they shouldn't have stayed playing around with that dog for so long. Then Chuck closed the door behind him and leaned against the knob.

There's no window, David was thinking very coolly in spite of the pounding of his heart. And the only opening out of here, beside the door, is that narrow slit in the roof the telescope points to. So he's cornered. But he looks awfully strong. All the same, he's got Mr. Bass's notebook; and if he thinks he's going to make off with it and get the formula for the filter out of there, he's mistaken.

"I'm David Topman, Mr. Brumblydge, and this is Chuck Masterson. We're friends of Mr. Bass's."

"I am happy to know you, David and Chuck. You see, I, too, am a friend of Tyco Bass's. I came here to ask him some questions, and when he didn't answer the door, which I found open, I thought that

he might be here in his observatory. So I came on up."

"Yes, but what are you doing with Mr. Bass's notebook?" demanded David, staring straight into Prewytt's eyes.

"You haven't any right to it," said Chuck. "It's private. You shouldn't have looked into it."

"But I *haven't* looked into it," returned Mr. Brumblydge indignantly. "Oh," he caught himself, "that's not quite true. As I passed the desk, I happened to catch sight of something about invisibility. And when I saw it, it excited me so that I slapped the book shut and — well, I will have to admit — I began dancing around with it." Now Prewytt Brumblydge laid Tyco's notebook down on the desk. "Boys, I did not look through it — though if I know Tyco Bass, it is full of such experiments and discoveries as any scientist would give an eyetooth to share."

"It's got —" began Chuck, and then drew in his breath sharply. For he had been going to boast (because he was so proud of Mr. Bass), *It's got millions of things in it you've never even begun to think about*. But now he felt David's elbow slowly pressing into his stomach, and immediately he knew what he was to do. Quietly, quietly, he turned the key in the lock at his back and, hidden by David,

who was standing in front of him, slipped the key into his pocket.

Now they were locked in, alone with the enemy.

Yet Prewytt Brumblydge somehow did not look in the least like an enemy.

"May I sit down for a moment?" he asked. "I think that I should like to tell you why those few words I saw excited me so."

"All right, Mr. Brumblydge," said Chuck in a businesslike manner.

"I think we'd better hear," added David, and now both boys came over to the desk and Chuck carelessly flipped the safe door closed.

"For many years," said Prewytt, sitting down in Mr. Bass's desk chair, pushing the notebook away and looking at them very seriously, "for many years Tyco Bass has spoken to Dr. Frobisher and me of space travel. Of course, we simply smiled at him. But then I managed, some time ago, to invent a filter with which I discovered another satellite besides the moon. However, before I could even announce my discovery, I broke my filter. Now I see that Tyco, too, was working secretly along the same lines. And just now, when I put his filter over the eyepiece of the telescope and beheld my little green satellite again, for the first time in my life I longed to travel through space.

"I thought: What if Tyco is right? What if we *could* travel away from this noisy confusion of factories and jet planes and automobiles and radios and television sets — simply soar away through the stars! What a wonderful ideal! Yes, but more than that, my friends," and here Prewytt Brumblydge suddenly leaned forward and fixed the boys with his large, gleaming eyes, "more than that, a very practical one —"

"*Practical!*" exclaimed Chuck and David in one voice, and David was suddenly overcome with such an acute attack of suspicion and anxiety that he began to get a stomach-ache.

"Yes, practical," repeated Mr. Brumblydge, his whole face alight with anticipation. "And I will tell you why. Listen! When I first determined that that little satellite out there had an atmosphere — an atmosphere, I found, not much different from our own — I could scarcely believe it. How could this be possible? For we all know that a tiny body of that size — thirty or forty miles in diameter — having so little mass, would have practically no gravitational attraction and hence no atmosphere.

"Well, there was no answer to my question, and there seemed no possibility of getting one — until one day I went for a walk.

"On that fateful day a tiny bit of metal came fly-

ing to me out of the skies, a bit of metal that has given me, as if it were a gift, the answer to why my little satellite — ”

“But it isn’t *your* little satellitel” shouted Chuck, exploding with indignation.

“Well, you see, I’ve called it mine,” returned Prewytt calmly, “because I hadn’t any idea, naturally, that someone else had found it too. But as I was saying, it gave me the answer to why this satellite has an atmosphere. Can you guess? No! Well, then, I shall tell you.

“The answer centers upon two things: first, the fact that Brumblum, that bit of metal, is enormously heavy. And second, the fact that the beams of both Brumblum and the satellite test infragreen under the spectroscope and cannot be seen at all without the filter. What does this mean? Think, my friends! The answer stares you in the face!”

Did it? David and Chuck, unable to come upon any answer, stared at each other. But then a quiver of understanding flashed into Chuck’s eyes, and just as he was about to speak, David exclaimed:

“And so Bas — I mean, and so the little satellite’s *heavy!* Because it’s made of Brumblum — maybe pure, solid Brumblum — ”

“And so it has absolutely *enormous* gravity for its

size," finished Chuck, filled with excitement, "and therefore it *can* have an atmosphere!"

Prewytt Brumblydge smiled and nodded and Chuck drew in his breath and turned to David.

"Dave, d'you suppose Mr. Bass knows? D'you suppose he knew all the time? He never *said* anything. He never wrote —"

But at this David gave Chuck a look.

"All right, Mr. Brumblydge. Now we understand all this. But what did you mean when you said it would be a very *practical* idea if you could have a space ship to speed away through the stars? Does this have something to do with your Brumblitron and the B-rays we read about in the newspapers?"

Prewytt Brumblydge chuckled, laced his fingers together and twirled his thumbs. Then, just as he was about to speak, he pushed out his lower lip and frowned. And David could see that he was struggling to decide whether or not to let them in on a secret.

The Most Dangerous Question

NOW ALL AT ONCE Mr. Brumblydge got up and began walking back and forth again, his hands behind his back and his neat, small shoes twinkling. Finally he stopped.

"I have been wondering," he said, "how much to tell you. But I feel I must tell you everything. Don't you see, *if* my Brumblitron is a success — *if* I succeed with my B-rays — *if* it turns out to be true that I can harness them for all sorts of undreamed-of purposes, as I am certain I can — *then I must have more Brumblium*. And if I only had a space ship, then there would be no end to the Brumblium that would be mine for the taking."

David and Chuck stared at Prewytt Brumblydge in horror, with words from their last fateful adventure with Horatio Q. Peabody ringing in their ears: *mining operations on Basidium!*

"Listen to me," said Mr. Brumblydge, not even noticing their expressions. And he came and stood before them with his hands dug deep in his pockets. "I will tell you my secret. For years man has been baffled by the problem of how to turn sea water into fresh in some simple, inexpensive way. There *are* ways, yes. But the cost is so great or the method so slow that these processes are almost useless. And yet if we could — if we could, I say — then the desert places of the world would bloom and no man would go hungry.

"Well, then, this is my secret: *I believe that B-rays are the answer.* Yes, my friends," and here Prewytt Brumblydge turned and once more began walking up and down, "I believe that once I have them harnessed, once I have learned to control and direct them, once I have learned all that they can do, I shall have the final answer to the problem of turning sea water into fresh. And it would be at practically no cost but that of setting up my Brumblitron on the seacoast with pipelines carrying unlimited amounts of water into the thirsty desert. Think of it, boys! Only think of it! Why, it will entirely revolutionize man's life on earth and we shall no longer have to worry about the population outgrowing its food supply."

David and Chuck gazed at Prewytt Brumblydge

in wonder. Could it be possible that what the little man said was true?

"Are you sure that your B-rays can do this, Mr. Brumblydge?" asked David.

"Sure! How can I be sure of anything until I have been given the chance to go ahead with my Brumblitron?" cried Mr. Brumblydge in exasperation. "And I really don't like to do that until I have spoken with Tyco. That is why I came here — to settle the whole matter to Horace Frobisher's satisfaction."

"You mean," put in David, "to settle the whole matter of whether Dr. Frobisher is right and you *will* start a chain reaction if you build the Brumblitron and set it to work — or *you* are right and it will *not* start a chain reaction."

"Yes," sighed little Mr. Brumblydge; "yes, yes, yes. I just want Tyco's word. But I assure you: *if* the Brumblitron is going to explode, I shall take care that *I will be the only one to disappear*." Then he waved his hands about impatiently. "But what nonsense. Oh, I *must* talk to Tyco. Where is he? Can you tell me?"

"He has gone on a long trip, Mr. Brumblydge, and we can't possibly get hold of him. He left everything in our care."

"Boys, listen. If he is going to make public his dis-

covery of the green satellite and his formula for the filter, do you suppose he would be willing for you to confide the formula to me? And if he has been at work on a space ship, as I somehow suspect he has, do you think he would mind my knowing? I need only a space ship to get more Brumblium. This is terribly important!"

There was a moment of deep silence inside the observatory.

And in that instant when Chuck's and David's eyes met and the question hung between them, David felt as if the whole affair of Prewytt Brumblydge wavered in the balance. *If* he and Chuck should give Mr. Brumblydge what he asked for, then "the desert places of the world would bloom," he had said, "and no man should go hungry." And yet if Prewytt Brumblydge made the filter and the space ship, then Basidium would become a mining town, its quiet villages would be turned into quarries, with slag heaps dotting the once green and mushroomed landscape. The defenseless Basidiumites would be driven into hiding on their own planet, for if Prewytt Brumblydge went there, others would go too.

"No!" cried Chuck. "No, Mr. Brumblydge, not in a million years!"

But David said nothing.

How could he even think of trying to persuade Chuck to give Mr. Bass's secrets away, and to Prewytt Brumblydge of all men? Why, at this very moment, did he have such a strange, strong urge to say, "All right, Mr. Brumblydge, copy out the formula! And here's the way you make a rocket motor, and wire it up, and here's how you make an oxygen urn?" But he mustn't, he mustn't! He must never say that!

Yes, but the earth is more important than Basidium.

"If you would share these secrets with me," said Mr. Brumblydge earnestly, "you have my word that I shall never give them away." And now he picked up the notebook again. "You had better put it —" he began, but in that instant Chuck and David were upon him.

In the very next, however, Prewytt Brumblydge had slipped from them as though — as though he were nothing but a puff of wind between their fingers! It was unbelievable: one minute Chuck and David had him, and the next they hadn't! And then, from a little distance, he held the notebook out to them.

"I was only going to hand it to you," he said, smiling, "and suggest that you put it in the safe."

David went hot with shame.



"We're sorry, Mr. Brumblydge, really we are. But we can't give away what Mr. Bass has written down."

"If *he* wants to tell you sometime," said Chuck, "then that's up to him. But we can't."

At these words Prewytt Brumblydge shrugged. Then he sent them a quick look.

"I see," he replied. "In that case the whole matter is settled at least for now. I shall continue as I had planned. I'd thought, if you gave me the formula and a design for a space ship (if Tyco has worked one out), that I might return to San Julian. But — so be it. You have decided." Shrugging he stepped over to the door and waited for Chuck to unlock it.

Downstairs, they had just got out onto the porch when a loud racketing of voices and music burst suddenly upon the quiet air. It was a neighbor's television set being turned on.

"Would you believe it," said Mr. Brumblydge, putting his fingers to his ears, "my landlady has her set on night and day so that I am forced to practically live at the observatory. Someday we shall all be vegetable-shaped, with stalklike eyes waving groggily in front of television screens. An abominable fate!" cried the little man in indignation.

At this picture of themselves in the future, David

and Chuck had to burst out laughing. And then David said:

"But, Mr. Brumblydge, why don't you just go away somewhere — to an observatory where there is no town with landladies with television sets? Isn't there some quiet place you could go where you could live in peace?"

Prewytt Brumblydge smiled a strange smile.

"When I was a boy in Aberystwyth, in Wales," he said, "my mother and father used to take my brother and me during summer vacations to a little island in the North Atlantic. It wasn't always quiet there, but it was nature's voice you heard.

"The great seas crashed on the rocks. You think we have waves along this coast? Ah, my boys, you've seen nothing! The ancient Britons had built their rock shelters there, and we played among the ruins. They'd raised great stone monuments, and we played in their shadows. We climbed out on the headlands and sang, shouting to the incoming seas:

*"Men of Harlech, in the hollow,
Do ye hear, like rushing billow,
Wave on wave that surging follow
Battle's distant sound?"*

*"'Tis the tramp of Saxon foemen,
Saxon spearmen, Saxon bowmen.*

*Be they knights or hinds or yeomen,
They shall bite the ground!"*

What a glorious tenor the little man had! How he shook his fist! How his voice rang out! The way he sang that old Welsh war song with its stirring, fighting, tramping rhythm sent the chills up and down the boys' spines. They stared at him in amazement, their eyes wide.

"Well, now," he said, his face suddenly alight with happiness, "I must be going. I'm off for Texas, you know, and it's quite a way. Please tell Tyco to call me long distance the minute he gets back, will you?"

A few moments later Prewytt Brumblydge, in his little car, was speeding off along Highway 101. But after a bit he pulled over suddenly to one side.

"Oh!" he exclaimed aloud, "I forgot to tell those boys I took the Brumblum! Well, I shall just have to write Tyco the minute I get to Aunt Matilda's. *Tchk!*" Then off he went. And as he drove, quite fast, he put his head back and began to sing:

*'Tis the tramp of Saxon foemen,
Saxon spearmen, Saxon bowmen.
Be they knights or hinds or yeomen,
They shall bite the ground!*

The Problem

ABOUT FIVE WEEKS later, one week before Prewytt Brumblydge was due back at the observatory on San Julian, Dr. Frobisher happened to call Aunt Matilda in Texas to ask to speak to her nephew on a matter of some importance.

"Why, he's not here, Dr. Frobisher," said the old lady, "and hasn't been for well over a month. Said he had some sort of experiment to get on with. Said he couldn't wait any longer to hear from that little fellow by the name o' Bass. And he asked if he might borrow one o' my planes, because he wanted to get off all by himself somewhere, an' I said o' course he could. So after puttin' in all sorts o' odds an' ends an' enough victuals to feed an army, he flew away an' I haven't seen hide nor hair of him since. Haven't any idea where he was off to."

When he could speak, Dr. Frobisher said:

"Miss Brumblydge, tell me, did you get any inkling as to the exact nature of the experiment?"

Aunt Matilda said she wasn't sure, but she had a notion it was something to do with a — a Brumbli — something or other. At least that was what she thought he'd said, but she hadn't paid much attention, being far too busy with the management of her enormous cattle ranch.

After poor Dr. Frobisher had collected himself and finished off the conversation as best he could, he said that the problem of finding a needle in a haystack would be quite simple compared to what faced them now.

"But don't you worry, Dr. Frobisher," comforted Chuck when the boys were told, "because *we* can find the needle in the haystack. We promise you we can."

The Chase

The Detectives

DR. FROBISHER got in touch with a detective agency at once, and two men by the name of Tickle and Fewsmith came to question Chuck and David about Prewytt Brumblydge. They were both very friendly and kind, but they wasted no time in getting to the point.

"Try to remember anything, boys, anything you can," instructed Mr. Tickle. He was a large man who looked rather like a farmer in a city suit, and he had quick, bright blue eyes that missed nothing. Mr. Fewsmith, thin and grayish, was the sort of person you would never notice anywhere. He said hardly a word, but made little notes from time to time.

"Well," said David, "he talked about his Brumblitron, and said he wouldn't do anything about it until Mr. Bass got back. That's why we didn't worry about him when he went off on his vacation. He said he needed more Brumblium — that's the



metal he uses for his B-ray experiment. And — let's see — ”

“And he said,” Chuck went on, “that if only he could find out if his Brumblitron worked and he could make a success of it, that then he could turn sea water into fresh water very cheaply and that he could make the deserts bloom and that no man would go hungry. Yes, that's exactly what he said,” finished Chuck, pleased he'd been able to remember just the words Prewytt Brumblydge had used.

Mr. Fewsmith nodded and wrote, very small and regular.

Mr. Tickle coughed, then thought a moment. “But you see,” he said, “what we need most to know is where he was thinking of going. Of course he might not have been thinking of going any particular place *then*, but you never can tell. Did he say anything about deserts?”

