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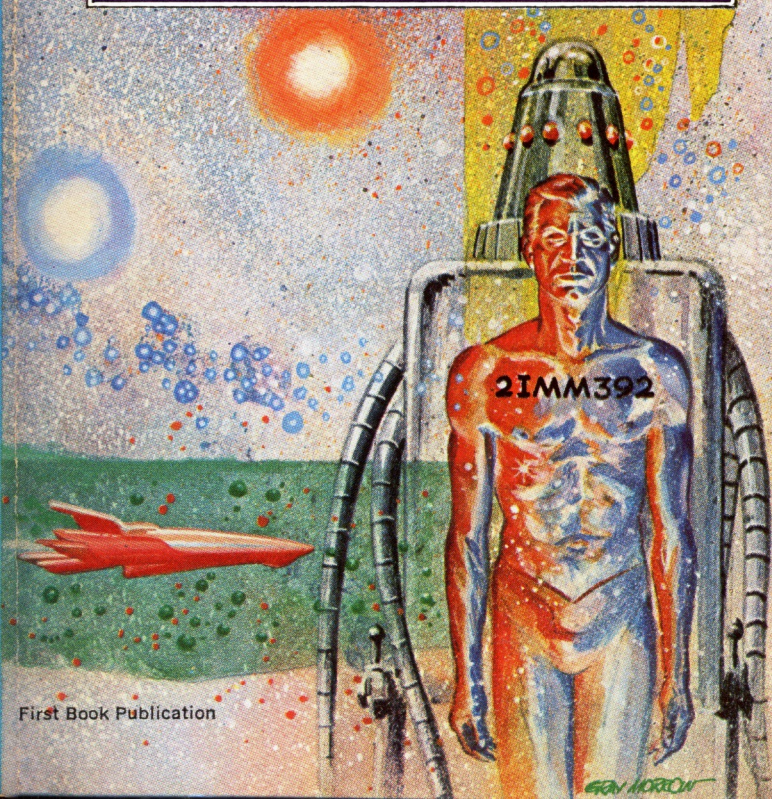
**PROFESSOR JAMESON
SPACE ADVENTURE**

#1

the planet of the double sun

Neil R. Jones

**The first saga of the Zoromes—
a cosmic series in the grand manner!**

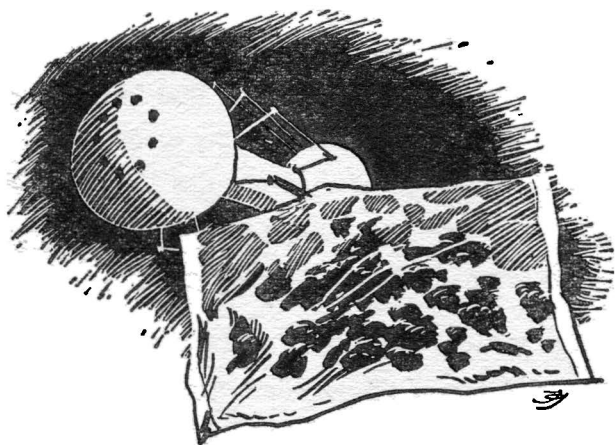


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A CLASSIC OF STAR EXPLORATION

The space-exploration adventures of Professor Jameson have been the star features of many science-fiction magazines since almost the dawn of such periodicals. Truly, it can be stated that the Jameson series of Neil R. Jones has been the longest running continuous character adventure series in the history of science-fiction, never failing to hold the attention and enthusiasm of readers.

In THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN, Ace Books presents the start of this terrific series. Here Professor Jameson first makes contact with that amazing star-traveling race, the immortal metal men of Zor, joins their ranks and encounters his first terrific adventures—on a planet of two suns whose triped inhabitants pose a problem in space exploration that threatened to end the professor's career before it had barely started!



THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

by

NEIL R. JONES

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**THE
PLANET
OF THE
DOUBLE SUN**

ONE: THE JAMESON SATELLITE

PROLOGUE

THE ROCKET SATELLITE

IN THE DEPTHS of space, some twenty thousand miles from the Earth, the body of Professor Jameson within its rocket container cruised upon an endless journey, circling the gigantic sphere. The rocket was a satellite of the huge, revolving world around which it held to its orbit. In the year 1958, Professor Jameson had sought for a plan whereby he might preserve his body indefinitely after his death. He had worked long and hard upon the subject.

Since the time of the Pharaohs, the human race had looked for a means by which the dead might be preserved against the ravages of time. Great had been the art of the Egyptians in the embalming of their deceased, a practice which was later lost to humanity of the ensuing mechanical age, never to be rediscovered. But even the embalming of the Egyptians—so Professor Jameson had argued—would be futile in the face of millions of years, the eventual dissolution of the corpses being just as certain as immediate cremation following death.

The professor had looked for a means by which the body could be preserved perfectly forever. But eventually he had come to the conclusion that nothing on Earth is unchangeable beyond a certain limit of time. Just as long as he sought an Earthly means of preservation, he was doomed to disappointment. All Earthly elements are composed of atoms which are forever breaking down and building up, but never destroying themselves. A match may be burned, but the atoms are still unchanged, having resolved themselves into smoke, carbon dioxide, ashes, and certain basic elements. It was clear to the professor that he could never accomplish his purpose if he were to employ one system of atomic structure, such as embalming fluid or other concoction, to preserve another system of atomic structure, such as the human body, when all atomic structure is subject to universal change, no matter how slow.

He had then soliloquized upon the possibility of preserving the human body in its state of death until the end of all Earthly time—to that day when the Earth would return to the sun from which it had sprung. Quite suddenly one day he had conceived the answer to the puzzling problem which obsessed his mind, leaving him awed with its wild, uncanny potentialities.

He would have his body shot into space enclosed in a rocket to become a satellite of the Earth as long as the Earth continued to exist. He reasoned logically. Any material substance, whether of organic or inorganic origin, cast into the depths of space would exist indefinitely. He had visualized his dead body enclosed in a rocket flying off into the illimitable maw of space. He would remain in perfect preservation, while on Earth millions of generations of mankind would live and die, their bodies to molder into the dust of the forgotten past. He would exist in this unchanged manner until that day when mankind, beneath a cooling sun, should fade out forever in the chill, thin atmosphere of a dying world. And still his body would remain intact and as perfect in its rocket container as on that day of the far-gone past when it

had left the Earth to be hurled out on its career. What a magnificent ideal!

At first he had been assailed with doubts. Suppose his funeral rocket landed upon some other planet, or, drawn by the pull of our great sun, was thrown into the flaming folds of the incandescent sphere? Then the rocket might continue on out of the solar system, plunging through the endless seas of space for millions of years, to finally enter the solar system of some far-off star, as meteors often enter ours. Suppose his rocket crashed upon a planet, or the star itself, or became a captive satellite of some celestial body?

It had been at this juncture that the idea of his rocket becoming the satellite of the Earth had presented itself, and he had immediately incorporated it into his scheme. The professor had figured out the amount of fuel necessary to carry the rocket far enough away from the Earth so that it would not turn around and crash, and still be not so far away but what the Earth's gravitational attraction would keep it from leaving the vicinity of the Earth and the solar system. Like the moon, it would forever revolve around the Earth.

He had chosen an orbit sixty-five thousand miles from the Earth for his rocket to follow. The only fears he had entertained concerned the huge meteors which careened through space at tremendous rates of speed. He had overcome this obstacle, however, and had eliminated the possibilities of a collision with these stellar juggernauts. In the rocket were installed radium repulsion rays which swerved all approaching meteors from the path of the rocket as they entered the vicinity of the space wanderer.

The aged professor had prepared for every contingency, and had set down to rest from his labors, reveling in the stupendous, unparalleled results he would obtain. Never would his body undergo decay; and never would his bones bleach to return to the dust of the Earth from which all men originally came and to which they must return. His body would remain millions of years in a perfectly preserved state, untouched by the hoary palm of such time as only geologists and astronomers can conceive.

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His efforts would surpass even the wildest dreams of H. Rider Haggard, who depicted the wondrous embalming practices of the ancient nation of Kor in his immortal novel *She*, wherein Holly, under the escort of the incomparable Ayesha, looked upon the magnificent, lifelike masterpieces of embalming by the long-gone peoples of Kor.

With the able assistance of a nephew, who carried out his instructions and wishes following his death, Professor Jameson was sent upon his pilgrimage into space within the rocket he himself had built. The nephew and heir kept the secret forever locked in his heart.

Generation after generation had passed upon its way. Gradually humanity had come to die out, finally disappearing from the Earth altogether. Mankind was later replaced by various other forms of life which dominated the globe for their allotted spaces of time before they too became extinct. The years piled up on one another, running into millions, and still the Jameson Satellite kept its lonely vigil around the Earth, gradually closing the distance between satellite and planet, yielding reluctantly to the latter's powerful attraction.

Forty million years later, its orbit ranged some twenty thousand miles from the Earth while the dead world edged ever nearer the cooling sun whose dull, red ball covered a large expanse of the sky. Surrounding the flaming sphere, many of the stars could be perceived through the Earth's thin, rarefied atmosphere. As the Earth cut in slowly and gradually toward the solar luminary, so was the Moon revolving ever nearer the Earth, appearing like a great gem glowing in the twilight sky.

The rocket containing the remains of Professor Jameson continued its endless travel around the great ball of the Earth, whose rotation had now ceased entirely—one side forever facing the dying sun. There it pursued its lonely way, a cosmic coffin, accompanied by its funeral cortege of scintillating stars amid the deep silence of the eternal space which enshrouded it. Solitary it remained, except for the occasional passing of a meteor flitting by at a remarkable

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speed on its aimless journey through the vacuum between the far-flung worlds.

Would the satellite follow its orbit to the world's end, or would its supply of radium soon exhaust itself after so many eons of time, converting the rocket into the prey of the first large meteor which chanced that way? Would it some day return to the Earth as its nearer approach portended, and increase its acceleration in a long arc to crash upon the surface of the dead planet? And when the rocket terminated its career, would the body of Professor Jameson be found perfectly preserved or merely a crumbled mound of dust?

I

40,000,000 YEARS AFTER

ENTERING WITHIN the boundaries of the solar system, a long, dark, pointed craft sped across the realms of space towards the tiny point of light which marked the dull red ball of the dying sun which would some day lie cold and dark forever. Like a huge meteor it flashed into the solar system from another chain of planets far out in the illimitable Universe of stars and worlds, heading towards the great red sun at an inconceivable speed.

Within the interior of the space traveler, queer creatures of metal labored at the controls of the space flyer which juggernauted on its way towards the far-off solar luminary. Rapidly it crossed the orbits of Neptune and Uranus and headed sunward. The bodies of these strange creatures were square blocks of a metal closely resembling steel, while for appendages, the metal cube was upheld by four jointed legs capable of movement. A set of six tentacles, all metal, like the

rest of the body, curved outward from the upper half of the cubic body. Surmounting it was a queer-shaped head rising to a peak in the center and equipped with a circle of eyes all the way around the head. The creatures, with their mechanical eyes equipped with metal shutters, could see in all directions. A single eye pointed directly upward, being situated in the space of the peaked head, resting in a slight depression of the cranium.

These were the Zoromes of the planet Zor, which rotated on its way around a star millions of light-years distant from our solar system. The Zoromes, several hundred thousand years before, had reached a stage in science where they searched for immortality and eternal relief from bodily ills and various deficiencies of flesh and blood anatomy. They had sought freedom from death, and had found it, but at the same time they had destroyed the propensities for birth. And for several hundred thousand years there had been no births and few deaths in the history of the Zoromes.

This strange race of people had built their own mechanical bodies, and by operation upon one another had removed their brains to the metal heads from which they directed the functions and movements of their inorganic anatomies. There had been no deaths due to worn-out bodies. When one part of the mechanical men wore out, it was replaced by a new part, and so the Zoromes continued living their immortal lives which saw few casualties. It was true that since the innovation of the machines, there had been a few accidents which had seen the destruction of the metal heads with their brains. These were irreparable. Such cases had been few, however, and the population of Zor had decreased but little.

The machine men of Zor had no use for atmosphere, and had it not been for the terrible coldness of space, could have just as well existed in the void as upon some planet. Their metal bodies, especially their metal-encased brains, did require a certain amount of heat even though they were able to exist comfortably in temperatures which would instantly have frozen to death a flesh-and-blood creature.

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The most popular pastime among the machine men of Zor was the exploration of the Universe. This afforded them a never-ending source of interest in the discovery of the variegated inhabitants and conditions of the various planets on which they came to rest. Hundreds of spaceships were sent out in all directions, many of them being upon their expeditions for hundreds of years before they returned once more to the home planet of far-off Zor.

This particular spacecraft of the Zoromes had entered the solar system whose planets were gradually circling in closer to the dull red ball of the declining sun. Several of the machine men of the spacecraft's crew, which numbered some fifty individuals, were examining the various planets of this particular planetary system carefully through telescopes possessing immense power.

These machine men had no names and were indexed according to letters and numbers. They conversed by means of thought impulses.

"Where shall we go?" queried one of the men at the controls, questioning another who stood by his side examining a chart on the wall.

"They all appear to be dead worlds, 4R-3579," replied the one addressed, "but the second planet from the sun appears to have an atmosphere which might sustain a few living creatures, and the third planet may also prove interesting, for it has a satellite. We shall examine the inner planets first of all, and explore the outer ones later if we decide it is worth the time."

"Too much trouble for nothing," ventured 9G-721. "This system of planets offers us little but what we have seen many times before in our travels. The sun is so cooled that it cannot sustain the more common life on its planets, the type of life forms we usually find in our travels. We should have visited a planetary system with a brighter sun."

"You speak of common life," remarked 25X-987. "What of the uncommon life? Have we not found life existent on cold, dead planets with no sunlight and atmosphere at all?"

"Yes, we have," admitted 9G-721, "but such occasions are exceedingly rare."

"The possibility exists, however, even in this case," reminded 4R-3579. "And what if we do spend a bit of unprofitable time in this one planetary system—haven't we all an endless lifetime before us? Eternity is ours."

"We shall visit the second planet first of all," directed 25X-987, who was in charge of this particular expedition of the Zoromes, "and on the way there we shall cruise along near the third planet to see what we can of the surface. We may be able to tell whether or not it holds anything of interest to us. If it does, after visiting the second planet, we shall then return to the third. The first world is not worth bothering with."

The spaceship from Zor raced on in a direction which would take it several thousand miles above the Earth and then on to the planet which we know as Venus. As the spaceship rapidly neared the Earth, it slackened its speed, so that the Zoromes might examine it closely with their glasses, as the ship passed the third planet.

Suddenly, one of the machine men ran excitedly into the room where 25X-987 stood watching the topography of the world beneath him.

"We have found something!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Another spaceship!"

"Where?"

"But a short distance ahead of us on our course. Come into the foreport of the ship and you can pick it up with the glass."

"Which is the way it's going?" asked 25X-987.

"It is behaving queerly," replied the machine man of Zor. "It appears to be in the act of circling the planet,"

"Do you suppose that there really is life on that dead world—intelligent beings like ourselves—and that this is one of their spacecraft?"

"Perhaps it is another exploration craft like our own from some other world," was the suggestion.

"But not of ours," said 25X-987.

Together, the two Zoromes now hastened into the observation room of the spaceship, where more of the machine men were excitedly examining the mysterious spacecraft, their thought impulses flying thick and fast like bodiless bullets.

"It is very small!"

"Its speed is slow!"

"The craft can hold but few men," observed one.

"We do not yet know of what size the creatures are," reminded another. "Perhaps there are thousands of them in that spacecraft out there. They may be of such a small size that it will be necessary to look twice before finding one of them. Such beings are not unknown."

"We shall soon overtake it and see."

"I wonder if they have seen us."

"Where do you suppose it came from?"

"From the world beneath us," was the suggestion.

"Perhaps."

II

THE MYSTERIOUS SPACECRAFT

THE MACHINE MEN made way for their leader, 25X-987, who regarded the spacecraft ahead of them critically.

"Have you tried communicating with it yet?" he asked.

"There is no reply to any of our signals," came the answer.

"Come alongside of it, then," ordered their commander. "It is small enough to be brought inside our carrying compartment and we can see with our penetration rays just what

manner of creatures it holds. They are intelligent, that is certain, for their spaceship does imply as much."

The space flyer of the Zoromes slowed up as it approached the mysterious wanderer of the cosmic void which hovered in the vicinity of the dying world.

"What a strange shape it has," remarked 25X-987. "It is even smaller than I had previously calculated."

A rare occurrence had taken place among the machine men of Zor. They were overcome by a great curiosity which they could not allow to remain unsatiated. Accustomed as they were to witnessing strange sights and still stranger creatures, meeting up with weird adventures in various corners of the Universe, they had now become hardened to the usual run of experiences which they were in the habit of encountering. It took a great deal to arouse them from their unperturbed attitudes. Something new, however, about this queer spacecraft had gripped their imaginations, and perhaps a subconscious influence asserted to their minds that here they had come across an adventure radically unusual.

"Come alongside it," repeated 25X-987 to the operator as he returned to the control room and gazed through the side of the spaceship in the direction of the smaller cosmic wanderer.

"I'm trying to," replied the machine man, "but it seems to jump away a bit every time I get within a certain distance of it. Our ship seems to jump backward a bit too."

"Are they trying to elude us?"

"I don't know. They should pick up more speed if that is their object."

"Perhaps they are now progressing at their maximum speed and cannot increase their acceleration any more."

"Look!" exclaimed the operator. "Did you just see that? The thing has jumped away from us again!"

"Our ship moved also," said 25X-987. "I saw a flash of light shoot from the side of the other craft as it jumped."

Another machine man now entered and spoke to the commander of the Zorome expedition.

"They are using radium repellent rays to keep us from approaching," he informed.

"Counteract it," instructed 25X-987.

The man left, and now the machine man at the controls of the craft tried again to close with the mysterious wanderer of the space between planets. The effort was successful, and this time there was no glow of repulsion rays from the side of the long metal cylinder.

They now entered the compartment where various objects were transferred from out the depths of space to the interplanetary craft. Then patiently they waited for the rest of the machine men to open the side of their spaceship and bring in the queer, elongated cylinder.

"Put it under the penetration ray!" ordered 25X-987. "Then we shall see what it contains!"

The entire group of Zoromes were assembled about the long cylinder, whose low nickel-plated sides shone brilliantly. With interest they regarded the fifteen-foot object which tapered a bit towards its base. The nose was pointed like a bullet. Eight cylindrical protuberances were affixed to the base, while the four sides were equipped with fins such as are seen on aerial bombs to guide them in a direct, unswerving line through the atmosphere. At the base of the strange craft there projected a lever, while in one side was a door which apparently opened outward. One of the machine men reached forward to open it but was halted by the admonition of the commander.

"Do not open it up yet!" he warned. "We are not aware of what it contains!"

Guided by the hand of one of the machine men, a series of lights shone down upon the cylinder. It became enveloped in a haze of light which rendered the metal sides of the mysterious spacecraft dim and indistinct while the interior of the cylinder was as clearly revealed as if there had been no covering. The machine men, expecting to see at least several, perhaps many, strange creatures moving about within the metal cylinder, stared aghast at the sight they beheld. There was but one creature, and he was lying perfectly still, either

in a state of suspended animation or else of death. He was about twice the height of the mechanical men of Zor. For a long time they gazed at him in a silence of thought, and then their leader instructed them:

"Take him out of the container."

The penetration rays were turned off, and two of the machine men stepped eagerly forward and opened the door. One of them peered within at the recumbent body of the weird-looking individual with the four appendages. The creature lay up against a luxuriously upholstered interior, a strap affixed to his chin while four more straps held both the upper and lower appendages securely to the insides of the cylinder. The machine man released these, and with the help of his comrade removed the body of the creature from the cosmic coffin in which they had found it.

"He is dead!" pronounced one of the machine men after a long and careful examination of the corpse. "He has been like this for a long time."

"There are strange thought impressions left upon his mind," remarked another.

One of the machine men, whose metal body was of a different shade than that of his companions, stepped forward, and his cubic body bent over that of the strange, cold creature who was garbed in fantastic accouterments. He examined the dead organism a moment, and then he turned to his companions.

"Would you like to hear his story?" he asked.

"Yes!" came the concerted reply.

"You shall, then," was the ultimatum. "Bring him into my laboratory. I shall remove his brain and stimulate the cells into activity once more. We shall give him life again, transplanting his brain into the head of one of our machines."

With these words he directed two of the Zoromes to carry the corpse into the laboratory.

As the spaceship cruised about in the vicinity of this third planet which 25X-987 had decided to visit on finding the metal cylinder with its strange inhabitant, 8B-52, the experimenter, worked unceasingly in his laboratory to revive the

long-dead brain cells to action once more. Finally, after consummating his desires and having his efforts crowned with success, he placed the brain within the head of a machine. The brain was brought to consciousness. The creature's body was discarded after the all-important brain had been removed.

III

RECALLED TO LIFE

AS PROFESSOR JAMESON came to, he became aware of a strange feeling. He was sick. The doctors had not expected him to live: they had frankly told him so—but he had cared little in view of the long, happy years stretched out behind him. Perhaps he was not to die yet. He wondered how long he had slept. How strange he felt—as if he had no body. Why couldn't he open his eyes? He tried very hard. A mist swam before him. His eyes had been open all the time but he had not seen before. That was queer, he ruminated. All was silent about his bedside. Had all the doctors and nurses left him to sleep—or to die?

Devil take that mist which now swam before him, obscuring everything in line of vision. He would call his nephew. Vainly he attempted to shout the word "Douglas," but to no avail. Where was his mouth? It seemed as if he had none. Was it all delirium? The strange silence—perhaps he had lost his sense of hearing along with his ability to speak—and he could see nothing distinctly. The mist had transferred itself into a confused jumble of indistinct objects, some of which moved about before him.

