

THE GALAXY MASTER — Planets & Women Were His Pawns

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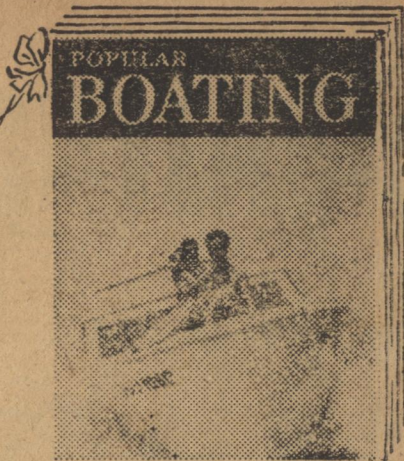
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Editor

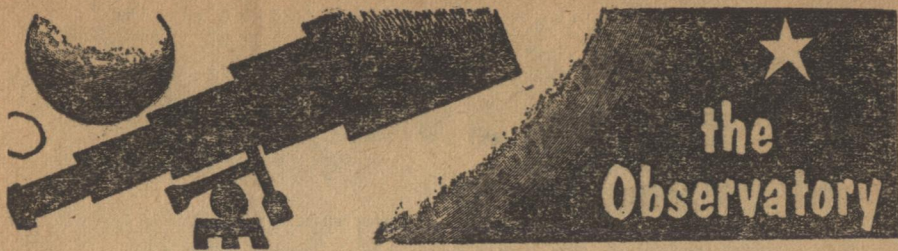
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BY THE EDITOR

## GUEST EDITORIAL BY HAL ANNAS

• Your concern over atomic waste is timely. Needing the information for a story scheduled to appear elsewhere, I did some research. The substance is this:

No practical means of disposal has been devised. If you dump it in the oceans it returns in rainfall. If you bury it you get it back in food.

Deep areas of oceans are thought by some not to circulate their waters. These have been suggested as disposal places. Others are less certain and mention earthquakes and submarine volcanoes and other possibilities, including the possibility that the waters do circulate, and deepsea fish that might die from radioactivity and rise to the surface.

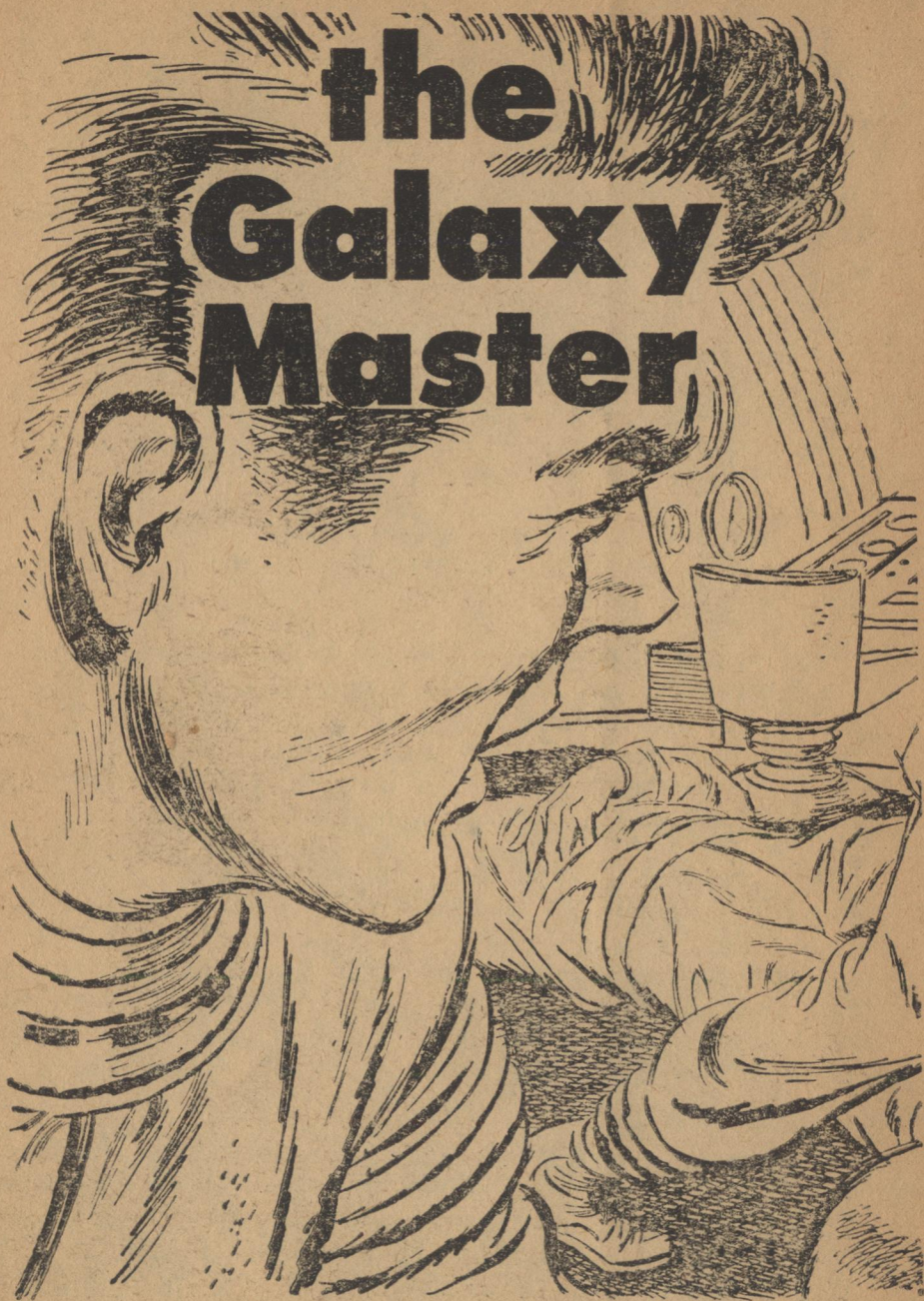
One proposal is to rocket the stuff into space. This is mathematically possible. It hasn't been established as a physical practicality. There are possibilities of rockets exploding in the atmosphere or, their engines failing, falling back to burst and free the deadly stuff on the ground. As of now, the project is considered too costly. There is another reason for delay. Discoveries may reveal atomic waste to be of enormous value.

At present the stuff is stored in lead containers. Buried, I think. But it still means man lives in the vicinity of a powderkeg. An accidental explosion could free the stuff. An ordinary cordite bomb pinpointed could do it. Which means that any nation, large or small, possessing airplanes and

*(Continued on page 130)*



# the Galaxy Master



The girl knew plenty about rough-and-





tumble fighting. She proceeded to demonstrate.



# THE GALAXY MASTER

By MALCOLM MEADE

*Strange worlds have been found out there in space—strange kings and weird subjects. But never had a lord of life and death ruled such a paradise of female beauty. What were his motives? From whence had he come? And more important—what was his sinister source of power?*

I CAME inside wringing wet and kind of dizzy with the heat. It must have been a hundred and twenty in the shade, but then, it isn't every planet that has two suns sweating down out of a blood red sky.

The three of us were living in a rat-trap hovel by then, the kind the natives wouldn't even spit at. We couldn't help it because we'd almost run out of money. The other guys looked up hopefully, Whitey Mead from where he was sprawled on the broken-down divan under the room's one glassless window, and Gus Steele from the plank table, where an empty bottle of whiskey—our last—stood before his folded arms.

"Any luck?" Mead asked. Steele just grunted.

"Well, I finally got to see the Earth Ambassador," I told them.

"You're kidding," Mead said.

Steele swung around eagerly, his huge forearm sweeping the whiskey bottle to the floor.

"I saw him, all right," I told them. "By video. Better than no contact at all."

"You sure as heck are kidding," Mead persisted. He was a little guy with a shock of dead white hair over a gaunt, unhappy-looking face and the meanest looking eyes you ever saw. I didn't know if Whitey Mead was as mean as his eyes made out or not—he kept his thoughts to himself, even after all the weeks we'd been stuck here on a furnace-hot planet deep in-



side the Sagittarian star swarm.

"I saw him by video," I repeated. "When the natives say no outworlders are permitted on their planet, they mean it. The Earth Ambassador lives on an artificial satellite half a million miles out and conducts all his business by video."

"What he say?" Mead asked. Steele picked up the whiskey bottle and put it back on the table.

"That his hands were tied," I told them. "That he's sorry but he can't do a thing for us. That if we can't get off M'hunna under our own steam, we spend the rest of our lives here. And I don't have to tell you the natives won't let us go."

"What's the matter with them, they're human just like we are," Steele's deep voice boomed. These were almost the first words the brooding, taciturn giant had spoken in two days.

They got a laugh from Whitey Mead. "It ain't the natives," he said. "They're just simple tools, happy with their darned energy boxes. It ain't them."

The energy boxes were really something. Every M'hunna native had one.

None of the natives ever worked. The little energy boxes, no bigger than nursery blocks, took care of all their needs. The incredible boxes drove cars, powered airplanes, broadcasting stations, cooling systems, anything. They didn't seem to use fuel. I'd seen them close up and there didn't even seem to be any openings in them. Little blocks. Nursery blocks. So stored with power that no one on M'hunna had to lift a finger to work.

"The way I figure it," Steele said, "they won't let any outworlders in for fear we'll steal their energy boxes and see how they work. We're lucky they don't kill us." It was quite a speech for Steele, but it was all wrong and we all knew it.

"In the first place," Mead said, "they don't have to kill us. They just see that we stay here." That part was a cinch for the natives. A few weeks ago the freighter the three of us were crewing through the Sagittarian swarm had developed subspace drive trouble. We'd made an emergency landing on M'hunna, the natives had confiscated our spacetub, and we'd spent the ensuing weeks trying either to get our ship



back or book passage off the planet. But we never even got to find out where our ship was, and there apparently was no such thing as passage to or from M'hunna.

"In the second place, like I said," Mead went on, "it ain't the natives. All you got to do is keep your ear to the ground in this crummy place they call M'hunna City, you'd know anyway that much. It ain't the natives run this show. It's somebody the natives fear and obey. The Valkys, they call 'em."

"Valkys, I heard that somewhere in town," Steele said, growing talkative. "I thought it was some kind of religion."

"Religion, nuts," said Mead. "The Valkys, whoever the Valkys are, run things around this part of the galaxy. Not just M'hunna. The whole show. Five hundred worlds or more, from what you hear the natives say. And it's the Valkys who give out energy boxes to all the worlds. All they want in return is complete obedience." Mead smiled his mean little smile, as if his facial muscles were reluctant. "Wouldn't you give complete obedience to a ruler who let you alone and made it so you never had to do a day's work in your

life but could just go around playing all the time?"

Mead nodded slowly. "Then we got to see the guys running things," he said. "The Valkys."

I pointed out: "Trouble is, the Valkys never come to M'hunna."

Mead smiled again. "Now there's where you're wrong, Ted," he told me. "While you were out seeing the ambassador and while Gus here was finishing our last bottle, I was outside in the city." He paused, breathing through his mouth, his small, close-set eyes going intense. "A spaceship came in."

"What?" I croaked.

"The natives didn't confiscate it. They bowed and scraped. I was right there. It ain't much of a ship, but it'd be big enough to hold all of us, if you get what I mean."

"A Valk ship?" I asked.