“No,” said David. “No special desert — nothing about deserts, really, except that he wanted to make them bloom. I guess Texas was about the most deserty place he mentioned — where he was going for his vacation.”

“He talked about Aberystwyth,” remembered Chuck. “At least he said he was a boy there, but Dr. Frobisher says that Aunt Matilda says that's all

nonsense, because he was a boy in Merthyr Tydfil; he never lived in Aberystwyth in his life."

"And he sang us a song," went on David. "It was an old Welsh war song he used to sing all those years ago and it was wonderful. He sang it real loud and shook his fist — two verses of it. My Dad says it's called *Men of Harlech* — that is, when we told him about it."

Mr. Fewsmith wrote.

"Do you recall," he said, very low, speaking for the first time, "do you happen to recall just *why* Prewytt Brumblydge came to Number Five Thallo Street?"

"Yes," spoke up Chuck. "He came to see Tyco Bass to discuss the Brumblitron with him, to be sure Mr. Bass thought the experiment was safe, because Dr. Frobisher was worried about it."

"Do you think he might have come to get the piece of Brumblium?"

"We don't know about that," Chuck replied.

"But we've hunted and hunted since then, my mother and dad and Dr. Frobisher and Chuck and I, with a Geiger counter, and we've never found it," added David, "so maybe it was never there. I don't see how Mr. Brumblydge could have had time to get it."

"When did you first see Mr. Brumblydge?"

"Why, in the newspaper — oh, I see. Up in Mr. Bass's observatory. That was the first time in the flesh," replied Chuck. "And he was in there when we opened the door."

"Ah," said Mr. Fewsmith. "Which means that he could have been in the house for some time, isn't that so?"

"Oh, but we'd just *been* up in the observatory a few minutes before," protested David. "We'd been up there doing some — some research work, and then I thought I heard a noise somewhere so we went downstairs to investigate. But there was only this old crow flapping around and cawing, so we went all around the house and didn't find anything, so we came on up again. And that was when we found Mr. Brumblydge. But we weren't gone longer than about five minutes — I shouldn't *think* —"

"Yes, but Dave . . . remember the little foreign car? We saw it before we went in the first time — I *know*, because you said you'd never seen it before. And that was the car Mr. Brumblydge went off in —"

"And so *that* means," groaned David, "that he was already there when we first came and could

have had plenty of time to hunt for the Brumblium. Oh, except that *we* unlocked the front door — ”

“But do we know the *cellar door* wasn’t unlocked?”

“No,” said David, and he looked very unhappy.

“Which means,” pointed out Mr. Tickle, “that if the cellar door was not locked, and that if the Brumblium was in there (which seems a likely place for it), it had been acquired by Mr. Brumblydge before you boys arrived.”

“Supposition,” said Mr. Fewsmith, writing and writing, steadily but without hurry.

“Quite,” said Mr. Tickle. “Well, now — is there anything else? Anything at all?”

David and Chuck thought.

“Nothing,” said David at last, “except that Mr. Brumblydge said he’d like to live some place quiet, where there were no radios or television sets. He said his landlady drives him crazy playing hers night and day and that some time we’ll all be vegetable-shaped with eyes like stalks waving in front of television screens.”

“And that’s all?”

“Is it, Chuck?”

Chuck said he thought it was, except that Mr. Brumblydge had told them the Brumblium showed a blue-green band under the spectroscope — that is,

when you used a filter — only he didn't see how that would help. And as Chuck said this, David watched Mr. Fewsmith writing, the long pencil moving evenly from one side of the page to the other.

Now nobody said anything, and so then Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith got up, and as Mrs. Topman showed them to the door, they said the only thing left to do was to alert all the authorities everywhere to try to spot Aunt Matilda Brumblydge's plane. And they said that if the boys happened to think of any smallest thing that might be of importance, they were to get in touch with them at once, and they left a card on the hall table.

Then, just as the two men were about to go down the steps, Mr. Fewsmith turned.

"By the way," he said in his gray, quiet voice, "Dr. Frobisher mentioned something about a satellite Brumblydge had spotted once. Did he say anything to you about that?"

"Yes, sir," replied David. "He said he wanted a space ship to go there, because he believes it's made of Brumblium and he thought he should investigate for himself."

"You boys didn't mention this to us."

"No, because I guess we were trying to think of some place he *could* go, the way you wanted us to, some place he might have been planning on. But

he couldn't build a space ship and go to a little planet way out in space."

"No," said Mr. Fewsmith gently. "No, I suppose he couldn't. Well, good-by."

And the two men went away.

When they had gone, David and Chuck looked at one another and then at Mrs. Topman. She had left the whole interview to them, saying nothing, because it was entirely their affair.

"Were you scared, Chuck?" asked David.

"Awfully scared. It's hard to talk about Basidium to outsiders, even if they don't know what they're talking about. I always get a funny feeling in my stomach."

"Me too. But anyhow, we told 'em the truth, everything except that we've actually *been* to that little satellite. Well, come on, let's get busy. Maybe your Grandpop's tried out the motor."

So now Chuck and David and Mrs. Topman went down to the cave on Cap'n Tom's beach, where he was still at work on the space ship.

Like a Little Swiss Watch!

ALL THAT PAST MONTH Cap'n Tom and the boys had been slowly reassembling the ship, thinking there was no immediate hurry. First they had taken the space ship carefully apart, wiping and oiling every fine little pipe and bolt and spring and nut, laying out all the wires and labeling everything as they went along so that it could all be put back together again according to Tyco Bass's instructions.

That month had been a tense one! One spring broken, one bolt or nut misplaced, one wire incorrectly labeled might have meant disaster. Sometimes under the strain the boys had grown edgy and cross and once they had got into a fight. But at that, Cap'n Tom had threatened to stop the whole proceeding at once, and so they had been friends — instantly!

"Oh," said Mrs. Topman, "if I ever have to go through a time like this again . . . I don't think I could stand it."

But that was before the news came of Prewytt Brumblydge's going off in Aunt Matilda's plane. After that, from being tense, the atmosphere grew feverish.

"But I cannot really see how this makes any difference," Mrs. Topman had said, coming into the cave with David's father the day before Tickle and Fewsmith arrived.

"What do you mean, Mom — you can't see how it makes any difference?"

"I mean," she had said, looking at the space ship in a way that meant she couldn't bear looking at the boys, "that I don't believe this space ship can ever take off again after plunging into the ocean — I don't believe we can trust you to go out in space with it when neither Tyco Bass nor Mr. Theo has had a hand in putting it together again. After all, Cap'n Tom's only human."

"But, Mrs. Topman," exploded Chuck in desperation, "Prewytt Brumblydge is getting ready to finish his Brumblitron — if he hasn't already. And who could find him quicker than David and me up there on Lepton with Mr. Bass's telescope and filter?"

"Dad, aren't you going to say a single word?" pleaded David.

But Dr. Topman only stared at the space ship, long and smooth and silver on its four-wheeled

carrier, apparently unharmed, apparently just as it had always been. Yet what if the whole thing simply went to pieces? David could see him thinking.

"I don't know," he had answered at last. "I don't know what to say. It looks as if we're in for it if we do let you go and in for it if we don't."

"Well, we could signal Mr. Theo and find out what *he* thinks. Maybe now he can get in touch with Mr. Bass."

But when they signaled from the quiet little observatory, Mr. Theo seemed to have deserted them.

It was evening, a deep, cobalt twilight, and the first faint stars were coming out. The air was perfectly clear and the stars shone steadily as they had always done. But there was no answer from Basidium. Mr. Theo was busy elsewhere, and who knew where Mr. Bass had gone? Far, far away to some other galaxy. From where he was now, if he had looked into the mightiest telescope, the tiny earth would seem not to exist.

"How awfully still everything is," said David, after they had signaled and signaled for almost an hour. "Well, I guess we might just as well give up."

And so they turned off the lantern, put the filter back and locked up the safe and went home to bed.

Now when Mrs. Topman and the boys came to the cave after Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith had gone, they found Cap'n Tom standing with his arms crossed over his broad chest. He was studying the space ship, which was outside the cave but still lying on its carrier.

"Grandpop! Grandpop! Did she start up?"

"Did she work all right, Cap'n Tom?"

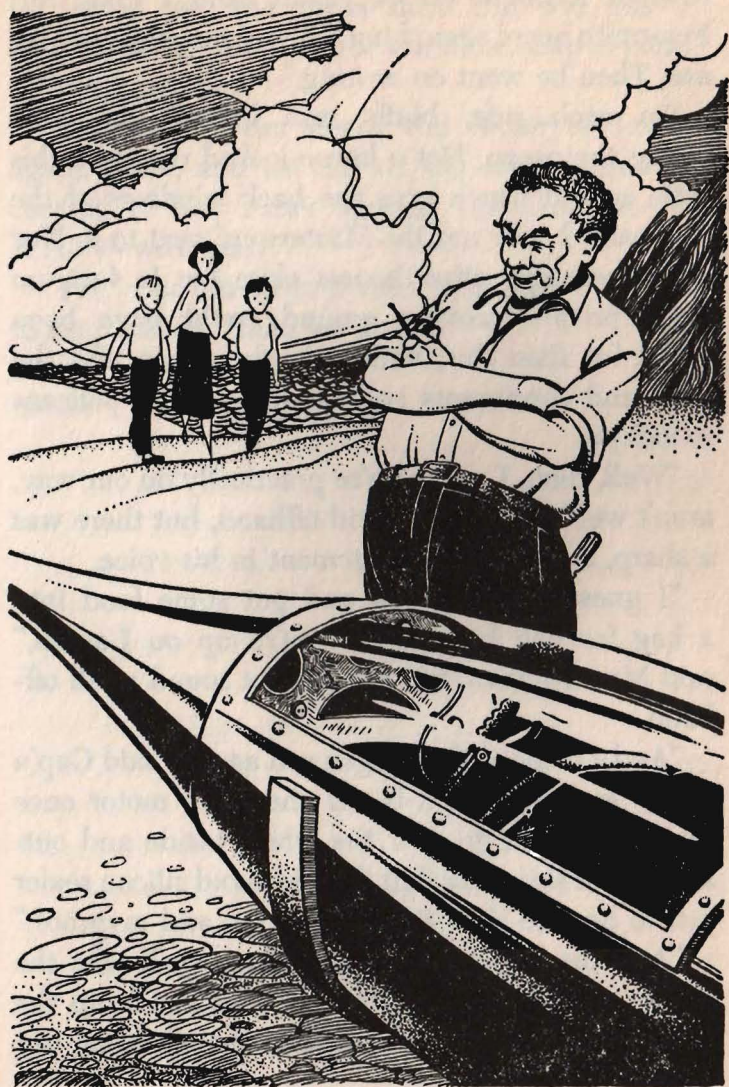
Cap'n Tom turned to them and grinned. Then he ran one hand through his crisp white hair.

"That she does, boys, that she does. I turned on as much power as I dast, without taking off for Lepton myself, and what a treat that was! Seems as if she was just asking to leap right up into the sky, but there wasn't a quiver, not a rattle nor a shake. Firm as a little watch. Yes, that's how she strikes me — like the finest Swiss watch it's possible to make, that keeps perfect time even though it's tiny. That fellow Tyco Bass! You boys were right: he's a genius, or a magician, I don't know which. All the while I've been putting this ship back together again, I've marveled."

"And just think," said David in awe. "At the very time we were up there talking to Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith, you were down here actually testing the space ship!"

"I heard something," said Mrs. Topman. "But I

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thought it might be jet planes. And I think Mr. Fewsmith heard something too — I saw him cock his ear. Then he went on writing.”

On each side, bluffs rose behind the cave facing the ocean. Not a house looked down on this little curved beach save the back windows of the Topmans’ house and the Mastersons’ next to it. Nor were there any other houses close by. In fact, no more private proving ground could have been asked for than this, with only the ocean and the gulls and cormorants and sandpipers and pelicans to look on.

“Well, then, I guess we’re practically on our way, aren’t we?” remarked David offhand, but there was a sharp, thin edge of excitement in his voice.

“I guess I’d better go and put some food into a bag for you boys while you’re up on Lepton,” said Mrs. Topman, but she did not sound at all offhand.

“And I’ll check the oxygen urn again,” said Cap’n Tom, “and maybe I’d better check the motor once more, and then go over the whole inside and outside of the ship with that fluid resinoid silicon sealer just to be sure she’s tight as a drum and rayproof.”

“And the minute Dad gets home, we’ll take the station wagon over to Mr. Bass’s and pick up the telescope and the filter, and then the telescope can

be bolted into the space ship. Did you get the electric socket fixed up for the filter, Cap'n Tom?"

"I did, my boy."

"And we'd better check the vector to Lepton again, Dave, and we can set the controls now according to Mr. Bass's figures. Then tonight — at 11:15 — we'll start."

"Yes," said David in a voice which he tried hard to keep steady, "then we'll start."

The "Pheep" Fails

THERE THEY ALL WERE, gathered at the foot of the big rock down on the beach at eleven o'clock that night, and the space ship had been rolled across the sand on its carrier and pushed upright. The moon was out, striking a soft gleam from that poised, wingless form. Everything had been packed in, so they believed. But then David remembered something.

"Cap'n Tom," he cried, "we've forgotten the magnets."

Those magnets! Ever since it had suddenly occurred to Chuck and David yesterday afternoon that they could not stick to Lepton without them, because Lepton was so tiny it had no gravity, David had forgotten the whole matter until just now. Cap'n Tom had said he would take care of it, and that was that. But he hadn't said a word about it since.

Now he laughed.

"What kind of a seagoing man do you take me

for, David? No captain can afford to forget anything, at least not anything that's his responsibility — or he'd never have a ship under him. Just take a look at those tail blades down there, and you'll see the ends of the magnets sticking out. I've bolted them on. They don't look very neat, but that won't matter to anyone, and they work. Now get in there and settle. You should be ready to pull up anchor any minute — ”

“The maps!” said Chuck. “I've forgotten the maps.” And he actually went pale, though you wouldn't have noticed it in the moonlight. Those had been Chuck's responsibility — enormous outline maps Cap'n Tom had brought out from his sea chest and that, all put together, showed every corner of land on the earth.

Now Chuck turned and began running. He knew exactly where he had left those maps, rolled into a big tube on his bed.

While Chuck was gone, David climbed up on the rock, got into the space ship, and sat in Chuck's seat by the door looking down at his parents and Cap'n Tom.

How different this trip was from the other two he and Chuck had taken! Only now did he realize how lighthearted they had been on those other occasions. But so much depended this time. True,

the fate of the Mushroom People had hung on the success of their first journey to Basidium, but they had gone with Mr. Bass's blessing.

"David," his mother called up, "if you don't see anything, don't feel badly."

"But we *must* see something, Mom — we *must*!"

Now Dr. Topman climbed up the rock and stood opposite his son, leaning one hand against the ship.

"Do you mean, then," he said, "that you and Chuck are going to keep circling the earth until you think you *have* spotted something? Why, you could go on for days doing that and never see a thing. You haven't that much food with you — and what are we to be thinking down here? How will we know what's happened to you?"

"Why, because we're taking one of the lanterns, and you have one — and we can signal."

"I know, David, but I'm afraid I must say that you may go around only six times — in other words you may stay only the length of time Mr. Bass figured on, and that was twelve hours."

"Please, Dad, please don't put a limit on us!"

"But I've got to, David. Even twelve hours seems terribly long. It will be an awful wait for your mother and Cap'n Tom and me. You must promise to try to sleep whenever you can in the dark periods."

"All right, Dad, but won't you let us stay twenty-four hours if we don't spot anything at first? We'll sleep — Mr. Bass said there would be a period of thirty-five minutes of darkness in every two hours."

"Listen, son," called up Cap'n Tom, seeing what a pass things were coming to, "remember that Dr. Frobisher and the detectives are working on this too. The whole business doesn't rest on your shoulders alone."

"Yes, it does," said David. "It *does*. Chuck and I left that cellar door open, and I'll bet the Brumbium was in there. But, anyway, we'll find the needle in the haystack. I know we will, because Mr. Bass said never to doubt."

Dr. Topman gave his son a queer, quick look, then he reached over and patted David's shoulder and turned and made his way back down the rock again.