He was now conscious of some impulse in his mind which

kept questioning him as to how he felt. He was conscious of other strange ideas which seemed to be impressed upon his brain, but this one thought concerning his indisposition clamored insistently over the lesser ideas. It even seemed just as if someone was addressing him, and impulsively he attempted to utter a sound and tell them how strange he felt. It seemed as if speech had been taken from him. He could not talk, no matter how hard he tried. It was no use. Strange to say, however, the impulse within his mind appeared to be satisfied with the effort, and it now put another question to him. Where was he from? What a strange question—when he was at home. He told them as much. Had he always lived there? Why, yes, of course.

The aged professor was now becoming more astute as to his condition. At first it was only a mild, passive wonderment at his helplessness and the strange thoughts which raced through his mind. Now he attempted to arouse himself from the lethargy.

Quite suddenly his sight cleared, and what a surprise! He could see all the way around him without moving his head! And he could look at the ceiling of his room! His room? Was it his room! No—it just couldn't be. Where was he? What were those queer machines before him? They moved on four legs. Six tentacles curled outward from their cubical bodies. One of the machines stood close before him. A tentacle shot out from the object and rubbed his head. How strange it felt upon his brow! Instinctively he obeyed the impulse to shove the contraption of metal from him with his hands.

His arms did not rise; instead, six tentacles projected upward to force back the machine. Professor Jameson gasped mentally in surprise as he gazed at the result of his urge to push the strange, unearthly looking machine-caricature from him. With trepidation he looked down at his own body to see where the tentacles had come from, and his surprise turned to sheer fright and amazement. His body was like the moving machine which stood before him! Where was he? Whatever had happened to him so suddenly? Only a few moments ago he had been in his bed, with the doctors and his nephew

bending over him, expecting him to die. The last words he remembered hearing was the cryptic announcement of one of the doctors:

"He is going now."

But he hadn't really died after all, apparently. A horrible thought struck him! Was this the life after death? Or was it an illusion of the mind? He became aware that the machine in front of him was attempting to communicate something to him. How could it, thought the professor, when it had no mouth? The desire to communicate an idea to him became more insistent. The suggestion of the machine man's question was in his mind. Telepathy, thought he.

The creature was asking about the place whence he had come. He didn't know; his mind was in such a turmoil of thoughts and conflicting ideas. He allowed himself to be led to a window, where the machine with waving tentacle pointed towards an object outside. It was a queer sensation to be walking on the four metal legs. He looked from the window and he saw that which caused him to nearly drop over, so astounded was he.

The professor found himself gazing out from the boundless depths of space across the cosmic void to where a huge planet lay quiet. Now he was sure it was an illusion which made his mind and sight behave so oddly. He was troubled by a very strange dream. Carefully he examined the topography of the gigantic globe which rested off in the distance. At the same time he could see back of him the concourse of mechanical creatures crowding up behind him, and he was aware of a telepathic conversation which was being carried on behind him—or just before him. Which was it now? Eyes extended all the way around his head, while there existed no difference on any of the four sides of his cubed body. His mechanical legs were capable of moving in any of four given directions with perfect ease, he discovered.

The planet was not the Earth—of that he was sure. None of the familiar continents lay before his eyes. And then he saw the great dull red ball of the dying sun. That was not the sun of his Earth. It had been a great deal more brilliant.

"Did you come from that planet?" came the thought impulse from the mechanism by his side.

"No," he returned.

He then allowed the machine men—for he assumed that they were machine men, and he reasoned that, somehow or other, they had by some marvelous transformation made him over just as they were—to lead him through the craft of which he now took notice for the first time. It was an interplanetary flyer, or spaceship, he firmly believed.

25X-987 now took him to the compartment which they had removed him to from the strange container they had found wandering in the vicinity of the nearby world. There they showed him the long cylinder.

"It's my rocket satellite!" exclaimed Professor Jameson to himself, though in reality every one of the machine men received his thoughts plainly. "What is it doing here?"

"We found your dead body within it," answered 25X-987. "Your brain was removed to the machine after having been stimulated into activity once more. Your carcass was thrown away."

Professor Jameson just stood dumbfounded by the words of the machine man.

"So I did die!" exclaimed the professor. "And my body was placed within the rocket to remain in everlasting preservation until the end of all Earthly time! Success! I have now attained unrivaled success!"

He then turned to the machine man.

"How long have I been that way?" he asked excitedly.

"How should we know?" replied the Zorome. "We picked up your rocket only a short time ago, which, according to your computation, would be less than a day. This is our first visit to your planetary system and we chanced upon your rocket. So it is a satellite? We didn't watch it long enough to discover whether or not it was a satellite. At first we thought it to be another traveling spacecraft, but when it refused to answer our signals we investigated."

"And so that *was* the Earth at which I looked," mused the professor. "No wonder I didn't recognize it. The topography

has changed so much. How different the sun appears—it must have been over a million years ago when I died!”

“Many millions,” corrected 25X-987. “Suns of such size as this one do not cool in so short a time as you suggest.”

Professor Jameson, in spite of all his amazing computations before his death, was staggered by the reality.

“Who are you?” he suddenly asked.

“We are the Zoromes from Zor, a planet of a sun far across the Universe.”

25X-987 then went on to tell Professor Jameson something about how the Zoromes had attained their high stage of development and had instantly put a stop to all birth, evolution and death of their people, by becoming machine men.

IV

THE DYING WORLD

“AND NOW tell us of yourself,” said 25X-987, “and about your world.”

Professor Jameson, noted in college as a lecturer of no mean ability and perfectly capable of relating intelligently to them the story of the Earth’s history, evolution and march of events following the birth of civilization up until the time when he had died, began his story. The mental speech hampered him for a time, but he soon became accustomed to it so as to use it easily, and he found it preferable to vocal speech after a while. The Zoromes listened interestedly to the long account until Professor Jameson had finished.

“My nephew,” concluded the professor, “evidently obeyed my instructions and placed my body in the rocket I had built, shooting it out into space, where I became the satellite of the Earth for these many millions of years.”

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"Do you really want to know how long you were dead before we found you?" asked 25X-987. "It would be interesting to find out."

"Yes, I should like very much to know," replied the professor.

"Our greatest mathematician, 459C-79, will tell it to you." The mathematician stepped forward. Upon one side of his cube were many buttons arranged in long columns and squares.

"What is your unit of measuring?" he asked.

"A mile."

"How many times more is a mile than is the length of your rocket satellite?"

"My rocket is fifteen feet long. A mile is five thousand two hundred and eighty feet."

The mathematician depressed a few buttons.

"How far from the sun was your planet at that time?"

"Ninety-three million miles," was the reply.

"And your world's satellite—which you call Moon—from your planet, Earth?"

"Two hundred and forty thousand miles."

"And your rocket?"

"I figured it to go about sixty-five thousand miles from the Earth."

"It was only twenty thousand miles from the Earth when we picked it up," said the mathematician, depressing a few more buttons. "The moon and sun are also much nearer your planet now."

Professor Jameson gave way to a mental ejaculation of amazement.

"Do you know how long you have cruised around the planet in your own satellite?" said the mathematician. "Since you began that journey, the planet which you call the Earth has revolved around the sun over forty million times."

"Forty—million—years!" exclaimed Professor Jameson haltingly. "Humanity must then have all perished from the Earth long ago! I'm the last man on Earth!"

"It is a dead world now," interjected 25X-987.

"Of course," elucidated the mathematician, "those last few million years are much shorter than the ones in which you lived. The Earth's orbit is of less diameter and its speed of revolution is greatly increased, due to its proximity to the cooling sun. I should say that your year was some four times as long as the time in which it now takes your old planet to circumnavigate the sun.

"How many days were there in your year?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five."

"The planet has now ceased rotating entirely."

"Seems queer that your rocket satellite should avoid the meteors so long," observed 459C-79, the mathematician.

"Automatic radium repulsion rays," explained the professor.

"The very rays which kept us from approaching your rocket," stated 25X-987, "until we neutralized them."

"You died and were shot out into space long before any life occurred on Zor," soliloquized one of the machine men. "Our people had not yet even been born when yours had probably disappeared entirely from the face of the Earth."

"Hearken to 72N-4783," said 25X-987. "He is our philosopher, and he just loves to dwell on the past life of Zor when we were flesh and blood creatures with the threat of death hanging always over our heads. At that time, like the life you knew, we were born, we lived and died, all within a very short time, comparatively."

"Of course, time has come to mean nothing to us, especially when we are out in space," observed 72N-4783. "We never keep track of it on our expeditions, though back in Zor such accounts are accurately kept. By the way, do you know how long we stood here while you recounted to us the history of your planet? Our machine bodies never get tired, you know."

"Well," ruminated Professor Jameson, giving a generous allowance of time, "I should say about a half a day, although it seemed scarcely as long as that."

"We listened to you for four days," replied 72N-4783.

Professor Jameson was really aghast.

"Really, I hadn't meant to be such a bore," he apologized.

"That is nothing," replied the other. "Your story was interesting, and if it had been twice as long, it would not have mattered, nor would it have seemed any longer. Time is merely relative, and in space actual time does not exist at all, any more than your forty million years' cessation of life seemed more than a few moments to you. We saw that it was so when your first thought impressions reached us following your revival."

"Let us continue on to your planet Earth," then said 25X-987. "Perhaps we shall find more startling disclosures there."

As the spaceship of the Zoromes approached the sphere from which Professor Jameson had been hurled in his rocket forty million years before, the professor was wondering how the Earth would appear, and what radical changes he would find. Already he knew that the geographical conditions of the various continents were changed. He had seen as much from the spaceship.

A short time later the Earth was reached. The space travelers from Zor, as well as Professor Jameson, emerged from the cosmic flyer to walk upon the surface of the planet. The Earth had ceased rotating, leaving one half its surface always toward the sun. This side of the Earth was heated to a considerable degree, while its antipodes, turned always away from the solar luminary, was a cold, frigid, desolate waste. The space travelers from Zor did not dare to advance very far into either hemisphere, but landed on the narrow, thousand mile strip of territory separating the Earth's frozen half from its sun-baked antipodes.

As Professor Jameson emerged from the spaceship with 25X-987, he stared in awe at the great transformation four hundred thousand centuries had wrought. The Earth's surface, its sky and the sun were all so changed and unearthly appearing. Off to the east the blood red ball of the slowly cooling sun rested upon the horizon, lighting up the eternal day. The Earth's rotation had ceased entirely, and it hung motionless in the sky as it revolved around its solar parent, its orbit slowly but surely cutting in toward the great body

of the sun. The two inner planets, Mercury and Venus, were now very close to the blood red orb whose scintillating, dazzling brilliance had been lost in its cooling process. Soon, the two nearer planets would succumb to the great pull of the solar luminary and return to the flaming folds, from which they had been hurled out as gaseous bodies in the dim, age-old past.

The atmosphere was nearly gone, so rarefied had it become, and through it Professor Jameson could view with amazing clarity without discomfort to his eyes the bloated body of the dying sun. It appeared many times the size he had seen it at the time of his death, on account of its relative nearness. The Earth had advanced a great deal closer to the great star around which it swung.

The sky towards the west was pitch black except for the iridescent twinkle of the fiery stars which studded that section of the heavens. As he watched, a faint glow suffused the western sky, gradually growing brighter, the full Moon majestically lifted itself above the horizon, casting its pale, ethereal radiance upon the dying world beneath. It was increased to many times the size Professor Jameson had ever seen it during his natural lifetime. The Earth's greater attraction was drawing upon the Moon just as the sun was pulling the Earth ever nearer itself.

This cheerless landscape confronting the professor represented the state of existence to which the Earth had come. It was a magnificent spread of loneliness which bore no witness to the fact that it had seen the teeming of life in better ages long ago. The weird yet beautiful scene, spread in a melancholy panorama before his eyes, drove his thoughts into gloomy abstraction with its dismal, depressing influence. Its funereal, oppressive aspect smote him suddenly with the chill of a terrible loneliness.

25X-987 aroused Professor Jameson from his lethargic reverie. "Let us walk around and see what we can find. I can understand how you feel in regard to the past. It is quite a shock—but it must happen to all worlds sooner or later—even to Zor. When that time comes, the Zoromes will find a new

planet on which to live. If you travel with us, you will become accustomed to the sight of seeing dead, lifeless worlds as well as new and beautiful ones pulsating with life and energy. Of course, this world, being your own, holds a peculiar sentimental value to you, but it is really one planet among billions."

Professor Jameson was silent.

"I wonder whether or not there are any ruins here to be found?" queried 25X-987.

"I don't believe so," replied the professor. "I remember hearing an eminent scientist of my day state that, given fifty thousand years, every structure and other creation of man would be obliterated entirely from off the Earth's surface."

"And he was right," endorsed the machine man of Zor. "Time is a great effacer."

For a long time the machine men wandered over the dreary surface of the Earth, and then 25X-987 suggested a change of territory to explore. In the spaceship, they moved around the Earth to the other side, still keeping to the belt of shadow-land which completely encircled the globe like some gigantic ring. Where they now landed arose a series of cones with hollow peaks.

"Volcanoes!" exclaimed the professor.

"Extinct ones," added the machine man.

Leaving the spaceship, the fifty or more machine men, including also Professor Jameson, were soon exploring the curiously shaped peaks. The professor, in his wanderings, had strayed away from the rest, and now advanced into one of the cup-like depressions of the peak, out of sight of his companions, the Zoromes.

V

ETERNITY OR DEATH

HE WAS WELL IN the center of the cavity when the soft ground beneath him gave way suddenly and he catapulted below into the darkness. Through the Stygian gloom he fell in what seemed to be an endless drop. He finally crashed upon something hard. The thin crust of the volcano's mouth had broken through, precipitating him into the deep, hollow interior.

It must have been a long way to fall—or so it had seemed. Why was he not knocked senseless or killed? Then he felt himself over with three tentacles. His metal legs were four broken, twisted masses of metal, while the lower half of his cubic body was jammed out of shape and split. He could not move, and half of his six tentacles were paralyzed.

How would he ever get out of there? he wondered. The machine men of Zor might never find him. What would happen to him, then? He would remain in this deathless, monotonous state forever in the black hole of the volcano's interior unable to move. What a horrible thought! He could not starve to death; eating was unknown among the Zoromes, the machines requiring no food. He could not even commit suicide. The only way for him to die would be to smash the strong metal head, and in his present immovable condition, this was impossible.

It suddenly occurred to him to radiate thoughts for help. Would the Zoromes receive his messages? He wondered how far the telepathic messages would carry. He concentrated the powers of his mind upon the call for help, and repeatedly

stated his position and plight. He then left his mind clear to receive the thought answers of the Zoromes. He received none. Again he tried. Still he received no welcoming answer. Professor Jameson became dejected.

It was hopeless. The telepathic messages had not reached the machine men of Zor. They were too far away, just as one person may be out of earshot of another's voice. He was doomed to a terrible fate of existence! It would have been better had his rocket never been found. He wished that the Zoromes had destroyed him instead of bringing him back to life—back to this!

His thoughts were suddenly broken in upon.

"We're coming!"

"Don't give up hope!"

If the professor's machine body had been equipped with a heart, it would have sung for joy at these welcome thought impressions. A short time later there appeared in the ragged break of the volcano's mouth, where he had fallen through, the metal head of one of the machine men.

"We shall have you out of there soon," he said.

The professor never knew how they managed it, for he lost consciousness under some strange ray of light they projected down upon him in his prison. When he came to consciousness once more, it was to find himself inside the spaceship.

"If you had fallen and had smashed your head, it would have been all over with you," were the first thought impulses which greeted him. "As it is, however, we can fix you up first rate."

"Why didn't you answer the first time I called to you?" asked the professor. "Didn't you hear me?"

"We heard you, and we answered, but you didn't hear us. You see, your brain is different than ours, and though you can send thought waves as far as we can you cannot receive them from such a great distance."

"I'm wrecked," said the professor, gazing at his twisted limbs, paralyzed tentacles and jammed body.

"We shall repair you," came the reply. "It is your good fortune that your head was not crushed."

"What are you going to do with me?" queried the professor. "Will you remove my brains to another machine?"

"No, it isn't necessary. We shall merely remove your head and place it upon another machine body."

The Zoromes immediately set to work upon the task, and soon had Professor Jameson's metal head removed from the machine which he had wrecked in his fall down the crater. All during the painless operation, the professor kept up a series of thought exchanges in conversation with the Zoromes, and it seemed but a short time before his head surmounted a new machine and he was ready for further exploration. In the course of his operation, the spaceship had moved to a new position, and now as they emerged 25X-987 kept company with Professor Jameson.

"I must keep an eye on you," he said. "You will be getting into more trouble before you get accustomed to the metal bodies."

But Professor Jameson was doing a great deal of thinking. Doubtlessly, these strange machine men who had picked up his rocket in the depths of space and had brought him back to life were expecting him to travel with them and become adopted into the ranks of the Zoromes. Did he want to go with them? He couldn't decide.

He had forgotten that the machine men could read his innermost thoughts.

"You wish to remain here alone upon the Earth?" asked 25X-987. "It is your privilege if you really want it so."

"I don't know," replied Professor Jameson truthfully.

He gazed at the dust around his feet. It had probably been the composition of men, and had changed from time to time into various other atomic structures—of other queer forms of life which had succeeded mankind. It was the law of the atom which never died. And now he had within his power perpetual existence. He could be immortal if he wished! It would be an immortality of never-ending adventures in the

vast, endless Universe among the galaxy of stars and planets.

A great loneliness seized him. Would he be happy among these machine men of another far-off world—among these Zoromes? They were kindly and solicitous of his welfare. What better fate could he expect? Still, a longing for his own kind arose in him—the call of humanity. It was irresistible. What could he do? Was it not in vain? Humanity had long since disappeared from the Earth—millions of years ago. He wondered what lay beyond the pales of death—the real death, where the body decomposed and wasted away to return to the dust of the Earth and assume new atomic structures.

He had begun to wonder whether or not he had been dead all these forty millions of years—suppose he had been merely in a state of suspended animation. He had remembered a scientist of his day who had claimed that the body does not die at the point of official death. According to the claims of this man, the cells of the body did not die at the moment at which respiration, heart beats and the blood circulation ceased, but it existed in the semblance of life for several days afterward, especially in the cells of the bones, which died last of all.

Perhaps when he had been sent out into space in his rocket right after his death, the action of the cosmic void had halted his slow death of the cells in his body, and held him in suspended animation during the ensuing millions of years. Suppose he should really die—destroying his own brain? What lay beyond real death? Would it be a better plane of existence than the Zoromes could offer him? Would he rediscover humanity, or had they long since arisen to higher planes of existence or reincarnation? Did time exist beyond the mysterious portals of death? If not, then it was possible for him to join the souls of the human race. Had he really been dead all this time? If so, he knew what to expect in case he really destroyed his own brain. Oblivion!

Again the intense feeling of loneliness surged over him and held him within its melancholy grasp. Desperately, he decided to find the nearest cliff and jump from it—head-first! Humanity called; no man lived to companion him. His four

metal limbs carried him swiftly to the summit of a nearby precipice. Why not gamble on the hereafter? 25X-987, understanding his trend of thought, did not attempt to restrain him. Instead, the machine man of Zor waited patiently.

As Professor Jameson stood there meditating upon the jump which would hurl him now into a new plane of existence—or into oblivion—the thought transference of 25X-987 reached him. It was laden with the wisdom born of many planets and thousands of centuries' experience.

"Why jump?" asked the machine man. "The dying world holds your imagination within a morbid clutch. It is all a matter of mental condition. Free your mind of this fascinating influence and come with us to visit other worlds—many of them are both beautiful and new. You will then feel a great difference.

"Will you come?"

The professor considered for a moment as he resisted the impulse to dive off the declivity to the enticing rocks far below. An inspiration seized him. Backing away from the edge of the cliff, he joined 25X-987 once more.

"I shall come," he stated.

He would become an immortal after all and join the Zoromes in their never-ending adventures from world to world. They hastened to the spaceship to escape the depressing, dreary influence of the dying world, which had nearly driven Professor Jameson to take the fatal leap to oblivion.

TWO: THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

I

THE SPELL OF THE BLUE SUN

PROFESSOR JAMESON stood in the fore of the spaceship and gazed philosophically into space, ruminating upon the past, present and future, and upon the strange events of his life. How weird and unbelievable it had all been. Yet, here he was, one of the machine men of Zor, a convert of the dying world. He allowed his glance to drop from the darkness of space, studded with its fiery points, to his metal anatomy. He was now a Zorome, one of the deathless individuals of a far-off world of the Universe. Theirs was a life of eternity and continual adventure, and before them lay boundless space, with its myriad of stars, each a sun, around many of which circled planets, like the professor's own solar system. Strange worlds. Even stranger forms of life. And not without peril, for under certain conditions the metal heads of the machine men were not invulnerable to death. All this the metal men of Zor had told him. And it all lay before him.

Gazing once more into the star-studded firmament, the professor, who had been labeled 21MM392 by the Zoromes,

contemplated two close-set discs of light which the spaceship rapidly approached.

Another machine man walked to the side of the professor and aroused him from his dreamy reveries by a telepathic observation.

"We are nearing one of the double suns."

"How weird and beautiful they are," said the professor, transferring his thoughts to his fellow Zorome. "One of them is a blue sun, the other an orange sun. Are there many of such?"

"Yes," replied 8B-52. "We have also found triple suns, and one of a contrasting color. Of course, even the double suns are not numerous, but among the trillions of suns in space they are not hard to find."