"It figures, don't it?" Mead demanded. "A Valk ship, men. And a Valk ship can get us off of here. Unless you want to spend the rest of your lives sweating to death on M'hunna."

"What about the crew?" I asked.

"That's the heck of it," Mead told me, smiling again. "There was only one Valk in the ship." He licked his thin



lips: I'd never seen a man do that before. "A Valk girl," he said.

"A girl?"

"And a real dish," Mead said. "All by herself with a spaceship full of energy boxes. I seen it. I was right there. Nobody stopped me. They figured I'd never be leaving M'hunna anyway, so why would they have to stop me?"

Mead lit a cigarette. We didn't have many left, but I didn't stop him. "We're going to steal that ship," he said. "It's the only way. And we're going to steal it with the Valk girl aboard. She'll lead us out of the Sagittarian swarm, boys. Or she'll get her pretty little throat ventilated."

"I don't like the idea of kidnaping her," I said.

"You got any better ideas?"

"Explain the situation to her, and—"

"Sure. Right away. At Valkys' orders the natives won't let us off their planet. You think the Valks wouldn't say the same thing? Use your head, man. Maybe they wouldn't be as easy-going as the natives: maybe they'd put us all in jail or even kill us. No, we got to kidnap the girl, I tell you."

"I still don't—"

"And that ain't all," Mead continued. "Didn't I tell you she had a ship full of energy boxes? How'd you like to be a three-way owner of a few thousand hunks of unlimited energy? How'd you like to find out what makes 'em tick, and maybe even manufacture them back home where we come from? How'd you like to be the master of the galaxy, Mr. Ted Drummond?"

"If the Valks get wind of what we're trying to do—"

"They won't," Mead said quickly. "Not until it's too late. They don't let anyone on the planets they control, but they don't venture outside Sagittarius, either. If we get away, we'll be all right. I'm telling you, man, it's a cinch."

I didn't like the idea, and I don't really know why. Whitey Mead had his mind all made up, though. He's only a little guy, but it's the little guys with the drawn, gaunt faces who can be the stubbornest of all. All along, he'd had Gus Steele eating off the palm of his hand, so naturally Steele agreed with him now. I shrugged and said, "I guess you're running the show, Whitey."



"You won't regret it," he told me.

That night, when M'hunna two suns set, we went to the Valk spaceship.

It wasn't any bigger than the ferries which ply space between Earth and Luna. And it wasn't even guarded.

There aren't any proper spacefields on M'hunna, not as you know a spacefield to be. M'hunna city, though, had been laid out with a lot of plazas full of statues and fountains and glades of trees. If a small ship like the Valk job came down vertically, it would have plenty of room to land in one of those plazas. And it was right to one of them—the big central plaza—that Whitey Mead led us.

It was hot. Not as hot as during the day, but hot enough so we were covered with sweat just from walking there. The sultry heat bothered big Gus Steele most, of course. Mead actually seemed to like it. At least I had never heard him complain about it.

Mead had a knife he'd picked up somewhere. He wasn't kidding about ventilating the Valk girl's throat if necessary. Gus Steele had only his big hands, but

they'd be enough for the Valk girl and a handful of her boy-friends, if any. I had a length of metal pipe, but I felt foolish carrying it. Hadn't Whitey Mead said there was just the one girl and her energy boxes?

"Look," Mead whispered. "The airlock's open."

It was, all right, and a light shone inside the Valk ship.

The plaza was deserted, as we'd known it would be. The M'hunnas like the furnace heat of their days. The nights are chilly for them, I guess, so they keep off the streets. They're a dried-out, shriveled lot of humans, too, the women among the homeliest I've ever seen in the galaxy and the men skinny and puckered of skin as if they spent all their time in a Turkish bath. Well, they lived on M'hunna, didn't they?

"Gus," Mead whispered. "You wait outside till we call you. Anybody comes, you clobber him. Understand?"

Steele grinned. There was the possibility of action tonight, and his big body had craved action for weeks.

"Me and Ted are going inside," Mead said, and before I even take a breath or wonder what was going to happen, he had one foot inside



the airlock. There was only one thing I could do. I followed him.

We went through a narrow companionway running parallel to the hull of the ship. The walls gleamed with a source of light I couldn't see. Then we heard something. Mead lifted his hand and we stopped moving. We froze there.

It was the sound of singing.

A girl's voice. Singing to herself.

Mead turned around, smirking. His knife gleamed. His face told me what a cinch this was going to be. We began moving forward again, on the rubber heels of our spaceboots, without a sound. We went by a control room. Then a storeroom—full of little black cubes. Energy boxes. I couldn't see Whitey Mead's face then, but I was willing to bet he'd almost be drooling at the mouth. My own emotions were a little confused. Sure, I wanted to get off M'hunna as much as Mead did. I couldn't see spending the rest of my life on this sweat-box of a planet. But I also couldn't see kidnapping a defenseless girl. As it turned out, that idea couldn't have been further from the truth.

We came to an archway. Through it was the girl's living quarters.

She was doing what you'd expect a girl anywhere to be doing this time of night. She was sitting before a mirror, combing out her long blonde hair. She was dressed for the heat, in a white skirt no longer than a tennis skirt and a narrow white band of a halter. The last thing I expected, after the M'hunna natives, was a girl so pretty she almost took your breath away. But she was like that. Her hair was long, going halfway down her bare back. Her skin was a tawny color and looked as smooth and soft as silk. If this sounds corny, I can't help it. Heck, I'm no poet and to really get an idea of what she looked like, her absolutely beautiful face in the mirror and all, you'd need poetry.

Suddenly she saw us in the mirror. She dropped the hairbrush and stood up and swung around, fury on her face.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded in the spatial lingua franca which even the M'hunna natives had picked up.

I didn't answer. I didn't know what to say. It was



Whitey Mead's show. He said, his voice a purr: "Just take it easy and you won't get hurt," and advanced toward her with the knife.

As I've said, Whitey Mead's a little guy. I'm a head taller than he is, and I'm about average height. The girl was my size, tall for a girl, but slender with long smoothly rounded limbs and a high waist and supple grace in every line of her body. She let Whitey Mead get very close. She stood there watching him. The fury was in her face only, but she still looked lovely.

"What do you want?" she asked. "Don't you know it's forbidden to . . ." Her voice trailed off and her eyes widened.

"That's right, kid," Mead said. "We ain't natives. If you get that much, then get this too. We don't let the native taboos bother us." He laughed. It was the most humorless sound I have ever heard. "The native taboos mean about as much to us as your life does," he said. There was nothing subtle about Whitey Mead.

The girl's eyes were still big. If anything, bigger. "Who . . . are you?" she gasped.

"We'll ask the questions," Whitey Mead said. "Just march out of here into your control room, there's a good girl."

She looked at him for a few seconds. Her eyes narrowed and she took a deep breath and did the next to the last thing I expected. Her left arm blurred in quick, fluid movement. The knife flashed in Mead's hand. The next thing I knew, the girl was holding the knife. I just stood there gawking with my metal pipe.

That was the next to the last thing. Then the girl did the last thing I expected. This time it was her right arm. You could hardly see it. She pivoted behind it and her small fist blurred and there was the sound of flesh striking flesh. Mead's head jerked back as if it had been sledgehammered, and Mead went over on his back. I gawked some more. The girl had knocked him out as cleanly as I'd ever seen a man knocked out.

Quite calmly, she set the knife down alongside the hairbrush on her dressing table and walked over to me. We looked at each other. I felt the weight of the metal pipe in my hand. I couldn't use it on her, not on a girl,



even after what I'd seen her do to Whitey Mead. Maybe she saw that in my eyes, I don't know. After a while she turned away contemptuously and said: "Take your friend and go."

Mead was groaning and trying to sit up. His eyes blinked. I stared foolishly at the metal pipe. Then Mead bellowed for Gus Steele.

Sending little Whitey Mead down for the count was one thing. I'm no Hercules, but I can use my fists when I have to. I could have done that too. But big Gus Steele was something else again. When we'd run out of grub money in M'hunna city a week ago, Gus had earned us some by letting the biggest of the natives poke him as hard as they could. He'd grunted and smiled and they'd paid up whatever it was they'd wagered that they could knock him down.

"Don't let her fool you, Gus," Mead warned as the giant came in. "She's an Amazon."

Gus Steele stared. He isn't the quickest man on the up-take. While he stared, the girl hit him. She got in a couple of good licks that would have sent little Whitey Mead over on his duff again and might have bothered me

plenty, too. Gus Steele's enormous head snapped back maybe half an inch, and that was all.

Then he lifted the girl off her feet and held her, watching her legs kick at air. She did a lot of fighting, most of it with air, until she realized it would take a platoon of her—and of almost anybody—to bother Gus Steele much. Then she subsided. The men were in command again.

"Ted," Mead said, getting up, "you close the airlock. Gus, you take that wildcat into the control room and sit her down at the controls. Strap her in if you have to."

There was blood on Mead's chin. He wiped it away with the back of his hand and walked, a bit unsteady on his feet, after Gus Steele and the girl. Gus had set the girl down and she went under her own power. The fight had gone out of her. She didn't sulk. She didn't rant. She just acquiesced. I couldn't help thinking she'd given in too easily, and it bothered me.

We stood in the control room. Mead had his knife again. The girl was at the controls, waiting silently. Her calm kind of got to you, and gnawed. It was like she



didn't have a care in the world.

"You'll do what we say," Mead told her. "Exactly what we say. Your life means nothing. We only want to get back where we belong—with this shipload of energy boxes. You got it?" From habit, Mead had spoken in English. I was about to remind him of it when the girl said:

"But—you speak my language!"

Naturally, she said that in English. And it was the only thing that seemed to rattle her.

"Your language," Mead gasped. "Where does it get off being—"

"Miss," I said, "have you always spoken English?"

"Why, of course. It's the language of my people."

"But—"

"Hold it," snapped Mead. "You philologists can get together later. Right now, we are going to blast off of M'hunna."

The girl's ship did not tear the fabric of space with fiery power. It did not contort our muscles with the pain of eight or nine G's. It merely left M'hunna at incredible speed, minus the agonies of acceleration. Well, it was powered by one of the energy boxes, wasn't it?

For two days we streaked through space. Mead was hardly with us in the control room; he'd spend most of his time back with the stored energy boxes, studying them, trying unsuccessfully to take them apart, mostly just contemplating them. Gus watched the girl. When she slept, he slept. He was the only one who could handle her with ease, and Mead wasn't taking any chances. She seemed docile enough, though.

I spent my time talking to her. She was neither friendly nor unfriendly. She spoke English as well as I did, although the idioms and nuances of speech we each employed were different. I asked her how it was she spoke her language, but she couldn't answer that one. It was called English, she said, had always been called English, and had been—always—the native language of her people. She would answer almost any question I asked, unless it was about the energy boxes. Then she'd clam up, and I didn't push it.

Her home world, she told me, was a big place almost twice the size of M'hunna. Since M'hunna was nearly Earth-size, that explained something. It explained the



girl's unexpected strength. Having to fight a pull of gravity nearly twice what we were accustomed to from birth, of course she would be immensely strong for her size and sex. I made a joke of it. I said: "I'd hate to tackle one of your men."

"But we don't have any men," she told me.

I just looked at her.