After that there was silence while they waited for Chuck — silence except for the voice of the sea all up and down the coast. Then a cry came from across the beach — and there was Chuck, with a big roll of something white in his arms, running over the sand as fast as he could.

"Got 'em, Dave! Am I in time?" He was gasping for breath, and now he stopped to peer down at the luminous hands of his wrist watch, drew a sigh

of relief, handed the big roll of maps to Cap'n Tom, and scrambled up the rock to the door of the ship.

"Good luck, children — good luck!" cried Mrs. Topman.

"Best of luck!" called Dr. Topman. "Only six times around, remember!"

The boys took one last look at the three standing below them, Cap'n Tom handed up the maps, wished them a safe journey, and then they closed the door of the ship and bolted it.

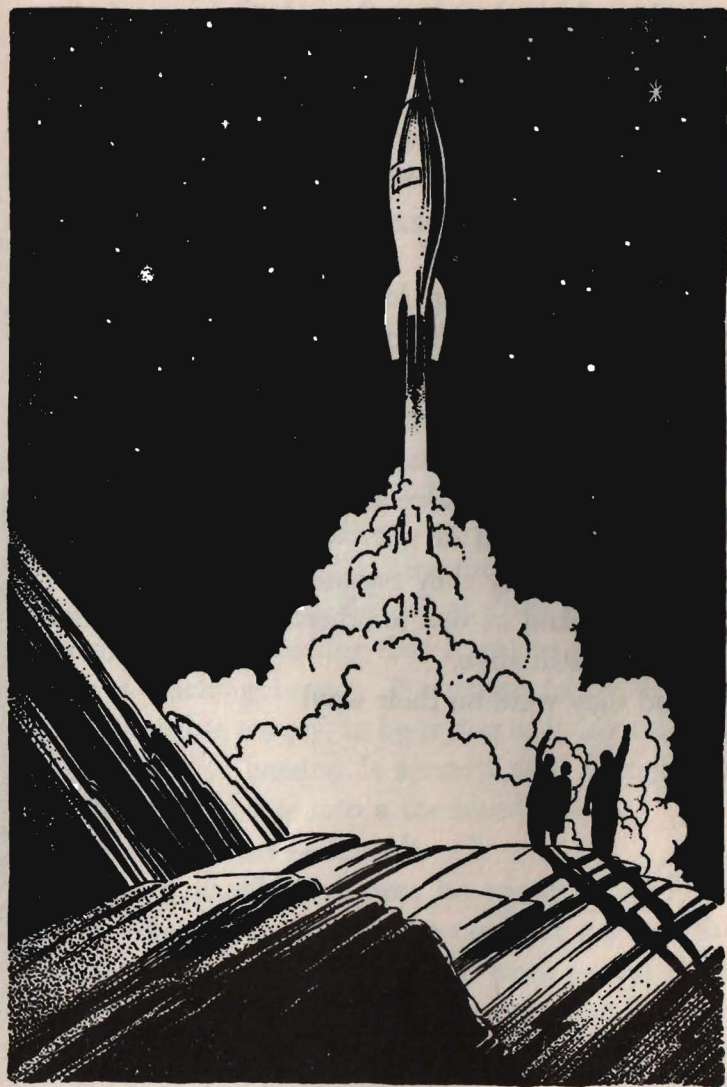
"Oxygen urn, Chuck."

"Yes," and Chuck let himself down past the telescope, which did not yet have the filter fitted into place over the eyepiece, and turned the little spigot on the urn. It's got to start pheeping, David said to himself. It's just got to — so this'll be more like the other trips. It would be a kind of comfort, he thought, listening anxiously. He heard Chuck turn the spigot, which gave a small protest; then there was a faint "Pheep — phee-ee-eep," and nothing more.

"Chuck, isn't it working?"

"It's working. But Grandpop couldn't get it to 'Pheep' regularly. No matter what he did, it wouldn't."

Now Chuck climbed back up; the boys leaned close to the window to wave a last time (Mrs. Top-



man kissed her hand to them both — wasn't that like a woman? And so they sent her a couple back); then they settled in their seats, fastened their belts tight, and hung on hard in preparation for that terrible jolt which comes after the first slow part of the ascent.

“All right, Dave — ”

And David, having long since set the controls according to Mr. Bass's directions, pressed the button, pulled back the stick — and roaring filled their ears. After a few moments some giant force smashed them back in their seats so violently that they could not breathe. They did not know whether the space ship had taken off or not — they knew nothing.

Then gradually they regained their senses.

They looked at one another. They were whole; they were still alive.

And they were on their way!

The Pit of Blackness

THEY HAD ONLY a fleeting moment to feel the vibration of the space ship, to look down at the tiny, sparkling lights of earth, to know that the moon still hung in the sky.

Then something terrifying started to happen — and kept happening. David had been fully aware of the vibration of the ship after he had come out of the shock of take-off. But all at once the vibration became so bone-shaking that it was as if their craft were a bucking bronco. It seemed to be fighting some invisible enemy, to be trying to break through some invisible barrier. It seemed as if it might at any moment shiver into a thousand pieces.

“Chuck, it can’t — it can’t —”

It can’t *what*? What was he trying to say? He knew what he meant but he couldn’t get out the words. His mind could scarcely work — and there was no answer from Chuck. We are done for, was all David could feel. Mom was right — Cap’n Tom



couldn't make the space ship work like a little Swiss watch after all, and we are lost and done for. And then "sound barrier" came into his head. Yes, that was it. The workings of this little ship, having been put together by mortal hands, were flawed. It was not perfect, could never be perfect as it once

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had been, for the deft, light, magical touch of Mr. Bass and Mr. Theo had been missing. And now the ship could not get through the barrier of sound — that was what he had been trying to say.

At this very moment, it must be trying to struggle upward at the speed of sound, at twelve and a half miles a minute. And unless it could pass this speed, unless it could emerge beyond the sound barrier, it would be dashed back to earth as though it had struck a ceiling of steel.

David, now, did not know what was happening. Sick and dizzy, he was shaken into blackness, into a pit of blackness. And yet, dimly, very, very far away, he thought he heard his own voice reminding himself of what Mr. Bass had said: "You must never doubt, David." But the words were so faint, so faint, he could scarcely hear them.

Then at last he lifted his head. His sickness and dizziness had passed away, and he looked out of the window of the space ship; and there . . . there before him — just as he remembered from another time, from that first wonderful flight to the Mushroom Planet when he and Chuck had been alone, and then the second time when Mr. Theo was with them — were the hundred million billion suns of the Milky Way.

"Oh, Chuck," he cried, and it was almost a sob

because he was so thankful and relieved, "look, we've come through!"

Chuck didn't answer, and David turned to him. And there was Chuck leaning forward, staring out of the big window of the space ship just as *he* had done at that seemingly boundless stream of stars punctuated with nearer, brilliant points of light that shone steady and unwavering.

This is our galaxy, thought David, our home galaxy. And in the whole endless universe, Mr. Theo had told them, there are millions upon millions of galaxies like this: clouds of stars, some in spirals, some in globes, some like fiery pools with veil-like edges and blazing centers, some like maelstroms, some like pinwheels. But all, all of them, were made up of unthinkable numbers of suns. And this Milky Way, David thought, that I am seeing now, is the thickest part of our galaxy, seen edgewise. It was hard to imagine — but it was true. And it was so beautiful, and the suns crowded so thickly and brilliantly (though they were thousands of light-years apart), that it did not matter *how* you imagined it. For there it was!

"Yes," said Chuck presently, not very loud. "Yes, we've come through, haven't we?"

Then they didn't say any more, partly because they wanted only to look, and partly because they

had it in the backs of their minds that, in another second or so, Mr. Bass's planetoid should be heaving into view.

For all that had happened, when time had stretched away seemingly without end and then spun off into nothingness, had taken no longer than three minutes.

"Just think, Dave — before, even though we traveled at seven miles a second (at least after we'd accelerated) to get out of the pull of gravity, we had to keep going for two hours to get to Basidium. But a thousand miles to Lepton . . . Why, that's nothing!"

"I know, Chuck, but don't you remember what Mr. Bass said at the place where he gave us the directions for setting our controls? We're *not* just going straight out from the earth for a thousand miles. At first we went fifty miles up, and then we veered eastward — of course always going away from the earth at the same time. I guess we — Chuck! Look! Look! There she is — *there's Lepton!*"

Mr. Bass had said Lepton would be there. Why then did the actual sight of that small, rough mass seem miraculous, almost beyond belief?

The boys in their space ship had left that infinitesimal spot of earth, Cap'n Tom's beach, far, far behind under the rising curve of their vector.

And it was as though their speed, combined with the great whirling speed of the earth, had flung them onto the very trail of this little chunk of metal hurtling around the earth at the rate of over four miles a second.

Now the reversatron was turning the ship. Now David, working the controls according to Mr. Bass's directions, was slowing the speed of the ship from seven miles a second down to 4.38 in order to match Lepton's speed. Now they were descending tail-first, and, instant by instant, in all that vast sea of space, the planetoid and the ship drew together.

How was it possible for Mr. Bass, in his observatory, just by doing all sorts of difficult sums in arithmetic, to have arranged that at precisely such-and-such a spot in space, at precisely such-and-such a moment after starting time, their space ship should meet first Basidium and now Lepton?

But it was possible — because here they were.

The Long Search

NEAT AND SMALL and firm, the space ship settled like a bird on its minute perch. Unbelievable it seemed to David that they were actually clinging to something as tiny as Lepton and that they could continue to cling there until the twelve hours was up.

Just as Mr. Bass had written, in his notebook, Lepton was a small chunk of metal, irregular, and no bigger than an ordinary city block in any dimension. And how rough was its surface, how jagged! All tortured peaks and hollows it was, so that the brilliant sunlight, shining on it at an angle, cast the most grotesque shadows. He had been very lucky, thought David, staring out at that frightening landscape and shivering, to have been able to get the ship down onto a fairly level spot! What if — he asked himself suddenly — what if one of those rough peaks had pierced the bottom of the space ship? They would have been finished. There would

have been nothing — nothing at all — they could have done to save themselves. For of course Lepton was airless — that is, without an atmosphere of any kind — so that the oxygen in their ship would have escaped at once.

Beyond the edge of Lepton loomed the gigantic earth with five thousand miles of surface within range of their sight.

Far off to the west, cloud masses, twisted by a giant airflow, covered Hudson Bay and the Northeastern United States. Near the Yucatán Peninsula it looked as though a hurricane were gathering, spinning like a pinwheel and beginning to move toward the mainland. Across the Atlantic, cumulus clouds streamed westward, chased by the trade winds. And beneath these layers of dazzling white clouds stretched subdued shades of gray and green and orange broken by vast areas of ocean, so dark as to be almost black. But over all these other colors, the great orb of earth glowed a soft, transparent blue as though wrapped in the gauze of its pale blue atmosphere.

How beautiful it is, thought David. Surely it must be the most beautiful of all the sun's planets.

"But we must get busy," cried Chuck, forcing his eyes from the almost frightening sight of this small platform with its little horizon only a few hundred

yards away, hanging in space, in nothingness. "We must start hunting, Dave!"

"Yes — yes, we must!" And David commenced fumbling around for the filter, but he couldn't think what he had done with it. Befuddled he felt, with all the things that had happened to them in so short a time.

"Got it, Dave — right under my seat in its box, just where we put it. Now you take it, and when I've climbed along to the seat by the eyepiece of the telescope, you hand it to me and I'll fit it on. D'you mind if I watch first?"

David shook his head. Why should Chuck be so chipper and ready for action, and he so woolly and muddled? It made him angry — and then he remembered that Chuck said he'd slept like a rock last night until almost eight this morning. But he himself had wakened in the dark and lain staring at the ceiling, going over and over the problem of how they were to scan every inch of the earth in their search. They could not do it, that was the thing. For the latitudes toward the North and South Poles were beyond their reach, and if Prewytt Brumblydge had taken it into his head to hide out somewhere off there, they were helpless.

When you are out in space, beyond the pull of gravity that gives your body its knowledge of "up"

and "down," you are weightless. And it would have been impossible for Chuck to get to the eyepiece of the telescope without something to cling to. So Cap'n Tom had made hand-holds to a seat where the searcher could sit. Now Chuck undid his belt and turned and put out his hand to grasp one of those bars. But with no up or down feeling in his hand, it was astonishing how hard it was for him to aim it toward the exact spot he wanted it to go.

When at length he had gotten to the telescope seat and strapped himself there, David handed him the filter, and he plugged it in to the socket Cap'n Tom had wired into the ship.

"Chuck," murmured David, "doesn't it always seem strange to you that we should zoom *up* from the earth toward the place we want to go, and then when we get there, whether it's Basidium or Lepton, the earth looks as if it's — not down — but just out? There it is, and we can sit here in our space ship that's standing on its tail on Lepton, and look right at the earth."

"*Mmm-mm*," returned Chuck, intent on getting the focus adjusted. "And maybe if some giant could see both us and the earth at the same time, our space ship'd look as if it was sticking right out from the side of Lepton. Dave — Dave, I've got it fo-



cused. And the filter works perfectly. I can see — oh, I can see . . . !”

“*What* can you see, Chuck? Where are we now?”

“I can see,” said Chuck in a low, absorbed voice, “some water — and I’ll bet it’s the Aegean. Yes, because there’s that island —”

“Lesbos?” asked David instantly. “By the Gulf of Edremit, off the west coast of Turkey?”

Was there any spot of land on the whole face of the globe they had not memorized — its shape and position? All during this past month, even though they had been told they might never get up on Lepton and need not worry any longer about Prewytt Brumblydge, they had studied the pink- and green- and orange- and yellow- and lavender-patched pages of David’s big atlas until they knew them by heart. And because their maps were only outlines of the land masses, they had been busy these last weeks filling in boundaries of countries, tracing rivers and mountains, and putting in names very neatly in black ink. It was as though someday they might have to take a great, hours-long, final examination in geography upon which everything depended. Everything — yes, everything, indeed.

“Now focus it finer, Chuck, focus it closer — and see what you can see.”

There was silence while David drew out of Cap'n Tom's big bundle of maps the sheet on which was outlined the top of Africa and Asia Minor and the Mediterranean.

"Dave," said Chuck in an awe-struck voice, "I can see a whole little village. I'm over in Mesopotamia now looking into the streets of this village, and there're people in it moving like insects. And some of them — some of them are going out across the desert. Maybe they're archeologists and a whole lot of natives going to dig up ruins — because farther over — farther over — there're holes — yes, I think it *is* a dig —"

"But, Chuck — don't stick at one spot if there's nothing suspicious. We've got the whole world to cover. Keep moving — only examine everything carefully. Here, let me look!" And David, overcome with anxiety, started struggling with his belt. His fuzziness was gone. He wanted to be sure every spot of the earth was searched, and he wanted above all else to see through that amazing filter that pierced earth's layers of clouds as though they did not exist. Then he sank back again. "Nope," he said firmly. "We can't waste time scrabbling around. We might miss something. You stay for half an hour, then we'll change, just the way we planned.

And I'll make a mark on the map any time you see anything suspicious, or even — ”

“A little bit peculiar,” finished Chuck.

And so the long search began.

But it was far, far more difficult and tedious and discouraging than either boy had dreamed possible. For though each of them in his turn minutely examined as much of the earth as he could, by sweeping the telescope slowly back and forth as he passed over the turning globe, they both knew at last that they could never be certain of spying upon every square mile of it as they had foolishly imagined they might. And David, when he was concentrating on one area, felt absolutely certain that, in the very place he was not looking, Prewytt Brumblydge was busy with his Brumblitron.

What they were looking for, most of all, was a tiny plane sitting off by itself somewhere and a big, weblike antenna on top of a tower or house. If they could find these two together in some isolated spot, they felt that there must be Prewytt Brumblydge.

In Manchester, England, they saw an enormous dark weblike instrument curved like a saucer. But they knew that this was a receiver for broadcast signals from certain stars, those dark or only faintly luminous suns that strangely send intense radio

waves into space. They saw one in Amsterdam, Holland, and one in New England that was a detector for catching beams from vast clouds of hydrogen that move through the universe.

But they had known that these great radio telescopes would be there — they were already marked on their maps.