"I recollect," remarked Professor Jameson, "that the astronomers of my day and age viewed a few of them through their telescopes, but they were so far off, and the telescopes were so comparatively inadequate to cope with such inconceivable distances, that little was ever learned of the double stars, though they were known to exist."

"I have seen them before," stated 8B-52. "If you think the double suns beautiful, wait until you see their planets."

"I can imagine," mused the professor.

"You can imagine nothing compared to that you will see," returned the Zorome. "We are heading for the planet nearest the two suns. There are four planets to the system, and they all have their orbits about both suns. Occasionally, in the case of double suns, you will find that some of the planets revolve around each of the suns while others of the same system, having their orbits farther from the suns, revolve around both. The suns, as in this case, invariably revolve about a common center between them, passing completely around one another at intervals."

"That would tend to produce eclipses," said the professor.

"It would," agreed the machine man. "There would be no lunar eclipses, however, seeing that the first planet possesses no moons."

"If it did possess moons," ventured Professor Jameson,

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

"what queer, varying effects of moonlight we might witness. There would be a full moon, one side colored blue and the other orange."

"We shall observe such a phenomenon from one of the other planets before we leave this system," stated 8B-52. "The second planet has two moons and the third one has four moons. The fourth and last planet, however, like this one, has not a single moon."

Together they gazed in rapt wonder at the fascinating contrast of blue and orange colors of the great flaming globes.

"Then we shall land on the inner of the four planets?" ask the professor.

"Yes, 21MM392," replied another of the machine men, who had just come up and joined the two. He was the leader of the expedition, 25X-987. "It should be a novel experience, your first meeting with the planet of a double sun."

"I have had many a wonderful adventure with you since you took me from my rocket," said Professor Jameson appreciatively. "It is with keen anticipation that I look forward to this exploration before us. As you say, it will be my first sight of a planet having a double sun of bi-colors."

More of the Zoromes crowded about the three. The machine men were never tired of hearing the discourses of Professor Jameson. He was educated and had taken quickly to their ways and philosophy. He was an interesting figure among them, and in their emotionless, companionable manner they had grown fond of him. His viewpoint was that of an Earth-dweller of some forty million years before, and his ideas, though sometimes appearing grotesque to them, were indeed unique.

And now they discussed the double sun and the retinue of planets as the spaceship raced on at a fantastic speed ever nearer the bi-luminary of the starry heavens.

The twin globes of the two suns gradually grew more flaming and brilliant as the spaceship neared the inner of the four planets. The blue sun appeared slightly larger than its orange contemporary, though less brilliant.

Slowly the space flyer of the Zoromes descended upon the planet of the two suns.

"How beautifull" expressed Professor Jameson in awe. "What unparalleled splendor!"

"It is indeed so," agreed 25X-987.

The sunlight from the two suns, which were situated several million miles away from one another, presented an alluring color effect upon the side of the planet facing them. From one portion of the rotating planet an observer would have seen the blue sun in the east just above the horizon, while the orange sun was just past its zenith. From another position upon the planet, it would seem that the orange sun was just sinking, while the blue sun rapidly neared its zenith.

It was at this latter point that the spaceship came to rest upon the surface of the strange planet bathed in its unworldly glory. To one looking down from the cosmic traveler far above the atmosphere, the surface represented a weird blend of blue and orange hues. The view upon the planet was even more vivid and alluring, the two colors blending, clashing and contrasting as the case might be, depending upon the nature of the topography.

The Zoromes left their space flyer and walked out upon this strange planet of kaleidoscopic beauty. In temporary silence they viewed the exotic magnificence of the world they had come to explore—the planet of the double sun.

Never, thought Professor Jameson, had he seen anything to parallel its awesome, unearthly elegance. Truly, the mental vision of heaven by the early saints of Christendom could not have excelled this world of paradise for the optical senses.

A rolling, undulating landscape of hills and valleys stretched away in every direction. Beautiful trees grew out of a luxuriant riot of varicolored vegetation, their tops bending over on every side, feathery festoons of misty, trailing creepers adorning their branch ends swaying ever so gently in the breeze. Many shades of moss carpeted the lower extremities of the massive tree trunks, while in the upper foliage of the forest giants, birds of lovely feather and plumage

trilled sweetly or else echoed strange calls entirely foreign to the ears of the Zoromes. Lovely shrubbery, interspersed here and there with open spots of violet sward, dotted the landscape as far as the eye might reach. Flowers of gorgeous hues bedecked the sun-kissed hillsides, their lovely heads nodding dreamily, as if welcoming these strange creatures to their wondrous world.

From where he stood with his companions upon a comparatively lofty eminence, Professor Jameson gazed out over a silent sea whose waters spread away to meet the far distant horizon. The crystal clear atmosphere of the planet appeared to be of a rarefied nature, or else it supported little dust, for several stars of the first and second magnitudes were clearly visible within the sapphire vault of the sky's illimitable depths. The blue sun, being of a slightly fainter intensity than its lesser companion, now occupied the zenith, being not quite directly overhead, while the orange sun rested upon the watery horizon, preparing to sink out of sight.

The latter sun threw a rippling path of strange-hued rays across the violet-tinted ocean which lay calmly lapping its flowered shores. It was such a lane down which one might have expected the immortals to have walked. Had the Zoromes possessed a nasal sense, intoxicating fragrances of the verdure's surrounding blossoms would have crept up to them from the dense foliage bordering the sea.

The orange sun's burnished disc drew gradually toward the vague line which marked the blending of violet water with sapphire sky. The burning orb slowly sank among a few wisps of multicolored clouds drifting on the far distant horizon of water like dim ghost ships. Sinking, sinking, as if reluctantly bidding its blue contemporary farewell, it passed slowly into the translucent depths of the peaceful sea which lapped a distant shore.

And now, except for the orange and golden sunset, a wonderful, blue transformation took place, and many of the blossoms were seen to close their petals. It was a deep, somber blue, and the Zoromes felt a strange influence overcome them, as if an intangible presence held their minds in a

grip of morbid imaginings. Like an oppressive mantle, it altered the previous cheerfulness of the beautiful world.

Near the shores of the ocean, the Zoromes had noticed thousands of rough, craggy protuberances projecting above the water line, literally thousands of them extending in heterogeneous array for some half mile from shore. Now, as the blue sun reigned supreme in all of its azure majesty, mysterious ripples broke the surface of the silent sea, and strange animals of the water crawled out upon the miniature islands. They were medium-sized creatures, fully half the size of the machine men, and were equipped with eight flipper-like appendages.

Raising their heads to the blue orb in the sky, they voiced in unison a weird, wailing cry, which rang dismally in the ears of the Zoromes.

"This is nearly as oppressive as your dying world, 21MM-392," spoke 25X-987, addressing the professor. "What a contrast there is here between the shining of the orange and blue suns and the blue sun alone."

"I should say that it was much more oppressive here at this time than on the dying world which you called Earth," observed 72N-4783, an eminent philosopher of Zor. "I have the feeling that there is an unseen presence about us."

"Perhaps it is the influence of the blue sun and the dismal wailing of those water animals," suggested Professor Jameson.

"No," replied 25X-987. "Such things do not affect us. We are too accustomed to strange scenes for that. We shall journey over the planet and see what we can find."

"In the spaceship?" asked 9G-721.

"No. We'll leave the spaceship here with half our number. The rest of us will explore, using the mechanical wings."

And so it happened that half of the Zoromes, twenty-five in number, were detailed to stay with the spaceship while the remainder, including 25X-987 and Professor Jameson, went upon an extended journey of exploration over that part of the planet in the vicinity of the interstellar flyer.

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

With the mechanical wings attached to their metal bodies, the Zoromes flew low over the surface of the planet, and were soon far from their companions and the spaceship. The wings were capable of propelling the machine men at a fast rate over the surface of the world, and they traveled steadily with few stops until the setting of the blue sun.

Then there fell an intense darkness, and down from the sky gleamed a multitude of fiery stars. There they stretched across the dark expanse of heavens like the flaring sparks of some mighty, universal conflagration, which, in a literal sense, they truly were.

With the setting of the blue sun, the Zoromes descended for a conference.

"The night will not be long," said 25X-987. "The orange sun will soon rise."

"The planet has three times as much daylight during the present situation of the suns as it has darkness," spoke 8B-52. "The suns revolving about one another give to their planets different phases of daylight as well as the varied periods of daylight and darkness. There is usually more daylight than darkness in the case of these double suns, but occasionally the two periods of daylight and darkness are equal. The period of darkness is never longer than the period of daylight, unless the planet's axis is tipped as was your Earth's."

"I do not experience that uneasy feeling since the blue sun went to rest," mentioned 72N-4783.

"Nor I," exclaimed 9G-721.

"It has something to do with that blue sun," said 25X-987.

"When the orange sun is not in sight," added the professor.

"We shall find out the reason before we leave," stated 25X-987.

True to 25X-987's prediction concerning the rising of the orange sun, it was not long in coming. First there was a suggestive lessening of the darkness in the east, followed by a bronze haze which gathered rapidly until in a burst of glory the flaming orb of the great sun broke above the horizon.

Under the dazzling brilliance of the solar orb, the Zoromes took to the air once more, continuing their tour of exploration. They found they were approaching a comparatively barren section of the planet. Deep canyons lay below them, and there grew but little vegetation.

25X-987, followed by his twenty-four companions, soared down out of the sky and into the deepest canyon, the high, rocky walls rising far above the Zoromes as they flew lower and lower into the depths. Professor Jameson judged the bottom of the rocky defile to be some two miles below the surface. Farther and farther they sank within the cavernous maw of one of the great scars which extended across the face of the planet.

Finally the bottom was reached, and the machine men of Zor found themselves in a semidarkness which had not yet been penetrated by the sun's rays. Indeed, the suns would have to be high in the heavens to send their rays down into the long, ragged pit in which the Zoromes now found themselves.

"Look," exclaimed 9G-721. "It is a pit of death! See the bones!"

Following the wave of 9G-721's tentacle, the rest of the machine men saw that the floor of the canyon was littered with white, gleaming bones. They were strewn about profusely, and in the semi-gloom of the deep canyon they shone pale, mysterious and forbidding.

"What could have occurred here?" asked the professor. "Surely it must have been a wholesale destruction of life."

25X-987 gazed in rumination at the moldering bones. "I wonder," was all he said.

Eagerly, the machine men inspected the bones carefully, attempting a reconstruction in their vivid imaginations concerning the probable appearances of the dead creatures. How might the living possessors of the bones have looked? What sort of animals had they been, and why had they died in such wholesale numbers? Ah, it was a mystery, and if there was anything of which the Zoromes were inordinately fond, it was mystery. They searched for evidence of weapons used

in the slaughter, but they found none, enhancing the obscurity of the situation.

The machine men spread far out, examining both sides of the canyon, but there were only the white heaps of bones to mock them.

"They were creatures who walked on three legs," informed 8B-52, who had been spending his time with another of the Zoromes examining the bones. "They possessed three upper appendages, but they were not tentacles."

"The upper appendages were more like those of 21MM-392 when we found him in the rocket," spoke 5F-388, the other machine man who had been inspecting the bones. "They were jointed."

"Like my arms, you mean," supplemented the professor.

"Yes, that's it," affirmed 5F-388.

"Do you find the bones of any other creature besides those of the Tripeds?" asked 25X-987.

He received negative replies.

"It would seem, then, that it was a battle which involved but one species," observed 965A-10.

"Not necessarily," countered 25X-987, enjoying the mystery of the situation. "The victors of the fray could possibly have emerged from the conflict unscathed, or else removed their dead. And we do not even know as yet whether there was a battle. These creatures might have died of a plague."

"I am certain they were intelligent beings," spoke one of the Zoromes. "We found these articles on some of them."

He extended to 25X-987 several small, metal articles. One of them was a curiously formed ring which had been taken from a digit, or finger, of one of the Tripeds' upper appendages. The Zoromes gathered around their leader to examine the trinkets. They were especially interested in the ring.

"There is some sort of an emblem upon it," spoke the professor.

"Three double suns!" exclaimed 25X-987. "What do you suppose that—"

25X-987 did not finish his telepathic speech, which was

suddenly interrupted by a message from down the canyon. Incessantly it rang in their minds:

"Come! I've found something!"

II

THE TRIPEDS' BONES

THE ZOROMES, as one man, made their way quickly to their companion, who had announced his find, some of them running rapidly on their four legs while others took to the air, their mechanical wings gliding them rapidly through the crystal-clear atmosphere of the planet.

Quickly they swarmed about the machine man who had summoned them. He stood before the canyon wall, pointing upward.

"Hieroglyphics!" exclaimed Professor Jameson excitedly.

There, upon the wall, were carved and painted an intricate set of pictures and symbols.

"What does it mean?" asked 9G-721.

"That we must decipher this and perhaps learn of the fate of the Tripeds," replied 25X-987.

"Look!" spoke the professor, waving a tentacle at a scrawled figure upon the wall. "There is what the Tripeds looked like! See—the figure has three legs, and there are also three jointed arms!"

"And there above him are the two shining suns," said another of the machine men, pointing out the solar orbs upon the wall of the rock.

"He is running," observed 72N-4783.

It was even as 72N-4783 had said. The Triped was sketched in the act of running, casting a fearful glance over

his shoulder. Nothing pursued him, however, and the Zoromes were at a loss regarding the reason for his flight.

"Here is another picture," stated one of the machine men, "and it seems to bear a connection with the other in some respects."

"Only one sun is shining in this picture," stated 25X-987.

"The blue one," commented the professor.

"And the Triped is falling down dead!" exclaimed 3R-579.

The engraver, who had put the pictures upon the canyon wall, had executed this particular sketch with masterful skill. Still casting a fearful look of terror and anguish over his shoulder, he was in the act of pitching forward dead. Around him lay many other silent companions who had fallen to rise no more.

The Zoromes now contemplated the next picture group. It was a strange one. One of the Tripeds was depicted in the act of leaping off the heights of a rugged cliff. Another, with upraised bludgeon, was about to crash it down upon the skull of a comrade, while others, apparently horror stricken, rushed forward to foil the consummation of the terrible deed. Above this scene the blue sun held sway.

The last group of pictures was the strangest of all. The orange sun shone brilliantly, surrounded by a blue ring. The Tripeds were shown running hither and yon, while above them in the air flew dim, shadowy, menacing forms. The Tripeds were evidently trying to avoid them.

"What does it mean?" queried several of the machine men.

"The blue sun is eclipsed by the orange one," said 25X-987. "As for those creatures in the air, we have not met them here as yet."

"We have seen but few creatures of any kind, come to consider the matter," observed Professor Jameson. "There were the water animals who voiced their weird cries, and we have seen many birds of varying species, but do you know that in all our traversal of the forests we have seen no animals?"

"That is true," mused 72N-4783.

They now inspected a new row of pictures above the ones at which they had been looking. In one picture the orange sun shone alone. Below it, the Tripeds were engaged in various peaceful duties. In the next picture, both the blue sun and the orange sun shone. The Tripeds were still engaged in the occupations of their everyday life. In the third picture, which was the last of that group, the blue sun shone by itself in the azure sky, and below it not a Triped was in sight. Only one object was visible, and this appeared to be a symbol of some kind. There was a round, white object, under which rested a six-pointed cross.

"It is the skull of a Triped with three of the upper appendage bones laid across one another below it," explained 8B-52.

"The skull and crossbones," remarked Professor Jameson. "In my day and age upon the Earth, such an emblem meant death."

"And that is probably just what this means too," considered 25X-987. "There is something sinister in that blue sun, though I am at a loss to know why it should be so."

"Then our morbid feelings we experienced beneath the sole reign of the blue sun were not our imaginations?" queried the professor.

"Never," replied 25X-987. "It is not like the Zoromes. That blue sun held some terrible menace over the Tripeds."

"Perhaps its rays killed them," ventured 43V-73.

"I doubt it," spoke Professor Jameson. "They appeared well and happy in the sunlight of both the solar orbs."

"But," argued 43V-73, "could not the rays of the orange sun have nullified the death rays of the blue sun?"

"Possibly," was the professor's partial agreement.

"Behold!" cried one of the Zoromes, pointing a long tentacle above them.

The attention of the machine men was focused directly upward through the single eyes in the peaks of their heads. Far, far above them on the canyon's western lip there shone a blue haze.

"The rising of the blue sun!" explained 25X-987.

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

The machine men of Zor followed the canyon's long, winding course. Sometimes it grew narrower and then again it would broaden out once more. Small side canyons now commenced to run into the larger crevice, many of them being far below the level of the main canyon floor, so that the Zoromes often looked into the dark, giddy depths of canyons within a canyon. Several times they found piles of bones of the long dead Tripeds, some of them crumbling to a white powder when touched. Occasionally they came across mysterious writings and illustrations.

One of the pictures appeared to warn all trespassers to avoid searching the canyon any farther. It was an ominous warning to go back. The symbol of the skull and bones lent it emphasis. But still the machine men followed the deep canyon's course, and now it commenced to get darker, and the crevices and chasms in the rocky floor grew more numerous, so that a good share of the time saw the machine men of Zor on the wing.

"The orange sun is setting," said 25X-987. "The blue sun has passed its zenith."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar regarding those suns?" asked the professor as he watched the ebbing glow of burnished bronze upon the high cliffs above them.

"They appear nearer," replied 25X-987.

"But they are not."

"No. It is merely their revolutions about one another."

"The distance between them never varies at any time."

"The orange sun has gone below the horizon," spoke 25X-987. "How beautiful it is when they are both shining, and how depressing and deathly when the blue sun shines alone."

The Zoromes continued on between the towering walls of rock. The blue, gloomy haze which now settled down about them like a dismal shroud of despair seemed scarcely to lessen the Stygian blackness, lending to it only an eerie, sombrous feeling of intense sadness.

"This is what one upon my planet in my day would have called 'giving a person the creeps,'" remarked the professor.

"It is queer," agreed 25X-987. "In all our millions of years

of travel we have never before experienced such strange sensations, such indescribable and undesirable feelings. I believe it is what you explained to us as fear, 21MM392, that frame of mind we have never yet known."

"It might be termed that," replied Professor Jameson, analyzing the situation of the machine men. "Never having known fear before, you are not in a position to know whether or not your sensations are born of fear. I have known the sensation of fear many times in my past life upon the Earth, and can readily recognize it. Our present sensation is not so much of fear as it is an ominous warning of danger which constantly disturbs our minds. Were it fear, my friends, we should experience the desire to depart from the canyon at once, spread our wings and fly back to the spaceship. As it is, we have not the slightest inclination to do so."

The professor's logic was convincing.

Ahead of them there suddenly occurred a commotion. The Zoromes milled excitedly about the edge of a ragged pit.

"Seize him quick—he knows not what he does!" came the telepathic message ahead of 25X-987 and the professor, who, absorbed in their conversation, had lagged in the rear.

"He's gone!"

"We were too late!"

"What's up?" inquired the leader of the expedition, flying quickly over the heads of those before him.

The professor followed swiftly behind him.

"7L-4208 developed a sudden disease of the mind, we believe!" came the reply. "He took off his wings, laid them down upon the edge of yonder crevice, and before anyone could restrain him, had jumped!"

"Head first!" added another of the machine men who had witnessed the mad act.

"Such occurrences are rare and do not happen for ages at a time!" exclaimed 25X-987. "Go down to the bottom of the pit, and see if he can be saved."

Swiftly, several of the machine men flew down into the darkness and out of sight. It was a long while before a reply came up to them.

"He is a mass of wreckage!"

"His brain! His brain!" inquired 25X-987 anxiously.

The leader of the Zorome expedition received an answer in three words laden with deep portent:

"It is destroyed!"

"7L-4208 is dead!" lamented 25X-987 in regret. "21MM-392, you have witnessed something which is practically unheard of—the death of a Zorome. Your coming added one to our ranks; now our number is the same as before. Evidently something went wrong with 7L-4208's brain, prompting him to do the rash, unreasonable act that he did."

"Either that or else it was the dismal influence of the blue sun," spoke Professor Jameson suggestively.

"Impossible," stated 25X-987. "We are not susceptible to such influences."

"Do you remember my sensations just before we left the dying world, and how near I came to doing the very same thing as that which 7L-4208 just did?"

"Certainly," replied 25X-987. "But you must remember that your mind is a great deal different than ours in structure, even if we do enjoy a mutual exchange of ideas. We are immune to any outward attempts to sway our judgment."

"Indeed," agreed the professor, "our minds are much different."

"Silence!"

The caution came suddenly from one of the machine men. Each and every Zorome halted and stood motionless so that his passage over the canyon floor should emit no noise. The rattling, scuffing and clatter of metal limbs against rock ceased.

"Do you hear it?" asked the machine man strangely.

"Hear what?" asked 25X-987.

"Listen—there it is again!"

And now to the Zoromes there came a hum, a low, droning buzz as if from far off—yet very near. For a time it hung on a long, monotonous, doleful note, which gradually rose to a giant wail.

"What an awful cry that was!" observed 72N-4783.

"If I possessed bones, it would have chilled them," said Professor Jameson.

"Did you recognize how nearly the last half of that cry resembled the sound emitted by the water animals we saw on the tiny islets of the ocean?" asked 25X-987.

"Yes," replied the professor, "but that cry came from something else—not from the water animals."

"There it is again!"

"I hear several—they mingle together."

"It is coming nearer!"

"From where?"

"Around the bend ahead of us!"

"No, from behind!"

"Out of the air above us!"

"From the walls of the canyon!"

"It emanates from all around us!" exclaimed the leader of the Zoromes. "How unusually excited my men have become! This is not their usual way! I too feel a tenseness—it is strange."

In truth, the Zoromes were not acting like their usual selves. Excitement strode rampant among them. Some of the machine men betrayed a bit of nervous panic which was radically unlike them. Awe had supplanted their customary stolid indifference.