"We've never had any," she said, and went on: "What do we need men for?" If she couldn't answer that one, I wouldn't try to answer it for her. As it turned out, she knew what she was talking about—at least from the viewpoint of racial continuity.

She never asked what we were going to do with her. I thought that a little strange, but let it ride.

On the third day out, I found out why. The hard way.

Whitey Mead was taking one of his rare catnaps. He'd do that maybe twice a day, and the slightest sound out of the ordinary would wake him. Don't ask me how he did it, but he seemed to get enough rest. Gus was busy watching the girl, to see she wasn't up to any tricks.

Naturally, she had been up

to the biggest trick of all. Instead of heading the small spaceship toward the rim of the Sagittarian swarm and through it, she had astrogated it to the very heart of the star swarm.

I happened to look through the viewport. I saw the luminous, broiling gray stuff first. All space ahead of us seemed to be filled with it, seething and rolling and billowing almost like dense smoke. You can't judge distances in interstellar space, especially when you're running on sub-space drive. It could have been a few thousand miles off; it could have been half a light year.

"Take a look at that," I told the girl. You see, I still trusted her.

"I know," she said. "The Space of Mists."

"But what the devil is it?" I asked.

She pursed her lips in thought and gave the first surprising evidence of advanced technology. Except for the energy boxes and the spaceship, she behaved almost like a primitive girl you might find on some small island on a backwater planet. But then she said: "It's a visualization of pure energy at the junction of terrene and contraterrene space."



I looked at her. She giggled when I got to my feet too quickly in weightlessness, soared up toward the ceiling, and bumped my head not gently. I made swimming motions and tumbled awkwardly down. "What did you say?" I gasped. "Contraterrene space!"

She nodded. It did not seem to bother her. It bothered me plenty.

One of the few great mysteries left unraveled by human science was the mystery of contraterrene space and matter. There was no theoretical reason why it didn't exist, but mankind had never found it. That was just as well for mankind—or for the particular men involved in the discovery. You see, contraterrene matter is—well, inside-out matter. While the nucleus of normal matter is positively charged and the electrons negatively charged, contraterrene matter is reversed, with negative protons giving the nucleus a negative charge and positively charged electrons. That sounds involved, and is, but the important thing is this: theoretically, a meeting of terrene (normal) matter and contraterrene matter would be tremendously unstable.

The result would be an explosion instantly converting all the matter involved into pure energy. What I'm getting at is this: the explorer finding contraterrene matter would go up in a blaze of glory on a cosmic scale before he had a chance to write home about it.

"But we're heading right for it!" I told the girl.

She nodded again. "I know. My home is in there."

I swam through weightlessness to the controls. Amused, she did not try to stop me. I pulled the sub-space drive lever. It was locked in place. I banged it, but it wouldn't budge. Then Whitey Mead came into the control room.

"Trouble, Ted?" he asked me. He was instantly awake.

I told him. He ran over to the viewport. I followed him and peered anxiously over his shoulder in time to see all space disappear in the broiling white mists. Whatever they were, we were in the middle of them.

"Change our course," Whitey snapped at the girl.

She stood there, smiling slightly.

"Gus," Whitey said.

The giant came ponderously toward the girl. She backed away slowly. For



some reason I still can't quite figure out, I got between them. She wasn't exactly a shrinking violet, and she'd tricked us into thinking we were heading out of Sagittarius. She could take care of herself. But who could take care of himself when confronted with Gus Steele?

"Hold on, Gus," I said.

He looked at Mead. He said, while Mead nodded: "You get out of the way, Ted," and took a step toward us.

When he raised his hands to brush me aside, I hit him with everything I had. He did not try to block it. My arm went numb to the elbow and I had the questionable satisfaction of seeing Gus Steele stagger back half a step. That was all. I think he enjoyed being hit. It must have proved something for him.

The girl shouted something. We didn't hear her. Mead said: "Make her change our course, Gus."

Gus brushed me out of the way and my head slammed against a bulkhead. Just then the small spaceship shuddered its entire length and the faint hum of its subspace drive was suddenly stilled. I didn't get it at first. My head rang. But our forward mo-

tion had been stopped—without the consequential deceleration.

A moment later, before my head could clear, we were boarded. They came through the airlock, and they wore no spacesuits. They were just two girls in short skirts and halters. Our own girl—not our captive as we'd thought, but our captor—had signaled them somehow. I don't know how. She was always watched. It must have had something to do with the way she took the little spaceship into the mists. Anyhow, she signaled them.

Mead spoke quickly to Gus. I was still too dazed to get the drift of it, but Gus nodded and sent the first of the boarders flying with a sweep of his huge forearm. The second one looked surprised but pulled something about the size of a pencil from the waistband of her skirt. She pointed it at Gus and there wasn't a sound, but Gus settled to the floor gently as a feather inside the weightless ship.

The girl with the weapon looked up questioningly, accusingly. "Men, Sue," she said. "You brought men here with you." Sue. It kind of floored me. But why



shouldn't her name be Sue—if she spoke English as well as we did?

"They were trying to steal energy boxes and take them outside the swarm," Sue said. "I did what I had to."

"Shall I kill them now?" the girl with the weapon asked calmly. I wondered then if Gus Steele was dead. But he stirred, and one of his hands moved.

"You better not," Sue said promptly. "They may have confederates somewhere. We'll have to make sure. We'll have to question them."

"You mean," the girl with the weapon demanded, "take them back to Earth with us?"

"Earth!" I gasped.

They ignored me. Sue nodded. She knew full well we had no confederates. It occurred to me all at once that she was trying to save our lives, at least for the moment. I couldn't figure out why.

"But our laws say no outsiders—and certainly no men—can live on Earth more than forty-eight hours. They'll have to be executed sooner or later."

I gulped. They weren't play-acting. Those words

meant exactly what they seemed to mean. If we let them take us from this spaceship, we had—at most—forty-eight hours to live.

Sue nodded. "We'll worry about that on Earth," she said.

Shrugging, the other girl returned the small weapon to her skirt. She took unconscious Gus Steele's arm and gave it a gentle tug. Gus floated weightlessly toward the airlock. She prodded him ahead of her and he floated outside into the mists. Through them a couple of dozen yards I could see another airlock, the great vault-door swung back, yawning blackly. Gus floated through it and disappeared.

The two girls who'd boarded Sue's ship took Whitey Mead next. He didn't resist. It surprised me, but Whitey was always one to size up a situation at a glance while other men, less self-assured or younger or both, including me, would rave and rant. Then I noticed a funny thing. The girl who had boarded Sue's ship behind the girl with the weapon hadn't said a word. All the while, she'd been staring at Whitey Mead. She'd never seen a man before, I told myself. She



stared at him steadily, unblinking, as if bemused. I saw it, and Whitey Mead saw it. If Sue and the other girl noticed, they gave no sign. Maybe the wheels were already starting to go around in Whitey Mead's brain. I don't know. All I know is he went to what seemed certain death without putting up a fight.

Sue and I were alone for a few moments in the smaller ship. "They—they're really going to kill us?" I asked.

Sue didn't look at me. Maybe I'm dense. She didn't have to gape in open-mouthed wonder like the other girl. She was seeing her first man, too—except for the shriveled up M'hunnaese subjects. She said: "Our laws demand it."

"But they could have killed us right here."

"You might have confederates. They have to find out."

"You know we're in this alone."

Sue didn't answer that. I waited helplessly at the airlock. "I'm sorry it has to be you," Sue finally said. "You were friendly. You're not like the others. Don't you see, Ted? Don't you see? We have a wonderful life. Utopia, thanks to the energy boxes and our subjugation of

the Sagittarian planets. We don't want that changed. We know what it would be like if outsiders got wind of the energy boxes, to use your Whitey Mead's favorite idiom. We can't . . ."

She floated toward me in the weightless ship. She came quite close. "I was always taught . . . men are cruel and would rule us if they could . . . our planet is large, but we're few in number . . . Ted, Ted! Why did you have to come here?"

Her hands touched my face. I kissed her on the lips.

She broke away as if I'd hit her. "Why did you do that?"

"I don't know why," I said. "When a man and a woman . . ."

"But there's no such thing as a man and a woman on my world."

I wanted to kiss her again. I didn't have time to search my motives. Was I like Whitey Mead, who'd noticed how the quiet girl had eyed him and who already was hatching plans for his escape? Or was it something else?

I never got the chance to find out. The two girls returned through the airlock. "You'll take your own ship in, Sue," the talkative one



said. "You can expect a summons to appear before the Patriarch soon after landing."

Sue nodded. She wouldn't look at me now.

The other two girls escorted me to the airlock. I suddenly didn't want to go out there. Death was all their laws had for me, death within forty-eight hours. Wild thoughts went through my mind. Maybe they were going to kill me now. They were trying to lead me outside into space without a helmet, weren't they? Of course, they didn't wear helmets either, so it probably was okay. But at the moment I wasn't so rational. I thought of only one thing: I couldn't go out there with them.

They had other ideas. And, like Sue, they'd been raised on a world with twice Earth-norm gravity, although they called it Earth. I struggled at the airlock, but they grabbed my arms and heaved and I went outside into the mists with them. Space—and mists. It wasn't cold. I breathed. Or, I tried to breathe. It scared the heck out of me, because nothing happened. I couldn't breathe. Then, when I calmed down a little, I realized I didn't have to breathe. It was as if,

miraculously, my energy was conserved. More than conserved. It was as if the mists imparted new energy to me. I felt strong as the proverbial lion and thought vaguely of a space where terrene and contraterrene matter meet, not in a single awesome explosion but in a controlled release of energy. Was this such a place? Did the energy flow, somehow, into my muscles? And, more than that—couldn't this meeting of terrene and contraterrene matter, a controlled meeting as a nuclear pile is controlled—couldn't it explain the amazing energy boxes?

I made a mistake. I tried to use my new strength to get away and fight my way back to Sue's spaceship. But the two girls grasped my arms up high and tugged me, kicking and struggling to no avail, through the mists to the larger ship. I should have realized that the strange strength - of - the - mists was vouchsafed to them as well.

One of them, though—it was the silent, dark-haired one—gave me a look like she wanted to eat me up. It was the same one who'd made eyes at Whitey Mead. As we entered the big ship she squeezed my arm against her



and brushed her lips over my cheek. When we got inside the ship and could breathe normally again, she didn't. That is, her breath came too quickly and a red spot the size of a half-credit coin blazed on both her cheeks. The other girl, to whom such things probably meant less than nothing, never noticed it at all. Then I was thrust into a small compartment on one side of the ship, and a heavy metal door banged shut. Whitey Mead was seated against the wall in there, watching without particular interest as Gus regained consciousness.

"The dark-haired one," Mead said.

I said nothing.

"She'll be our ticket to freedom," he said.

That didn't get a response from me either.

"And to the energy boxes," he added.

There was a sink and a water tap against the wall. I went over and got some water for Gus Steele.

A moment later, the ship got underway. Destination, death. But strangely, that didn't seem to bother Whitey Mead.

We landed on the world the girls called Earth a few

hours later. Naturally, it wasn't Earth. It was halfway across the galaxy from Earth and a bigger world. You could feel the size as soon as you set foot on it. You felt sluggish, as if there were weights fastened to all your limbs. You could walk all right, but if you had to run you knew it would be like running uphill with an invisible man trying to drag you down.