During the periods of darkness when, of course, they could not search the earth, they looked at the moon. And if they had not been tense with anxiety for these brief nights to pass and the periods of light to come, they would have been lost in wonder at what they saw so close they had the feeling they had only to step outside the ship to walk right into that ghostly land.

But even as they stared at the moon, they had to talk.

“Dave, what if we fail?”

“But we can’t fail — we just can’t. We’ve got to find Prewytt Brumblydge even if we have to search till our eyes fall out of our heads.”

“And your Dad said we could only go around six times —”

“And the earth’s too big, and we lose so much time when it’s dark. Hurry up, Lepton — hurry!”

But Lepton went serenely at her own pace, which was precisely 15,801 miles an hour.

"Dave, I've been thinking. Mr. Bass didn't know we were really going to have to use Lepton as a space station. He thought it would just be fun for us to come up here someday and sit on her and look at the earth. But if he'd known what we have to do, I'll bet anything he'd have given us a vector and speed that would allow us to circle the earth as we please — on our own, in the space ship —"

"Yes, but he said that someday perhaps earth people would use Lepton as a space station."

"Sure, because they would need it as a base for operations, with supplies stored here and little test satellites and things like that. But we haven't any supplies, and we don't *need* to stay here. Why should we? If Lepton can circle the earth, so can we. And we could go at our own speed, fast or slow as we needed to. Couldn't we, Dave?"

"I don't know. I just don't know."

"Well, let's try!" And now Chuck, who was up beside David until it should be light enough for him to go back to the telescope and take his turn at searching again, put his hand on David's arm and gave him a shake. Eagerness brimmed in his voice. "We know exactly what time we have to head for home, and just about where we'll be over the earth — Mr. Bass figured that all out for us. All right, why

shouldn't we just take off from Lepton now, and get out of this dark side of the earth fast — ”

“But, Chuck, we — ”

“And then we could slow down on the light side and search wherever we please! Dave, let's leave Lepton. Let's get over onto the light side quick so we can start hunting again. It's stupid to stay here. Come on!”

David turned and stared at Chuck in absolute amazement.

“Chuck, are you crazy? What do you think we're on — a bus or something, down at the corner of Forest and Lighthouse? Why, you *must* be crazy!”

“I'm not crazy!”

“You are too — you're as crazy as an old hoot owl.”

For a moment Chuck glared at him. David could see he was filled with fury, and he knew they were going to have a fight.

Of All People on Earth

NOW CHUCK'S QUICK FIST came out and punched David in the shoulder and David grabbed his arm and Chuck pushed him away.

"Well, I'd rather be crazy," shouted Chuck, "than a stick-in-the-mud like you. You think you're so bright. You think you know everything. You always do all the talking and answering, the way you did when Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith came about Prewytt Brumblydge —"

"I didn't — I didn't do *all* the answering. And that one time when I did answer quick, just at the end, I had to — because *you* didn't say anything. But the rest of the time we both answered —"

"But you first. You always first, and it makes me mad —"

"Sure! And if I left it up to you, then where'd we be?"

"O.K.! So now when I want to do something that takes some courage, you say I'm crazy. But why

not do something? Maybe that Brumblitron is getting ready to blow everything up this very minute, and here we sit like a couple of old hens on a perch. Besides — ” and now Chuck’s voice rose even higher and he seemed about to explode with resentment — “this isn’t your ship. I suppose you think it’s your space ship — but it was my Grandpop that put it together again. Who are you to decide what we should — ”

“Well, it isn’t *your* ship, either! We made it. It belongs to both of us. And go ahead and take off from Lepton, if you’re so darned smart. *You* decide how to set the controls to keep just a thousand miles above the earth so we won’t be sucked down by gravity. You decide on a vector that’ll let us look all over the earth from the North Pole to the South. You decide what speed we should go at — ”

“All right, I will — I will. Just move, so I can sit there — ”

“And then when we get to that place above the earth just about where we should be when it’s the exact time to start for home, why you fix her up so we’ll land on Cap’n Tom’s beach again. Of course we might land in the ocean or in the middle of the Sahara Desert, but what difference would that make?”

For a minute David thought Chuck was going to

punch him again and then they'd be in a fight. They'd be mad at each other all the rest of the time they were up here, having to change places every half hour to hunt for Prewytt Brumblydge, and they wouldn't speak, and it would be awful. Here they'd be, all alone, a thousand miles out in space, fighting with each other.

"Well, come on, Chuck — let's change places. You wanted to."

But Chuck never moved.

"Are you scared?"

"No," said Chuck in a dark voice, "I'm not scared. But if anything went wrong, it'd be my fault. No matter what went wrong, it'd be my fault." Then he was silent, and he didn't say anything for quite a while. But at last he turned. "I just get so I could *bust* sitting here not doing anything."

Yes, thought David, that was it. That was always the way with Chuck. He could never bear just sitting waiting. He could never bear not doing anything when there were so many things he might be doing if only things were different. But it was dark, and they could not leave Lepton. And so they *must* wait, and there was an end of it.

"Dave," said Chuck after two or three minutes, "I've been thinking about Prewytt Brumblydge."

"What about Prewytt Brumblydge?"

"Do you remember, after he'd asked us for the formula for the filter and the plans for the space ship, how he picked up Mr. Bass's notebook and we jumped on him to get the notebook away? Do you remember anything funny about what happened?"

"Yes," David answered. "Yes, I do. He just sort of melted out of our hands. We had him — and then we didn't have him — and I was grabbing him tight and hanging on, but it didn't do any good. Without even moving a muscle, it seemed as if he sort of slid away from us and I don't know how."

"Do you think it was magic?"

David shook his head.

"No, I don't think *that* — " .

"Well, listen. You remember when we were on Basidium we found out that the Mushroom People could get through little tiny narrow places? And you remember what we said, Dave — that they were compressible? They're not humans, with bones like ours. They're spore people — they're different. Well, you know what? *I think Prewytt Brumblydge is compressible.*"

Once more David stared at Chuck, but this time in dawning agreement while one little detail after another fell into place.

"Prewytt M. Brumblydge . . ." he said.

"That's right, Dave. What do you want to bet that M. stands for Mycetes? And did you notice his head — how big it is? Not as big as Mr. Bass's or Mr. Theo's, but a little large for his height. And do you remember what Dr. Frobisher told us about Mr. Bass and Prewytt Brumblydge? That he felt there was some bond between them, and that Mr. Bass knew what it was but hadn't said anything?"

"Yes," cried David, "I remember! And when Prewytt told him about the meteorite, Mr. Bass said how remarkable it was that a little chunk of metal flew out of the sky and Mr. Brumblydge found it, and he himself was given another just like it — special bits of the lost planet, he said, discovered by those two *of all people on earth!*"

"So then Mr. Bass *does* know," went on Chuck. "He knows what those meteorites are, and what Basidium is made of. But what did he mean, Dave — pieces of the lost planet?"

"I think I remember. I was reading something the other night about meteors. I got to thinking about them because of Brumblium, y'see. And it said that maybe meteors are bits of a planet that was once part of the solar system, and that it broke up, and that's why there are so many asteroids between Mars and Jupiter — big shoals of them: the remains of that lost planet. And maybe that's

what Basidium is, a chunk of it, and the two pieces of Brumblium as well."

"But then, do you s'pose the lost planet was *made* of Brumblium?"

"Oh, no — otherwise those asteroids between Mars and Jupiter could only be seen with the filter. But there are meteors that are just iron, and others that are mostly nickel and iron. Well, Basidium happens to be Brumblium, which is what makes it heavy enough to have an atmosphere. Just think, Chuck — a little tiny planet with so much mass it can keep enough atmosphere for living things to breathe!"

"Well, I remember reading about stars so heavy that a matchbox full of their substance would weigh millions of tons — "

"Chuck, do you suppose if Prewytt Brumblydge knew that Basidium was his home and the little Mushroom People his people, he'd still want to take mining equipment there and mess it all up?"

"I don't know, Dave. Who could tell anything about what Prewytt Brumblydge would want to do?"

Now there was silence, but in the next moment David turned and studied Chuck and his face was troubled.

"Chuck, I've thought of something. If we find

Prewytt Brumblydge, what's going to happen to us when we get back to Pacific Grove?"

"Why, I don't know. What would happen? Everybody'd be glad."

"That's just it — everybody! How are we going to explain to Dr. Frobisher and Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith and the newspapers? How are we going to explain about spotting Mr. Brumblydge in some old cave or desert island or something right after being told he was missing? Chuck, we're going to be in the most awful mess we've ever been in."

A Momentous Decision

CHUCK'S EYES darkened.

"I never thought," he said. "I never thought. First thing we'd have to phone Dr. Frobisher right off the bat, and he'd get in touch with Tickle and Fewsmith — and it'd be terrible."

"Yes, because they'd keep asking their little clever questions," David went on, "until they'd gotten us into a corner we couldn't get out of —"

"And then, maybe," said Chuck, all worked up, "being so tired and exhausted and everything, we'd probably get just mixed up enough to go and give Mr. Bass's secrets away. Dave, what're we going to do?" Then he stared straight ahead and appeared to be thinking hard. "Maybe we could get Dr. Frobisher to promise he wouldn't tell anybody if we let him know about Lepton and the space ship."

"No, we can't do that, Chuck. We can't ever tell anybody. If we tell one person, then we're finished. But, listen, what if, somehow, we could manage to

stop Prewytt Brumblydge all by ourselves — all on our own?”

Chuck drew in his breath.

“All on our own, Dave? But how? You mean maybe not go home?”

“That’s it. Not go home at all.” Now David leaned forward and took hold of Chuck’s arm. “I mean — as soon as we spot Mr. Brumblydge, we could just signal Mr. Theo from here for a vector to wherever Mr. Brumblydge is hiding.”

Slowly Chuck’s face lighted, and he was so overcome with astonishment he couldn’t speak for a moment. Then:

“Dave, yés! But what about our folks? Oh, I know! We can signal to them too that we’re going to stop Mr. Brumblydge first before we come home.”

David was ready to burst with excitement.

“Chuck, let’s signal our folks right away!”

“But what’s the use of that? We haven’t found Mr. Brumblydge yet.” Chuck heaved an enormous sigh. “We’ll just have to keep our fingers crossed,” he said, “that at the same time Basidium’s in a good position to get our signals, Pacific Grove’s in a spot to get them too. Do we dast do it, Dave?”

“We’ve got to dast.” Then David pointed. “Look, now we can go on hunting.”

For there, far, far to the east, a segment of earth

was beginning to brighten. And the earth turned, and little Lepton swung steadily forward along her orbit until now the great globe beyond them was divided into dark and bright. Gradually the dark side slid down and away, the bright side rolled up, and once more their search could go on.

"When I Was a Boy in Aberystwyth—"

FIRST CHUCK and then David searched.

They saw the gleaming round domes of great observatories all over the world, in America and England and Russia and France and Germany and South Africa. They saw a rayed ball of light that traveled with them as they swung over the oceans, and knew that this was the sun's reflection upon the water. Other bright gleams came from giant solar furnaces whose curved mirrors caught the sun's rays and produced temperatures as high as that on the sun's surface.

They saw jet cruisers riding the jet stream that sweeps across the upper part of the globe between the latitudes of 40° and 50° North. They saw ocean liners creeping at a snail's pace across the oceans, making no progress at all that one could see. And they beheld a sight they had dreamed of ever since Mrs. Topman had read them *Lost Horizon*:

a green and lovely valley high in the Himalayas between India and Tibet.

"Dave — Dave — d'you suppose — could it be — Shangri-La?"

Then David had to look, whether it was his turn or not, and he remembered the young girl who had turned, in a single instant, into a shriveled crone before the very eyes of her companions when she went from that sunlit valley through the crevice into the blizzard of those cruel mountains on the other side.

David could not tear his eyes away for remembering that strange story. But they had to go on searching.

They searched especially all lonely, out-of-the-way places, the endless wastes of deserts and high plateaus. And yet, David said to himself, Prewytt Brumblydge is exactly the kind of man who would be just where you would never think of him being.

When I was a boy in Aberystwyth, he had said.

Now their orbit was taking another swing northward and they had come again to Northern Africa, and then Spain. There was the Bay of Biscay, and Land's End at the foot of Britain, and above it — Ireland. David was watching at this time and as he thought of Aberystwyth, he trained the telescope upon Wales and searched carefully. But he saw no

tower topped by a cobweb with a plane waiting nearby.

*"'Tis the tramp of Saxon foemen,
Saxon spearmen, Saxon bowmen.
Be they knights or hinds or yeomen,
They shall bite the ground!"*

sang Chuck. "See anything, Dave?"

"Not yet."

We went to a little island in the North Atlantic, he heard Prewytt Brumblydge say. *The ancient Britons had built their rock shelters there and raised great stone monuments . . .*

A little island, thought David. A little island can be a lonely place and, surrounded by the northern seas, nobody would ever come there. He turned the telescope on that deep green patch of land which is Ireland and worked carefully up along its rugged, sea-bitten, western coast — on up and up, where the sea has so fiercely torn the shores that it is nothing but one island after another. Yes, but there was no cobweblike antenna, nor any plane to be found on any of those small, rocky outposts. Now he passed little Inishtrahull, which stands opposite the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland. Beyond this there is a patch of bare ocean and then you go out from the islands of Tiree and Coll and

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come to Barra Head, which is at the very bottom of the Outer Hebrides.

"I'm opposite Scotland, Chuck."

"Yes?" asked Chuck. "What do you see?"

Now there was silence; and David did not know why, but his heart began to beat faster and he held his breath as he went up past Barra and came at last to . . .

"I think," he said in a low voice, "I think I see it."

For the briefest second there was another silence, as though Chuck were too stunned to speak. Then he tore his belt loose and turned, forcing his hands as quickly as he could toward the hand-holds.

"What d'you mean, Dave? *What's* it? Let me look!"

And he scrambled out of his seat and edged himself along to the telescope, while David tried to get himself out of the way so that Chuck could look.

Chuck put his eye to the filter, and again no one spoke.

"Dave, I can't believe it! But there is something shining, partly hidden — but as if it might be part of a plane. And farther over there's a sort of stone place. And I think I can see —"

"It's an island, isn't it?" insisted David. "What you're seeing is on an island?"



“Yes, and I — ” And then the strangest expression came over Chuck’s face. It went blank with astonishment — absolutely blank.

“Maybe it’s my eyes,” he muttered, and he shook his head and rubbed his fingers back and forth across them. “Maybe I’ve stared too long, but it’s funny — I can’t see anything but a blur. Or maybe just clouds, as if the filter isn’t working any more.”

“Isn’t working any more!” yelled David. “That’s impossible! Here, let me look again. Is it plugged in?” And they both turned to see, and the cord was tight in its socket, just as it had always been. “Well, your eyes *are* going on the blink, that’s all.”

Now David settled himself at the telescope and leaned toward the filter. And then — just as Chuck's had done — his face too turned blank with astonishment.

"It's — it's *not* working. The filter's not working! Oh, Chuck — right now, right when we finally . . ."

But he couldn't say anything more. All he could do was to keep turning the telescope in one direction after another; but it was no use. He saw nothing but cloud, and then, when the clouds passed, the softly blurred surface of the earth.

And now something else began to happen. It seemed to David that Lepton trembled beneath them. At least, the space ship trembled, or shook; or at least there was a horrible queasy feeling of unsteadiness as though Lepton, or the space ship, was no longer firm. And this feeling was so sudden and so strong and sharp that a cold chill of horror ran up and down his arms, and then he went burning hot inside his jacket. His heart thudded. He looked at Chuck.

"Chuck, did you feel it?"

"Yes. It — it was like a sort of little earthquake. Do planetoids have earthquakes?"

"How could they? No — it feels as if the space ship has come loose, or — or as if Lepton's going to leave its orbit."

Chuck's eyes widened and his mouth dropped open for a moment in terror.

"What'll we do?"

David couldn't answer, because he had no more idea what to do than Chuck had. If Lepton suddenly, for some mysterious reason, took off into space away from the earth, what *could* they do? They might set their controls for the return journey, but Mr. Bass's calculations would no longer hold good.

"How much longer do we have, Chuck? We've been around the earth six times — almost."