Above, the blue sun now poured its suffused light straight down into the canyon, its azure orb set like a flaming jewel in the depth of sky. Like a scattering of lesser gems, the fiery stars gleamed in riotous profusion beyond the circle of its aura of closer light.

The low buzzing and hum became more intense, and appeared to rise and fade all about them. Frequently the hum would rise and terminate in a dismal wail. They were the most deathly cries the professor had ever heard, and his companions, the Zoromes, seemed strangely affected.

"Help!"

The cry rang in the minds of the machine men.

"Help!"

With a tremendous leap, one of the Zoromes had re-

peated the act of 7L-4208, jumping into a deep cross canyon, his wings folded uselessly against his metal body. From the doomed man, there came an unintelligible gibberish mixed with wild thought pictures.

"He pushed them off!" elucidated 8B-52 excitedly to his superior, who had leaped to the edge of the precipice. "22D-5 shoved 429C-257 and 98S-533 off the edge just before he himself leaped! The cry for aid came from 429C-257!"

"What madness is this?" asked 25X-987 in desperation. "What possesses my men?"

From the dark canyon's depth into which the three Zoromes had pitched to their deaths there issued a whirring noise. Up out of the gloom there hove a dark object which flew aimlessly in and out of the darkness a moment before it came to rest upon the edge of the pit.

"98S-533!" exclaimed several of the machine men, simultaneously recognizing their companion.

"I spread my wings just in time to check my swift descent!" stated 98S-533. "Someone pushed me off as I was standing on the ledge looking down!"

"It was 22D-5!" informed 8B-52. "He also pushed 429C-257 just before he leaped himself!"

"This is terrible!" stated 25X-987. "There is a presence within this canyon whose menacing influence is irresistible. We must see if our two comrades are within our power to save, and then we shall quit this gloomy place."

22D-5 and 429C-257 were found to be irreparable. Their metal skulls had been crushed like eggshells.

Like a horde of departing birds, the machine men spread their metal wings and flew far up to where the canyon walls began, evacuating the blue depths of the immense crevice with its insidious humming and unseen, haunting death which played grimly upon the minds of the space wanderers.

"I have never encountered such a horrible place as this before," deplored 25X-987 to the professor, as up through the air they coursed far above the canyon. "We have met and overcome much flesh and blood opposition in our wanderings, and we have successfully repulsed the attacks of scientifically

organized beings of other planets without casualty to our ranks. Here is an enemy or invisible entity which wreaks death by suggesting a self-imposed destruction."

"What are you going to do?" asked Professor Jameson.

"Return to the spaceship, bring it here, and with our scientific apparatus discover why our comrades plunged to their deaths. We shall then remove the menace, whatever it is."

A call came from the rear. "We are short four men!"

"We must go back," stated 25X-987, "and rescue them!"

"27R-410 is beyond rescue!" stated one of the machine men.

"When we had risen halfway up through the canyon, he unscrewed his head and threw it back into the depths! His body flew onward aimlessly for a ways before it crashed into a canyon wall and smashed to pieces!"

"We must go back!" repeated 25X-987 resolutely.

"To return is death!" impressed Professor Jameson upon his friend's mind. "We shall return in the spaceship if we return at all! It is rash suicide to turn back! You saved me from that once, and now I am determined to save you!"

"You are right, 21MM392," agreed the leader of the space expedition finally. "We must leave this vicinity as soon as possible. Our group now numbers eighteen. We must hurry back to our comrades."

Swiftly they flew back over the barren country of the canyons. Beneath the smoldering glow of the blue sun they saw afar off on the horizon the thin line of vegetation which marked the beginning of the great forests.

"That sound—that terrible humming sound!" warned 25X-987. "I hear it again! We are being pursued! Put on speed!"

"It is no use," declared Professor Jameson. "The terrible sound comes from before us as well as from behind us."

"Let us gain the spaceship, where we are certain we shall be safe."

"We'll be much safer when that blue sun has set," opined the professor. "You know, I believe that some form of radio-activity emanating from that blue sun is responsible for all this."

"Would it create that humming noise as well as bring disorder and death into the minds of my unfortunate men?"

"Perhaps."

"We shall find out."

"Where are the rest?" asked the professor, looking back.

"There is no one behind us."

"We have flown far ahead of them," observed 25X-987, "unless—"

"Unless they have succumbed to the menace," finished Professor Jameson.

25X-987 sent out a call. There came an answer from behind, and as the two machine men wheeled in the sky they perceived upon the horizon three black dots which rapidly overtook them. They proved to be three of the Zoromes.

"Where are the others?" asked 25X-987. "There should be thirteen more of you."

"They dived to their destruction along the way back!" exclaimed 8B-52. "This is a veritable death hole!"

"Were they attacked?"

"No. Either something happened to their wings or else they left us voluntarily."

"Some of them flew madly into one another, cleaving each other's wings off and thus ending their lives," said 305N-56. "I could declare that some of those accidents were no more than vicious attacks. They were completely demoralized. It occurred just after you and 21MM392 forged ahead of us and out of sight."

"This is the worst yet!" ejaculated 25X-987. "Thirteen of them—I have lost twenty now!"

Struck dumb by this latest tragedy within their ranks, the five remaining Zoromes winged their way rapidly back over the luxuriant forests and dense verdure toward the spaceship and their companions they had left with it. And as they sped on over forest, hill, valley and stream, the blue sun set in a murky haze of azure, bringing on the darkness.

The Zoromes immediately felt a peace of mind as the blue orb disappeared below the horizon. The malignant pressure

upon their minds abated, and no longer did they sense the sad promptings of the evil influence. The humming in the air had ceased a short while before sundown.

III

AMID THE PHANTOMS

PRESENTLY THEY NEARED the spaceship, and as they did so the telepathic communications came thick and fast.

"A terrible thing has befallen us while you were gone!" stated a voice from the spaceship. "We are nearly wiped out—but two of us remain!"

"What happened?" demanded 25X-987, fearing the worst.

"A strange thing occurred among us! Our comrades went crazy mad, killing each other and themselves!"

"You mean—you mean—during the reign of the blue sun?"

"Yes—that was it!"

"And were there humming noises?"

"Many of them—and the water animals came up and wailed."

"There are but two of you remaining? What happened to the rest?"

"Some of them are at the bottom of the ocean," replied 69B-496. "They flew above the rocky crags and disappeared under the surface when the water animals voiced their weird cries. Then, too, several of them smashed in each other's heads in hideous combat. 4C-9721 even spread death among us with the ray gun before we overpowered him. He later answered the lure of the wailing water animals. He is somewhere out there."

69B-496 pointed a tentacle into the darkness toward the silent sea with its rough, jagged islets.

"They were possessed of the devil!" exclaimed Professor Jameson.

"What do you mean?" queried 25X-987.

"Merely an Earthly expression which at present comes nearest to solving the situation."

"Where are the rest of your tentacles?" inquired the leader of the Zorome expedition, glancing over 69B-496.

The latter machine man stood before them with but two of his six tentacles remaining. In place of the other four, there projected only ragged metal stumps.

"The ray gun wielded by 4C-9721 did it," replied 69B-496. "It cut a clean swath clear through 149Z-24, but luckily it didn't hit his head, and he can be repaired."

"Bring me down," issued a new voice, breaking in upon the thought transmissions of the machine men.

69B-496 reached up on a shelf and brought down the peaked head of a Zorome, who opened and shut his metal eyelids a few times.

"Place his head on a new body," ordered 25X-987.

"It was horrible," exclaimed the head of 149Z-24 suddenly. "I saw them! I came near to going, and I saw them!"

"Saw them? Saw what?" queried 25X-987.

"I didn't get a good look at them, but I saw the things just the same."

"What things?" asked Professor Jameson.

I don't know," replied 149Z-24. "They were dim and shadowy objects which floated about in the air. I had only a glimpse of them when 4C-9721 shot the ray gun among us. There seemed to be a fascinating, enticing lure they held forth to me. It was irresistible, and I came near to giving in and going when the ray gun cut through me. Then of course I couldn't and after a while the persuasion left me."

"Go where?" asked 25X-987 excitedly, eager to get to the bottom of the mystery. "Explain yourself! What were your feelings, and what made you want to go?"

"I really don't know," answered 149Z-24. "I never felt

that way before. There seemed to be no definite incentive, and I do not remember any particular lure. It was a strong persuasion for me to give up thinking—that was all they asked of me, just to give up thinking. That humming and wailing was a voice—an audible voice, not a thought voice. Yes, there were the thought voices, too, but they appeared to linger in the background, as if waiting. The wailing and humming voices were the more insistent."

"Hypnotism!" explained Professor Jameson. "Strange creatures are hypnotizing our forces to extinction!"

"Yes, but what are they?" asked 25X-987.

"And where are they?" added 69B-469.

"25X-987," warned the professor, "we are now but seven where we came fifty-one. I advise that we leave at once to avoid complete extinction."

"But they can't get us inside our spaceship, and I am going to return to the canyon of the bones to see if our companions are really beyond recall. I shall also solve the mystery, and wreak out revenge upon whatever creatures have killed my comrades."

"Your revenge will but lead you on to destruction," stated Professor Jameson.

"But perhaps our companions, who fell back into the canyon, may not be past rescue," entreated 25X-987.

"We should investigate that, most assuredly," stated the professor, "but I wouldn't do it while the blue sun shines alone in the sky."

"That is the mystery," mused the leader of the Zorome expedition. "What has the blue sun to do with it?"

"I would forego the satisfaction of knowing," warned the professor. "It would mean stepping into a death trap."

The seven Zoromes prepared for the return trip to the canyon of the dead. The head of 149Z-24 was mounted upon a new body, and new tentacles were placed on 69B-496.

The orange sun had peeped above the eastern horizon, and now the planet of the double sun was once more transformed

into a vision of celestial loveliness, a veritable Garden of Eden.

The spaceship cruised far above the weird forests with their bright plumed birds and queer lack of animal life. Off toward the barren canyon of death they headed. It was only a short time after the rise of the orange sun that the blue sun hove into view, following closely upon its contemporary.

"See how close together they are," observed Professor Jameson.

"Yes," said 25X-987. "Before the sunset, there should be an eclipse."

"The orange sun is the more brilliant of the two, even though it is a bit smaller," said the professor. "When the orange sun comes between the blue sun and the planet, there will be a blue ring around the orange sun."

"There is the canyon," said 25X-987, pointing to the barren lands far below where a great ragged rent cut the surface of the strange world, disappearing into the far-flung horizon.

Under skillful manipulation, the space flyer was lowered into the ominous depths of the shadowy canyon, the walls rising menacingly as if ready at any moment to close in upon the spaceship of the machine men, crushing it beneath millions of tons of rock debris. Or so it seemed to Professor Jameson, who felt ill at ease, and was possessed of grim, gloomy forebodings.

Slowly they settled down upon the canyon floor among the white clumps of scattered bones, many of which crunched hollowly beneath the dark hull of the spaceship.

"Search up and down the canyon," ordered 25X-987. "See if you can find the remains of the thirteen men we lost in leaving the place."

The search was made, and remains of most of the dead Zoromes were found. Their metal bodies and brain cases were discovered smashed and crushed where in their mad plunges planetward they had come into contact with the rocky terrain.

"We are safe from the devastating death as long as the

orange sun accompanies the blue sun in the sky," warned Professor Jameson. "To remain when the blue sun shines alone is rank suicide. Every one of our companions either killed himself or was killed by a comrade. None of them was killed forcibly by anything on this planet, yet some compelling influence drove them to suicide. Now that we know our friends to be unquestionably beyond our aid, I would advise most urgently that we leave at once."

"Not until I know, and have been at grips with, whatever killed so many of our men!" stated 25X-987 firmly.

"To remain is death!" counseled Professor Jameson.

"But we are now prepared, where before we were taken unawares," said the leader of the expedition from Zor. "We shall build up a mental resistance against the menace which seeks to derange our minds."

"Beware!" warned the professor. "I can now understand the reason for so many white bones in the canyon! The Tripeds died of the same malady beneath the terrible rays of the damnable blue sun as afflicted your men!"

"We shall meet and destroy the menace!" was 25X-987's ultimatum. "Remember that we are Zoromes!"

"And that forty-four of us have fallen prey to the unseen evil within the last rotation of this planet!" reminded the professor. "Confidence has supplanted your caution entirely, 25X-987!"

"The suns! The suns!" exclaimed one of the machine men suddenly. "They are touching!"

"The beginning of the eclipse!"

"The orange sun is crossing before the blue one!"

A small tip of the blue sun had already disappeared behind the encroaching orange orb, and very gradually the great solar spheres moved into conjunction with their first planet.

And then upon the ears of the machine men fell a faint humming noise which increased in volume and intensity.

"The death call!" exclaimed 149Z-24 excitedly. "It is the death call!"

Now there came several wails, rising to a more piercing

pitch than the Zoromes had yet heard them during their brief stay upon the planet.

"Into the spaceship!" commanded 25X-987.

Eagerly the machine men obeyed the order. But even within the spaceship the dismal howls and terrible humming vibration were heard. Every now and then there occurred a wailing noise which apparently issued from within the spaceship itself, drifting suddenly back to the outside once more, as if the author of the hideous sound had passed through the walls of the interstellar craft.

"Look!" cried 69B-496 in alarm. "I see them! I see them plainly!"

"Where?" queried the machine men in unison.

"There!" exclaimed the Zorome, pointing above him with wildly waving tentacles.

"The shadows!" exclaimed 25X-987. "They are the shadows which fly about!"

And now all of the Zoromes perceived them as the two suns merged into an eclipse. Wide, flapping, shadowy forms they were, flying on leathern wings, the air being full of them. Queer round heads surmounted the bat-like bodies. A pair of bright, gleaming eyes were set in the head, while below them from a wide distended mouth issued the frightful wails and dismal humming.

"You can see right through them!" ejaculated the professor.

"And they are flying through the rock walls!" added 8B-52.

"Here comes one of them for the spaceship!" warned 149Z-24.

Directly toward the space flyer from Zor the ghostly creature flew, and with a piercing wail came right through it as if the ship had not been there. The phantom swooped straight down toward 25X-987 and Professor Jameson where they stood a bit apart from the rest of the Zoromes. It enveloped them and passed, the two machine men being clearly visible to their companions all the time. The wraith continued

on and out of the spacecraft, leaving the two machine men standing together in surprise and consternation.

"The thing passed right through us!" exclaimed 25X-987 in surprise. "It must be an optical illusion!"

"That medley of sound they are making is no illusion," said the professor. "I am not superstitious, but I believe that here is something entirely beyond us. We had best leave while we may."

"Turn the ray guns upon them!" commanded 25X-987, gazing upward through a transparent section of the spaceship at the horde of encircling bird creatures.

The machine men obeyed his bidding, and presently several iridescent fingers of light were probing upward to where the ghostly creatures wheeled and circled on the wing. Where the destroying rays touched the canyon walls the rock disappeared, leaving dark holes, but the rays had no effect whatever upon the phantoms who continued their aimless course above the space flyer.

Voicing their weird, depressing cries, they gazed downward upon the spaceship of the Zoromes, regarding it with a solemn mien.

"They resist the ray!" cried 305N-56. "It leaves no impression upon them!"

"Seize 149Z-24!" cried 69B-496. "He has gone mad!"

Several of the machine men seized their companion, who had staggered towards a section of the craft's delicate mechanism with an upraised metal bar, evidently bent on destroying the apparatus.

"Those creatures have his mind in their power!" exclaimed 25X-987. "Quick! We must get out of here! Rise out of the canyon immediately."

Swiftly the spaceship rose from the floor of the canyon, leaving the pathetic piles of scattered bones far below. Through the midst of the phantoms they passed, not so much as perturbing them in the least. Back and forth they flew in the space occupied by the interplanetary craft as if it were not there.

A singular fact which Professor Jameson noticed con-

cerned the queer conditions regarding the passage of the phantoms through an opaque object. Though possessed of the ability to disappear within the solid walls of the canyon, and the power to fly through the spacecraft at will, Professor Jameson saw that they never flew through one another. Often their wings would strike together in contact, throwing either one or else both of the creatures off balance temporarily. How strange, he mused. The phantom creatures who voiced their evil, menacing cries were barely visible, it being possible for the professor to discern the cliff wall through their semi-transparent bodies.

The spaceship flew above the ghostly crew, but their weird calls still lingered, and the Zoromes were possessed of the forlorn and dejected spirits which had previously been engendered by the blue moon. At a far height above the canyon the leader of the Zoromes ordered the spacecraft to be halted. He had no sooner stopped the ship than from below there came the humming sound which the machine men had now come to regard in loathing and disgust.

"They're coming!" admonished 305N-56.

"Wait!" ordered 25X-987 in a strange manner. "Don't start away yet!"

From below, two of the dim apparitions flew up around the spacecraft, flying back and forth through it several times, giving voice to their sepulchral wails, the solemnity of their faces entirely free of changing expression. As they flew about the interplanetary ship, through the machine men, and through any solid object they encountered, the phantom creatures grew dimmer and dimmer, until they were entirely invisible. Only their weird cries were heard, and these grew faint and dwindled away.

"The orange sun is nearly past the blue one," observed 8B-52 after the last faint hum had died out.

"The eclipse is nearly over," said 69B-496.

"What manner of creatures could those things have been?" pondered 25X-987.

"I believe that I have the secret at last," said Professor

Jameson with gravity. "I have solved the riddle of the blue sun and the deaths of our companions."

"What is it?" asked 25X-987 eagerly. "Speak, 21MM392!"

"With all your super intelligence," stated Professor Jameson, "I don't believe you would have ever solved the problem. During all of your millenia of exploration among the cosmic realms of space you have never encountered the likes of such circumstances as we find on this planet of the double sun. With all your super knowledge, you lack the one item of experience which my Earthly life gave to me quite coincidentally, and which now places me in a position to understand the amazing circumstances through which we have gone.

"Where we stand upon this planet there are really two worlds—the world we see about us now and the world of the phantoms. The world of the phantoms, however, is in a different dimension than this one, being upon a different light and color vibratory scale. The creatures we saw are not really phantoms in the literal sense of the word. They merely appear as phantoms to us, just the same as we do to them. They are of concrete proportions in their own plane of existence, even as we are real in our own life.

"When the blue sun shines alone, it exerts a strange color and vibratory effect upon whatever part of this planet it strikes. It produces the strange character of partially bringing together these two worlds, each of a different dimension. The presence of the orange sun neutralizes this effect. The depressing influence of the blue sun which we noted so quickly is due to the fact that it brings together the sound and thought transferences of these two worlds. The strange quality of the blue rays has not the power to bring the two worlds into bodily contact, however, and that explains the reason for the phantoms flying through the opaque objects of this world.

"When the blue sun is alone in the sky, the voices and thought transferences of the two worlds mingle as one. The strange apparitions from the other world of this planet are

responsible for the deaths of our companions as well as for the wiping out of the Tripeds.

"Do you remember the drawings we found on the rock walls in the canyon of death? Everything was depicted as peaceful beneath the reign of the orange sun alone, as well as during the shining of both suns, but under the spell of the blue sun, we saw a great havoc wreaked among the Tripeds. Suicide and murder stalked rampant among them, and death finally took its toll of the entire race just as it destroyed our companions.

"Then we saw the illustrations of an eclipse of the suns, the blue sun being eclipsed by the orange one. Beneath it, we saw the Tripeds pursued by this malignant horde of shadowy appearing birds, phantoms such as we just saw. They are visible to us only during an eclipse. A mysterious action of the blue rays around the orange sun during an eclipse brings about a partial visibility of this hidden world, although I truly believe that while the blue sun shines solitary the denizens of the other world can always see us. It stands to reason.

"The creatures we saw from the other world are of a warring, destructive nature. By a hypnotic power peculiar to them, they seek to destroy the animals of this world by mentally reaching across the boundaries separating the two planes of existence and wiping them out by overpowering mental suggestions of murder and self-destruction. This power, as you have already witnessed, is great enough to even counterbalance the super-intellect of a Zorome, though I believe that they themselves are possessed of no great intelligence. Their propensity for hypnotism is not necessarily derived from a magnitude of brain power. I believe it to be a birthright similar to that of the electric eel of my own planet, about which I once discoursed to you. Hypnotism and occult power is their birthright even as the power to exude electric shocks is the eels' natural ability."

"Why didn't they kill the birds we saw in the forest, and also the water animals?" asked 25X-987, greatly impressed by the professor's impressive conclusions.

"That I can't say for sure," replied Professor Jameson. "It explains the lack of animal life in the forests. As to the birds, I might venture the suggestion that they are so much like the creatures of the other world that they have sentimentally been spared. Perhaps the water animals' environment renders them impregnable to the suicide inducements of the other-world entities. Then again, they may have something in common with them. Their cries were similar, and they emerged from the water only when the blue sun shone alone."

"You are a genius, 21MM392!" exclaimed 25X-987 admiringly.

"Not necessarily," said the professor. "You see, when a young man at college, I was very much enthused at one time about hypnotism, and though unable to exercise it myself, I read a great deal concerning it."

"With all our traveling from planet to planet—from sun to sun—from system to system—we have never before come across what you call 'hypnotism.' I can readily perceive that it is the keynote to this mystery, and were it not for you, the puzzle would forever have remained unsolved."

"And can you now understand why it is imperative that we leave at once?" asked the professor, gazing apprehensively at the blue sun. "Even now the orange sun has passed from before the face of the blue one, and is sinking beneath the horizon."

"Now I realize how 149Z-24 saw the shadowy forms when he came near to answering their lure," said 69B-496. "The light from the ray gun combined with the blue sun's rays and the fact that he was under the hypnotic spell gave him the power of vision to see them."