It was night when we landed. We were quickly ushered down a street past a row of small, spherical buildings, then a vacant space of about a mile, then more round buildings, then another vacant space. We passed a few girls out walking, but it was quite dark and I don't think they noticed we were men. I began to think that was the general idea—to keep us hidden.

Pretty soon we reached a small kiosk with a flight of steps going down. The two girls led us down there. Gus looked at Whitey Mead, but the little man shook his head. Not now, the gesture said. Sure, maybe we could break free now—but what for? We'd still be on this world of women, with no way of astrogating through the surrounding mists. And we



wouldn't have the energy boxes, either.

We were led along a tunnel and to a large cell. Bars clanged down, footsteps drifted off, and we were left alone with our thoughts. Mead kept on yammering about the energy boxes. Gus said not a word. Under the circumstances, I did the most sensible thing that could be done. I fell asleep.

A faint sound awoke me. I looked up.

It had come sooner than I had expected. The dark-haired girl was there. The bars were up.

"Get off your duff," Mead told me. "She's got some kind of a car waiting."

"Where are we going?"

"Let me worry about that. Or let her worry about it. You and Gus just come along."

I shrugged. I didn't mind Whitey Mead puffing out his hollow chest if it meant we all wouldn't be dying inside of forty-eight hours.

In the dim light of the small lantern she was holding, the dark-haired girl's face looked eager, but she said: "I have changed my mind."

"Gus," Mead said.

"No. I mean it is not the little man I want. It is this

other one." She came close to me and nuzzled her face next to mine. She was very young: I had not realized how young. Probably, she was still in her teens.

"What's your name, man?" she asked me.

I told her.

"I am Joannie." She nuzzled me again.

"All right, all right," Mead snapped. It's hard to figure a mean little man like Whitey Mead. At another time the girl's decision might have grated on his ego, but not now. Now he had only one thing in mind. Well, two things. Escape. And the energy boxes. He said: "You can have him, or both of us, or anything you want. Only, let's get out of here."

"I want to rub my lips across your cheeks again," the girl told me.

"For crying out loud," Mead swore, "let her rub her lips over your crummy cheek or anything she wants!"

It was a funny situation—but a desperate one. She rubbed her lips. She rubbed her lips some more. She giggled. Her hand clutched mine. She was doing nothing more than a girl would do on her very first soda-pop-in-the-corner-drugstore date back on



Earth, but she had waited all her life for it. Finally, Gus pulled her away from me, and we all went down the tunnel. The girl came back and held my hand, her fingers clutching and unclutching to make sure I was still there. I'm only twenty-eight, but she somehow made me feel as old as Methuselah's great-grandfather.

We went up the steps. Something loomed up there in the darkness, a vehicle of some sort.

"You sit in front with me," Joannie told me.

"Sit wherever she wants, Ted," Mead groaned.

We headed for the car, but a woman's voice called: "Joannie?"

In despair, Joannie cried, "It's my roommate!"

The roommate was a big female silhouette in the darkness. "Joannie," she said, "I didn't give you permission to take my car. And who are those people with you?"

"Nobody," Joannie said in a shaky voice.

The roommate was bigger than Joannie, and sounded older. She sounded as tough as lizard skin. It was like the situation down below—funny, but desperate.

"Hit her, Gus!" Mead whispered.

There was a loud noise, a choked-off oath, and the sound of something falling.

"Let's go," Mead told us. He climbed into the back of the small vehicle with Gus. Joannie got in front.

"Get a move on," Mead called.

I began to get in front. There was a noise behind me. I started to turn around, when a big hand came down on the back of my neck. Joannie's roommate, up close, was only a little smaller than Gus Steele. Needless to say a mighty big woman.

The car made a faint sound. So did Joannie.

"Get moving!" Mead cried.

Joannie whimpered. Then the car sped away. With dreams of escape and energy boxes, Whitey Mead wasn't going to be delayed by anybody.

The big hand was still on the back of my neck. Joannie's roommate was the biggest woman I have ever seen. She must have weighed two hundred pounds, and she wasn't fat.

"Who are you?" she asked.

I didn't say anything.

"Why do you wear your hair so short?"

I figured she'd find out soon enough for herself. Her



free hand explored my face. I needed a shave.

She let out a yelp. Her other hand let go of my neck. She may have been big. She may have been almost as strong as Gus Steele. But she was still a woman. She proved it then. She let out a squawk and did what women have been known to do when shocked.

"You—" she said, gasping, "you're a—man." Then she fainted.

I ran down toward the spherical houses. I didn't know where I was going, and every running stride in the double-Earth-norm gravity was an effort. But I had to get away. Anyplace.

I didn't get very far. Something hit my legs from behind, and I went down. At first I thought it was Joannie's enormous roommate, but it wasn't.

We grappled. I couldn't do much against the pressure of two gravities, though. I looked up into Sue's face.

"Joannie's just a girl," she said angrily. "A little girl. She was acting funny. I followed her. The others got away, didn't they?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'm sorry, Ted," she said. "I'm taking you to the Patriarch. Right now."

But Sue's right now actually meant in the morning. She led me into a vehicle, a small round car with no visible means or propulsion. The car rolled forward with barely a sound, and pretty soon we reached our destination. There was another flight of steps going down, another tunnel, another cell. The bars slammed down, Sue turned away without a word, and her footsteps retreated in the darkness.

Two girls in uniform came for me in the morning. They wore the first uniforms I had seen on this Earth of theirs, silver kirtle and black halter. Each of them carried one of the pencil-shaped stunning weapons.

"Out of there, you," one of them said. The bars scraped and groaned into the rocky ceiling.

I asked: "Where's Sue?"

"If you mean the girl who brought you here, she has to appear before the Patriarch too."

I shrugged. I didn't know if they meant Sue was in trouble or not, but at least I'd be seeing her again. I couldn't help wondering if she wanted it that way too, then realized this was one heck of a time to think of



something like that. For all I knew, a death sentence for an Earthman named Ted Drummond would be handed down this morning. Such a thought is not calculated to give you much of an appetite, so I passed up the breakfast I was offered, and they led me straight to their Patriarch.

He held forth in the biggest building I'd seen on this planet. It was white stone and had a huge portico out front and high columns like in the Roman forum. There were plenty of the silver and black uniforms around there and the sound of tramping feet echoing through the portico. Word must have got around, and pretty soon the tramp-tramp-tramping came in our direction as I was marched along the portico. I probably drew more stares than an Orionian fire beast. But there was food for thought there: only some of the stares were hostile. Plenty of the uniformed women looked at me the way Joannie had looked. This world would be one heck of a fine place for a bachelor to call home—except that I was sure the Patriarch would have other ideas.

Besides, there was Sue.

My guards led me to a long

hall flanked by great tapering columns. The Patriarch sat at the far end on a black marble dais. Guards lined the hall, armed not with the pencil stunners but with spears which probably were primarily ceremonial. A lone girl was on her knees at the foot of the great dais. As I walked closer, I saw it was Sue. She kneeled there, head bowed, her long blonde hair loose and almost touching the marble floor.

"That is all you have to tell?" the Patriarch asked.

His voice startled me. For one thing, it echoed and re-echoed through the long hall. But that was only part of it: he had quite the deepest, richest, most sonorous voice I'd ever heard—male or female. Surprisingly enough, he was not a big man. He looked almost old enough to be Sue's grandfather, or mine too, for that matter. He was bent and wrinkled and, except for his voice, didn't impress me much until I saw his eyes. Those eyes almost made me forget the voice. They seemed to shine with an inner light and I had the wild idea they would set a Geiger counter to clicking. They were not the kind of eyes you could stare down if



your life depended on it. I wondered if mine would.

"Yes, Patriarch," Sue said humbly, all but choking on her words.

"Then you admit you knew these men had no confederates, yet talked the others into bringing them here alive?"

"Yes, Patriarch."

"For love of one of them?"

Just then Sue looked up. She saw me and her throat and face grew suddenly pink. The Patriarch's laughter boomed and he said: "That is answer enough. This, then, is the man?"

Sue's head bowed further. Her hair touched the floor. She wouldn't look at me.

"Although you knew," the Patriarch went on, "this would be in violation of our most important laws, those which say Earth must never be visited by outsiders?"

"Yes," Sue mumbled almost inaudibly.

"Then, child, there is only one sentence I can pronounce. I sentence you to—"

"Wait!" I yelled.

Hands grabbed my shoulders, a knee was thrust into the small of my back, and my head banged against black marble. My senses blurred as I was dragged

forward. A spear point touched my throat.

Heedless I went on: "Wait. It wasn't her fault. I take all the blame."

The Patriarch's laughter boomed again. "Since you'll die in any event and probably know it, I can't put much stock in your words."

A hand grasped my hair and my head was jerked back. The spear point bit into my throat. Far off, I heard Sue whimpering.

"But hold!" rang out the Patriarch's voice. "I'll hear him out."

I needed time, plenty of time. I knew my life hung in the balance—and Sue's. I had no plan. I hardly even knew what I would say. I needed time to think. I took a deep breath as the spear point left my throat. Then I spoke.

"Should your taboo against outworlders coming here apply to men of Earth, Patriarch?" I demanded. "Earth—the original Earth which I don't have to tell you was the home of your ancestors—your origin and heritage."

It was only a guess but, I thought, probably a good one. It alone could explain the name of their world and the language they spoke.

"Your origin does not in-



terest me," said the Patriarch drily.

"Only your fate," one of the guards whispered in my ear.

My heart was hammering and I couldn't seem to get enough air to breathe. I'm no advocate, but I sensed that our lives would depend on how well I spoke, possibly on how big, and how convincing, a lie I told.

"Did it ever occur to you," I asked boldly, "that I was sent here by the government of Earth to find you?"

Interest flashed in the Patriarch's smouldering eyes. I wondered what a fisherman would do now, play a little longer with his lure or strike hard with the hidden hook. I did not know how long I could hold the Patriarch's interest. I decided to strike. I said:

"Didn't it also occur to you that if I don't return to the original Earth as scheduled, a much larger expedition might be sent here to find me, an expedition of such undreamed of power that you couldn't hope to cope with it?"

There was a long silence. Sue's head swung around in my direction. There was a questioning look in her eyes but I stood facing the Pa-

triarch and tried to appear unconcerned.

"Can you show proof?" the Patriarch asked in a somewhat subdued voice.

"The burden of proof isn't on me," I responded quickly. "The burden of faith is on you."

"But surely you must have some identification."

"I'm not an ambassador, but only a scout."

"And the others with you, the ones who fled, kidnaping a young girl, are they representatives of the Earth government too? If so, we have only contempt for your government."

"They are not representatives of Earth," I answered truthfully enough. "They were part of the crew of my ship. And while I hold myself responsible for their behavior, I can't control their actions."

"What does your government want with us?"

"First, to find out all about you. Second, to reintroduce you to Earth's galactic civilization." Probably, that was true enough. In the past, lost Earth colonies had been found. More often than not, their mores and cultural patterns had deviated so far from Earth norm that it took



decades, sometimes whole generations, to correct them.

"But," the Patriarch asked craftily, "if you were sent here to find us, you ought to know all about us."

"Not at all. This wouldn't be the first colony we lost track of, not by a long sight."