"In — forty-three minutes, our twelve hours will be up. That means we've got only about three quarters of an hour to find that island on the map and signal Mr. Theo and then signal our folks."

"Shall we do it, Chuck? Or shall we set the controls for home?"

Now Lepton trembled as if at any moment it might give a great final shudder and spin away from its orbit altogether. The boys were silent with fright. And even though the time was running out in which they must signal, David could only keep trying the filter to see if it might not start working again. But his hand shook as he focused the telescope at various distances. And it occurred to him that now they had no way at all of knowing if

Basidium was on this side of the earth, so that Mr. Theo could receive their signals, for it was no use — the filter was dead, as if something had suddenly reached out and stricken its power from it.

Something had reached out.

"Chuck, I've thought of an idea. When did all this begin to happen — the filter going dead on us and Lepton starting to shake?"

"Why, you know — just when we saw the shining thing on the island, and the stone place — and . . . Dave, do you suppose . . . ?"

"The B-rays, Chuck! Mr. Brumblydge's B-rays! Maybe they're so powerful that when they're being drawn toward one place, like the big antenna, they affect whatever's in the way above the place they're being drawn to."

"Yes, but, Dave, did we see the antenna? I was so busy trying to decide if that was really part of a plane, and if it was really an island down there or part of a headland —"

"I know, I know — I'm not really sure I saw any big antenna on the house, or whatever it was. But, Chuck, don't you see — the filter's going dead right then and Lepton's trembling just prove for certain—"

"That that is Prewytt Brumblydge on the island. Now we know for sure."

"Yes," said David, "if only it'll do us any good."

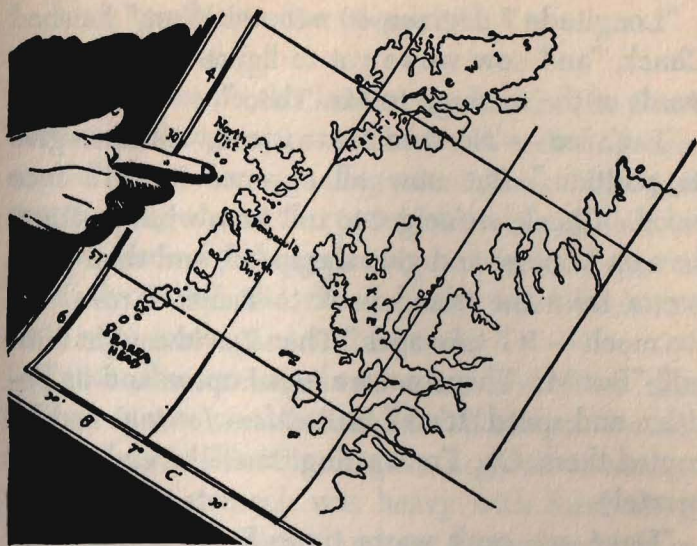
Waiting

WHETHER IT WOULD do them any good seemed doubtful during the next terrible forty minutes. Lepton trembled and trembled, and the space ship wavered ominously, without letup, until David thought surely he was going to be sick at his stomach.

"Do you feel awful, Chuck? Sort of seasick?"

"Yes, and I don't know if it's because I'm scared or because of the shaking. But we've got to send our signals — come on, let's begin. We've got to find the island first."

Now Chuck unrolled the big bundle of Cap'n Tom's maps again, where on top the last one lay which showed the British Isles. He and David bent over it while David's finger went up past Ireland following the path he remembered so vividly from those tense moments just before the filter went dead. Past little Inishtrahull opposite the North Channel his finger moved, across an empty



stretch of ocean and then out from the isles of Tiree and Coll to Barra Head at the bottom of the Outer Hebrides. Then up — and opposite Benbecula to a tiny spot of land.

“That’s it, Chuck — I know it is.”

“But how can you be sure? Maybe there’s more than one island there, lots more than one, too little to be shown on a map.”

“There’s no time to wonder about it, Chuck. I’ve got to be sure. And it’s right across Little Minch from the Isle of Skye, and that’s exactly where I was. Here, I’ll put it down: latitude 57 degrees, 19 minutes North —”

"Longitude 7 degrees, 40 minutes West," finished Chuck, "and now we've got to figure out the exact words of the message to Mr. Theo."

"Let's see — 'Need vector to island,' and then give its position." But now all at once David's face paled. "Chuck, we've got to tell *from* what position, here on Lepton, and give the speed, and then get a vector from the island back to Pacific Grove. It's too much — it'll take ages." Then David caught himself. "But Mr. Theo *knows* about Lepton and its position and speed. It's all in *Random Jottings* and he copied them. Oh, I'm wasting time!" he ended desperately.

"Dave, we can't waste time. Keep writing!"

"But I can't write. My hand's shaking —"

"Then print. Now listen: 'Need vector for 11:15 A.M. from Lepton to land on island (and give its position) and vector from island to Pacific Grove.' How's that?"

"But why 11:15, Chuck?" asked David, furious that his fear could make his fingers so awkward.

Chuck drew in his breath and rubbed a hand across his stomach.

"Mr. Bass's time to leave. If we don't get a signal from Basidium, then we'll just have to take off for Pacific Grove."

"How much time have we left?"

"Half an hour."

Now out came the lantern, and with Mr. Bass's *Random Jottings* open to where the code had been copied down for signaling, David carefully read out the long-shorts that would translate their message to some watching person on Basidium. Just as carefully Chuck slid the lantern's hood back and forth with exact pauses in between.

Twice the message was sent, and then they waited. It was now five minutes of eleven. Twenty minutes were left. Chuck gave a groan of anxiety and David's stomach was heavy with foreboding. They should not doubt, and yet it was hard not to. And how could it be possible to want time to hurry on the one hand, and to stay on the other — to keep it back so that Mr. Theo could translate and then figure two vectors, and to hasten it forward so that as quickly as possible they could leave this speck of metal on which they were shuddering through space?

Then suddenly, unbelievably, the lantern glowed and darkened, glowed and darkened, and Chuck joyfully shouted out the signals while David scratched them down as fast as he could. Then the lantern went dark and did not light again.

"What does he say, Dave?"

"He says he'll figure for us! Chuck, just think, he was there. He got our message. But how can he possibly answer in time? But maybe it's not hard for *him*. Can he see us, do you suppose — with his filter, I mean? He'd have to, to get our exact position over the earth, I should think, because how could he figure without it? Chuck, maybe we'll make it to Mr. Brumblydge's island after all —"

"And we've got to signal our folks. Oh, but we can't, can we? Not till everything's finished, or it might interfere just when Mr. Theo's trying to send his answer."

"But Chuck, with our lantern sending out its beams every which way into space, perhaps our folks caught the flashing on their lantern too. I hope so. And I hope they understood we were flashing to Mr. Theo for directions."

Now again they waited in silence. And Lepton — or the space ship — or both together — kept up their terrifying, incessant trembling.

"What time is it now, Chuck?"

"Six minutes after eleven. Nine minutes more."

"We could signal Mr. Theo to take his time, now we know he's figuring for us."

"But what if we got our signals crossed, Dave?"

You keep forgetting. And then what if it turns out he can't figure, for some reason or other?"

Chuck was right and David was silent.

"It would be nice if Mr. Bass were here," he ventured after a moment or two, ashamed, and wondering if Chuck were braver than he.

"This is lots, *lots* worse than blasting away from earth," burst out Chuck, as if he'd just been waiting a chance to say it. "At least you know what's coming and what causes it — and you know it'll be over in a moment or two. But we don't know what's — *Dave!* Long . . . long . . . short — long . . . short. . . Pause. Long . . . short — short —" and Chuck's voice, high with tension, continued steadily, unerringly, while David concentrated every atom of his being upon taking without making a single mistake.

At last the signaling ceased, then in a moment or two commenced again. And David checked himself and found that this time, on the first try, they had got the message *pre-cise-ly* as Mr. Theo had sent it.

They could not take time to send a *Thanks* for they still did not know if they had the vectors. Instead, while David translated, Chuck sent a message to their folks. For perhaps — perhaps some-

where far off, near the horizon of that five-thousand-mile area not hidden by the earth's curve, lay Cap'n Tom's beach where his grandfather and David's father and mother were waiting for them at this very moment.

Sighted Prewytt stopping same, he flashed. *Sighted Prewytt stopping same* — and was enormously pleased with himself for having remembered, out of somewhere, "Sighted sub sank same," that someone during some war had signaled home.

"Got the directions, Dave?"

"All finished. And he *did* send the vectors, and I've set the controls! Time, Chuck?"

"Eleven fourteen," Chuck answered in a low voice. Then silently he counted off the seconds as they ticked past. "All right, Dave. Ready — let's — GO!"

At last — at last — away from Lepton, tailed by a brilliant burst of reddish flame, soared a minute, silvery-golden object which described an arc against the deep, deep blackness of space, flattened out, and then streaked earthward into the pale blue blanket of atmosphere beneath them. Inside the tiny object, David and Chuck had regained their senses.

They turned and looked at one another. Their eyes were bright.

"Dave, we did it! We're safe — we got away from Lepton —"

"And we're going to Mr. Brumblydge's island into the bargain!"

The two boys, like wild Indians, hooted and hol-
lered with pure joy and relief, pummeled and
pushed one another — and then suddenly:

*Men of Harlech, in the hollow [sang Chuck],
Do you hear, like rushing billow [David joined in],
Wave on wave that surging follow
Battle's distant sound?*

*'Tis the tramp of Saxon foemen
Saxon spearmen, Saxon bowmen.
Be they knights or hinds or yeomen,
They shall bite the ground!*

Over the Gray Wastes

NOW THE VAULT of space, with the stream of the Milky Way spilling across it, appeared to lighten from black to cobalt and then from cobalt to blue-green as they entered the first layers of light-reflecting atmosphere. The sun had a rolling, tumbling sea of cloud to shine across; and to David, filled with happiness as he was, it appeared substantial as if he might have jumped out and run shouting across it — up one billow and down the next, his arms stretched out and all eternity to run in.

“Crikey — the time!” said Chuck. “Let’s see — in Mr. Theo’s directions here, it says to shut off the motor exactly five minutes after starting time, then in two minutes to turn the ship tail down, and then — after that — we’ll see the island. Dave, do you suppose we actually will? In another forty seconds it’ll be five minutes.”

As they sped through space, they could think of nothing but the passage of time, divided into

small compartments and seeping away second by second to one duty and then another as the sweep hand on Chuck's watch went round and round.

"Dave," said Chuck, his eyes on his watch, "what if it's night when we come down? What if it's all rocky and we can't see —"

"But Prewytt Brumblydge landed his plane. And won't it be afternoon? If we were going to land in Pacific Grove around 11:30 A.M., I should think it'd be about five hours later in the British Isles."

"Turn her now," said Chuck. "Then in a minute or two we should see . . . something."

Now the little ship descended rapidly on a curve through ever thickening layers of atmosphere with great masses of cloud streaking past their window. Then — there beneath — it seemed they could spy a stretch of darkness and, as they came nearer, the darkness lightened through patches of cloud to gray — yes, the vast gray wastes of the ocean on a leaden, cold, late afternoon in the northern part of the world.

"Dave, at least it's the ocean!"

"Do you see any islands?"

"Yes — yes, there are the islands —"

"And are they in the shape of the Outer Hebrides? Do you see Lewis, and then the three smaller ones south of it?"



"I can't be sure, but — yes, there're three pieces of land," shouted Chuck in triumph. "And now a little one down at the tip — and that's Barra. See it, Dave?"

"And a little one in between North and South Uist, and that's Benbecula — and — and off Benbecula —"

Tensely the boys searched. Would they sight the tiny stitch of land off Benbecula that meant they were coming down as they should? Now the gray wastes drew closer, and closer, and, as the ship descended, the Outer Hebrides slid away, and beneath the space ship . . . right beneath . . .

"The island, Chuck! Mr. Theo did it! He did it! It's Mr. Brumblydge's island!"

Quickly David turned on the rocket motor, and from the tail of the ship came a burst of flame and power that would cushion their landing on that rugged dot of land. Wildly, as they came down tail first, their eyes searched the island for some welcome sign. But they could not be certain of what they were seeing. Had that been a shining speck, picked out by a fitful gleam of sun flashing for an instant through the steely skies? Had that been (already it was gone) a heap of stone on the western coast with, on top of it, a dark, saucer-shaped web?

A Warning Voice

THE SPACE SHIP came down gently on an expanse of gray-green gorse sloping up to a dark peak, steep and rocky and somber. When the boys opened the door they heard the tumult of heavy seas breaking against the cliffs, and gulls screamed and circled overhead under gray, wind-driven clouds.

When they dropped to the ground, David looked at the dark peak and thought, What if the island isn't small? What if it's miles across and we can't find the little house Mr. Brumblydge is hiding in?

"Dave, it *was* at the other end of the island, wasn't it, that there was a stone place, or tower or something? We *did* see it, didn't we?"

"Yes, and it had something on top of it. I'm sure it did. Come on, Chuck, let's start climbing."

Now the boys made their way through the purple heather and yellow-starred gorse, and as they went up, they would stop to listen every once in a while and to catch their breaths.

"Do you hear anything, Dave?"

"Nothing but the sea and the wind. Let's keep climbing, Chuck — let's keep going up!" for what a terrible thing it would be, David thought, if having tried so hard and come so far, they should at the final moment be just too late.

Now at last they came to the top of the peak, and from where they stood they looked down over an expanse of open heath that extended away right to the cliffs. Where it flattened out there were curious, low rocky mounds; and in other places slabs of rock leaned together as though humans had placed them in this position for some ancient purpose. And in the whole of that lonely, windswept place, there was not a tree save for a small, flattened clump in a hollow, almost hiding what could now be seen was Prewytt Brumblydge's plane.

Without a word the boys began running. For at the far end of the island, standing on an abrupt rocky rise and silhouetted against the cold sky, they saw a broad tower built of stone — a tower of the strangest shape, for it was wider at the bottom than at the top. And on its ruined summit was the saucer-shaped antenna.

"But, Dave," cried Chuck as they drew near, "how do we get in? There's no door — not even any windows —"

Terrifying it was, in some nameless way — that blind, silent tower standing at the edge of the sea, at the extreme edge, for during the highest tides the great waves must have thundered at its very foot.

"There must be a door — or some kind of opening somewhere. *Listen*, Chuck!" And they stopped and stood there not far from the tower, their ears strained to listen.

What they heard — faintly — faintly — was a hurried, steady crackling, almost lost to them under the roar of the sea. And it held such an ominous, momentarily increasing urgency that they could only stand rooted to the spot trying desperately to place it in their minds.

"I know, Dave — I know — it's a Geiger counter, going like mad, the way they do in atomic furnaces when the cadmium rods are out and the atomic energy's going too high —"

Their hearts pounding in their chests with fear, they ran like the wind up the rocks to the bottom of the tower and then around it in search of a door. At last they came to a low opening and when they were inside, that terrible crackling was to be heard more loudly now and mounting in rapidity.

They stood in half-darkness and all they could see, by the light from the doorway, was that stone steps mounted up to the right.

"Mr. Brumblydge!" shouted David into the blackness overhead. "*Stop it! Stop it! Stop the Brumblitron!*"

But there came no answer. The tower was deathly still except for the deadly warning of the Geiger counter.

Up they went into the dark. And at length they came to a little stone room, littered with the rubbish of ages and lit only by a faint light that crept through chinks in the walls. They ran across it and up more steps that wound always round and round inside the walls of the tower, and as they went up they knew, by the fierce warning of the counter, that they were nearing its source.

Now they came to a room in which part of the floor and the wall was ruined on one side, so that you could look out into the hollow heart of the tower that was open to the sky. And in the middle of this room, at the very edge of that gaping hole in the floor, sat a squat black box about three feet square and two feet high, and from the box went wires, winding out of the room and up the inside of the tower to the antenna above. Out of the hole, toward which the box was slightly tilted by an iron bar wedged between it and the floor, there came, as though from the bottom of a deep, deep well, the hollow boom of the sea, rumbling, and then breath-





ing away in a sigh. And from a Geiger counter, lying beside the box, came that deadly crackling like a hundred high tension wires crossed and snarling.