"We must hurry from here," announced 25X-987 gravely. "21MM392 has spoken correctly. It is death to remain!"

IV

THE JUGGERNAUT

THE SPACESHIP rose upward on a slant, and as it did so, the orange sun, whose great shining sphere had rested half above and half below the horizon, sank out of sight. The blue sun now occupied the sky, and it would not be long before it, too, would follow its orange contemporary to rest.

Almost immediately with the cessation of the orange sunshine, there arose upon the air the vibrant humming accompanied by its concert of sad wails. The volume of sound swelled up and around the speeding spacecraft, and the apprehensive Zoromes knew that in, out of and around their ship the ghostly creatures from the invisible dimension flew, eager to lure them to self-destruction.

"Keep control of your brains!" exclaimed 25X-987 wildly. "Concentrate as you never have concentrated before, or it is certain death."

One of the horrible wails directly at their ears came to mock the machine man's command. Swiftly the spaceship sought to leave the heavy atmosphere.

Somewhere below in the control room there came a rending crash of metal. Professor Jameson and 25X-987, in company with 8B-52 and 69B-496, rushed into the compartment to ascertain the cause of the furore.

"149Z-24 has broken loose!" ejaculated 372V-22.

The machine man who had spoken was firmly holding his mentally deranged companion with a grip of entwined steel tentacles.

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

"Put him in the buckler!" ordered 25X-987. "We have no time to waste if we are to leave this accursed planet of the double sun!"

But the order was never executed. All at once there occurred throughout the spaceship a terrific shock. With a terrible impetus of increased motion, the interplanetary craft multiplied its speed and whirled madly on through the dense atmosphere of the globe. The Zoromes were sent tumbling to the floor, their metal bodies and limbs rolling into grotesque heaps at the far ends of the spacecraft chambers.

Hurriedly they regained their feet.

"The ship will crash!" exclaimed 25X-987 wildly. "149Z-24 has broken the controls of the mechanism which regulates our speed! We are doubling speed every moment!"

"We'll crash or else burn up in the atmosphere like a meteor!" cried 8B-52.

The wind of their passing whistled eerily around the spacecraft. The shrieking arose to a hissing roar as the space flyer of the Zoromes rapidly gained speed in its mad rush through the sea of crystal ozone.

"Where are we heading?" asked 25X-987, expecting to be smashed into atoms at any moment.

69B-496 glanced at a dial.

"We are pursuing a long arc, in relation to the planet," he said.

"Upward or downward?" asked 25X-987 in mingled hope and dread.

"Downward!" came the hope-shattering reply. "The curve of the arc is slightly greater than the curve of the planet's surface, so that in view of our present altitude we shall not crash right away."

"But in that time we shall be burnt up with our spaceship!" cried 305N-56, his tentacles waving excitedly.

"The friction is becoming terrific!" exclaimed 25X-987.

"There is nothing we can do but wait for a miracle!"

"Or death!" added Professor Jameson.

The hissing roar had climbed the scale of sound vibrations until it was now a terrible whine. The spaceship judder-

nauted on through the planet's atmosphere, carrying the seven machine men to perdition in its inevitable crash which the passing time brought rapidly nearer.

"It is the end!" prophesied 372V-22. "The accursed planet will claim us all!"

25X-987 appeared to have lapsed into a strange stupor, a dazed condition. He said nothing.

"We are halfway there!" came the notification of 69B-496 at the dials.

A wave of suffocating heat swirled through the interplanetary craft. The friction of the terrific speed was beginning to manifest itself. It appeared to be a race between the atmosphere and the lithosphere, to see which would claim the spaceship first.

"There is nothing we can do," came the resigned observation of Professor Jameson, "but—"

"Leap!" came the startling thought wave from the crazed 149Z-24. "Leap!"

"Leap!" echoed 25X-987, a strange concourse of thoughts mingling with the suggestion of 149Z-24.

"Leap before we crash!" cried 149Z-24 wildly. "Save yourselves from sure death!"

"Leap out!" mused 69B-496, turning the matter over in his mind.

"Yes!" exclaimed 149Z-24 enthusiastically. "It's the only way."

"The only way!" repeated 305N-56 mechanically. "Yes, it is the only way!"

"Come, jump out and be free!" urged 149Z-24.

"Stop!" cried Professor Jameson. "Enough! You are yielding to the will of the phantoms of the other world! They are leading you on to suicide!"

The machine men were oblivious to his warning. Evidently they had not heard him.

"Leap!" was 25X-987's only thought. It was rapidly nearing a conviction under the masterful hypnotism of the unseen creatures from another dimension. Already, they had made 149Z-24 their tool and devoted emissary and were large-

ly spreading their insidious influence over the little group of machine men through him.

"The only way!" reechoed 8B-52.

"Cease!" pleaded the professor in a superhuman mental effort. "Do not yield!"

"I'll leap!" was the ultimatum of 305N-56, as if in reply to a request.

He moved slowly toward the door of the spaceship. Professor Jameson sprang forward to bar the way. 149Z-24 was before him, however, and came to grips with the professor before he could reach the egress and prevent 305N-56 from leaving the craft. The machine man appeared to execute the act by no volition of his own, and Professor Jameson knew it to be another prompting of the hypnotic menace.

"Leap!" continued 149Z-24. "The only way!"

305N-56 moved to the spaceship door, flinging it open. Had it been in the fore of the craft the onrushing atmosphere would have smashed him backward like a feather to the far end of the room, but the egress was in the rear. Without another thought impression, 305N-56 leaped out into the deep blue sunlight and was gone. Eagerly following suit, 25X-987 and 8B-52 moved toward the opening.

"Don't!" warned the professor in vain, madly attempting to struggle from the tentacled deadlock of 149Z-24. "You are crazy!"

A sickening feeling obsessed the professor as the two machine men jumped. 149Z-24 now said nothing, and the professor perceived that his mind was in a chaos of terrible resolves. The professor knew that he was viewing the destructive thought impulses of the flying phantoms. He no longer sought to check his companions' mad intentions, knowing full well that it was useless. Helplessly he looked on as 69B-496 and 372V-22 took the fatal leap.

And now 149Z-24 released the professor suddenly and backed away. Was he about to leap too? Then into the mind of the mentally deranged Zorome Professor Jameson saw the horrible thought, the terrible command from the other dimension, come slowly stealing:

"Death to 21MM392!"

The professor faltered and backed away from the machine man who stood dazedly before him. The open door clanged dismally while the screaming wind still shrieked gloomily. The depressing sunlight of the blue sun spread a melancholy azure glow into the interplanetary craft.

With the quickness of a cat, 149Z-24 grasped a heavy metal bar behind him and rushed down upon the unprotected 21MM392 to crush his metal skull.

Professor Jameson, the instincts of self-preservation still dominant in his clear-thinking mind, slumped forward as the crazed machine man struck. Two quick actions occurred simultaneously. As the heavy metal bar missed the ducked head of Professor Jameson and placed a great dent upon his metal cubed body, the latter's tentacles closed quickly about 149Z-24's jointed legs and lifted him off the floor.

Staggering to the opening of the spaceship, the professor hurled the metal body of 149Z-24 down upon the great planet which was spinning dizzily past below them.

Professor Jameson made his way to the fore of the craft after having closed the door, and now he gazed out to see what lay ahead of him. The space flyer raced along, apparently on a horizontal position with the planet, its broken, uncontrolled propulsion mechanism running wild, but the professor knew that the distance between the spaceship and the planet was gradually closing.

He was the last of the Zoromes, spared but for a short interval following the fate of his machine comrades. He would soon crash to his death with the spaceship.

Contrary to the assertion of 305N-56 that the space flyer would double and redouble its speed until the friction of the air burned it up, the interplanetary craft from Zor did nothing of the kind. Though the friction with the atmosphere had produced an unusual warmth within the interior, the speed of the ship had failed to rise above a certain maximum. This was due to the solidity of the air, which did not allow the tremendous velocities attained in free space.

Far ahead of him, Professor Jameson perceived a dull, pink-

ish glow lighting up the distant skyline in the direction the spaceship was headed. The blue sun was sinking below the horizon, and the inky blackness of night hovered near as the unpiloted space flyer catapulted onward at such a remarkable speed for terrestrial travel.

The far-off pink glow the professor had discerned upon the horizon in the azure dusk had now mounted to alarming proportions, spreading a red, lurid flare up into the sky. It was a long way off. Rapidly the spacecraft ate up the distance, and in the complete darkness which had now fallen the professor saw the red, angry flare to be a tremendous holocaust leaping skyward from the bowels of the planet.

Great scarlet tongues of flame licked upward angrily for many miles from the terrible inferno the uncontrolled spaceship now recklessly approached. Huge fragments of rock many times the size of the spacecraft, along with red spurts of fountainous lava, vomited skyward. It was such a volcano as human imagination could never conceive in its actual picture. The vastness of the awesome display and the boundless magnitude of the spectacle lent the impression that a ravaging eternal fire was about to consume the entire world. It was a vision far beyond the conception of Dante, beside which his inferno would have appeared belittled by the contrast.

Into this hell of upcast molten rock and seething flame the spaceship of Zor careened in its mad flight. It contained the solitary machine man, 21MM392, known previously to the men of the Earth as Professor Jameson. As the spaceship raced into the first ring of smoke and flame, the professor realized that here was a dramatic climax to his equally dramatic career. He would be burned into gas, and the residue of his body and of the spacecraft would be converted into lava. The crash of the ship of space would occur in a swirling lake of living fire, or else a hurtling boulder cast out by the tremendous fury of the perpetual flame and seething activity would crush the spaceship in flight.

Professor Jameson, the last Zorome of the ill-fated expedition, awaited his end with a patience born of martyrdom and philosophy. He had been a martyr to science in his Earthly

life, and among the Zoromes he had become a confirmed philosopher. Death offered no terrors to him. It was life's greatest adventure, if, however, a bit mysterious and menacing. But what could constitute adventure without mystery or menace of some description?

The hell of the raging conflagration enveloped him, and produced a roaring as if all the elements of the Universe were unloosed at once. Red, raging flame licked hungrily about the speeding spaceship, and swirling smoke spread its murky haze around the ill-destined craft. Glowing rock debris and spattering, liquid fire showered the metal sides, while by a miracle the huge boulders missed the ship in its mad flight through the raging hell.

A dizziness and weakness assailed the mind of Professor Jameson within its metal skull. The terrific heat, which would have shriveled the body of a flesh and blood creature, killing it instantly, was now beginning to affect the metal machine man's brain a bit. The spaceship was intensely heated, parts of its metal shell glowing red. The skull of Professor Jameson was growing hot, and with a sudden lurch of dizzy senses, his consciousness departed and he knew no more. The professor's last sensation was that of being whirled rapidly over and over as the space flyer glanced from the side of a huge, smoldering, upflung rock and gyrated dizzily down into the lake of fire.

Why was it that Professor Jameson had eluded the sinister fate of his fellow Zoromes to succumb to the living fires? Why had his mind escaped the irresistible lure of the phantoms from the other world? The sagacity, wisdom and power of intellect of the Zoromes had outweighed his own in most respects—yet they had fallen before the hypnotic spell to which he had remained immune.

The truth of the enigma lay in the fact that Professor Jameson's mind, as 25X-987 had once remarked, was a great deal different from the gray matter of the machine men of Zor. In justice to the Zoromes, those wanderers of Cosmic space who had stored up the knowledge of millions of years,

let it be said that the hypnotic influence of the winged phantoms depended not upon the power of intellect. Their weird power of mind across the barrier of an invisible dimension exerted its influence through the susceptibility of the mind's structure.

Professor Jameson's brain structure was radically different from that of the Zoromes and the Tripeds, and as there was no harmonizing of his mind matter with that of the winged phantoms on the other place of existence, the professor had been immune to the fatal lure.

The professor attempted to compose his thoughts. His mind rolled sluggishly in a riot of confused mental pictures. He appeared to be drifting in an immense, unending blackness of eternal mystery. He groped—he sought about him, and found he had nothing to reach with, nothing with which to apply the sensation of touch. He scarcely knew whether or not he existed, and imagined himself merely a shadow among shadows, a bare hint of existence. Where was he—what had become of him? He wondered vaguely, but there was no manner in which to satiate his inquisitiveness. All was mystery.

For a long time he felt the presence of objects near him which he could not touch, and then out of the depth of blackness before him there shone a dull gray light. It grew slowly to gradually fill up his vision. The light whirled like a mammoth pinwheel and then slowed up, resolving itself into three spots of varicolored light surrounded by finer points of scattered brilliance. His blurred vision was clear once more, and he seemed a bit more conscious of himself. Something long and circular lay before him. Involuntarily he moved a bit, and the thing moved. It was a tentacle—his tentacle. Then he was not removed from the body—not dead even. But where was he?

His senses and thinking power now emerged from the state of temporary incapacity to function properly. He looked upon the other side of him, lifting the eyelid shutters of the eyes on that side of his head.

He saw the interior of the spaceship. Once more he

looked out through the transparent side of the interplanetary craft at the three comparatively large splotches of light he had previously seen so indistinctly. There were grouped close together.

Two of them were bright disc-like objects which shone against a velvety blackness, while the third object appeared as a semi-disc which glowed less brilliantly. Professor Jameson gave a gasp of incredulity. He was once more out in space, far from the planet of the double sun, which was represented by the half-circle of light. The two round objects were the double sun, one orb blue and the other orange.

How had he escaped the volcano's fiery depth into which the uncontrolled spaceship had madly rushed in its wild, unrestrained flight? The last thing he remembered, before his heat-disordered brain had given way to unconsciousness, was the terrific, glancing impact with the red-hot boulder cast from the blazing inferno's chaotic activity. A great indentation upon the side of the interstellar traveler mutely testified to the collision with the volcanic rock. And then the professor remembered that through the window of the spinning spaceship he had obtained a few fleeting glimpses of the white-hot lake of fire rushing up at him with incredible velocity.

What had happened? Had this final sight been the delusion of an overheated brain? Evidently the glancing blow dealt by the huge chunk of volcanic debris had driven the interplanetary ship back into space, where its uncontrolled speed had rapidly taken it from the vicinity of the planet. A plausible solution suddenly occurred to the professor. Possibly the lake of fire he had seen approaching, following the collision with the hurtling boulder, was but the reflected mirage of the lake's fiery surface upon the bank of lurid smoke clouds hovering far above the blazing holocaust. Suffice it to say, however, that he had been miraculously delivered from the hellish fate to which he had considered himself inevitably consigned.

He arose and made his way to the control room, where he glanced at the partially wrecked machinery. He found the

dials and consulted them, finding that the spaceship pursued a course around the double suns. The spaceship had become a satellite of the blue and orange suns even as the four planets which encircled the suns. Professor Jameson found that the orbit of the disabled spacecraft was midway between the first and second planets. The spaceship had long since ceased its own mad speed, making the professor wonder how long he had remained unconscious. For an Earthly day? Had it been a month, a year, or—or an age? It made little difference, for here in space, time was an unknown quantity, and when one is devoid of senses, time ceases to exist. The professor had no knowledge of how long he had remained unconscious and could calculate no approximate guess.

The spaceship's machinery was irreparably wrecked, and Professor Jameson was doomed to a solitary, lonely life of perpetual existence in his annual course around the double suns, enabled to watch at all times the various phases of the planet on which had occurred the death of his comrades. He was the last of the Zoromes, and the only escape from the monotony of the existence which lay before him was by suicide. The professor contemptuously shunned this expedient of release.

For over forty million years he had lain preserved in death within his rocket container, to be found and brought back to life by the Zoromes. And now he was consigned by the irony of fate to a similar existence, except that, this time, he was not bereft of life and the sensation of living. His was to be a perpetual life of loneliness, in trivial comparison with the life of a flesh and blood creature of any planet.

The stars and passing comets would be his only companions, silent ones of the cosmic Universe, and perhaps occasionally a passing meteor would flit its temporary greeting before continuing its aimless pilgrimage on into the realms of eternal mystery.

Would a spaceship from Zor ever chance that way sometime in the eonistic future to release him from his Cosmic prison? There were many of the machine men expeditions

scattered throughout space, but his disabled spacecraft represented the proverbial needle in the haystack, and the haystack but a solitary haystack among billions. It was a forlorn hope, with chances of a trillion to one. Better were the chances of a space expedition from one of the four planets of the double sun finding the wrecked space traveler.

Perhaps in the ensuing ages measured only in geological history, the simple forms of life upon these planets would rise through various progressive scales of evolution to an inevitable position of scientific prominence, where the art of space flying would be conquered. Then would the professor's eons of loneliness be abruptly ended, plunging him into a series of new and startling adventures?

Such a hope must lie far in the interminable future, and the fruits of such a hope were to be born only of an undying patience and a wonderful philosophy. Moodily, and in deep, meditative rumination, Professor Jameson, lost in the twisting labyrinth of his own thoughts, stared across the depths of vacuum to where there spun lazily in space the planet of the double sun.

THREE: THE RETURN OF THE TRIPEDS

I

A DERELICT OF SPACE

YEARS PASSED down the hallways of time and into the dim, eternal past. The wrecked spaceship containing its one, immortal passenger still pursued its lonesome orbit around the bi-luminaries between the first and second of the four planets of the double sun. It had been upon the first world, the planet nearest the double sun, where the lamentable extinction of Professor Jameson's companions had occurred.

Three diversions were left the professor to furnish him occupation. He mulled over the past, he contemplated the future, and his third, and perhaps most entertaining, diversion was the use of the powerful telescopes with which the spaceship was equipped. The telescopes represented a boon to him. With their lens, he examined all four of the planets, the supermagnifiers bringing into life-size semblance all details upon the first two worlds. The telescopes served to pass the time more quickly, and the professor was less mentally irked by the centuries of solitude he was forced to endure than might have been the case.

Time and again, Professor Jameson had attempted the futile task of repairing the wrecked machinery of the interplanetary craft. It was to no avail. The mechanism was wrecked, broken and beyond repair. The masters who had created it were dead, victims of the evil phantoms, driven to suicide and murder by hypnotic promptings of an irresistible, insidious nature.

Sleep the professor knew not. Sleep would have been a blessing, temporarily freeing his mind from the monotony of existence—the ceaseless existence which was his. But the machine men were not capable of sleep, and the professor was denied this respite. The machine men required no food. They had only to live and live and live. When a part of their metal body wore out, it was replaced.

If the professor was denied the oblivion of sleep, he was somewhat compensated by one of this three principal occupations which served as a substitute for sleep: deep introspective recollection. Clearly the professor's past life stood out before him—even to that initial life when he had been an Earthman, a flesh and blood creature. Recollection of the past was to him a soothing tonic, relaxing his mind into a coma, its nearest possible approach to sleep. Contemplation of the future, requiring more of a mental effort, seemed not so restful. But to dwell in the past—that was different.

Often the professor's thoughts would wander back to his old home in the little village of Grenville where he had been a studious scientist of meteorology. He had also experimented with radium, conducting his experiments in conjunction with his interest in rockets. The latter hobby had been responsible for his present condition. Otherwise his bones would have moldered to dust some forty millions of years past.

How uncanny it all seemed. Here in the wrecked spaceship of the Zoromes, many millions of light-years from his planet Earth, now a dying world, Professor Jameson looked back with amazing clarity upon the scenes of some forty million years ago. But then—most of that time he had been dead, his memories impressed indelibly upon his brain.

Within the remote chambers of his memory the professor

once more lived over his Earthly existence. He forgot his deplorable situation, forgetting that he was a machine man—immortal—known among his fellow Zoromes as 21MM392. Once more he was in a gay, throbbing world, his ears attuned to the laughter of sentient beings. He became oblivious to his solitude.

And so Professor Jameson dreamed away the centuries of his loneliness within the wrecked spaceship when he was not gazing through one of the telescopes. The latter were extremely invaluable to him. With them, he learned many things which served to render his position and future a lighter one in prospect.

An examination of the second planet had brought forth a startling discovery which careful watching later verified. The second planet was inhabited by the Tripeds. They represented a vast population living upon all sections of the globe. There were other creatures on this second planet, but the Tripeds dominated. The third and fourth planets were much too far away for minute details to be distinguished by means of the telescopes, and the professor was not certain as to their being inhabited.

Professor Jameson often pondered the inevitable question which had manifested itself on his discovery of the Tripeds. When he, 25X-987 and others of the machine men had found the Tripeds' bones in the canyon of the first planet, they had believed them to be the remains of the inhabitants of that world. There had been literally thousands of the bleached skeletons scattered in every direction. Then too, there had been the writing and pictures upon the canyon walls.

To which world did the Tripeds belong? Obviously they had made their trip across space in some interplanetary vehicle. This was another mystery which intrigued the professor. He was puzzled by the fact that he saw no spaceships upon the second planet. What other reason could there be except interplanetary navigation to explain the presence of the Tripeds' bones on the first planet and living Tripeds on the second? The professor discarded the idea as utterly impossible that two exactly similar races could have sprung up on

two separate worlds. His travels among the planets of the Universe with the Zoromes had taught him that such an occurrence represented the wildest and most remote possibility. Then why were there no spaceships? The professor merely shook his metal head and wondered.

By their magnificent cities, which Professor Jameson viewed through his telescopes, it was evident that the Tripeds were highly civilized and cultured. Two theories were entertained by the professor. One: the Tripeds' original home had been upon the first planet, but because of the menace of the phantoms they had journeyed to the second world. Two: the bones in the canyon of the first planet represented a colonizing expedition from the second planet. The professor was a bit inclined to favor the latter supposition.

Unknown to the Tripeds, the machine man watched them from far out in space. He also watched the shadowy forms flit about the first planet during the double sun's eclipses.