The Patriarch stood up on his dais for the first time. He was a surprisingly small man, bent of bone and shriveled of flesh. His voice was very much smaller when he said: "All right, I'll tell you. Three hundred years ago, a hundred women set out in a spaceship—as wives for a new colony in Ophiuchus. The ship was lost—here in Sagittarius. Our ancestors were on the ship."

"But you . . . there were no men . . . you couldn't possibly . . ."

"Necessity. We had to reproduce or die. A group of women setting out for the outworlds, as you know, is not a group of housewives. There were, among other things, biochemists among us. All our efforts went to finding a way of reproduction by parthenogenesis. This we found: the egg merely has to be stimulated, then pricked in the right environment of liquids and at the right temperature—but the details,

I'm sure don't interest you, but this might: I am the only male that ever evolved in the history of our world."

"Tell me, have you produced any . . . ?"

"I have remained celibate," the Patriarch said sternly.

I'd been playing it by ear and I now saw the possibility of another opening. But there was a risk. I had to take a chance and needle him.

"That's rather strange," I said glancing around at the luscious women in attendance—almost leering.

The Patriarch's eyes blazed. "I am above carnal things!"

"Uh-huh—and I know why. You were afraid of producing another male. This way, you're master—master of the galaxy your planet rides in. Birth a line of males and you would be all washed up."

His eyes blazed. He opened his mouth. The death-order was on his lips.

I spoke casually. "You asked a minute ago why—if we were agents—why we didn't know more about you. This answers your question. Your jealous dictatorship of this planet does not fit into the New Universe." I didn't know what the New



Universe was but I didn't think he did either.

The pronouncement was delayed. At least he was shaken that much. He sat silent for a moment, then went off on a tangent.

"I serve them well. They have no problems; no work to do. This world, as you may have heard, is at the meeting place of contraterrene and terrene space. There ought to be a cataclysmic explosion; there isn't. The energy is, incredibly, nature-controlled. It only remained for us to store it in what the M'hunnaese call energy boxes, distribute them to the surrounding planets in return for work and goods, and live in a perfect Utopia. It is this Utopia we do not want disturbed, under any circumstances."

"Even if the mother planet wishes to reclaim you?"

"Even then—although if we must, we'll negotiate with Earth. But that still leaves the problem of you—and your men."

"No problem," I said. "Give us a ship, and a pilot. For your own safety, we have to return to Earth."

"Your men are guilty of kidnaping."

"My men—"

"I think you're bluffing."

I smiled at him. Any moment, he might pronounce Sue's death sentence and mine. I had to appear confident, cock-sure, indifferent to his whims. "Can you take the chance not to believe me?" I asked.

"I can see that your men are brought to justice—and any of my own subjects who violated our laws."

"Be careful what laws are violated," I pointed out. "You have a big planet, but you couldn't possibly have a big population. While Earth is interested in its lost colonies, it won't see its own laws and wishes violated."

"What you say may be quite true," the Patriarch observed without fear. "Our population is hardly more than ten thousand — still, though, a notable achievement from a base of one hundred in just three hundred years. And as for punishing my own subjects—"

"Who never stopped being Earth subjects."

"Who were born fifty thousand light years and three centuries from Earth and Earth's sovereignty, young man!"

I could sense we were quibbling now. So far, all I had done was postpone the



Patriarch's pronouncement of sentence. Before the quibbling ended in an outburst of anger, I had to get something concrete from him.

I asked: "Do we get freedom—and a ship?"

"You get nothing but death."

Sue's eyes went big. My own heart thumped and pounded against my ribs. The Patriarch smiled a cold smile. "Unless you can find your two crewmen and bring them back here, so that I may see them and release them into your custody," he said. "Unless you can capture them and take them off *this* world with you—with no harm befalling any of our people. Do that, and you live. Do that, and you'll have freedom and a ship. Do that, and even the girl will be pardoned. But do it exactly as I have said it must be done."

I looked at Sue. She returned my stare solemnly and I nodded to the Patriarch.

"And incidentally, young man," the old man said with a faint smile, "it's a very interesting story you've been telling me, but I don't believe a word of it." That took some of the starch out of me, all right. "I like your

spunk, though, and I always relished a good lie, well thought out, well told. Besides, perhaps you are right. Perhaps it is time the two worlds met. Perhaps we even ought to give our secret of the energy boxes to Earth." His face went bleak. "But not to a couple of privateers like your crew! To the entire population of Earth, men, women, and children—only to them."

Naturally, I said I thought it was a good idea. The sooner the better.

"But you don't represent your government, and don't think you had me fooled for a minute. You're still up to your ears in trouble, young man. I'll go along with your lie, and with you—if you succeed. There is a premium on success here on our Earth. The good effort means nothing. You must succeed or die—you understand? Capture your men, see that no harm comes to my subjects—and you're free to go."

"But where—"

"Not another word." The Patriarch clapped his hands. "Not one more word."

Guards with spears led me away from the dais. When we had almost reached the other end of the long hall, a



slender figure came running toward us. It was Sue.

"I'm going with you, Ted," she said. "I can help you."

I hoped she could. As for myself, I didn't know where to begin. Maybe, I thought grimly, the Patriarch knew that all along and was just playing with us. . . .

After the guards reached us, I was like a man groping around blindly through thick fog. Exactly how did you go about finding two Earthmen on a planet twice the size of Earth? Even if all the other inhabitants were women, it still seemed an incredibly difficult task. And then, assuming you found them, how did you go about overpowering them and bringing them before the Patriarch so he could release them in your custody? Especially if one of them was a giant with tremendous strength?

Sue solved that problem soon enough. The guards gave us one of the cars—apparently they're community-owned—and we drove a couple of miles across the city. All Sue would say was: "There's a cousin of mine you ought to meet." She wouldn't tell me why, and I let it ride. She had to explain what cousin meant here, though: it meant a girl who'd

been born the same month Sue had been born. Relations are added up chronologically, not by blood.

We met Sue's cousin, whose name turned out to be Inez, twisting metal bars into pretzel loops for exercise. Inez was, with plenty of room to spare, the biggest woman I had ever seen. She was over six and a half feet tall and as wide across the shoulders as Gus Steele, and wider through the hips and thighs. She was a veritable volcano of a woman, with a hard, homely, flat-planed face and hands the size of ham-butt. If she wouldn't be a match for Gus Steele on a world of twice Earth-norm gravity, then no one would.

After Sue explained the situation to Inez, the big woman demanded in a voice almost as deep as a bull-frog's: "And you want me to go with you?"

"To take care of the one called Gus Steele, yes. He's very strong."

Inez laughed. Two hundred and fifty pounds of woman shook with laughter, and that seemed to be all the answer we would get.

Then Sue dropped a bomb-shell by asking: "All right, Ted. Where are they?"



"Where are they?"

"Yes. Where are they? Let's go get them."

"But I thought you—"

"Oh, no. I don't know where they are."

And that did it. Say the diameter of this world called Earth was twice the original Earth's—over fifteen thousand miles. Say it had its share of oceans, continents, islands. Where did you look?

Inez groaned her disappointment. The delay seemed to bother her. She cracked her knuckles with a noise like pine trees being split.

"What about the girl that went with them?" I suggested.

"Joannie?" Sue asked.

I nodded, and off the three of us went in Sue's car, Inez making it list heavily to one side. Joannie wasn't home. Joannie's roommate, if any, wasn't home.

A car was waiting out on the street behind ours, with two silver - and - black uniformed girls within. "The Patriarch wishes it be known," one of them pronounced, "that you have only two days to accomplish your mission."

"But we—" I began.

"Any more than two days, and the Patriarch would

doubt both your ability to find the men and your desire to do as you were bid."

We couldn't argue. Sue got behind the wheel of the car. I groaned and climbed in beside her. Inez made it list as we got underway.

Foolishly, we spent the first of our two days trying to track down a lead on Joannie. She had simply vanished. We slept fitfully that night. Inez was a self-appointed guardian of the chastity of her chronology-cousin. At first I didn't know where she got the idea it might need a guardian, but then I saw the way Sue was looking at me and tried to unravel my own confused thoughts about Sue. It ended up by us sneaking outside like a couple of truant kids while Inez slept. Maybe the face that we had only one day of freedom left before the Patriarch pronounced sentence had something to do with it. Maybe we knew, although neither one of us said it in so many words, that we were existing on borrowed time. Anyhow, we looked at each other in the pale light of the new dawn, and came together without a word. Ten minutes later, Inez came rumbling outside like a tank, and caught us necking. A smile



lit up her wrathful face. There was just no predicting Inez.

We had breakfast, Inez eating enough for a platoon. Then I stood up and said: "Well, for crying out loud."

Sue looked concerned. "What is it — something wrong with the eggs?"

"Whitey Mead and Gus," I said. "Of course."

"What are you talking about?"

"He's addled," suggested Inez.

"Addled, my foot," I said, grinning from ear to ear. "I know where to find them."

"Ooo, Ted!"

"You have any factories that turn out the energy boxes?" I asked. "I ought to have my head examined for not thinking of it sooner. They want energy boxes, in quantity. Obviously, that's where they'll be."

"That's fine," Inez said.

"Just great," Sue said.

"What's the matter?"

Sue took my hand and squeezed it. "I'll tell you what's the matter. We have only until sundown today, is the matter. And there are fourteen energy box factories."

"Fourteen!" I gasped.

They nodded. We didn't finish breakfast.

By noon we had visited four of the factories. By sundown, six more. We turned up nothing.

As we left the tenth factory, a car pulled up alongside ours. Inside the transparent dome of its cockpit were three silver-and-black uniformed Patriarch police. One of them said what police anywhere will say: "Pull over!"

Sue stopped the car and looked at me helplessly. Night was coming. The silver of the police uniforms gleamed in the gathering darkness. Inez got ponderously out of the car. For all her size, she moved swiftly. Two silver-and-black uniforms faltered, two long-tressed heads were bashed together with a very final sort of a sound, and two police women slumped to the ground.

But the third police woman fled into the night.

I looked at Inez. Inez beamed. One of the police women groaned. "So now we're fugitives," I said.

We visited the eleventh factory stealthily. Our pattern of movement was plain enough. At one of the remaining factories we would surely encounter more police



than we could handle, Inez or no Inez. The eleventh factory was shut down for the night. Inez stalked the watchwoman, and tackled her, and sat on her, and learned that no fugitive Earthmen had showed up.

We hit paydirt at factory number twelve, but it didn't seem to matter—since the police were waiting for us.

There were two cars, prowling cars, I guess you'd call them. Or maybe, with Inez on the loose, it was the riot squad. Anyhow, they were waiting for us.

We parked a quarter of a mile away and walked toward the big gray bulk of the factory building. Halfway there we stumbled over a figure hiding in the shadows near an adjacent warehouse. She opened her mouth to scream, but Inez cupped a big hand over it and the scream was smothered.

It was Joannie.

"Where are they?" I said.

Inez released her. Joannie gasped, "In there! In there! I didn't want . . . they made me . . . they . . . you're not the police."

"Do the police know they're in there?" I asked.

Joannie said nothing. Inez scowled at her. Joannie bit her lip and said, "N-no. The

police are waiting for someone else."

"For us," Sue said.