"Mr. Brumblydge!"

"Mr. Brumblydge — Mr. Brumblydge!"

David pushed wide the creaking, half-open door that led into another room — and there, huddled at a rough wooden table in oblivious concentration, sat Prewytt Brumblydge, writing away for dear life as though at any moment he might never be able to take up his pen again. His table, lighted by a grimed and naked lantern, was scattered with papers. And so dim was the place that it seemed more like a cave than a room, but David could not mistake that unforgettable, broad-shouldered figure.

Mr. Brumblydge turned. He stared with open mouth and widening eyes as though he stared at ghosts. Then he leaped up with such violence that his chair clattered upon the floor. For a moment you could see that he listened. Then with a cry of absolute horror he dashed the boys aside as though they were leaves and was out into the other room. First he pulled a switch in the side of the Brumblitron, but as this had no effect, he began tearing at the wires that reached up to the antenna.

"Push!" he shouted. "Help me shove it over!"

Down came the wires, but the frightful part was that, once they were down, the crackling did not cease.

Now David and Chuck got onto their hands and knees and began pushing with their shoulders, while Prewytt Brumblydge laid hold of the bar of iron and tugged upward. But that must have been a box of stone, for it would not budge. And as Mr. Brumblydge tugged, and the boys got their shoulders against the box and strained until it seemed their muscles must burst and their very bones must break, David knew that the crackling had increased — steadily, steadily.

"*Harder!*" cried Prewytt Brumblydge.

Now at last the black box commenced to tilt — slowly — and yet the warning of the Geiger counter continued as though the box held within it all the power it needed to send that crackling up to the final, fatal pitch.

Little Mr. Brumblydge seemed to be prying upward with every last ounce of strength in his body. His face was scarlet; his breath whistled between his teeth. And then at last David knew that the box teetered on the edge, that its leaden case was cracking with unsupported weight. Desperately Prewytt Brumblydge gave a final tug, Chuck and



David strained with all their might — and the Brumblitron went over into nothingness.

No word was spoken while it hurtled down through the dark length of the tower. Fainter and fainter sounded the warning of the counter — then silence, and a look of alarm came into Chuck's face. What could have happened? But now, far, far down — a splash.

"It is gone," murmured Mr. Brumblydge. He sighed.

And in that instant, trembling with the after-effects of having exerted more strength than he had ever thought his body capable of, it flashed into David's mind to pity poor Mr. Brumblydge, sighing above the ruin of his lost ambitions. The Brumblitron was gone forever. Could he build another? Would the deserts ever bloom now because of

Prewytt Brumblydge, so that all men might be fed?

David turned, surely to find him heartbroken.

But he was only mopping his head with a large, quite soiled pocket handkerchief, which he held up and gazed at in disapproval.

"*Tchk!*" he said. "One certainly wants one's washing done." Then he stuffed it back into his hip pocket and rubbed his hands together. "Well," he said, "that is most certainly *that!*" And he gave a last peek over the edge of the black hole. "Narrow escape, dreadfully narrow escape. Another fifteen minutes, perhaps less, and we should have been — *phht!* You and me, boys, I mean, of course," he added cheerfully, "not anyone else. Oh, I certainly never expected any visitors, and I *don't* see how you found me, but you must know how grateful I am —"

"But, Mr. Brumblydge," cried Chuck. "What *about* the Brumblitron? Where has it gone?"

"Why, into the sea," replied Mr. Brumblydge, seemingly without regret. "The ancient Picts built this tower for a fortress — it's called a *broch*, you know — and I believe that they might have stood their Norse prisoners here and sent them to their deaths down the dark well. Though not into the water, for in those days the shoreline was much, much farther out. But when I was a boy, before

the wall had fallen away there and the floor caved in, a round hole was here. The sea comes in under the cliff now in many places on this side of the island, because this is the western side where the tides are strongest. Not far from here, where the sea has eaten under, there is a huge fallen-in place — ”

“But what will the sea do to the Brumblitron, Mr. Brumblydge?” persisted David, a knot of worry gathering inside him. “Can’t it still explode? Professor Whipsnade told us once that a chain reaction could turn the hydrogen of all the seas into helium, and that then — ”

But Prewytt Brumblydge smiled and shook his head.

“Ah, my boy, that’s the whole point of the Brumblitron. Goodness me, didn’t I tell you? Only in sea water is its energy harmlessly dissipated, because it is put to work. Salt is sodium chloride. And what happens? The energy of the Brumblitron breaks up the sodium and the chlorine — and what have we then? Why, fresh water!

“Oh, it was a remarkable invention,” and here Mr. Brumblydge clasped his hands together and his eyes shone with appreciation as if the whole thing had been someone else’s idea altogether. “Such a pity it must be abandoned for lack of Brumblium — unless, of course,” he added thoughtfully, “I could

advertise for unusually heavy meteorites which, when cut and polished, prove to be a warm, glowing coppery color with peculiar markings on the face quite unlike Widmanstätten lines. Then again, on the other hand —”

And now there was a brief, vibrant silence during which Prewytt Brumblydge appeared to consider something while he studied their faces with an odd, sparkling expression.

“*What*, Mr. Brumblydgel” urged David, bursting with curiosity.

“On the other hand,” murmured the little man, his face lighting with a most disturbing mixture of mischief and triumph, “I could make use of a certain substance which so excited me as I worked out the different steps in its creation that I was completely deaf both to your voices and the voice of the Brumblitron rising to danger. With it I shall be able to simply — fly away” — and here Mr. Brumblydge’s hands came up like birds and his great eyes opened wide — “to that small, blue-green world we both know of, where I shall be able actually to *dig up* Brumblium — beautiful, unlimited amounts of Brumblium!”

The Chasm

BUT WHAT WILL YOU fly away *with*, Mr. Brumblydge?" managed Chuck after a moment in a faint voice.

"Why, with my brumblic pentathermonuclear-cosmicdiheliumite. Didn't I say? Such a fine, full, well-rounded —"

"But it won't *work*, I bet you!" broke in Chuck defiantly. "I'll bet you anything it won't work. Because it *isn't* a — why, it's not even ato —" and then he stopped short and David could almost see the letters of Mr. Bass's atomic tritetramethylbenza-carbonethylene wavering in the air between them.

Mr. Brumblydge gave him a sharp look and chuckled.

"Not even *what*, Chucky, my boy? Not even atomic, eh? A surprisingly knowing young man. Well, now, of course it's atomic. It's got to be. But it's brumblic into the bargain and *that* makes all the difference.

"Ah, Tycol" — and now Mr. Brumblydge laughed aloud and rubbed his hands together in glee — "I'll fashion a space ship — you wait. And I'll get out into space ahead of you!"

"How wonderfully everything has worked together — like nothing so much as a magic circle: first the B-rays; then out of them the Brumblitron, for the purpose of changing salt water to fresh but requiring Brumblium in the process; then B-rays again, working upon certain elements in such a way as to create the fuel necessary to reach the one spot where Brumblium is obtainable. Why, the whole thing is like one of those fairy mushroom rings you discover on the lawn in the morning where nothing has been before —"

Here he stopped as though completely carried away. And then all at once, quite without warning, his expression changed and became businesslike.

"Well, now," he said briskly, "we can't stay here mooning about all evening. First thing, we must get you boys back to the people you came with. Where's your plane, and where on earth is everybody anyway? Wandering around all over the other end of the island, I'll wager, with you two young scallwags off by yourselves determined to have the whole glory of stopping that foolish, muddle-headed, stubborn Prewytt Brumblydge from being

the death of himself — *and* in the nick of time, too. But we don't need to make too much of *that* fact, do we? Embarrassing — *tchk!* — should have had my mind on the business in hand. All the same" — and here he turned away into his room — "all the same" — and he swept his papers together, stuffed them into his pocket and darted out the door — "something was accomplished." And he clattered off down the steep stone steps that led through the walls of the *broch*.

"Oh, but, Mr. Brumblydge — Mr. Brumblydge — come back! You can't —"

"Don't you touch anything, Mr. Brumblydge," bawled Chuck, making off after him. "You stay right there!" And both boys tumbled down the steps in his wake.

Not a moment later, Prewytt Brumblydge was seen to disappear through the door of the tower. When they got outside, there he was, puzzled, staring about in all directions.

"Well, now, where is it — where is it — the plane? And Horace. Surely Horace Frobisher came along? Ah-ha, wait'll he hears about my fuel! And my plans for a space ship!" And now Prewytt snatched his papers out of his pocket and began shuffling them together (they were in a terrific mess) as though to get them into order and fold them over into a small

packet. "Not the three-stage rocket kind with parts falling off as you go along. No, no — that won't do at all. Small, I need it to be, compact, neat — staying all in one piece. Well, now, here we go — can't have everyone wandering about worrying."

But at that instant — would you believe it! — out of the bleak, lowering sky, even darker and more thunderous-looking than when the boys had landed on the island, a tremendous gust of wind shot down and, like some giant, invisible hand, snatched those precious papers out of Prewytt Brumblydge's grasp and sent them flying away in every direction — now high in the air, now down again.

"AA-AAA-AH!" cried poor Mr. Brumblydge, and the sound went up like the cry of a stricken animal. "*Catch them!* I'll *never* be able to do it again!"

Away he went, clutching, reaching, only to have the white sheets elude him as though they possessed some impudent, goblin life of their own.

"Chuck, he's going to lose them!" shouted David, and even as he shouted he felt a twinge of shame at the triumph in his voice. "Shall we help him — or let them go?"

"Let 'em go, let 'em go," yelled Chuck, hopping up and down in huge excitement at the sight of Mr.



Brumblydge's chances of getting to Basidium vanishing on the wings of the wind.

"But what if the wind dies? Then he'll hunt till he finds them."

"Then let's get them, and run like the dickens back to the space ship before he can catch us."

"But that'd be stealing — !"

Now they took off after the little man, and whenever one of them almost managed to pounce upon a sailing sheet of paper covered from top to bottom with the small, mysterious language of the brumblic formula — it skipped, sailed, fluttered away at

the very instant their eager fingers were closing in.

When David caught sight of Mr. Brumblydge again, a scrap of white right in front of him was leading him on and on to the very edge of that vast opening in the side of a hill of which he'd told them in the tower — an opening as though the earth had fallen through to some subterranean cavern far below, where the sea came pounding and clawing its way in.

"It's the main one," he heard Mr. Brumblydge cry. "It's the main —"

On the lip of the opening hovered that page on which was scratched, apparently, the very heart of all his labors. Now it was whirled above the chasm, then was drawn down — down — down — until it disappeared altogether. Mr. Brumblydge, racing up the hillside, gave a howl of despair; and then, before the boys' horrified gaze, wavered a moment on the chasm's edge — knelt, leaned forward, and vanished from sight.

When David and Chuck came to the chasm and stared over, they could not believe what they saw. For little Mr. Brumblydge was climbing rapidly straight down the rocky wall toward that place where his precious paper was caught by some twig or twisted vine. Where he found crevices to put his feet or ledges to cling to with his fingers,

they could not see. It was as though he were not human, but some elf or troll with the magic gift of clinging to nothing. *Not human! Not human!* But then he wasn't, was he? came into David's head. No, he was a spore person.

Oh, but born into the world of humans with the breath of this world in his blood. For now suddenly he must have missed his step — for his hands flew out, his white face turned upward, glimmering in the darkness, he gave a brief, sharp cry — and then backwards he went — and was seen no more.

The boys stood helpless and shuddering. Their voices drifted out across the chasm; and echoes of them sounded briefly and were lost in that enormous hollow.

Terrified, they listened. But all they heard were the gulls screeing in the wind, and the ocean roaring on the shore, and far, far beneath them at the bottom of the chasm, the hollow boom of the sea rushing in through the cavern and then sighing as it lost its force in the darkness and sank away.

Mr. Brumblydge was gone.

PART THREE

The Return

Street of Scotland, at the bottom
the go down the valley of the

A Most Unexpected Visitor

THE ANCIENT BRITONS *had built their rock shelters there, and we played among the ruins. And they'd raised great stone monuments, and we played in their shadows.*

Far, far away, it seemed, Mr. Brumblydge was saying that. Faintly, David heard him. Then he saw the windswept island and the stone-covered graves of the people who had fought in the *broch*, and he saw that ancient stone tower, windowless, standing above the northern seas as it had stood for nineteen hundred years.

*Men of Harlech, in the hollow,
Do ye hear, like rushing billow . . .*

But the men of Harlech were Welsh, and the *broch* was of Scotland. It was of ancient Scotland; it was Pictish. So Mr. Brumblydge hadn't been quite right, for the men who had defended themselves on that little island had been Picts, not Brit-

ons. And why was he singing a Welsh war song?
And where was he?

Now David saw the sea. He heard the scream of the sea eagle swooping for its prey. He saw the hillside covered with gray-green gorse and dotted with small yellow flowers. In the midst of the gorse was an enormous black hole, and toward that hole he saw Mr. Brumblydge running. Then he commenced running, too, and knew that if only he could overtake him, he could save him from what was going to happen. But try as he might, call as he might, he saw that he could not do it.

"Mr. Brumblydge! Mr. Brumblydge!" His voice was blown away, and the wind pressed against him and the little man tottered on the edge of the chasm and went over. He shouted and shouted into the wind. His voice was hoarse with shouting so that his throat ached, and not even Chuck was there. He was alone on the island — absolutely alone; no one could help him.

"Chuck — Mr. Brumblydge — where are you?" Then he made a last terrified effort to push against the wind — flung himself against it — and sat up in bed staring into the faces of his mother and father and Cap'n Tom and — Mr. Tyco Bass!

For a moment, he could not tell if he were dreaming now, or had been dreaming before. He looked at

them, at that circle of good, kindly, anxious faces, and at the bed he was in, which was his own, and then at the room around him, which was his own room. There was Chuck on the day bed over there under the windows, fast asleep, with the morning sun pouring in.

"Oh, Mr. Bass!" cried out David. "Mr. Bass!" He burst from the bedclothes and gave the little man such a hug as almost to demolish him. "I'm so glad to see you — I was having such an awful dream. And — oh, look! — you've still got your gray gardening coat on. How could you still have it on, after all the places you've been?" But somehow this seemed the most satisfying thing in the world: that Mr. Bass hadn't changed by so much as a hair or a thread.

"Yes," said Mr. Bass, smiling with pleasure. "I do go on wearing it, don't I? But then, as long as it holds together, I seem to find it the most suitable garment for all contingencies."

"Contingencies?"

"Yes, you know, different sorts of weather, different sorts of happenings, all kinds of possible events —"

"Oh," said David. "*Con-tin-gen-cies*," and added it to his vocabulary.

Then Mr. Bass, still smiling, came round and

sat down; and the bed did not even creak under his weight, for he scarcely had any.

"*Tchk, tchk!*" he said, his eyes warm with concern, "this has all been most regrettable. What a time you two boys have had, and how very proud we are of you! My goodness, when I think of the decisions you two have had to make, all alone, and how much depended upon them, then the distances you have covered, the courage and perseverance you have shown, and, on top of it all, the fact that you actually succeeded in keeping Prewytt from blowing himself up, I am filled with admiration.

"Can you imagine, I was busily at work at home — my new home in the other solar system — when I felt for some mysterious reason which I couldn't put my finger on that I must talk to Theo. So off I went. And at the time of my arrival on Basidium, Theo said that it had already been hours and hours since you had signaled him for the second time for those vectors to Prewytt's island and back from there to Pacific Grove. So, by the time I got to earth, you and Chuck had left the island and landed down on the beach —"

"With poor Mr. Brumblydge still at the bottom of the chasm! Mr. Bass, I can't remember what we told Mom and Dad when we got out of the space ship last night. But, Dad, did you send a cable?"

"Yes, David, we did," answered his father, looking very grave. "You're not to worry. We've done everything we possibly can. While your mother got you two something to eat and into bed, Cap'n Tom and I went down to the telegraph office and got off a cable to the American Embassy in London to have someone search the island for Prewytt Brumblydge —"

"And you gave them its *exact* location?" insisted David anxiously.