The professor had come to measure time by means of the spaceship's revolutions around its orbit, which circled the double suns midway between the first two planets. Each revolution he counted as a year. His year was a bit longer than that of the first planet. The second world's year was still longer than his own. Since the spaceship had been hurled up and away from the planet by the volcano, there had passed five hundred and seventy-one revolutions of his spacecraft around the double sun. Year in and year out, the professor watched the Tripeds and their civilization, a silent witness to all manner of events transpiring upon their world.

Occasionally he examined the first planet, the scene of his last adventures, but there was little to interest him on this world. The bones still lay in the canyon, the great volcano still erupted, and when the blue sun shone by itself upon any section of the first planet's oceans the water animals came out upon the rocks to voice their dismal wails.

Professor Jameson was not destined to remain in his lonely seclusion until his machine parts wore out and left him incapable of movement. Fate held a more active future for him. Of this the professor himself was positive, especially so

when one day upon the second planet he saw with his telescope an object for which he had vainly looked these many years. He saw a spaceship.

Had his machine body been possessed of a heart it would have beaten wildly. He watched the commotion and excitement about the huge object which he saw towed from a large building. That it was a spacecraft the professor was certain. It was no airship. The professor had seen the 'Tripeds' aircraft many times before.

Shifting the telescope's view to other sections of the planet, Professor Jameson saw similar spacecraft preparing for flight. Questions assailed him. Where were they bound? To the first planet—the third—or the fourth? Perhaps their telescopes had picked out his lonely, disabled spaceship? Why had he never seen these spaceships before in his telescopic travels over the second planet?

Enigma after enigma piled itself up within the professor's mind. All sorts of solutions presented themselves in a rapid whirl of conflicting possibilities. He must wait and watch—and in the meanwhile, conjecture.

Closely and constantly he watched the semicircle of light which marked the rotating globe. The region where he had seen the spaceships passed out of his sight, and as there seemed to be no activity upon the antipode which would point to an interplanetary venture, it was with a bit of impatience that Professor Jameson waited for the great ball to slowly turn upon its axis in a complete rotation.

When the second planet had once more rolled around into a position where his telescope disclosed the landscape he had viewed the previous day, he saw with surprise that the spaceships, with the exception of one, had gone. There had been eight; only one remained. Seven of the interplanetary ships had obviously embarked into space.

Where were they, and what was their prospective destination?

The professor sought them in the black, velvety depths of the cosmic void. They were doubtless in the vicinity of the second world of the double suns. After much searching with

the powerful telescopes, using first one and then the other, he discovered several tiny dots of light. The observing telescope, under the manipulation of the machine man, brought them to large size, revealing the sunlit sides of seven ships of space. He studied their route of travel. They were coming his way. Would they discover him?

But then, the first planet also lay in his general direction, and it was to this world they were probably bound.

The seven elongated cosmic flyers were apparently headed for the first planet. Unceasingly the professor watched them, and saw the spacecraft approach nearer and nearer as many rotations of the second world transpired. They had been many days upon their journey already. How slow their progress in comparison to the speed of a spaceship of Zor! As they came nearer, his hopes and fears rose. Would they discover his ship and release him from his plight? Were they possessed of sufficiently powerful telescopes to pick out his disabled spacecraft?

The supreme moment upon which the professor had gambled his hopes finally came. The Triped interstellar expedition was now at a point which would designate whether their attentions were focused upon the first planet or his helpless spaceship. Anxiously he waited and watched. His anxiety gradually resolved itself into apprehension, and from apprehension to dismay. At several thousand miles' distance, they passed him and continued on in the direction of the first planet.

Relaxing his patient vigil, he left the telescope in disappointment. He held one consolation, however. Sooner or later, he believed, they would find him. It seemed inevitable now that they had taken to space navigation. For a long time he gloomily contemplated the wrecked mechanism in the control room. After a while the professor turned once again to the telescope to note the position of the spaceships from the second world. He was surprised. Where there had been seven he now saw only six. Where was the other one? He looked sharper. Perhaps it lay behind one of the others. No, he concluded after a more careful examination, there were

but six. Where was the seventh? He swung the telescope slowly about in search of it. A magnified spaceship presently engulfed his field of vision, surprising him with its sudden appearance. It was the missing craft, and loomed up large in his sight. It was headed straight for his wrecked ship!

So they had seen the derelict of space after all. And they were coming to satisfy their curiosity. Not all of them. Only one came to investigate, intent on joining its companions later.

For the first time since that far gone day when he had been vomited from out the volcano's lake of fire in the wildly careening spaceship, Professor Jameson experienced a bit of excitement. The Tripeds were coming to investigate his mysterious craft, now a satellite of the double sun! What would they do? Especially when they learned that the mysterious craft held an equally mysterious occupant? What would be their attitude and conduct toward him? The machine man wondered, fully alert to cope with any situation which might arise. He hoped for the best.

The longest moments of his life were those consumed between the moment he discovered the solitary ship of the Tripeds approaching him and its arrival alongside the derelict of the Zoromes.

Certain sections of the disabled spaceship were transparent, and the machine man walked before these full in sight of the other craft to reveal to the Tripeds that the derelict held a living creature. How could he communicate with them, he wondered, now that they knew him to be within the lonely spacecraft? He pondered the question a moment before reaching a decision. He would try mental telepathy. He was uncertain concerning the receptive abilities of the Tripeds, but he could try. He knew they used a sound speech, for he had often watched them talk while viewing the second planet through one of his telescopes. He put forth a strong mental suggestion:

"I am a friend."

He waited a moment and then repeated the suggestion many times.

"I am a friend."

He waited. Then:

"Do you get my message? Do you understand?" He paused. "If so, let me know by maneuvering your spaceship to the other side of mine."

Professor Jameson waited patiently and expectantly for some sign which would reveal success in his efforts at communication. For a moment nothing occurred. The professor became doubtful. Then the Triped ship swung around in front of the derelict. They had received and understood his telepathic request. He waited for an answer. Hearing none, he realized the Tripeds' inability to respond by thought projection. He believed that were he to see them, he might read their minds.

II

RESCUED FROM ETERNITY

"MY SHIP'S MECHANISM is destroyed," he told them. "Tow me to the planet where you are going."

The professor had no idea as to how they would accomplish this, but left the details to their ingenuity. He was surprised to witness the alacrity and capability with which they handled the situation. The Tripeds shifted their spacecraft back and forth before the cosmic derelict until finally they appeared satisfied with the relative positions of the two. From the ship of the Tripeds there projected a long cylinder ending in a broad metal ring. It touched the side of the wrecked spaceship and clung. The Triped craft moved away with the salvaged derelict, which was locked into contact with the cylindrical shaft by magnetism.

The Tripeds' space flyers had been equipped with these

appliances in the event of an emergency. They were capable of exerting a strong magnetic attraction, and were for the relief of one of their space craft should it become disabled, necessitating its being towed.

Exultation possessed Professor Jameson as he felt the Tripeds' spaceship tear his wrecked craft from the orbit to which it had clung so long, carrying it towards the six distant space flyers which continued on their way to the first planet at a reduced speed. They rapidly overtook the six spaceships. Curious eyes watched the strange machine man who stood in plain view behind the transparent facing of his craft. Little did they guess that for many generations this weird metal man from another world and a far gone past had watched them and their ancestors.

Once more the bevy of spacecraft swept onward through the dark, cosmic void towards the first planet of the bi-colored suns. Bright lights from the seven ships of the Tripeds shone full upon the wrecked craft, which one of their number towed behind it. The black of space was replaced by a soft suffusion of glow which gradually grew brighter as they penetrated the ocean of atmosphere surrounding the planet.

Once more the bevy of spacecraft swept onward through the innermost planet of the double sun. Before, it had carried fifty-one machine men where now there was but one. Once more Professor Jameson gazed upon the unrivaled splendor of beauty limned in double colors of harmonizing blue and orange. But the machine man knew this elegance to be but a mockery. A sinister influence lurked invisible upon this strange world, ready to wreak havoc upon all living creatures, threatening death and disaster. The indescribable beauty of the planet represented a veritable siren of death.

Professor Jameson was anxious to communicate with the Tripeds. The spaceship had no more than landed when he opened the door and sprang out. He felt he must warn them at once of the frightful menace of the phantoms who would exercise their insidious powers when the orange sun sank below the horizon, leaving its blue contemporary to shine

alone. Perhaps they already knew of the phantoms. He would soon find out, he hoped.

Slowly the door in one of the spaceships opened, and a strange three-legged creature walked out. Professor Jameson obtained his first view of a living Triped at close range. The creature possessed three legs and three arms. The spherical body was surmounted by an oblong head equipped with three eyes arranged in triangular fashion. The general color of the Triped was red.

As Triped and Zorome surveyed one another in surprise and curious regard, the Triped being the more amazed of the two, the rest of the Tripeds emerged from their spaceships. To Professor Jameson's mechanical senses of hearing there came a low, gibbering chant of syllables as the Tripeds conversed among themselves. The machine man watched them closely, finding to his satisfaction that he could read their thoughts easily.

The professor made a mental inquiry:

"Why did you come here?"

This was instantly answered by a concerted bedlam of sound as the conversation waxed hot. One of the Tripeds, evidently a leader, stepped forward. Like the rest of the Tripeds, he was without clothing of any sort, but around his neck the red color of his rough skin was marked with green spots. He jabbered for a moment at the machine man, pointing upward occasionally to the two solar spheres. The professor paid no attention to his words. They were incomprehensible. He studied the Triped's mind. It was a bit confusing. The thoughts of the three-legged creature were a whirling chaos. Evidently he was explaining something—perhaps asking questions too.

If the Triped would only cease talking and concentrate upon whatever he wished the machine man to know, he would be understood, Professor Jameson believed. He told him as much.

"I know not your language. Tell me in your mind what you would say."

The Triped resorted to this medium of exchange of

thoughts. His efforts met with success. Translated to words, their conversation would have run like this:

"Where do you come from, metal man?"

"I came with a space expedition from a far-off planet of another sun. We landed upon this planet. When the blue sun shone alone, strange hummings and wailings drove my fifty comrades to kill one another and commit suicide. What are you here for? What relation do you bear to the bones we found scattered about the planet? They resemble your people."

"They are our people," replied the Triped. "They were killed even as your comrades died."

"Did you live here originally?"

"No. The bones you saw were those of a colonizing expedition. For a long time the members of the expedition resisted the phantoms, but they finally succumbed one by one. The second planet is our original home. Seven hundred years have passed since the great catastrophe occurred upon this world."

"Seven hundred years—the years of this planet, or your own world."

"Our own world."

"What is the length of your lives?"

"An average of two hundred and fifty years."

"This happened nearly three generations ago?"

"Yes."

"It has been well over four hundred of your years since we visited this world, and nearly eight hundred of this planet's years. My friends were all killed."

"As long ago as that?" the Triped queried, plainly astounded by the machine man's statement. "Don't you ever die?"

"Machine men never die unless their brains are injured or destroyed," replied Professor Jameson. "Otherwise, we machine men are immortal."

"Your spaceship was discovered a hundred and fifty years ago by one of our astronomers. At first it was overlooked as

merely a large meteor, and no attention was paid to it. What happened to your ship?"

The professor then told his entire story, beginning with his departure from the Earth in a rocket containing his dead body. He told of the Zoromes, and how he had become one of them himself, explaining that once he too had been a flesh and blood creature like the Tripeds, though dissimilar to them in form. He elucidated to them the manner in which his companions had all met their deaths, and how he had narrowly escaped a fiery finish in the tremendous holocaust of the great volcano, his wrecked spaceship being thrown out between the two worlds to become a satellite of the double sun.

"It is wonderfull" exclaimed the Triped.

The entire group of creatures sat silent, taking in the thought transmissions of Professor Jameson.

"Why did you wait seven hundred years before returning?" asked the professor. "Didn't you use spacecraft during all that time?"

"That is a story by itself," explained the Triped, whose name the professor later learned was Grg. "Briefly, it is this: Our expedition to this planet was the second of our initial trips following our conquest of space and a realization of the ability to journey to other planets in our system. Living on the second planet," (here the Triped gave voice to a name which sounded to the professor like Grvdlen) "we first of all explored our moons and the nearer planets. We found the third planet (Uzblt) devoid of all life. Here upon Trulfk we found, even as you machine men discovered, a beautiful world. We have never been to the fourth and last world of our system, Lkpfud."

"This fourth world is far out in space, I observe," commented the professor. "You dared not journey that far?"

"Not until we felt we were more experienced," continued Grg. "As our planet was overcrowded, and this one offered such an enticing existence, we decided to move a large fraction of our population here. We did. What you found in that canyon represents a good example of what happened.

As I say, for a long time we resisted these hypnotic promptings, putting up a hard, determined fight. It was no use. We finally discovered these malignant creatures to be within a different dimension and out of our reach. What remnant of our forces there were left flew back across space once more to Grvdlén."

In rapt attention, the professor followed the story of Grg, the Triped. Now he interrupted:

"And since the exodus from Trulfk to Grvdlén, this is your first trip?"

"Yes," replied Grg. "Even as strange as it may seem, this is the first time in seven hundred years we have made a venture into space."

"Why?"

"Because when our forces came back from Trulfk they found the home world in a chaos of civil war. The spaceships were destroyed by the radicals along with other public equipment. The radicals were triumphant, but their reign ended in anarchy, ruin and disorder. Our scientific progress degenerated. Only lately have we built up our civilization to a standard where we rediscovered the principles of space navigation and built spacecraft once more."

"I watched through many long years of your gradual rebuilding of civilization," stated Professor Jameson. "Of course, I did not understand a great deal of what I saw."

"You watched us?" queried Grg.

"The spaceship of the Zoromes is equipped with powerful telescopes. For more than five hundred years I have watched your progress."

"It must have been interesting."

"Though lonely," added the machine man. "Until I saw your thriving world and associated your people with the bones in the canyon, I believed myself doomed to eternal solitude within my wrecked space flyer. When I saw your civilization upon the second planet, I believed that sometime you would come and find me."

"Your beliefs were not ill founded," said Grg. "For a long time we have seen through our telescopes your spaceship

traveling upon its orbit, but we scarcely believed it to contain anything living."

"I have not yet asked you why you have come back to this first planet," said Professor Jameson. "Don't you fear the phantoms?"

"Not now!"

"Why so?"

"We are prepared! Our mission is one of vengeance!"

"Upon the phantoms?"

"Yes!"

"But they are intangible—inaccessible."

"Not to us now," said Grg with confidence. "We are going to rid this planet of their hideous presence. Then we shall colonize it once more."

"But how can you come into actual grips with them?" asked the professor. "Our destroying ray did no good in achieving that purpose, and our ray will disintegrate any known element."

"We shall enter their dimension and destroy them!" exclaimed Grg.

The professor gasped.

"Enter their dimension?"

"Yes!"

"Have you discovered a way?"

"We have!"

"But what of their hypnotic powers? Will they not kill you off even as those who came before you died?"

"We have provided against that," stated Grg. He turned to a subordinate and spoke a few words, and again addressed the machine man. "I shall demonstrate to you."

The subordinate returned with a queer headgear which Grg placed upon his head. A strap went in under his chin. From the top of the strange looking hat projected four glistening knobs coated with an iridescent metal.

"We are all equipped with these hypnotic nullifiers, or mind protectors," said Grg, "and the hypnotic forces of the phantoms" (here Grg, gave voice to a sound which described the phantom bird folk of the invisible dimension as *Emkls*)

"will have no effect upon us whatever. We have equipment which will send us into the Emkls' dimension, and then we shall kill them off."

"But it will be an unknown world," argued Professor Jameson, "and you know not what dangers may beset your path."

"Nevertheless, we'll chance it!" stated Glrg adamantly. "We shall have revenge upon these accursed devils, and rid this otherwise beautiful world of their evil scourge!"

Some of the fires of Glrg's vengeful feelings reached Professor Jameson. He visualized, as he had visualized many times during his solitude within the spaceship, his friends, the Zoromes, succumbing to the vicious lure of the Emkls. Once again he saw his companion, 25X-987, taking the fatal leap; he remembered how 149Z-24 had frantically sought to kill him; he recollected how many more of the Zoromes had either taken off their heads and smashed them down into the canyons or else leaped into the chasms headfirst. Now that it lay within his power, he too was inspired with revenge—a cold calculating revenge, however.

"May I go with you?" he asked.

"Of course—if your metal body will undergo the transition."

"Good," stated the machine man. "I, too, have a personal score to settle with these Emkls."

He looked upward to where the suns shone benignly upon the world of Trulfk.

"You will soon have an opportunity to test your hypnotic nullifiers," he informed the Tripeds. "Look."

The three-legged inhabitants of Grvdlén followed the direction of the machine man's waving tentacle with their triangularly arranged eyes. The orange sun neared the skyline. It would soon vanish beneath the horizon.

Professor Jameson now listened to the excited conversations of the Tripeds, which he did not understand. In and out of the spacecraft they scurried, donning the mind protectors which would render them impregnable to the urgings of the hellish creatures they were unable to see. The orange sun's burnished disc sank out of sight beyond the distant hills. In

the deep blue light there now stole over the group a depressing mood of ill-omened fatalism.

"We have no paraphernalia to protect you," stated Grg to Professor Jameson. "I shall be glad to protect you by locking you in one of the spaceships with several of the crew, however."

"I need no protection," replied the machine man. "In brain structure I am as unlike the Zoromes as they were unlike you. The Emkls do not represent a menace to me no matter how hard they try. That has been proved."

A low humming drone sang upon the air. The Tripeds commenced to chatter among themselves excitedly.

"Silence!" ordered Grg.

The humming grew in volume. Now it was punctuated by a sad, drawn-out wail. The Tripeds and the machine man waited, watching one another to see whether or not any hypnotic effect was registered among them.

"We must make this a thorough test," said Grg. "Free your minds of any resistance. Leave them open to suggestion. We must be assured of our headgear's invulnerability."

The rest of the Tripeds immediately complied with their leader's suggestion, patiently waiting. The humming became more intense and sustained, the wails shrieking down among the expedition from Grvdlén, the weird calls becoming more insistent.

"I wonder if they see us," mused Professor Jameson. "I've often wondered whether or not they possessed this faculty during the sole reign of the blue sun."

"I believe they do," opined Grg. "It is handed down among the Tripeds that the Emkls really do see this dimension during the period of blue sunlight, though no one ever knew for sure."

All during the reign of the blue sun up until the shroud of darkness settled over Trulfk the Tripeds sat and waited patiently to discover the qualities of their mind protectors. Grg appeared satisfied.

"They are a success," he concluded.

Professor Jameson was taken into the various spaceships

and shown the equipment which the Tripeds had brought from their world to carry into combat against the Emkls.

"Are you sure the Tripeds will be able to return from the dimension of the Emkls as easily as they go?"

"Yes," replied Grg. "All that is necessary to effect a return is to reverse the action of the mechanism in our transition cube. Half of us will remain here. The rest will enter into the world of the Emkls."

"Will there be communication back and forth?"

"No," replied the Triped. "All communications will be cut off."

For several days Professor Jameson roamed the planet of the double sun with his new-found acquaintances, the Tripeds. Once more they viewed the mute bones of their three-legged predecessors. They also found wrecked and twisted parts of metal belonging to the Zoromes. During this time, the Tripeds made their plans and prepared for an entrance into the other dimension, the habitat of the sinister Emkls. The day finally arrived when all preparations were completed.

Professor Jameson, with his three-legged companions, stood before a huge, cubic compartment of transparent material through which the two suns spread their blue and orange rays.

"The air has been pumped from the chamber," announced Grg.

By this time, the professor had learned the rudiments of their speech, and was enabled to understand them both from mental and physical standpoints.

"Are you still insistent in your desire to accompany half of our expedition into the other dimension?" inquired Grg of the machine man.

"I am," replied Professor Jameson. "I shall do everything within my power to further your ends and aid those who go with me."

"Very well," said Grg. "You will enter the chamber."

The machine man and forty-two of the Tripeds entered

the compartment's airlock. The Tripeds all wore atmosphere masks supplied with the vital gases of respiration from small tanks worn on their backs. Professor Jameson, whose metal body required no air for bodily sustenance, was without this equipment. He carried, however, one of the ray guns from the wrecked spaceship of Zor. This, he believed, would come in handy.

III

THE TRANSITION CUBE

THE AIR WAS withdrawn from the airlock, leaving the machine man and his three-legged allies in a vacuum. Through the transparent sides of the hollow cube they saw the balance of the Tripeds watching them in anticipation of their disappearance into the invisible dimension.

From several discs at the far end of the chamber, weird lights of a blue-green intensity were thrown over the assemblage within the cube. To the eyes of those about to be transported to another world, the forms of those outside became vaguer and less sharp of outline and detail. The Tripeds about the professor seemed to assume vivid green hues of varying shades. The sides of the cube were no longer transparent—in fact, they were no longer visible. They had become lost in the heavy blue-green haze. The transition to the other dimension was having a curious and alarming effect upon the Tripeds, the machine man observed. They were staggering about wildly and falling over one another, slumping downward out of sight to rise no more. He lost sight of them in the heavy green luminescence. He saw them disappearing around him one by one. It was not a case of fading from sight. They merely dropped out of sight below the level

of his feet somewhere, as if the bottom of the cube had opened to swallow them.

He dropped downward, reaching—ever reaching. His metal tentacles encountered the glazed surface of the cube's interior. For what seemed a long time, the professor stood there in this manner. The Tripeds who had accompanied him within the cube had all disappeared. Where were they? What had become of them?

Had he been transported to the world of the Emkls, leaving his three-legged companions behind—or was he the one who had been left behind? As he ruminated upon the question, one of his roving metal tentacles brushed in contact with an object which rattled and scraped against the floor on which he stood. He brought it forth from out of the green haze to discern its identity. Within the curls of his tentacles he saw the object to be a Triped's air mask.