Joannie went on: "I have the watchwoman out here, gagged and bound. We have a 'copter on the roof . . . going to fill it with energy boxes and get a spaceship over at the terminal. Then . . ."

"On the roof," Inez said. "Come on."

"She means the factory roof," I told Inez. "Not this one. And there are the police."

"And Joannie," Sue said.

"I really didn't want to help them," Joannie said, seeing me for the first time clearly. "In fact, it was this man I really—"

"He," said Sue in a surprisingly firm voice, "is spoken for."

Inez found some of the rope Joannie had used on the watchwoman. Pretty soon Joannie was bound and gagged too, and thrust back into the shadows of the warehouse.

We headed toward the factory—and the police—without any specific plan. Inez trotted on ahead. I didn't know what she had in mind until suddenly she sprinted at one of the police cars. Several of the policewomen



were seated in there, waiting, watching for us. Several of the others were out on the street. In the darkness it seemed as if Inez hit the car head on. Then her huge arms lifted, the vehicle rocked, rolled—and overturned. Female shrieks pierced the night.

Inez yelled: "Go inside after them! I'll hold off the police." As she shouted, she used her arms for flails. Two policewomen fell before the assault. I grabbed Sue's hand and ran for the shadowy doorway of the building. A whistle blew, footsteps pounded, voices shouted. We hit the door on the dead run and heard Inez' laughter in a booming, raucous challenge. The door was not locked.

As we pounded inside I realized Sue and I would have to—somehow—do what Inez would have done.

We would have to meet, and subdue, Gus Steele.

Not even pausing for breath, we pounded up several flights of stairs. The roof, Joannie had said. Thanks to her conditioning under twice Earth-norm gravity, Sue took the stairs a lot quicker than I did. For me each riser seemed two feet high on the first flight, three feet high on the sec-

ond, four feet high on the third. On the fourth I was all but sagging to all fours.

Then, all at once, we burst out on the roof. After the shadows of the narrow warehouse alleyways, it was a startlingly bright starlit night.

A helicopter was parked up ahead, all right. Surrounded by stacks and stacks of energy boxes. But we barely had time to see them before we all but got our heads knocked off. Literally.

Gus Steele was waiting for us with a wood beam which had been used in some sort of construction on the roof. It was the size of a small tree trunk and Gus swung it the way only a tornado—or possibly Inez—could have. Instinct alone made me duck, made me drag Sue down beside me.

The beam crashed against the roof doorshed, splinters and shards of wood flying. Gus Steele let out an exclamation of surprise as the sundering beam was torn from his great fingers. While he was still voicing his surprise, I hit him. I gave it everything I had, my fist connecting just below the point of his jaw. I recoiled like a released steel spring. Gus



Steele swayed about six inches and blinked at me and took a step toward me.

I groped on the floor and found a club of wood from the shattered beam. It was about the size of an ancient baseball bat, but, naturally, with rough edges. With it you could fell an ox—but an ox wasn't Gus Steele.

Then Sue cried: "The 'copter!"

A couple of dozen yards off, the 'copter blades had begun to spin. With or without Gus Steele, with or without the rest of his energy boxes. Whitey Mead was getting ready to desert what was quickly taking on the appearance of a sinking ship.

Sue sprinted toward the 'copter. There was a shout—Whitey Mead's voice. Then Gus loomed in front of me.

"Give me the stick, Ted," he said, holding out his hand. He looked bigger than a charging brontosaurus.

I swung the club. Downstairs and a world away, I heard shouting. The wood hit Gus somewhere — and bounced from my hand. I dove after it. Gus bellowed and dove after me. I got the club and swung around, discovering it was only half a club now. I threw it at Gus

and saw it bounce off his shoulder. He lumbered at me, and this time all I had to swing was my fists. I couldn't seem to get them around very fast under the twice Earth-norm gravity. I ducked under Gus' wild lunge and dove for his legs. We went down together with me on top. If Gus had come down on top, the fight would have been over. I pounded his face and head with my fists. He grabbed for me and got hold of one arm, almost wrenching it from the socket.

I groped on the floor and found another piece of the shattered beam. I slammed it against the side of Gus' head four or five times. He blinked. Across the roof, the 'copter rotors whirled and whirled. In the other direction, feet pounded up the steps.

I swung the club again. I don't know how many times I swung it. My arms were numb. I couldn't really get much steam behind the blows. But Gus let go of me, his legs drumming once or twice.

The police had to drag me off him—which they did. I'd acted like a wild man; and it was totally unexpected. I decided it was because of Sue: had Gus got the best of



me, Sue would have been next.

As it turned out, the police dragged me off the unconscious giant in time to see Sue toting a likewise unconscious Whitey Mead from the 'copter. Naturally, she hadn't even worked up an unladylike sweat doing it.

We brought Whitey Mead and Gus before the Patriarch. Gus was all right, except for three missing teeth. Whitey Mead had a shiner and a broken nose. As he promised, the Patriarch released them in our custody. I knew there was no Earth law that could punish Mead for what he'd tried—but they could, and probably would, take his spacer's license away.

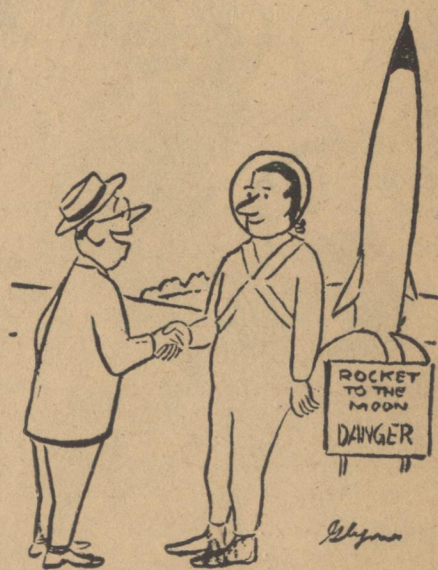
The Patriarch was true to his word. We were given a ship, and two days later blasted off. We'd even been given a dozen of the energy boxes, to see if our scientists could find out what made them tick. And we were given a message to the Earth Department of State. Their world wanted to find its way back into the family of planets.

That was all very interesting, but it didn't concern me at the moment. Neither did our prisoners, who were

safely below decks in irons. My co-pilot and I had other ideas. Delightful ideas.

You see, my co-pilot was Sue. And the Patriarch, using an authority of his office which had not been employed in three hundred years, had married us.

Sue, naturally, had a great deal to find out. **THE END**



"I know it's never been done before, Jackson, but don't you let that worry you one little bit. After all, there's got to be a first time for everything."





The lizards seemed a part of the ghastly nightmare.



# REPEAT BROADCAST

By HENRY SLESAR

THE lizard looked at Briggs and smiled.

At least, that was the way the scaly, bewhiskered face of the reptile appeared to the I.P. man, as he lifted himself on his elbows and stared back.

But he couldn't really trust his vision. He had the President of all headaches, and his bones ached from cranium to fibula.

"What's so funny?" he asked the creature.

The queer animal took a cautious step backwards.

Briggs arose painfully. There was soft green sand under his feet and a double sun over his head. The twin luminosity beat down with almost unbearable force.

"Where the devil am I?" he asked aloud.

These words really startled

*Space travel is an exciting thing to look forward to. It's fun wondering what we'll find out there among the stars. Life on other planets may be inspiring and uplifting; but then again a trip to the next galaxy may prove no different than a bad case of delirium tremens.*

the lizard. It scampered off and leaped atop a moss-covered rock. It squatted there, nervously, regarding the law officer with unblinking eyes.

Briggs watched it. It was a funny specie, all right. About a foot long, with hard scales that gleamed like mica in the brilliant sunlight, a set of mutton-chop whiskers, a pair of long, hair-line antennae, and a reptilian jaw set in a perpetual grin.

But the zoology of the strange planet couldn't hold Briggs' interest for very long.

"Devlo!" he shouted angrily. "The dirty rat!"

That did it for the lizard. Its little feet flew in all directions as it tumbled off its perch. It landed on its back, kicked itself upright, and then burrowed its way into



the soft sand. Its fright was so comical that Briggs couldn't help being amused—even though his situation was more desperate than funny.

The I.P. had been hunting Dev Devlo for three months, sending agent after agent across the inhabited star systems from Sirius to the Pleiades, in search of the wily bandit. Finally, Devlo had been cornered by a veteran law man aboard a star liner bound for Earth.

Briggs' job was easy after that. All he had to do was transport Devlo back home for trial.

But the job turned out to be more than routine.

It happened aboard the I.P. spacer *Outlander*. Briggs never figured that Devlo would do more than brood on the flight back to prison. Devlo was no pilot, so he'd never risk attacking the officer at the controls—not on the chance of a crack-up on some uncharted planet.

At least, that was what Briggs thought.

He found out differently. Devlo seemed to have as little regard for his own life as he had for the lives of others. He murdered so casually that he was fast establishing a record in the homicide files of

the Interplanetary Police. And when the *Outlander* was only sixteen hours in space, the bandit threw himself on the pilot and took his chances.

Briggs had no choice. Before he could stop his attacker, Devlo had fought his way to the control panel and—

"And then what?" said Briggs, shaking his head.

He couldn't remember.

The I.P. man walked around and surveyed his surroundings.

It was a monotonous landscape of greens and yellows; low-sloping sandy hills, a far-off patch of orange underbrush, a sky so bright your optic nerves jumped if you merely took a look. The oxygen supply was good, and the gravity compatible, but there wasn't much more you could say for the place.

Briggs tried to recall his Interplanetary Guide Book, but it was no use. He suspected that the world would be listed in the "undesirable" section. It was sure undesirable to him right now.

"But what happened?" he said, as he stomped around on the hot sand in irritation. Devlo must have gotten the ship down someplace; landing was an automatic affair. But he could never manage



the intricacies of a blast-off. Unless he tried it, of course, and—

Briggs said: "Then there ought to be a wreck around here someplace—"

But as far as his eyes could see in the blinding glare, there wasn't a sign of ship or shipwreck.

Briggs sat down on a clump of greenish sand and put his head in his hands.

"I'm lost," he moaned.

He sat that way for about ten minutes, and then the lizard reappeared. It advanced slowly towards the law officer, swishing its prehensile tail against the ground. When it was some four feet away, it stopped.

"Seek you," it said.

Briggs uncovered his face and looked at the lizard. His mouth dropped open.

"Huh?"

"Seek you," said the lizard again.

Sunstroke? thought the I.P. man. Was that his trouble? It would be *double* sunstroke on this nutty planet! But then he realized that the lizard was, indeed, saying:

"Seek you."

It came a little closer to the officer, timorous still, but growing bolder.

"Seek *me*?" said Briggs wryly.

"Seek you," said the lizard. "Apple jelly to hamfat, come in, hamfat."

Briggs jumped up.

"What in blazes!" he said.

The lizard started to back away and fell over itself. When it got to its feet, its back was covered with sand. It looked indignantly at Briggs, its muttonchop whiskers bristling with vexation.

"Hello, hamfat," it said.

"Hamfat?" said Briggs. "You got your nerve, you little crocodile!"

"Thanks for the photograph," said the lizard.

"What?" Briggs shook his head violently. "I'm *really* in trouble!" he said. "I'm out of my mind!"

"I always knew you were a homely guy, hamfat. But that's a mighty pretty girl in the picture."