"Its exact location," assured Cap'n Tom. "First of all, we got it when you signaled Mr. Theo from Lep-ton. When you got back, we found it marked on the map you'd been using, and then you told us four or five times before we left — don't you remember?"

"And have you heard from them — the Embassy people? Have they cabled back any news? Did someone go out and find the island?"

There was a moment of silence.

"Well, we're not sure — yet," replied his mother, coming and sitting on the other side of the bed and putting her hand over his. "But then it would take quite a while to get there, and it might be pretty difficult to get down into the chasm and search — and dangerous, too, if the tide's in —"

"And there was a storm coming on!" finished David in absolute despair. "Mr. Bass, *you* do some-

thing. *You* go there. You're the only one who can help now."

But what a strange look Tyco Bass gave him! He shook his head.

"I think there's no need, David," he said quietly. "I think you don't need to worry. Trust me!"

"You mean because he's — he's —"

"Because who's *what?*" came a voice from the other side of the room, and there was Chuck sitting up blinking at them. Then his eye lit on Mr. Bass.

"Why, Mr. Bass — where'd *you* come from? Oh, *boy!*" and Chuck was across the room in one bound giving him a hug that almost knocked him over.

"Chuck, my friend, how good it is to see you! Good heavens, how strong you are — for a person your age it is absolutely astounding!"

"Well, as I was telling David, I came here from Basidium. I really can't tell you how restless I'd been before that. I thought perhaps all I needed was a good long talk with Theo and Ta, when here it turned out I was restless because you boys needed my help so badly. Next time I shall know. But you should have seen Theo: how excited he was to be receiving signals from earth for the first time in history, though of course he was terribly concerned as to whether his last reply had got safely to you and what you had made of it —"

"And we must signal him, Mr. Bass," broke in Chuck. "We've got to signal him right away that we made it to the island and saved Mr. Brumblydge and — maybe everybody!"

Mr. Bass laughed and said he had already done that, while they were asleep. And then he asked them if they hadn't thought it rather convenient that Mr. Theo had just happened to be on hand to answer both their signals, because that would have meant he did nothing but watch . . .

"And surely," said Mrs. Topman, "he's got dozens of other things to do. Yes, that puzzled me."

"It puzzled us a little too, Mr. Bass," said David. "But we were so relieved at getting answers when we needed them that we didn't take too much time to wonder."

"Well, then, I will tell you how it came about. You see, it was not Theo who was watching all the time, because he is a very busy person. No, it was Ta's two wise men, Mebe and Oru —"

"Mebe and Oru!" Instantly David could see them, those funny little men, fragile as birds, twittering, scuttling hither and yon, getting in each other's way, bursting into fits of indignation, but getting over them at once.

"Yes, and you can have no idea how pleased and proud those two were. There was a short time in

there, between your first and second signaling, when no one was watching, and this worried Theo considerably. But when he had fixed up his observatory with the telescope he had built, and a Stroboscopic Polarizing Filter, and the lantern to send and receive, he told Mebe and Oru he had chosen them, with Ta's permission, above all others, to be responsible. Well, you should have seen their faces!"

Then Mr. Bass stopped as if he were listening.

"The door bell," shouted David, hopping out of bed. "Maybe it's a telegram. Maybe it's a cable from Scotland."

"A cable!" cried Chuck. "Who would — oh, Mr. Brumblydge. Oh, Dave, do you s'pose —"

"No," said Mrs. Topman at the window, and there was sharp disappointment in her voice, "no, it's only the gardener. I can see his truck. He probably wants to know if the hedge is to be cut back at the bottom of the garden."

Away she went, and while David and Chuck were getting into their clothes, David thought of something.

"Mr. Bass, have you looked at Lepton through the filter since you've been here?"

"Looked at Lepton? Goodness, no. I've been too busy. I never thought to."

"Well, maybe you should," said Chuck solemnly, pulling up his jeans. "We think she isn't there any more."

"Not there?" gasped Dr. Topman and Cap'n Tom.

"You mean not at all, Chuck?" asked Mr. Bass, startled.

"That's right. David and I bet each other, just before we went to sleep last night, that she's fallen right out of her orbit, because she was getting ready to, just when we left her. We even wondered if we were going to get off in time or if we were going to be whizzed off into space and never see the earth again. But it was *that* that made us sure about Mr. Brumblydge."

"Lepton trembling and the filter going dead on us both at the same time, you see, Mr. Bass," went on David, "just about when we'd spotted the island with something gleaming on it like a plane. Right then we thought we saw the antenna, so when the B-rays started everything acting up —"

"Why, then, that settled it," finished Chuck. "We knew that was Mr. Brumblydge's island. But, you know, I still don't see," he said, a deeply puzzled look stealing over his face, "how Mr. Brumblydge's B-rays, streaming out of space toward one little spot on earth, could make Lepton shiver like that

and keep on shivering, and knock the power right out of the filter."

A gleam came into Mr. Bass's eye as he leaned forward.

"Tell me," he said, "by what means did the space ship stick to Lepton?"

"Magnets," said Chuck.

Mr. Bass smiled and nodded.

"Ah-hah," he said. "That explains everything, then. You see, there weren't any B-rays — never, at any time — that is, *not* in such a way as to make Lepton tremble and the filter stop working. No, it wasn't B-rays, my friends. It was the sun."

Chuck's mouth dropped open and he forgot to close it.

"The sun!" repeated David.

"Yes, the whole thing is astonishing. Sometime yesterday morning, a great scarlet filament lashed out across the face of the sun over a huge active sunspot and at that moment short-wave radio transmission was blacked out over the whole daylight surface of the globe. Today up at San Julian and at other observatories all over the world sensitive magnetic instruments will, at precisely the same moment, start up a violent trembling.

"But the magnets on your space ship were affected almost immediately, as well as your electric power,



because you hadn't earth's atmosphere for protection. So that it wasn't Lepton itself trembling, you see," finished Mr. Bass, smiling at their incredulous faces, "it was the power in your magnets! I can just imagine your feelings when —"

And now, just as he had done before, Mr. Bass suddenly stopped speaking. Cap'n Tom and Dr. Topman and the boys, seeing the look on his face, turned — and what do you suppose?

Standing beside Mrs. Topman in the doorway of David's bedroom was Prewytt Brumblydge.

Of Course It Worked

WELL, you should have seen him!

His once neat little suit was now dirtier and more crumpled than ever, and looked, if one could believe it, as if he had been drowned. Sticking out of the cuff of one pant-leg was a piece of seaweed. His tie was gone. And his hair, that had always been so nicely combed before he went away, was absolutely wild.

"Tyco — at last! And David and Chuck, all safe —!"

"Prewytt, my good friend —"

"Great, jumping —" cried Cap'n Tom, starting up and staring.

"But, where . . . ?" stammered Dr. Topman.

"How could you have already . . . ?"

And David and Chuck, whooping for joy, got Mr. Brumblydge by the arms and began pummeling him in their great relief. What a confusion of welcoming shouts there was! No one could hear himself talk for

the questions that were being asked and not answered, but that didn't matter because everybody was so happy.

And when the welcoming was all over, and Prewytt Brumblydge had had a nice hot bath and had put on some pajamas and a bathrobe of Dr. Topman's with the cuffs of the pant-legs and sleeves folded up — why, then he and Mr. Bass were taken into the dining room where the table was all laid for breakfast, and he commenced the quite incredible story of his return from the depths.

First of all, when he came to, said Mr. Brumblydge (and you are to understand that all the while he was talking, he was putting away enormous amounts of cheese omelet and crisp bacon and hot buttered biscuits with plum jam and five or six cups of coffee), first of all he could not believe that he was still alive after such a fall.

In the second place, it seemed quite likely that he *was* dead, for everything around him was black. He lay there in the cold, clammy darkness trying to collect himself, wondering if he dared move, and if he would find all his bones broken if he did. Well, then, he moved, but in the wrong direction. For once again he found himself sliding and falling — down — down — down — like Alice in the rabbit hole — and no sooner had he come to rest than he



heard a frightful crash. And he knew instantly that a ton of water was rushing into the cavern from the sea, and that if he did not get up at once he would be drowned.

He started struggling, and like a crab he scuttled up the side of what proved to be an enormously thick, deep bed of kelp. Then he heard the wall of water behind him, and he clung to the thick ropes of kelp for his life while that ravenous giant, its force broken by the roof of the cavern, plunged over him.

"Oh," cried Prewytt Brumblydge, waving a biscuit in one hand and his fork burdened with a portion of his second helping of omelet in the other, "I thought that wave would *never* go back. It seemed to me I clung there for an eternity, with my hands dug into the tangle of weed, fighting with all my strength against the force of the water trying to suck me down. But at last this frightful experience was over, and up I went, creeping hand over hand to the top of the bed of kelp that had been gathering there in the bottom of the chasm, heaven knows how long, washed in by the tide.

"But now I must tell you something that you will never believe. The whole time I was scrabbling up that bed of kelp, I was chuckling and laughing away to myself like a lunatic and not caring two

pins that I had been within a hairbreadth of losing my life!"

Everyone stared at him in horror.

"Were you — had the whole thing been too much for you, Mr. Brumblydge?" ventured David, trying to imagine himself alone in that black cavern.

But Mr. Brumblydge shook his head and his eyes shone, and then he leaned forward.

"The water I had swallowed during my inundation was fresh!"

"Good heavens, Prewyttl!" exclaimed Tyco Bass.

"Then it works!" shouted David and Chuck together, bouncing up and down in their chairs like jack rabbits. "It really works!"

"What works?" cried Mrs. Topman.

"Impossible, man, impossible!" Cap'n Tom slapped his big hand down on the table and all the silver jumped. "There's no fresh-water current up there — *not* in the north of Scotland."

"Well, there is *now*, Gramp; there is now!"

"And all because of the Brumblitron," exulted David. "Just think, Mr. Brumblydge, this proves it! Oh, Mr. Bass, wait'll you hear —"

"Proves what — proves what?" demanded Mrs. Topman excitedly. "Am I to be told nothing?"

"Why, just what we got through saying — that the Brumblitron *works*, Mom. The sodium gets bro-

ken down, and the chlorine gets broken down, so what do you have? Why, fresh water, of course! It's simple."

"Yes, but *how* do they get — ?"

"Oh, Mr. Brumblydge, what if someone just happened to row over from Benbecula to explore the island and discovered the water was fresh right there below the broch before the desalting stopped! He'd tell everybody, and then they'd come over and taste it, and it'd get in all the newspapers — and then on the radio and television — and, oh, boy, wouldn't you give anything to see all their faces?"

"Do please go on, Mr. Brumblydge."

"Well, so anyway," continued Prewytt, vastly pleased with the impression his story was making and particularly keeping a triumphant weather eye on Mr. Bass, "there I was at last, out in the light again, and I could see that it was the kelp that had saved my life. The wind had been knocked out of me, and I must have got an awful crack on the head on my way down, because I had a great knot on my forehead. Then I'd rolled into the cavern, but not a bone was broken. Even after my ducking, I was as spry as a cricket — though dripping wet, of course — and when I looked up and saw, far above me, halfway between the bottom of the chasm and the top, my precious bit of paper held so fragilely

by a twig or leaf, I was filled with thankfulness.

"So now, what is there left to tell? Only that I crept up the side of the chasm, rescued my page as well as most of the others — ah, Tyco, wait till you hear about that! — and got out upon the top of the earth once again, only to find that you two scoundrels had deserted me."

"Oh, but we didn't desert you, Mr. Brumblydgel!"

"We waited a long time, Chuck and I, Chuck at the side of the chasm, calling and leaning over and trying to get up the courage to climb down, while I was at the edge of the cliff wondering how I could get into the cavern. But we'd —"

"We'd never have got back up again, Mr. Brumblydge. So then, after a while, we thought if you were still alive it would be much better to tell everybody and cable the Coast Guard or whoever would do it, to rescue you as soon as possible —"

"And here I rescued myself," beamed Prewytt Brumblydge, rubbing his hands together in anticipation and sending bright, sharp glances in the direction of Mr. Bass, who was watching him with fond amusement. "Rescued myself just as quick and neat as you please and slid along home over Greenland, making the entire journey in about sixteen hours, which is three under par — *and* all the while with the most tremendous news folded up in my

pocket." Now Prewytt slid a hand into the inside of his jacket and whipped out a bundle of papers.

"Here you are, Tyco, my lad. Wait till you see this: the complete equations for my own original space ship fuel: brumblic pentathermonuclearcosmicdiheliumite. I'll wager there's never before been anything like it in the world — nor ever could be, without my B-rays. Now all I have to do is put a space ship together, fill up the tanks — and off we go. Take you to the moon and back, that fuel will. Ah, but, Tyco — this fuel isn't the half of it. It's only a part of the most beautiful ring of reasoning and experimentation you've ever seen. And it all begins with my B-rays. There's no end to what they can show us. But I need more Brumblium, and when I get it, I shall be able to open up whole new vistas of knowledge about light and energy, with the final result, I tell you, being nothing less than the *Brumblydge Theory of the Universe!*"

Upon this staggering announcement, nobody could get out a word, and Tyco Bass gazed at Mr. Brumblydge for a moment with an expression which was absolutely unreadable.

"Well," he said at last, "I have only breath enough left in me, Prewytt, to ask that you explain everything at once."

Which Mr. Brumblydge proceeded to do, the two

little men leaning together over a great mass of crumpled papers and apparently going back to the very beginning. For they were talking about curved space and $ds^2 = dp^2 + dq^2$ and all sorts of terribly complicated things. They wouldn't even stop for lunch and the last Chuck and David heard, when they went out to see how their space ship had stood the journey home, was Prewytt exclaiming in the utmost exasperation:

"Tyco, you're as stubborn as a mule! Of course I'm right, and you're just annoyed because *you* didn't think of the whole thing first!"

Mr. Brumblydge Takes a Test

WHEN CHUCK and David got back up to the house, Mrs. Topman said that Dr. Frobisher had phoned from San Julian. He had been dumfounded, of course, to find that Prewytt Brumblydge was home again, as well as his old friend Tyco Bass, and was planning to call at 5 Thallo Street that very evening, with Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith, in order to get the whole story. Dr. Topman, she said, had taken the two little men over to Mr. Bass's house after she had pressed Mr. Brumblydge's suit and made him as presentable as possible.

"Dave, what if Mr. Brumblydge tells — about us finding him on the island? What if he tells Mr. Tickle and Mr. Fewsmith?"

"I've thought about that," said Mrs. Topman. "Maybe you'd better go on over."

And so they did, and when they ran upstairs to the observatory, they found Mr. Bass perched on

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the telescope stool as if he were listening to a story. Prewytt Brumblydge was pacing up and down.

"Ah, there you are, boys — yes, sit down, sit down," said Mr. Brumblydge. "I should like you to be in on this too." He had his hands behind his back and looked as if he were concentrating hard.

"Well, now, Tyco, as I was saying: it was something which haunted my thoughts night after night as I lay in my tower on the island trying to get to sleep. I had finished setting up the antenna and the Brumblitron, and there was no more for me to do. I had not gotten onto the idea of my fuel; so there I was, turning over and over in my mind this mystery, which I knew I should somehow have to follow down to the very end.

"Tyco, do you remember that when you found we had both come across those identical fragments of Brumblium, you said, 'You and I, Prewytt, of all people on earth, have discovered these two . . .'? And *why* had you said that? I wondered, lying awake at night, alone in my tower. Then I would turn on the lamp and sit up and stare at my hands, puzzled at what I saw. And I would remember something about your notebook. If we should compare notes and find that we had discovered the little blue-green planet on exactly the same night, how mysterious that would be! But not more mysterious,

Tyco, than what came to me that time when I saw your handwriting."

Now there was a small, tense silence in the observatory, so tense that in another moment David felt he would burst.

"Nobody can read that notebook, Mr. Brumblydge — nobody here on earth except Mr. Bass," cried Chuck. "It's private — it's his — even we can't read it."

"No," said Prewytt Brumblydge softly. "No, perhaps *you* can't read it. But I think I can."

So unexpected, so awful was this announcement, that for a moment David could not take it in. All this time he had been sure it was Mr. Theo's translation Prewytt Brumblydge had read. But in the next instant Chuck understood.