The machine man took several steps in the direction where he knew the nearest wall lay. His metal limbs stumbled over several more objects. He picked them up, finding more air masks, mind protectors and other articles either worn or else carried by the Tripeds on their expedition into the dimension of the Emkls.

Suddenly, without warning, the blue-green haze disappeared, and the professor found himself gazing through the transparent sides of the cube once more. Outside thronged the Tripeds, those of the expedition who had been left behind. Within the cube, Professor Jameson found himself alone, alone except for the variety of objects scattered about the floor of the transition cube. His forty-two companions were gone. They were obviously in the other dimension. Why had the cube failed to send him with them?

Gazing in stupefaction at the array of articles upon the floor, the solution of the mystery presented itself to him. The articles left behind by the Tripeds in their transition into the invisible dimension included everything of metal which they had either worn or else carried. There were metal weapons, air masks, hypnotic nullifiers, trappings and ornaments. The

machine man even saw a metal ring which he recollected as having seen around the neck of a Triped.

Meanwhile, as he watched the surprised Tripeds crowding about outside the metal cube and staring in at him, he heard the hiss of air as it entered the chamber. The door was opened and he walked out through the airlock. Instantly he was assailed by a multitude of queries from the excited Tripeds, who jostled about him in intense excitement and fearful anticipation.

"Where are they?"

"Are they dead?"

"What happened?"

"See—their air masks have all been left behind!"

Grg came to his rescue, silencing the Tripeds and commanding order. When comparative quiet reigned, Professor Jameson essayed an explanation. The Tripeds strained their mental faculties to receive his rapid telepathic thoughts as he related the occurrence within the cube.

"The green haze spread over us—the walls became invisible—we could see you no longer! My companions began dropping out of sight into the floor one by one! Vrazr, at my elbow, was the first to go! Then they were all gone, leaving everything of metal, including myself!"

"They are in the other dimension!" shouted one of the Tripeds in excitement.

"Unarmed and without air masks!" cried Grg in anxiety, realizing the danger in which his departed companions stood.

"Perhaps the atmosphere of the other world is like that of this dimension!" offered the professor.

"A possibility of which we are not sure!" exclaimed Grg.

"The metal!" shouted Brlx, chief operator of the transition cube. "Why didn't the metal enter the other world with them?"

"Because it is apparent your machine is not capable of transferring metal to the other dimension," stated the machine man. "Inorganic material does not respond to its forces."

Another of the Tripeds hurried to the side of Brlx.

"May I suggest that we did not use a sufficient intensity

of the rays? Metal is a great deal denser than material born of organic origin."

"It appears plausible," agreed Brlx. "We shall try again!"

"Are you willing to try again?" asked Grlg of the machine man.

"Certainly," agreed the professor.

The machine man reëntered the cube. The air was once more pumped out, and as before the blue-green rays sprang from out of the several discs to envelop the machine man in a heavy haze. This time it increased to such an intensity as to make invisible the machine man's tentacle before his very eyes.

Professor Jameson's senses reeled, and desperately, but in vain, he attempted to maintain a hold over his faculties. His brain rolled into oblivion, and his final thought was a truly terrifying one. It suddenly occurred to him that he stood in danger of being deprived of his brain, which, after all, was of organic origin, leaving his useless metal body in one dimension while his equally helpless brain progressed to another. With fear clutching at him, the professor knew no more.

When his senses returned, they were accompanied by the sensation of a short fall. His metal body appeared racked by a severe jolt. The intense, blue-green mist had now faded to a blue translucence through which the professor commenced to dimly perceive objects which fell at his feet with distinct thuds. The machine man instinctively guessed that he was now in the dimension of the phantom bird folk. As his senses became clearer, he saw that the objects which had apparently materialized about his head and had fallen to his feet were the metal accouterments of the Tripeds which they had previously left behind them.

The professor looked about him. He stood on a hillside. Above, a blue sun beat down its azure rays. The orange sun was nowhere in sight, evidently invisible to this blue dimension. He looked for his friends. Their recumbent forms, twisted in various poses upon the sward, rested where they had fallen. Instantly the phenomenon of the Tripeds dropping through the floor of the cube, his own experience of falling

a short distance, and the materialization and fall of the metal equipment were all solved. The surface of the blue dimension at this point was slightly lower than that of the other world.

It was a contingency which neither the Tripeds nor Professor Jameson had anticipated. The machine man disliked dwelling upon the possibilities offered had the surface of the blue dimension been far enough below that of the orange and blue dimension to have incurred a destructive fall. On the other hand, had the conditions been vice versa, in all probability he would have found himself buried beneath tons of the planet's strata.

The professor was aroused from his meditations regarding the dissimilarities of these respective spheres of existence by a horrible sight which met his wandering gaze. A hideous monster on two stilt-like legs was carrying off the body of a Triped. Others of the tall creatures were approaching from out of the distance in long strides. The long legs were surmounted by grotesque, fuzzy bodies all out of proportion to the long, thin legs which upheld them. The body resembled a spider's except that it had no visible head. Indeed, the machine man could see no eyes—only two waving antennae which sprang upward from the fuzzy, round body. Two long claws situated midway between the walking appendages clutched the senseless, perhaps dead, Triped in a firm embrace.

Swiftly the machine man raced after the weird creature—only to meet with a sudden, startling reversal. On coming close beneath the animal, which, though smaller of body, towered over him, a well directed kick of the creature's long leg bowled him over. The fuzzy monster then attempted an escape, but with amazing alacrity the machine man wrapped a tentacle about one of the stilt-like legs. It was a firm hold which his adversary could not break, and Professor Jameson felt himself dragged across the ground. Two more of the monstrosities joined the first. Evidently they were coming to reinforce their companion, but the professor feared them not. He appreciated the invulnerable qualities of the

machine body which was his, and realized that it would take many more than three of the strange animals to subdue him. What he did fear however, was the possibility of their getting away with their prey, Snrpd, the Triped.

As the two newcomers joined their companion, a surprising occurrence took place. Professor Jameson looked for some sort of an attack. There was none. Instead, the machine man witnessed as unexpected a situation as had ever occurred in his long life of adventure and exploration with the machine men of Zor.

The long legs of the creature to which he clung dropped off as the fuzzy animal transferred his inert burden to one companion and leaped upon the back of another. The machine man held within his grasp the elongated limb of the creature as he watched the three scurry off in long strides toward a distant forest, his late adversary clinging to the back of a companion. The third creature carried the helpless Snrpd.

Professor Jameson wasted no time, but hastily he turned to the spot where he had first seen the light of this blue dimension. He sought for and found the object he desired. It was the ray gun. Swiftly he raised it, pressing the butt. From it there leaped through the blue sunlight a dull red glow. Cautiously, so as not to touch the Triped, he directed the destroying light upon Snrpd's abductors. The one bearing Snrpd fell in his tracks, releasing the unfortunate Triped. The one bearing the other on his back had his legs cut from under him. As before, the creature immediately abandoned the stumps, and the one on his back released its hold. Each one attempted scurrying off at a slow, awkward gait. Professor Jameson relentlessly dispatched them, hurrying forward to where they lay.

To his increasing surprise, he found that the long limbs from which the fuzzy animals became independent at will were not a part of the creature at all. They were artificial limbs employed as stilts. Evidently the creatures were of some intelligence.

He hastened to the side of Snrpd, examining him carefully. Professor Jameson was glad to find the Triped alive,

though unconscious. If he lived, then of course the rest did. Upon the heels of this thought came a hail from behind the professor. Turning, he found Clbg rising weakly to his feet and calling to the machine man. Others of the Tripeds were stirring and attempting to rise to their three legs, evidently experiencing some difficulty in doing so.

"How do you feel?" asked the professor. "Are you quite all right?"

"I feel dizzy and weak," explained Clbg as he essayed to stand upon his feet.

"How do your lungs react to the air here?" inquired the machine man anxiously. "Can you continue to breathe this atmosphere safely?"

"My lungs appear to be functioning without any added effort," replied the Triped. "The air has a vague, sweet odor. It is strange. My limbs seem cramped as if I had fallen."

"You did fall," stated the machine man.

"I did?" queried Clbg in surprise. "From where?"

"From the other world." And the professor went on to explain the slight difference in elevations of the two dimensions at this point.

The remainder of the Tripeds collected around Clbg and Professor Jameson. Soon, Snrpd, unaware of the recent crisis in which he had been a principal figure, came limping over to the group. In turn, the machine man questioned them all concerning physical reactions following the transition to the blue dimension. He then related to them how it had taken two attempts on the part of Brlx to send him and the Triped's mental accouterments into the world of azure sunlight. He also pointed to the remains of the three fuzzy stilt walkers some distance away, relating the episode concerning the capture of Snrpd.

A humming drone broke in upon their conversation. There followed a piercing wail.

"The Emkls!" shouted a Triped warningly.

"Your hypnotic nullifiers!" shouted the professor above the rising tide of excitement. "Put them on!"

In mad haste the Tripeds donned their protective para-

phernalia, which lay scattered over the nearby turf. From the headgear of each Triped there glistened four knobs of oddly changing colors.

The Tripeds gripped their strange weapons which the machine man had seen them use so effectively time and again within the last few days prior to their entrance into the blue dimension. The guns used charges of energy as ammunition. When one of these charges hit an object, the latter exploded.

From down out of the sky there soared fully a score of the huge birdlike creatures on their leathern wings. They reminded Professor Jameson of bats. They resembled them somewhat in certain particulars.

"Don't shoot at them until they fly low about us," admonished the machine man. "Then we'll get them all."

Patiently they waited. The phantom creatures were no longer phantoms. They represented grim reality. Their figures showed up clear and black against the azure sky. With dismal wails and a constant humming, they circled the group of explorers and avengers from the world of the orange and blue suns. Within their cryptic wails, Professor Jameson sensed vaguely the insistent urging they were exerting upon these bold invaders who had so rashly penetrated the fastness of their hitherto inaccessible domain.

The Emkls flew lower and lower, apparently surprised at the futility of their initial efforts at breaking the morale of these three-legged animals and their metal companion. The hypnotic promptings were failing to accomplish their object. The insidious Emkls circled lower, their great wings flapping dismally upon the air. Still Professor Jameson abstained from giving the command to annihilate these malignant creatures.

Finally, one of their number separated itself from the group and swooped downward over their heads. With a terrifying wail bordering upon a scream, it passed above them a short distance. Another and still another of the Emkls followed the initiative of the first. Clearly the professor discerned the blank, staring eyes set in the hideous, round heads. The entire horde of some twenty Emkls now flapped

downward about the heads of the Tripeds. Professor Jameson gave the order to attack.

From the weapons of the Tripeds there burst forth a series of shots into the onrushing Emkls. Pandemonium reigned as the shots took effect. The wails and humming turned to screeches of pain and rage which were silenced as explosion after explosion exterminated the Emkls. They were literally blown to pieces. The few survivors strove to escape the devastating weapons of the Tripeds.

Previously, the Emkls had been all-triumphant. Secure in their own dimension, intangible to the creatures of the other dimension, they destroyed the latter at will by hypnotism. They had come to take their strange powers and invulnerability for granted. Safe from attack, lords of all living beings in their own world, they had never dreamed of danger to themselves. Now it had come to them. They were no longer inaccessible to their enemies.

Four Emkls, rising ever higher in the air, wailed and screeched their way on wing above the invaders. From Professor Jameson's ray gun there shot a lurid glare which settled upon the lowest of the four escaping Emkls. Without another cry, half destroyed by the disintegrating qualities of the machine man's weapon, the creature plunged to the ground. The three remaining Emkls were now beyond range of the deadly weapons employed by both the machine man and the Tripeds. Their faint cries now dwindled away, and their specks became lost below the horizon.

"Our first taste of revenge!" shouted Dnkt.

"And sweet, too!" spoke Ravlt in elation.

"We'll kill their entire population!" said another.

"We must send someone back to report to Glrg and Brxl!" announced Snrpd.

"And bring back two airships," added Professor Jameson. "There is room for two within the cube if one side is opened for their entrance. Two will be sufficient for our needs at present."

Ravlt, in joint command with the machine man, picked two of the Tripeds to enter back into the dimension of the

other world to report their condition and bring back aircraft with which to carry on the fighting against the Emkls.

"We shall soon receive a signal from Brlx," stated the professor. "Prepare to send our messengers back at once."

"Dlb and Ldgz will go," said Ravlt.

"A platform must be built," informed Professor Jameson, "so that Dlb and Ldgz will be upon a level with the cube."

The platform was soon built, and the two Tripeds mounted it, waiting for the return to their own dimension. It had been previously arranged with Glrg and Brlx that at regular intervals the action of the transition cube would be reversed so as to afford periodic returns to the blue and orange dimension.

At the predetermined time, the invaders of the blue dimension witnessed a startling transformation about the two Tripeds who waited patiently upon the platform. The intense green hue of the cube surrounded them, gradually rendering their shapes fainter in outline until they eventually disappeared. Only a thick green haze of cubic dimension remained. Suddenly this too disappeared, leaving only the empty platform the Tripeds had built.

IV

AIR RAIDERS

THE TRIPEDS and the machine man saw no more of the Emkls or the fuzzy animals who employed stilts in their perambulations. In fact, none of the inhabitants of the blue dimension were seen since the departure of the Emkls to the time the blue sun sank to rest below the horizon.

Night reigned. Strange groups of stars which Professor

Jameson had never seen before came out to set the sky atwinkle. No nocturnal sounds disturbed the tranquility. All was silence.

In the midst of the darkness there suddenly shone a green cube whose brilliant hue increased, presenting an opaque wall of green against the night sky. The Tripeds jabbered excitedly. The professor knew that it heralded the return of Dlb and Ldgz with the aircraft. As the green light disappeared, there hung above them in the air two long, pointed airships ready for flight. The two Tripeds, Ldgz and Dlb, brought the ships gently to the ground.

The machine man and his three-legged companions waited patiently for the dawn. They would then cruise over this strange world to which they had been transported by the scientific sorcery of the transition cube. At last they had come to grips with the Emkls, those wraiths who had spread their hypnotic scourge across the portals separating two dimensions, the blue from the orange and blue.

"We are certain that one of our previous theories has been exploded," said Professor Jameson.

"And what is that?" asked Snrpd.

"The world of Trulfk from where we just came is not visible to us from this dimension as we had supposed."

"But the Emkls appear to encounter no difficulty in seeking us out."

"True," agreed the machine man. "The Emkls must be possessed of an occult sight akin to their hypnotic qualities which would enable them to look into the other dimension when the blue sun shines alone."

Dawn came with a blue, luminous flush of light. Then up above the skyline there rose the azure orb visible to both dimensions. Professor Jameson wondered whether or not the orange sun had risen. There was no way of telling, in view of the fact that the orange sun was invisible in this dimension.

"We are ready," announced Ravlt.

"Divide the forces, and man the ships," counseled Professor Jameson. "It is best that we be off at once. Let the two

ships remain together. We must not take the chance of becoming separated."

The final preparations were made and the two airships rose into the blue sky. The machine man stood in command of one while Ravlt commanded the other. Together, the two ships cruised out over the planet of the blue dimension. They signaled back and forth in regard to their route of travel, outstanding features of topography, the lighter density of the atmosphere in comparison to the air of Trulfk, and other topics.

The terrain over which they flew at a high altitude underwent no appreciable changes as they progressed. There were the same forests, hills, dales and occasional waterways. No life was visible. Not once did they see either of the two types of animals they knew to exist upon this world. Of course, they were unable to perceive what the dark, thick forests cloaked.

The machine man, peering far ahead of their course with a telescope, caught sight of a queer arrangement of dark mounds a considerable distance to the right of the course they were pursuing. He quickly notified Ravlt, and both ships swung in that direction, picking up an increased speed.

As they approached nearer, dark specks were visible flying about over the dark domes, which rose to quite a towering height.

"The Emkls!" announced Ravlt.

As they came closer, another discovery was made.

"There, Snrpd, are the kind of creatures into whose hands you fell," informed the machine man.

Snrpd was appalled. About the avenues laid between the black mounds walked the round, fuzzy animals on their stilts. Some of them ambled along awkwardly without the walking poles.

"An Emkl city!" cried Dlb. "See how they fly in and out of the dark houses!"

Professor Jameson saw that this was true as he noticed several of the Emkls emerge from apertures in the sides of

the black mounds. At his side, Snrpd offered a plausible observation:

"The long-legs are allies of the Emkls—they live together."

The Emkls now perceived the two airships heading toward their city, and with excited cries and wails drew the attention of those below on the ground. From every one of the high mounds (and there were several thousand of them) there poured forth a black, flapping horde of the repulsive Emkls rising upward with cries in which were blended curiosity, suspicion and animosity. Their concert of wails and continuous humming arose like a veritable bedlam about the ears of the invaders. Straight for the two oncoming airships they flew.

"Fire into them!" shouted Ravlt as the black cloud bore down upon the aircraft.

Explosion after explosion rocked the air as the two ships threw a steady barrage into the overwhelming ranks! A steady stream of Emkls arose from all sections of the city! For every one shot down, five were ready to assume its place! The rapid fire did not check their approach! On they came!

"Rise to a higher strata of the atmosphere!" ordered Professor Jameson, taking a quick grasp of the situation. "Quick! Before they are upon us!"

The operators of the two ships were quick to follow the suggestion. Up they shot, skyward! In that moment, the Emkls, like a destructive mantle, were all about the two airships so that the blue sunlight took on the semblance of twilight. The guns of both ships kept spitting continuously, their silent messengers of death lodging in some portion of an Emkl where their silence was soon broken by dull explosions. The torn and mutilated bodies of the creatures then hurtled to the ground. During the terrible massacre, the black domes of the city were literally bathed in the blood of their owners.

The Emkls, it was apparent, lacked not for courage. They rushed fearlessly to the center of the conflict in unbelievable, overwhelming numbers, their screaming, buzzing ranks soaring and flapping about the two ships of the Tripeds

which were now being guided up and out of the living, flying, wailing horde.

Ravlt's craft was slightly above that of the machine man's. Both were rising through the almost solid mass of Emkls with the utmost difficulty. The wailing and humming of the loathsome bird creatures became a screeching roar in the ears of the Tripeds. Well might they be glad of the mind protectors they wore.

Professor Jameson had now lost sight of Ravlt's ship, hidden as it was by the flitting forms of the Emkls. There rang in his ears a cry which at once increased his anxieties and fears.

"We are falling!" shouted one of the Tripeds.

"Put on more speed upward!" ordered the machine man.

"Impossible!"

"The ship is loaded down with Emkls!"

"Our upward speed is at its highest notch!"

"Blow them off!"

"Hurry—before we crash!"

The three-legged gunners fired into the clinging swarm of Emkls which hung tenaciously to the airship. The latter were bringing it down rapidly. Many of them were blown to bits, but always there were more to take the place of those killed.

With a terrific impact the airship struck. The mingled sound of rending bones and crushed flesh came to the ears of the Tripeds as those of the Emkls hanging to the bottom of the airship were smashed flat.

There were also casualties among the Tripeds. With the exceptions of a bent leg, Professor Jameson found himself intact. The Tripeds arose drunkenly, many of them having sustained several injuries. Two were dead. The rest took themselves alongside the machine man, ready to repel the attacks of the fierce creatures into whose city they had fallen.

The Emkls labored desperately to enlarge a gaping hole in the side of the ship. With his disintegrating ray, Professor Jameson, machine man of Zor, burnt a hole through their ranks. The Tripeds cheered as they saw the Emkls drop swiftly back. But the respite was only for a moment. They

renewed their efforts to enter through the jagged hole which had resulted from the crash in spite of the terrible ray. Such an attempt represented rank suicide, for they were destroyed instantly.

A muffled explosion within the airship caused the professor to turn suddenly about. Snrpd had blown to bits an Emkl about to spring upon the machine man.

"They are coming through the front of the ship!" howled Snrpd as another of the winged devils closed upon him.

It was the last word Snrpd ever uttered. His head was immediately snapped off by the Emkl which sprang upon him. More of the winged inhabitants of the blue dimension were pouring in behind their companion. Professor Jameson saw the swift assault which terminated Snrpd's career, but he dared not leave his post. The Emkls were crowding about outside the hole, waiting for a chance to enter, no matter how desperate the chance. They seemed to hold no fear of death.

The remaining Tripeds leaped forward to the attack, hurling back for a brief moment the Emkls who, with folded wings, strode down upon them menacingly. The airship was filled with a humming and wailing as the Tripeds and Emkls closed with one another in mortal combat, the Tripeds going down beneath the greater physical violence of the overpowering number of Emkls. They were surging into the ship from the forward deck so rapidly that the machine man recognized the futility of holding the other entrance longer against invasion.

Dropping the ray gun, he sprang among the fighting Emkls and Tripeds, working his way to a position where the winged attackers were the most numerous. Six metal tentacles whipped themselves about six Emkls, crushing them slowly in a terrible embrace.

Professor Jameson experienced a keen satisfaction in the act as there sprang to his mind the memory of 25X-987, 149Z-24, 69B-496, 8B-52 and many more of the machine men of Zor. They had all died at the hands of these damnable creatures who were now tasting the revenge of a Zorome.

The Tripeds, spattered with the blood of their fierce fighting adversaries, now panted in exhaustion as Professor Jameson squeezed the life from the six wretched Emkls he held within his powerful tentacles, strategically blocking the passage from any further inroad of the dread monsters. The latter howled their rage and beat frantically upon their dying comrades in an effort to shove past.

Only three of the Tripeds were left. The crashing of the airship and the subsequent battle had taken toll of the rest.