"What picture?" said the I.P. man.

The lizard chuckled lasciviously. "Just send her around, boy, just send her around. Old apply jelly knows how to treat a lady."

Fascinated, Briggs took a few steps towards the animal. It was a mistake. The nervous creature misunderstood his intention, and skittered off into the distance.

"Double suns. Talking liz-



ards, Hamfat. Apple jelly!" Briggs slapped his thighs. "This place is too much for me!"

He went looking for the creature.

Dev Devlo surveyed the battered *Outlander* with more anger than sadness.

Landing the small ship hadn't been much trouble. But getting it into space again—minus the company of that sour-faced law man—had been no easy trick.

The rockets had blasted away all right, but the ship had only described a sickening arc and headed for the ground again. Frantically, Devlo had pulled the automatic landing control once more, and managed to bring himself down safely, not many miles from the blast-off point. But the landing was too abrupt, and the rear end of the ship smacked the earth with enough impact to dent the rocket chambers.

He cursed softly to himself, and began the work of piling up supplies outside the ship.

When he entered the *Outlander* for the second time, he looked at the radio and wondered if he should chance a call to the nearest base. An S.O.S. would bring a ship to

his rescue, but it would most likely be another I.P. vessel, and captivity was not what Devlo wanted.

I'll think of something, he thought.

He opened a tin of canned rations and ate them thoughtfully.

The scampering noise in the orange underbrush startled him. But when he saw that the cause was only a foot-long lizard of placid countenance, he laughed and finished his meal.

The lizard stared at him curiously. Devlo paid him no attention, but when the lizard came a few feet closer, he threw the empty tin at it.

The lizard ran off.

An hour later, when Devlo had stretched himself out on the ground in an effort to sleep, the creature returned.

When it was within three yards, it said:

"Southern Cross to Portsmouth. Southern Cross to Portsmouth."

Devlo reacted violently.

He leaped to his feet and screamed.

"Get outa here!" he shouted. "Get away from here—leave me alone!"

Briggs located the lizard sunning itself on a pile of bleached rocks. Its eyes were



shut, but they popped open as the officer approached.

"Hey, apple jelly," said Briggs.

"Seek you," said the lizard, its whiskers quivering.

"Food," said Briggs. "Tell me where I can get something to eat."

The lizard glared at him, and then, with a quick motion, hopped off the rocks and scooted off. But Briggs wasn't going to let him get away this time. He ran after the creature, assisted by the slightly weaker pull of the planet's gravity. The lizard realized that it was being chased, so it scampered all the faster.

Finally, Briggs tired. He flopped to the ground, panting heavily, as the lizard disappeared into the underbrush.

"What am I doing?" he asked himself aloud. He couldn't see much percentage in following the animal—but he could see no value in just staying put. The lizard might lead him to food and water, after all. Perhaps they had an inbred sense of direction, like the land crabs of Earth; a sensitivity to polarized sunlight.

Then he saw the second lizard. It resembled the first in every detail, but its tail

seemed just a shade longer.

It seemed less frightened of the I.P. man than the other lizard had been. It practically trotted towards him, grinning foolishly.

"Hey!" said Briggs.

"Sentiment in the House of Parliament," said the second lizard.

"Well, I'll be a . . ." Briggs got to his feet, dusting off the seat of his pants.

The lizard blinked. "Air Force Ministry announcement," the animal continued, in a definite British accent, "had lead to speculation concerning the continuation." The lizard made a crackling noise in its throat.

"What's it all about?" Briggs asked the heavens. Then he began to walk towards the creature.

"Say, listen," he said.

The bewhiskered animal backed up.

"A Labor majority in Winchester," it said as it edged away. "A West Indies delegation embarked this morning."

Then another lizard poked its scaly head out of the orange foliage.

"Heavy snowfall tonight," the third lizard warned.

Devlo was so perturbed that he forgot the value of



the container he hurled at the animal. The food tin bounced harmlessly on the rocks in front of the lizard.

"Get away from me!" the bandit cried. "Let me alone!"

He looked around him wildly. Now there were half a dozen of the bewhiskered reptiles, cautiously surrounding Devlo and his supply pile.

They were jabbering idiotically.

"Southern Cross to Portsmouth. Latitude 64 degrees, longitude—"

"Hello, Mitch! Lotta activity around these parts since I buzzed you last time—"

"Orchichornia, orchiosnia, orchiskutchnia—"

"Three-sixty-five a hundred-and-thirty-eighth street. Investigate—"

"*Shut up! Shut up!*" said Devlo. He cupped his hands over his ears. But he couldn't drown out the cacophony, and the lizards were becoming more numerous.

Then Devlo had an idea. He lifted a half-empty tin of meat ration and flung the open container towards the assembled creatures. They backed away from it at first, and then they trotted towards it and poked their

scaly snouts curiously at the contents. They were evidently satisfied that the food was desirable, for they quickly emptied the tin.

Then they walked back to Devlo, wanting more.

"Beat it!" said Devlo. "That's all there is, understand? That's all you get!"

"Seek you," said one of the lizards, licking its jaws with a long, forked tongue. "Big party over at Dearborn," said another, looking hopefully at Devlo. "Wish you could have come over, son."

"*Get away from there!*" the bandit shrieked, as one of the creatures loped over boldly to the stack of food tins. He made a threatening gesture with his arm, but the creature was undisturbed. It continued at the food.

"I said get away!" He kicked out at the lizard. It moved away, but several others came forward at the same time.

Devlo got frantic. He ran to the other side of the pile and threw a container at the reptiles. Some of them were scared away by the object, but others were not. The bandit used his foot again, but this time with unexpected results. One of the lizards attached itself to Devlo's shin by its jaw and held on.



"Ow!" Devlo yelled. "Get off me!"

He shook his leg, trying to disengage the creature. But the frightened animal kept its grip. Devlo shrieked in pain, then batted at the beast with his fist. The lizard dropped, but the rest of them took courage from the man's unnerved attitude, and came closer still to the appetizing mound of food.

Devlo panicked. He kicked his way through the encircling group of hungry lizards and leaped for the ship's ladder. He climbed it in a hurry and went inside, leaving the supplies to the voracious appetites of the talking animals outside.

Briggs followed his lizards, and it turned out to be a good idea.

The first place the animals hit was a thin stream of water, flowing rapidly down the side of a sun-shaded sandy hill. It was slightly green in color, and tasted brackish, but the law man was too thirsty to care. He drank his fill, and then doused his head in the stream.

The lizards didn't waste much time. They scooped up some water with their long tongues, and then proceeded

on their forced march to wherever they were going.

Briggs continued to dog their path. He had nothing to lose, he thought—and if the lizards could lead him to water, they might uncover a food source in the bargain.

He trudged after them for what seemed to be hours. Their pace was slow, but too steady for the officer's lagging energy. Several times he had to fall out of their patient march, and sit with his head in his hands under the unflagging rays of the double sun.

But he never lost sight of the animals, because more and more of the creatures had joined in the procession as they went along. Now there was a file of lizards almost a quarter-mile long. Indeed a weird caravan.

Briggs kept up the rear, stumbling, halting, weak from lack of food. But even his stubborn persistence couldn't keep him on his feet. At last, he dropped to the ground and fell into an exhausted sleep.

When he awoke, he was happy about one thing at least. The double-sun had set. The sky was dark, and the air was slightly cooler.

He got to his feet, looking for the lizards.



"Can you read me, Margaret? This is Al Cairo!"

"C978, please report your position. C978, this is Tecumseh, please report your position!"

"Shine on, shine on harvest—"

"Williwaw to Macomber. Williwaw to Macomber."

"Beautiful dames by the thousands, Mitch. Sweet morsel from Louisiana. Very special, my boy!"

"Southern Cross to Portsmouth."

Devlo felt like screaming, but he didn't. He gazed with half-mad eyes at the thickening crowd of lizards surrounding the spaceship, gnawing away at the food tins piled thirty yards from the doorway.

"I got to get outa here!" the bandit said aloud. "I got to get away from this place!"

He went back to the control board, trying to make sense out of the complex array of dials, meters, gauges, switches, buttons. Did he dare try another blast-off? Would the battered rocket chambers respond for him? Even as he asked himself the question, he knew he would never take the chance.

He was trapped. Trapped!

"Got a postcard from J.D.

in Maine. Sends his regards, Mitch!"

"Southern Cross to Portsmouth."

"No lovin' since January, February, June—"

"Southern Cross to Portsmouth—"

"Stop it!"

Devlo seemed to go completely insane. He yanked his gun from his space-gear, and rushed to the doorway of the ship.

"I'll show you, you rotten little pests!"

He fired into the pack of lizards.

Briggs heard the sound of the shot, even before he saw the form of the crippled *Outlander*.

He doubled his pace and came running towards the site. Devlo didn't even see him. He was too busy pumping bullets into the hungry lizards, who were now scampering away from the line of fire.

"Devlo!" he shouted.

The bandit looked up.

"Briggs!"

He was about to fire the gun again, this time at the oncoming officer. But suddenly, he changed his mind. He lowered the pistol and just waited while Briggs came up to the ship.



"Briggs!" said the bandit. "Thank God you're here! Thank God!"

"Let's have it," said Briggs quietly. He motioned towards the weapon.

Devlo looked at it. Then, almost with a sob, he handed the gun over.

"All right," he said. "All right. Only get us outa this place. Get us outa here!"

"Seek you," said a lizard, as Briggs went to the ship's radio. "House of Parliament," trailed from another lizard.

Briggs took no chances on the flight back. Devlo was bound hand and foot and strapped into the co-pilot's chair. He promptly fell into a troubled sleep.

When the rescue ship was launched into space, the I.P. pilot listened to Briggs' story with wonderment. The tale of the talking lizards had him fascinated.

"That's a weird one, all right," he whistled. "Obviously some kind of radio reception."

"That must be the answer," said Briggs. "The lizards are queerly constructed. I saw one of them, torn apart from Devlo's bullets. Its bones were like metal filaments."

"Then they were picking

up signals from someplace—"

"Not from someplace," said Briggs. "From Earth. They've developed artificial coherers that made them receiving stations for short-wave broadcasts. So we were listening to short-wave messages from home."

"Wow!" The I.P. pilot shook his head. "What a story you'll have for the press. I'd like to have half the dough after you're through serializing your stuff—"

"But the funniest part is this," said Briggs. "The planet was some eighty light years away from Earth. That means the lizards were tuning in on short-wave broadcasts eighty years old!"

Devlo made a noise, "What's bothering him?" asked the pilot, hitching a thumb at the bound prisoner.

"Bad dreams, I guess," said Briggs. "They gave him a hard time back there."

Devlo moaned. "Seek you," he said in his sleep.

The lizard was dying.

He felt no regret, even in this last moment on his beloved green soil. He had a memory-storehouse filled with pleasurable moments:



the quick thrill of scampering over the hot sand; the sensuous joy of burning sunlight and cool evenings; the gratifying sensation of trapping insects with his lightning-quick tongue.

He remembered, too, a moment in the long, long ago—how long, he couldn't begin to guess—when there was a great noise in the sky, and the giant, two-legged creatures came to their land, bringing strange and wonderful delicacies in round, hard containers; soft, tender things to chew and digest, like a thousand meaty insects

in each delectable bite. What a moment that had been, in the long, long ago!