"He had no business to read it, Mr. Bass. He stole your piece of Brumblium from where you had hidden it, and then he came up here when nobody was around and looked in your private notebook. And he took the filter from the safe and put it on the telescope and looked through it! He had no right —"

But little Mr. Bass was shaking his head.

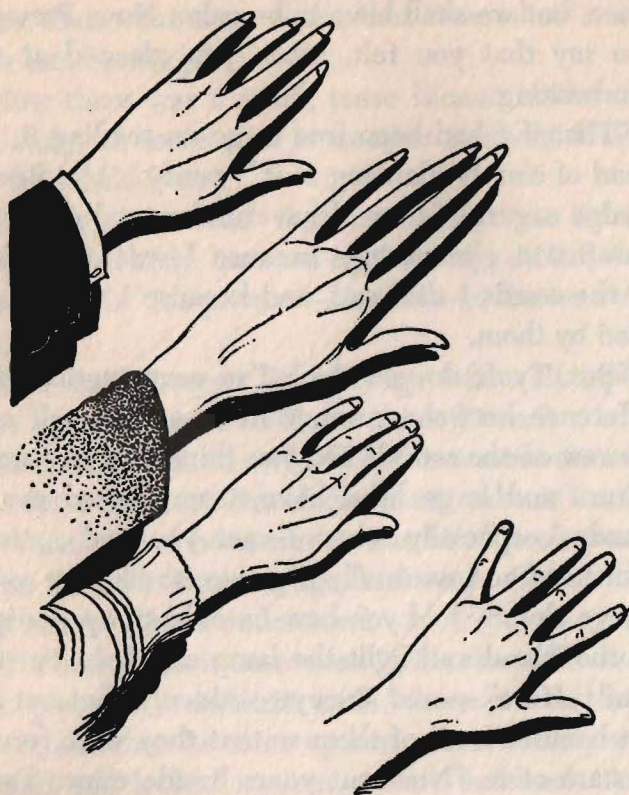
"Chuck, my boy — Chuck, it's all right. I assure you it's all right. Prewytt told me all about that and I quite understand. Now let us all sit down quietly and explore the matter. It is of the greatest impor-

tance, but we shall have to be calm. Now, Prewytt, you say that you felt, when you glanced at my handwriting . . .”

“That if I had been free to go on reading it, instead of simply glancing at it,” went on Mr. Brumblydge eagerly, “I could have understood it. Oh, it was just a glimmering, because I was so shaken by the words I *did* read, and because I was so excited by them.

“But, Tyco, do you think I’ve never noticed the difference between Aunt Matilda and myself and the rest of the world? Do you think that my small stature and large head have never caused me to wonder, especially when I met you and noticed your head and unusually big eyes, so like my own? I have already told you how I would sit up at night on the island and light the lamp and hold out my hands. Here” — and Prewytt suddenly shot out his left hand in front of them so that they were forced to stare at it. “Now put yours beside mine, Tyco, and you, Chuck and David, put yours out too. Now *look!*”

There they were, those four hands, so different from each other: Mr. Bass’s long and thin and delicate, Mr. Brumblydge’s short-fingered and plump, and the hands of the boys broad, brown and rather grubby. But for all the difference, there was some-



thing that anyone looking carefully for a certain detail about them would have noticed at once: the fact that Chuck's and David's hands showed a flush of healthy pink beneath the brown and under the nails, while the two hands held out beside them

were without doubt a very, very pale green — so pale as to be almost unnoticeable.

"What do you see, Chuck and David?" demanded Prewytt Brumblydge.

"Just — just hands," replied Chuck faintly, feeling himself cornered.

"And you, David?"

David, his heart sinking, looked at Mr. Bass, but Mr. Bass seemed lost in thought.

"It's the color, Mr. Brumblydge."

"The color — yes! And do you know that when I first discovered it I went to a doctor? I thought perhaps I had — not yellow jaundice, but green. I thought that I was sick."

"Oh, no, Mr. Brumblydge," burst out Chuck, "you'd be sick if you *weren't* green!" And then, aghast at what he'd said, he clapped both hands across his mouth and gazed over them at Mr. Bass; for what he'd told was something he and David had discovered on their first trip to Basidium: that all Basidiumites, or Mushroom People, are normally green (quite visibly green on the Mushroom Planet) and only become white when they are ill.

"So," returned Mr. Brumblydge quietly, "then you know about this. In fact, what do you *not* know? It swims in my head, I tell you, until I'm at

my wit's end, trying to piece this whole thing together. But you said just now, Chuck, that I would be sick if I weren't green. And why do I keep tying up the little blue-green planet with the color of my skin? Is it that they are both different shades of the same color?

"Tell me, Tyco — tell me: Who am I? *What* am I?"

"Mr. Bass, it's all Chuck's and my fault. If we hadn't left the observatory open that day —"

But Mr. Bass smiled and shook his head comfortably.

"No, no," he said. "With a person like our friend Prewytt Brumblydge, who makes one thing happen after another and will not rest before any mystery, the time would have come sooner or later. And it has come now. Well, I will settle two matters at once, Prewytt. I will give you a test, as to whether or not you can read my language, and in it I shall give you the answer to who and what you are."

And with these words, Mr. Bass wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to Prewytt Brumblydge, who took it almost as if he were afraid — and looked at it.

Then he read out slowly in a strange, muffled voice:

"Your people — and my people — are spore peo-

ple.' " He stared up at Mr. Bass. "Is that what you wrote, Tyco?"

Mr. Bass nodded.

"That is precisely what I wrote. And so at last you know that, like myself, you are a Basidiumite."

Only the Very Best

Mushrooms

"I AM — I AM a *what?*" cried Prewytt Brumblydge. Oh, and what now? David asked himself, shivering with excitement.

"Mr. Bass, does this mean that any Basidiumite here on earth can read your writing — Aunt Matilda, maybe, or some Mushroom Person living in Timbuktu?"

"No, David, not any Basidiumite. Only certain ones, with special abilities, like Cousin Theo and Mr. Brumblydge."

"Basidiumitel" exclaimed Mr. Brumblydge, and he stared from one to another in puzzled astonishment. And then a gleam of certainty flashed in his eye. "'Any Basidiumite here on earth,' you said, David. So then my mind leaps from one thing to another. You would not have said 'any Basidiumite here on earth' if there were not Basidiumites elsewhere. But where? On Basidium! Is that the name

of our little planet? 'Mushroom Person,' you said. And what is my middle name — that queer middle name which all of our family has in common and for which I will wager the M stands between Tyco and Bass? Mycetes — Basidium — but, of course — the spores of mushroom and fungi!"

"Oh, David!" groaned Chuck.

And David could only stare miserably at the floor, feeling as if he and Chuck had been betrayed by some teasing imp which caused every word they said to reveal things they did not want to reveal. He felt helpless, and promised himself he would not utter another sentence but would leave everything to Mr. Bass as he should have done in the first place.

"Am I right, Tyco?" cried Prewytt Brumblydge. "Tell me, am I right?"

"Of course you are right. And, David, whether you had spoken of Basidiumites elsewhere or not, it would have made no difference. So you mustn't look so unhappy."

"But, Tyco, there is something I can't fathom for the life of me. If, as David says, there are Basidiumites here on earth as well, I take it, as on the little planet — and we, you and I and Aunt Matilda (bless her soul, what would *she* say to all this?) are of the same — the same —"

"The same race, Prewytt," supplied Mr. Bass, smiling at the other little man's eagerness.

"The same race — why, then, how, in the name of everything so far discovered by science, did that bit of life out there on that planet get fifty or sixty thousand miles across the freezing abyss of space to this planet? It's not possible, Tyco — it's just not possible!"

Now Mr. Bass settled himself on the telescope stool again, crossed his legs and locked his hands around them.

"Listen!" he said. "Have you ever heard of the fairy tadpole?" None of them had, not even Mr. Brumblydge. "Well, the fairy tadpole is a tiny spot of life not even an inch long, with a round shell and one hundred furiously moving legs that whip it through the waters of the Greenland Icecap. And it is the babies of the fairy tadpole I want to tell you about, because maybe they can explain how it happened that millions upon millions of years ago a minute spore traveled — who knows, in a meteorite perhaps — from Basidium to earth or from some other unknown planet to both Basidium and the earth. At any rate, it is the fairy tadpole's winter eggs, protected by thick, dark brown shells, that make us stop in wonder.

"Because" — and here Mr. Bass leaned forward

and held up a hand — “you can cook them at 200 degrees Fahrenheit, which is almost boiling, and they will still hatch. You can freeze them at 360 degrees below zero and they will still hatch. And you can put them in a tube and bring the pressure down until it is only a breath away from an absolute vacuum, and they will still hatch.

“Now, can you tell me, Prewytt, that it is impossible for life to get from one planet to another? Perhaps it *is* impossible but I do believe that life in this universe is absolutely indestructible.”

Prewytt Brumblydge blinked.

Then he said:

“I agree that this is a marvelous thing, Tyco. But do you mean to tell me that you and I and all the rest of the Basidiumites here on earth are in the same class as — not tadpoles, of course — but fungi and puffballs and mushrooms?”

He looked deeply offended, and David and Chuck could hardly keep from laughing.

“Yes, Prewytt,” and the corners of Mr. Bass’s mouth quivered. “We are. Only we’re more complicated. However, don’t feel belittled. I’m certain you could be descended from only the very best mushrooms.”

Now David could tell Mr. Brumblydge was cogitating again.

"Tyco," he began presently, "how do the boys know so much about Basidium?"

David drew in his breath and Chuck became still.

"Because they have been there," said Mr. Bass quietly.

Mr. Brumblydge gazed from one to another.

"By space ship?" he got out after a little.

"Yes, Prewytt, by space ship."

Mr. Brumblydge swallowed, and then he got up slowly from his chair and clapped both hands to his head as though he were dreaming.

"And to think I boasted, Tyco — I *boasted* that I would put together a space ship and get out into space ahead of you! But I can never get ahead of you — never." And then he turned suddenly. "The fuel — is it satisfactory?"

"Quite satisfactory, I believe. But it could be," added Mr. Bass quickly, "that yours would prove more so. We shall have to try it."

"Have you gone on longer trips than Basidium?"

"No, or at least the boys haven't. As for me, I never travel by space ship."

Prewytt Brumblydge studied Mr. Bass for a moment while his mind worked on this remark.

"But you have been to Basidium," he ventured finally in a peculiar voice.

"Yes, Prewytt, I have. There — and millions of light-years beyond."

Now at last Mr. Brumblydge was reduced to deep silence. He seemed boggled, as though his mind could no longer work. But then it appeared that awe and suspense forced him to gather himself again for one last question. His eyes were huge.

"Tyco, do you mean that — do you mean that — while you have been away —" But he couldn't seem to get it out. "Where *have* you been?" he finished weakly.

Mr. Bass shifted around on the telescope stool, adjusted the telescope, turned the knobs and dials until he had just what he wanted, and then beckoned to Mr. Brumblydge and to David and Chuck. "It's a fine, sharp, clear evening and what I have to show you is perfectly in view. Here, Prewytt, take a look at this." Mr. Brumblydge put an eye to the eyepiece. "It's the Galaxy M 81 in Ursa Major, as you will recognize."

"But, no — surely," exclaimed Mr. Brumblydge, and his voice actually shook, "you couldn't — it can't be that M 81 is visible — no, no — not with this little telescope. Why, that galaxy's two and a quarter million parsecs away!"

"Oh, it's the filter," replied Mr. Bass calmly. "Such a pity you broke yours, Prewytt. And then, of

course, the structure of the telescope itself, and the polishing of the lens, has brought some quite remarkable things into view."

"What's a parsec, Mr. Bass?" asked Chuck. "What's the difference between that and a light-year?"

"Why, a light-year, as you know, Chuck, is the distance light travels in a year. But a parsec is the distance light travels in three and a quarter years, so that if you multiply that by two and a quarter million you get quite a distance. Now I shall focus more finely and you will see a star, Prewytt — and that star has a solar system somewhat like our own — " Here Mr. Brumblydge gave a low exclamation. "And on one of its planets is my new home."

Now Mr. Brumblydge looked his fill, and then he turned and studied Tyco Bass as though he were someone he scarcely knew.

"Come, boys," said Mr. Bass, holding out his hand.

"Just think," said Chuck after a little, "you don't live at 5 Thallo Street, Pacific Grove, California, U.S.A., Western Hemisphere, this earth, this solar system, this galaxy any more — but out there." Then he added: "No, it's still here, too, isn't it, Mr. Bass? It's got to always be here, too."

Then Mr. Bass adjusted the telescope so that

David would have a larger view, and when he looked he saw one of the most beautiful spiral galaxies he had ever beheld. It was a long oval with its veil-like, pinwheel edges dotted with individual points of light and the whole resolving gradually toward the center into a glowing sea. Now Mr. Bass seemed to lead him forward, for the brilliant sea became a cloud scattered thickly with countless numbers of suns, one of which, as Mr. Bass made another adjustment, grew brighter — and clearer — and there was his sun.

“What is it like, Mr. Bass? What is your planet like? How do you live? Are there people like us there? Are you happy?”

“Very, very happy, David. And of course there *are* beings there, but as for telling you about them, or the planet itself, that I cannot do.”

“But, why, Mr. Bass — why? Can’t you try?”

“I should so much like to. But how can I even begin? Earthly words, in any earthly tongue, would not start to tell you what it is like. If you were deaf and had never heard a symphony or someone singing, could I write a description on paper of how violins and horns and cellos and the harp and piano all sound playing together so that you would have any least idea? Or the sound of the human voice? No — no — though all the same, I might —”

But at that moment, the knocker sounded!

"Confound it!" exclaimed Prewytt Brumblydge, starting up in exasperation. "Just when we were really getting into things. Oh, and I still haven't asked you, Tyco, something that has been plaguing the back of my mind ever since you talked of Basidium. *What* about my Brumblium — isn't there anything you can do for me, no way of my getting . . . ?"

"I shall do the very best I can for you, Prewytt, and soon. That I promise you."

"And, Mr. Brumblydge," put in Chuck, "we have something to ask you. Do you want Dr. Frobisher to know that we got to the island just in time for you to stop the Brumblitron?"

"Good heavens, no! I should never hear the last of it —"

"Well, then," said little Mr. Bass, his eyes twinkling, "there may be no need to bring the boys into your adventure at all. But we shall leave that entirely up to you."

"Ah, and that reminds *me* of something. Chuck and David, how in the name of tarnation did you two know where I was? How did you find me? Was it magic?"

But they only grinned at Mr. Brumblydge and waited for Tyco Bass to speak.

"The truth of the matter is, Prewytt, Basidium isn't the only satellite of earth's beside the moon. There's still another — much smaller, much nearer, and it proved very handy! Now, not a word about anything to anybody —"

Knock! *Knock!* KNOCK!

And before poor Mr. Brumblydge could so much as open his mouth again, they had bundled him off downstairs.

Finally, when they were all gathered together, with Mr. Fewsmith writing and writing and writing and his sharp pencil going *sh-sh* from one side of his notebook to the other, Prewytt Brumblydge told the remarkable story of his adventures: how he had been so intent on his new formula for space ship fuel that he had almost forgotten the Brumblitron, then how the wind had taken all his precious papers and blown them away, how one of them had led him on and on to the very edge of a huge chasm, how he had fallen in and a great wave had washed over him and almost drowned him and how he had discovered from this that the ocean water in that vicinity was fresh, which proved that his Brumblitron was a success.

Dr. Frobisher and Mr. Tickle shook their heads in amazement, and Dr. Frobisher remarked that

the one thing that particularly impressed him was how soon after the boys had promised they would find the lost needle, Prewytt Brumblydge had returned.

“‘Don’t you worry, Dr. Frobisher,’ they said to me, ‘we can find the needle in the haystack. We promise you we can.’ How many times I’ve thought of that.”

“You mean, Horace,” said Prewytt solemnly, “it was almost as if they were planning to search for me from some sort of space station, and then swoop down in a space ship and stop me just in time?”

How everyone laughed at this ridiculous notion, and nobody laughed louder than Dr. Frobisher. Even Mr. Fewsmith, that thin, gray, quiet man, had to stop writing for an instant and smile — very slightly.



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