"We are lost!" shouted Dlb. "Seel!" He pointed to the hole in the airship's side where the machine man had recently repulsed an attack from this quarter so effectively with the ray gun. Through the enlarged opening there came an Emkl, followed by another and another. At their backs surged a countless throng of the fierce combatants.

"Fight to the death!" shouted Rmk, resolutely throwing himself into the attack. He blew up two of the hideous winged monsters before his weapon was wrested from him and he was forced to close with the overwhelming horde.

The machine man released the six dead Emkls and came to grips with new arrivals, seeking new victims. Into the airship there rushed another stream of the insidious inhabitants of the blue dimension. In reckless abandon they stumbled over the corpses of their fallen compatriots. Professor Jameson found plenty of work for his tentacles. The three Tripeds had gone down almost immediately following the last, defiant cry of Rmk. As he had urged them, so had they done. They had all died as brave Tripeds, fighting to the last.

Professor Jameson, seeing that his companions had all been killed, hunted for his ray gun. He could not find it. The weapon lay somewhere beneath the pack of the dead Tripeds and Emkls. Knowing that little could be accomplished here, and that the airship had become a concentration point of attack, he immediately jumped through the torn side of the airship and into the vast assemblage of the Emkls waiting outside.

They were all around him. Leaping upon him, they bore him down ere he had taken more than five steps from the

wrecked craft. He snapped shut his mechanical eye shutters as he felt strong jaws rasping against his metal head. One of his metal tentacles was wrenched from his body. With the remaining five he threshed about him wildly, and many an Emkl was knocked over with a crushed skull or other mortal injury. The machine man was seized by many of them, and even his unparalleled strength was insufficient to prevail against their overwhelming numbers.

The airship had fallen in an open space among several of the black domes. In fact, it had grazed one of the buildings in its descent, leaving a great scar from summit to base. Far above him, Professor Jameson saw the ship of Ravlt's command as a tiny dot upon the sky. The Emkls had abandoned the attack upon it, and the ship now rode solitary and unhampered far above the city.

Through the wailing, surging, threatening mass of Emkls the professor was borne. He perceived many of the fuzzy creatures among the crowd, some of them on their stilts and others without them.

Ravlt's ship was now dropping small objects from its position above the Emkl city. They loomed larger as with a swift momentum they fell upon the towering black domes, exploding and casting their contents in all directions. The city was being bombed. The explosives fell thick and fast, some in the streets between the domes while others exploded upon the tops of those structures which they chanced to hit. The Emkls appeared but little perturbed by this offense tactic. A few circled upward toward the airship of the Tripeds, which was now on high and well out of the possibility of another mass attack. Those of the Emkls who were so fearless and reckless as to venture near were promptly blown out of the sky.

The machine man was borne onward towards the center of the city. Suddenly he felt his captor's steps falter as their wailings took on a different note. The Emkls passed through three stages of emotional attitude. They became curious—then frightened—finally frantic. Releasing the professor, they rushed about pellmell as if seeking escape from some

unseen demon. Professor Jameson was dropped abruptly to the street from which he picked himself up to gaze bewildered at this new turn of affairs. He sought the cause of it.

All over the city the Emkls had turned riotous, panic-stricken and abandoned to chaos. The machine man wondered if the bombs had occasioned it. As a faint smoky haze drifted before him upon the atmosphere, he became aware instantly of the reason for the Emkls' strange behavior. The bombs had released a poison gas! The Emkls were falling like stalks of corn before a gale! In thin wisps the almost invisible vapor curled upward to assail those of the insidious creatures upon the wing, choking them and causing them to reel downward to death.

In the streets the choking, destroying vapor hung like a pall, reaching into the black, high-domed domiciles of the Emkls, searching out each innermost corner for victims. Every living creature that breathed fell before the onrush of the deadly gas.

Professor Jameson, the machine man, strode through the city of death, unmolested by the terrible bird monsters into whose hands he had fallen. The streets were now packed with the corpses of his enemies. Among them were to be seen the dead bodies of the round, fuzzy animals as well. One of the latter Professor Jameson saw posed in a grotesque position of death. With great long stilts sprawled apart like props, he lay dead up against the side of a black dome. The machine man gave one of the stilts a kick, bringing down the lifeless body into the dust.

Above him the airship soared in the upper air lanes, keeping well above the heavy, poisonous gas. A few of the surviving Emkls who had been fortunate in flying above the gas were winging their way toward the horizon, having seen their comrades die by the thousands. The machine man realized that Ravlt would never dare bring the airship down and pick him up while the deadly vapor spread by the bombs lay like a shroud over the city. He also had no idea concerning the length of time it would take for the dissipation of the gas.

He decided to leave the city, seeking an open spot beyond where he might be picked up by the Tripeds. Through the city streets he made his way, stumbling over the scattered piles of dead Emkls, wishing he possessed his mechanical wings at that moment. He had not brought them with him; they were left behind in the orange and blue dimension, reposing in the wrecked spaceship.

Passing the last cluster of dark mounds, he found himself upon the outskirts of the city. He now put a good distance between himself and the silent assemblage of black domes, noting with satisfaction that those in the airship had divined his intentions and were following him, the airship hovering lower. Finally, having cleared the vicinity of the life-destroying gas, the Tripeds descended and picked him up.

"Are you all right?" inquired Ravlt.

"One tentacle missing is all," replied the machine man. "The rest of my ship's company were wiped out."

"So we saw before we let fly with the gas bombs," said Ravlt. "You're lucky to be a machine man. Otherwise the Emkls would have done for you just as easily."

"The bombs did their work well," commended the professor. "The entire city's population is wiped out. The streets are literally choked with the dead."

"We should have resorted to the gas bombs in the first place," spoke Ravlt in self-reproach. "Then we should not have lost half of our forces."

"The price of overconfidence and curiosity," stated the machine man. "It is a lesson we shall not forget."

"What terrible fighters they were!" exclaimed Kvsb as the ship gained altitude. "How cheaply they held life, and how ferociously they attacked!"

"Nevertheless, they learned to keep away from our ship after a while."

"What shall we do now?" asked Professor Jameson.

"I believe the best thing to do is return to our own dimension and come back reinforced to attack the other Emkl strongholds we may find," advised Ravlt.

And so they headed back across the world of the blue

dimension toward the spot where they had entered it. The sun was now at its zenith. They cruised low in order to scan the topography. Once on the far horizon they perceived the black domes of an Emkl city.

"We'll attend to that at a later date," said Ravlt.

V

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

THEY WERE returning to their starting point by a different route than the one they had taken on coming to the city of the Emkls, and now they gazed upon physiographical peculiarities which they had not seen before. The land took a sudden, deep drop into a broad basin whose other rim lay beyond the horizon.

"A dry sea bottom," observed Frlst.

"Drop lower," directed Ravlt to the pilot. "Our route extends across the edge of this depression."

"It looks lonesome," commented Professor Jameson, his eyes scanning the great valley whose other rim lay out of sight.

"Perhaps it is a gouge taken out of the planet by collision with another cosmic body," ventured Ravlt.

Far ahead of them, a little to the right of their course, there lay another deep drop within the vast valley of mystery.

"Guide the ship in that direction, and we'll fly over it," ordered Ravlt.

"How deep it is!" exclaimed Frlst.

"And wide!" added another.

"As if a great chunk had been cut from the bottom of the basin," said Ravlt to the professor.

The latter was gazing down into the huge pit with one of the airship's telescopes. Some of the Tripeds were doing likewise.

"The sunlight is fading," spoke Stn suddenly.

"What? At its zenith?"

"You must be imagining it."

"Yes! It is!" affirmed Ravlt, confirming Stn's discovery.

"The blue is changing color near the center of the sun!"

"An eclipse!" shouted Stn in realization of the actual truth.

"It is an eclipse upon the other world! The orange sun is crossing before the blue one!"

Professor Jameson had paid but little attention to the excited discourse of the Tripeds. Something had gripped his attention within the depths of the pit. He gazed fascinated at something upon its bottom.

The mental faculties of the Tripeds were diverted from their contemplation of the vague change the blue sun was undergoing as the machine man cast an excited thought transference into the group.

"Look!" he directed them. "Down in the pit—on the bottom!"

The professor's excitement grew. The Tripeds had never seen him evidence excitement before. Those at the telescope followed his pointing tentacles with their instruments.

"There's something down in there moving around!" exclaimed Plmk. "You can hardly see it—so ghostly looking—I would say transparent!"

"Fly the airship down into the pit!" directed the machine man, an eye still glued to the telescope.

The ship of the Tripeds slowly sank into the depths of the great depression, Ravlt a bit wary for some sort of an attack by strange, unknown monsters of the blue dimension. As they drifted toward the floor of the pit, those of the Tripeds who were not equipped with telescopes were enabled to discern moving objects of vague, dim shape, barely perceptible.

Ravlt muffled a cry of surprise. He caught sight of a shadowy, fleeting form, recognizing it for what it really

was. He stared in sheer astonishment. The Triped's speech faltered, then he stammered in unbounded amazement.

"Why, it is—a—a machine man—like yourself!"

He pointed a shaking arm at the professor, who was silently gazing at the ghostly forms flitting about on the floor of the deep pit.

The machine man's thoughts were not for the three-legged creatures which surrounded him. The amazing discovery had for the moment rendered him entirely oblivious to their presence. His thoughts flew in rapid communication with the dim, elusive figures grouped about the pit's bottom, waiting for the airship to come to rest.

As the ship bumped gently to the floor of the chasm, it was apparent that the shadowy figures were machine men like the professor himself. The blue sunlight had been supplanted by a yellow haze which appeared to envelop the pit. Weird, gliding forms unlike those of the machine men floated below, above and on all sides of the airship, entering in and out through the solid sides of the craft at ease.

The Tripeds talked in awed tones among themselves. It was evident that the professor was holding communication with these strange, phantom machine men so much like him yet so transparent and unreal.

"You can see through them!" spoke Ravlt. "They are not tangible! See how they walk right through the sides of the ship!"

"They are not of this dimension!" opined Plmk.

"You mean that they are in the other world?" queried Ravlt. "The world where our companions await us?"

"Exactly!"

"But how are they visible to us?"

"The eclipse—you forget that!" reminded Frlst.

"Indeed, that explains it!"

As if in afterthought, Ravlt added: "Why didn't we find them on the planet? They cannot be there. Professor Jameison would have seen them with his telescope long before this—before we found his wrecked spaceship!"

The Tripeds shook their heads in perplexity and awaited

an explanation from the professor. They were not capable of attuning their thoughts to the telepathic conversation between Professor Jameson and the semi-visible machine men of Zor.

The professor, at sight of his long lost companions in the garb of phantom beings of another world, had been laid by the heels, figuratively speaking, by the sudden, unexpected discovery. In turn, on seeing 21MM392, the Zoromes were no less astonished than the professor himself.

Professor Jameson saw before him 41C-98, 744U-21, 6W-438, 29G-75, 56F-450 and many others among the ghosts of the pit.

"Where—where are you?" he asked. "How did you get there?"

"21MM392!"

"Yes! Where are you?"

"At the bottom of the ocean! And you—are you really in the world of the phantom birds?"

"Yes!" The professor's surprise was beyond description. "Why don't you emerge from the ocean?"

6W-438, principal spokesman of the group, pointed in mute reply to the question. His waving tentacle took in the lofty, towering walls about his companions and himself.

"We are prisoners of the seal" supplemented 56F-450.

"We number a full fifteen in this pit of the ocean," explained 6W-438. "If you remember, we were part of the crew detailed by 25X-987 to stay with the spaceship. Compelled by the hypnotic suggestion of those damnable bird phantoms, we were driven to what they believed would be our deaths. When we emerged from our trance we found ourselves here. That was quite a long time ago."

"Over seven hundred revolutions of this planet about the double suns," interjected the professor.

"How did you get where you are?" was the inquiry.

"It is a long story," replied Professor Jameson. "I'll get you out of the sea first; then I'll tell you."

Quickly the professor turned to his three-legged allies and briefly explained the situation to them. While he did so, one of the Tripeds gave a sudden exclamation of surprise.

"They're gone!" he shouted.

It was true. The machine men had disappeared. So had the yellow haze with its ghostly marine life. The eclipse had passed.

On the planet of the double suns, in the blue and orange dimension, the Tripeds waited anxiously for the return of their companions, who with the machine man had ventured into the dimension of the Emkls. At regular intervals they set the transition cube's mechanism working. Since Dlb and Ldgz had returned and gone once more with the airships, relating the story of their initial skirmishes with the stilt walkers and the Emkls, there had been no communication or manifestation from the expedition. The Tripeds were becoming a bit impatient, and had nearly decided on sending a new force into the blue dimension to ascertain the reason for the protracted absence of those under Ravlt and Professor Jameson.

Brlx interrupted the plans by calling their attention skyward. "The suns are nearing one another! There will be an eclipse!"

"Don your hypnotic nullifiers!" ordered Glrg. "We'll now be able to see into this other world!"

Above them, the Emkls materialized out of mere nothingness, and with dismal wails and incessant humming flew about over their heads. The Tripeds looked in vain for their friends but could see no trace of them. The eclipse lasted but a short time, and the ghostly shapes of the Emkls became faint, then disappeared. Their dismal wails also became stilled.

Brlx announced that it was time for the transparent cube to be filled with its green glow of light, giving their friends in the blue dimension an opportunity to return to their own world.

Eagerly they watched the cube of green light, seeking the forms of their comrades or the machine man. The emerald luminescence paled a bit. Strange forms commenced to materialize within the cube.

"They're coming back!" cried Glrg excitedly.

The yells of triumph turned to shouts of surprise and dismay as the forms within the green cube took on definite, distinguishable shape. No three-legged Tripeds or metal machine man occupied the cube's interior. It was literally packed with kicking, struggling Emkls!

"Let them out!" shouted Grg. "Stand ready to kill them as fast as they emerge!"

"Leave them in!" implored Brlx. "They'll strangle to death for want of air!"

Grg pondered the question, which was finally solved by the outcries of the other Tripeds, all of them brandishing their weapons and demanding the blood of the Emkls.

"Let them out! Let them out!"

"Open up!" ordered Grg. "Let them out! Stand by to destroy each and every one!"

The cube's entrances were both opened at once, the air rushing in with a loud report, throwing the leathern winged Emkls into a conglomerate heap, dazed and bewildered. The Tripeds lined up outside. As the Emkls either flew or walked out one by one, the careful aim of the Tripeds blew them to pieces. The Tripeds were enjoying the sport immensely, especially after their long wait and restricted activity. As the last of the Emkls flew out of the cube and disappeared in several loud reports, there arose a cry for more of the hereditary enemies of the Tripeds.

"Bring more of them from the other dimension!"

The cube was immediately emptied of the air which had been admitted, and once more the discs at one end filled the huge compartment with the green glow which so effectually hid everything it encompassed.

Impatiently the Tripeds waited for more victims, their appetite for massacre whetted by this initial onslaught. The green glow was allowed to suffuse the cubic chamber for the allotted time before Brlx ordered it to be dispersed. Gradually the green mists cleared to reveal a huge, bulky object which filled nearly half of the transition cube. It was one of the two airships which Dlb and Ldgz had taken with them into the blue dimension.

"The ship!" exclaimed Brlx.

"They're returning!"

"But where is the other ship?"

"Perhaps it is waiting to come through afterward," suggested Glrg hopefully, attempting to dispel the anxiety he felt. "They might not have had sufficient time to maneuver both into place."

One entire side of the transition cube was lowered to allow the egress of the craft. Professor Jameson was the first one to emerge from the airship as it swung out of the cube.

"Where is the other ship?" inquired Glrg.

"Destroyed by the Emkls along with half of our forces," he reported.

Then tersely he related their adventures in the blue dimension, with a full account of their discovery of his companions, the machine men, imprisoned in the depths of an unscalable pit at the bottom of the ocean.

"When we came back here to the transition cube, we found the Emkls flying in and out of its green haze. The—"

"Yes!" interrupted Glrg. "Some of them came through into this world! We killed them all!"

"The Emkls were so thick that we had to fight our way through them to place the airship within the green light," concluded the machine man.

"These Zoromes—the survivors—your friends!" said Glrg in his excitement. "Where do you say they are?"

"At the bottom of the ocean!" stated the professor. "I know the exact spot! We must bring them out!"

"By all means!" said Brlx. "Let's be off and at it immediately!"

The Tripeds' eagerness to bring forth the long lost machine men from the depths of their watery prison was surpassed only by the professor's zeal.

"We had best make the journey in one of the spaceships," advised Glrg. "It will float on the water, and we can lower lines to your friends."

"I'm going to descend into the sea on one of the lines," announced Professor Jameson.

They were soon floating in the spaceship of the Tripeds above the spot where the professor knew his fellow machine men to be.

"Only a machine man could do that," mused Ravlt in a remark to Glrg as the metal head of Professor Jameson disappeared beneath the surface in a swirl of bubbles.

"He was invincible in the combat with the Emkls," stated another of the Tripeds. "They overpowered him only by superior numbers, after he had killed many of them."

Down, ever down, sank the machine man through the yellow, misty waters, whose color deepened the lower he went. All the time, the Tripeds above unreeled the line which was sending him to the floor of the watery pit. A yellow phosphorescence replaced the filtered daylight as the machine man plumbed the lower depths of the sea. Soon, he saw the high wall of the pit slide upward and away.

He felt his metal legs bump against the ocean floor, and he gave several yanks on the line to announce his arrival to those above. Instantly he radiated a mental call to the machine men of Zor. He peered through the murky yellowness for a sight of his comrades whom he had supposed dead.

Through the suffused twilight of the yellow gloom there walked slowly toward him four metal forms, seaweed clinging to the waving tentacles. Approaching him were 41C-98, 744U-21, 6W-438 and 29G-75. It was truly amazing! Here in this living grave of the sea's yellow depth these machine men had survived for more than seven hundred years!

"Where are the others?" asked Professor Jameson. "You said there were fifteen survivors."

"Come," stated 6W-438. "We shall go to our underground rendezvous. You will meet the rest—what there is left of them."

Together the five machine men made their way to a cave dug in the side of the pit's wall. At its entrance stood two more of the long lost Zoromes. Professor Jameson noticed in surprise that one of them was possessed of but two tentacles, while his companion limped about on three legs and pos-

sessed four tentacles. A greater surprise was in store for the professor as he entered the cavern.

On one side were ranged nine metal heads in a row. The metal eye shutters opened at his approach. Across from the heads, on the other side of the cave, was a conglomeration of worn-out metal bodies, legs and tentacles.

"You see," explained 6W-438, "during the time we've been down here in this hole, many of our parts have worn out. They wear out many times faster in the water than anyplace else. Among the fifteen of us we have enough parts left to fully equip four with enough left over to partially outfit two others. We take turns in wearing the tentacles and legs—which, of course, have worn out quickest."

"Are there any more of the machine men left besides us?" asked 41C-98.

"Not that I know of," replied the professor. "Until I found you, I had thought myself the only survivor. How was it that the Emkls did not drive you to death down here?"

"Their hypnotic powers are of no avail to any living creature in the water. That is why the water animals who came out on the islets to wail at the blue sun were rendered immune to the phantoms you call Emkls. Sometimes during an eclipse we see the Emkls flying down here, even as we saw you."

"What about yourself?" queried 20R-654, one of the nine heads ranged in a row upon the cavern floor. "How did you escape the lure of the phantoms?"

"Who were the three-legged animals we saw you with, 21MM392?"

"How did you gain access to the other dimension?"

The questions flew thick and fast.

"Wait!" begged the professor. "When we are all safely out of here you shall be given a complete, detailed account of everything. It is a long story. The Tripeds are waiting to haul us out of here."

Picking up the nine metal heads, the seven Zoromes made their way to the spot where the professor had descended.

"Within our spaceship there are plenty of tentacles, bodies

and legs for you," Professor Jameson promised the nine heads.

When they reached the place where Professor Jameson had left the hanging line they found more lines, some of them terminating in large baskets. They could all make the ascent in one trip.

The professor gave the signal to pull up, and this was followed by the rise to the surface. The rescued machine men gave a last, farewell wave of tentacles to the various forms of marine life, which curiously regarded their departure.

Upon the surface of the ocean the long lost Zoromes made the acquaintance of the Tripeds. Professor Jameson then narrated an account of all that had taken place since over five hundred years before when 25X-987 had left them in command of the spaceship.

Within the wrecked spaceship of the machine men, in which the Tripeds had discovered Professor Jameson, the Zoromes reconditioned themselves with the large supply of metal legs, tentacles and cubed bodies. The spacecraft had even been supplied with a few empty heads.

"How are we to get back to Zor?" asked 744U-21, contemplating the wrecked mechanism of the spaceship with a wave of his tentacles. "The spaceships of the Tripeds are much too slow for interstellar travel."

"Bring it to our planet of Grvdlén," advised Glrg. "There you will possess the facilities to repair or rebuild your ship of space."

To Grvdlén they went—to the Tripeds' home planet.

Concerning the Emkls, Glrg made the following announcement:

"The blue dimension is infested by countless millions, perhaps billions, of the Emkls. At a later date, more of the Tripeds will return to the first planet and wipe them out systematically and scientifically, now that our successful pioneering expedition has paved the way."

The sixteen Zoromes resided upon the second planet of the double sun for nearly four years, rebuilding their spaceship. When they left for the general direction of distant Zor, their

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

number was increased to twenty. Four of the Tripeds had become machine men, having had their brains removed to the metal heads of the machines. Grg, Ravlt, Jbf and Brlx were no longer counted among the ranks of the Tripeds.

Manned by the twenty Zoromes, the spaceship left the solar system of the double sun, speeding rapidly toward the far-off stars and new adventures.

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