A young lizard came over to the dying creature, looking at it sorrowfully.

"Earth to *Outlander*," the young reptile said tenderly. "Earth to *Outlander*. This is Rocket Base, New York, to *Outlander*. Expecting arrival yourself and prisoner Devaux Devlo at nine, seven, fourteen, eight hundred. Congratulations, Captain Briggs!"

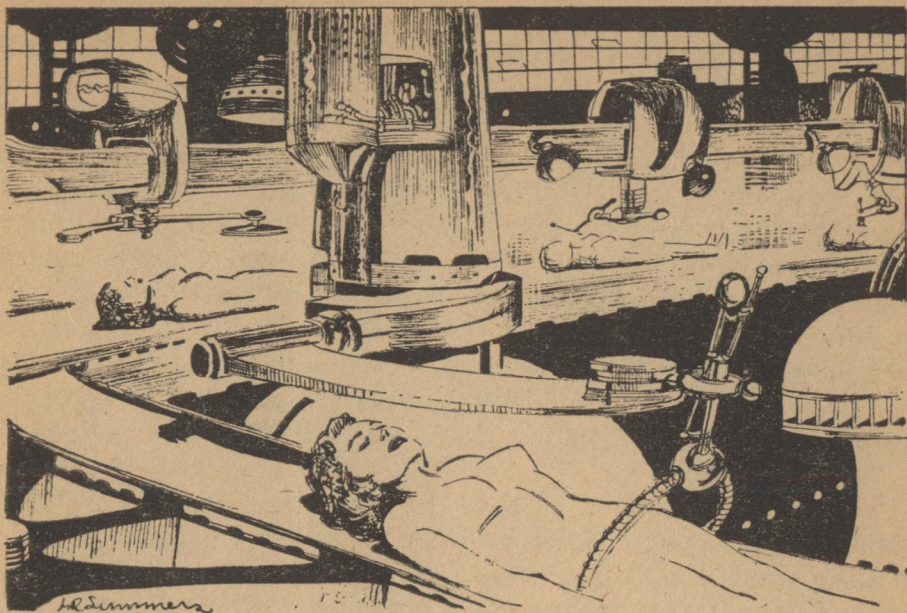
The old lizard smiled. And still smiling, it died.

THE END



"I warned you about our sticking close together!"





# *Marriages Are Made in Detroit*

By O. H. LESLIE

*Every year you can get a sparkling new model of your favorite car from Detroit. How would you like to order your wife the same way?*

IT WAS just an old robot who answered the reporter's ring; just a beaten-up metal thing with creaking joints and dented elbows. This was interesting, he told himself with satisfying perceptiveness. "The servants in Arno McElvoy's swank East Side apartment," he wrote

mentally, getting a jump on his assignment, "are all robots; not an android among them. While most of the fashionable homes of our local blue-bloods boast nothing but true-to-life synthetic folks, Mr. McElvoy persists in sticking to the old-fashioned metal monsters; in deference,



*no doubt, to the delicate sensitivities of his android bride."*

Well! This job wouldn't be so tough after all. There was still plenty to be said about *l'affaire McElvoy*, even though the newshounds of the country had seemingly pumped the story dry. But if a fellow uses a little imagination . . . the reporter smiled to himself, not without pride.

"Mr. Chester?"

The reporter looked at the doorway. Arno McElvoy, looking just like his photographs, stood there, resplendent in brocaded dressing gown and neatly-folded blue ascot, setting off his fine head of snowy-white hair. His smile, through the coppery tan of his unlined face, was a superb display of rather sharp white dentures. He held out his hand, and the reporter took it gingerly.

"How do you do?" the reporter said. "Hope I'm not too late, Mr. McElvoy. Got snarled up in traffic."

"Quite all right, quite all right," said the other graciously. He waved the reporter into a chair, supplied him with a trolley of assorted liquors, shoved a lean cigar into his mouth, and flicked a bright flame in his face from a jewel-encrusted lighter.

"Well!" said Arno McElvoy, falling back on a pneumatic sofa and crossing his short legs. "Here we go again, eh?" He dangled a rosetted slipper from one foot. He was wearing white socks.

"Yes," said Chester, somewhat uncomfortably. "I suppose you must be getting pretty bored with us newspaper people by now—"

"Bored? Not in the least!" For the first time, Chester noticed the black scrapbook on the marble-top table in front of the sofa. McElvoy, his eyes dancing in anticipation, flipped over the cover and started to exhibit his formidable collection of clippings.

"This is only recent stuff," he assured the reporter. "Got an attic-full of books about my *first* four marriages, but I'd just as soon use 'em for kindling. No, sir," he said, tapping a ringed finger on the book, "this is the only set of stories I care about."

The reporter joined him on the sofa and looked over his shoulder as McElvoy turned the pages. He went too fast for Chester to catch anything but banner headlines.

"MCELVOY MARRIES ANDROID" most of the early clippings stated, or in words



to that effect. "JUDGE RULES McELVOY MARRIAGE LEGAL" was the theme of the next few pages, along with "McELVOY AND ANDROID BRIDE LEAVE ON BERMUDA HONEY-MOON." Then followed the Sunday Supplement stories, the "as-told-to" items from the newlyweds themselves. "I MARRIED AN ANDROID" and "MRS. McELVOY SPEAKS" and "McELVOY SAYS ANDROIDS ARE BETTER THAN GIRLS." More news items concluded the book: "McELVOY SEES MORE ANDROID MARRIAGES" and "WOMEN'S CLUB CONGRESS DENOUNCES McELVOY NUP-TIALS." The millionaire chuckled over these last few clippings, and closed the volume with an expression of positive glee.

"Yes, sir," he said happily. "Wouldn't trade this for all the books in the Library of Congress. So you see, I don't mind you boys coming around with your pads and pencils. Not at all."

Chester returned to his chair. He cleared his throat. "Well, that's very good of you, Mr. McElvoy. I mean, you've been a brick about this thing, and we people of the,

er, profession appreciate it."

"Glad to do it," said McElvoy. "What paper did you say you represent?"

"No paper, really. That is, quite a few. You see, I write a syndicated column—"

"Oh, I see. Well, that's fine, fine." McElvoy rubbed his palms together. "Shall we get on with it?"

"Yes, certainly." Chester poised pencil over pad. "Well, I do know quite a bit already, of course. But suppose we go over the old ground again; I mean, just in case I can come up with a new 'angle.' "

"Fire away!"

"Let's see. This is your fifth marriage, of course . . ."

"And the happiest. Be sure to note that, Mr. Chester. After six months of marriage, I'm delighted to report that this is by far the most blissful marriage of my career."

The reporter made a note of it.

"Yes, sir," said McElvoy, his face glowing through the tan. "Smartest thing I ever did was to have her built. The perfect wife, Mr. Chester, the ideal helpmeet. The woman every man dreams about, my little girl." He hopped across the room and refilled the reporter's glass, then took a cigar out of the



box. "Yes," he continued, puffing on it contentedly, "she's the finest girl in the whole wide world. I ought to know," he giggled. "I designed her."

"Yes," said the reporter a bit dejectedly. "Trouble is, of course, you've already told the story so many times—well, it's hard to—to come up with a new slant on it, so to speak."

"I sympathize, my boy," said McElvoy. "Guess they've asked me every question in the book, haven't they? Well, let's think a little." He frowned, and studied the ash of his cigar. "You know about her construction, naturally," he said.

"Yes," said Chester. "Very ingenious, all right. But sort of an old story now. I mean, about that built-in devotion and everything—"

"Yes, I guess that's been covered. And the sex angle. That's always good, of course. First thing most of you news people want to know—"

The reporter blushed. "I know about it," he said, dropping his eyes.

"A perfect sexual adjustment," said McElvoy, making the cigar tip glow. "Extraordinary. As a matter of fact—" He leaned forward confiding-

ly, but the reporter stopped him.

"I think we better pass that over," he said hastily. "I mean, a syndicated column goes into all sorts of papers. Family papers, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said McElvoy. "Well, let's not give up. There are always new angles on a story like this. I remember when my second wife Eva threw me out of the bedroom window. Got quite a lot of press notice on that one. Amazing, the stuff you boys can come up with. One chap got a three-column story out of a taxi-driver who had seen me fall— But I guess that's neither here nor there."

"No, I guess not," said Chester.

A man walked into the room. He was tall, strikingly ugly, and so bony-thin his clothes looked like they had never left their hangers. He stopped when he saw the reporter, and backed off apologetically.

"Oh. Excuse me," he said.

"No, no, Doc. Quite all right," said McElvoy cheerfully. "This is Mr. Chester of the—what was that paper again?"

"I write a syndicated col-



umn," the reporter told the newcomer.

"This is Mr. Phil Trotter from the Mechanical Servant Company in Detroit." McElvoy smiled at the two men, and they shook hands briefly. "I call him 'Doc,'" McElvoy said, "but I think that kind of upsets him, eh, Mr. Trotter?"

"Not exactly," said the thin man, his neck reddening. "But I'm really just an engineer..."

Chester's journalistic instincts served him well. "Did you have anything to do with the—I mean, do you know Mrs. McElvoy, Mr. Trotter?"

The millionaire laughed. "Does he?" he said. "Doc here practically built her, didn't you, Doc?"

"Well, I wouldn't go quite that far. I supervised the, er, —Mrs. McElvoy's manufacture, but a great many other people had a hand in—had something to do with it," he said modestly.

"That's very interesting," said Chester shrewdly. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Trotter?"

The engineer hesitated. He looked over at McElvoy, and the millionaire for once stopped smiling and regarded the thin man doubtfully. Then, he shrugged his shoulders tol-

erantly, and gestured Trotter into a seat.

"I'll tell you the truth," McElvoy said seriously to the reporter. "I had Mr. Trotter fly in from the factory to look Mrs. McElvoy over. But it's nothing serious, you understand," he added quickly. "Isn't that right, Doc?"

Trotter smiled without humor. "That's right," he told Chester. "Just a little internal trouble. All women have something like it one time or another, even—" He paused.

"Even androids," McElvoy finished, breaking into a grin again. "Mrs. M. got to feeling under the weather the last week or so, so I gave the Doc here a call and he's fixing her up as good as new. Just goes to show you how *human* she really is, doesn't it, Mr. Chester?"

"Yes," said Chester, with a pale effort of a smile. "Mrs. McElvoy all right now?"

"She's fine," said Trotter. "I gave her a shot of iodine. Made a few internal adjustments. She's resting comfortably. There's really very little to it," he told the reporter significantly.

"Oh, it's no *story*," Chester agreed. "I'm just interested. I mean, you *are* a sort of doctor, in a way—"

"I'll say he is," said Mc-



Elvoy boisterously. "You should see him at work, Mr. Chester. Zip, zip—click, click—just like that razor business—"

The reporter gulped. "I don't understand."

"Mrs. McElvoy has an advantage over us ordinary beings," the engineer explained soberly. "We can examine her far more thoroughly than—anyone else. Especially internally. She's equipped with what you might call self-sealing sutures; easy as zippers . . ."

"Amazing," said Chester, making a note.

"Amazing is right," chuckled the android's husband. "Open her up and close her up, just like that. And not a sign of an incision or scar. Skin smooth as silk." He licked his lips reminiscently, and the two men shifted uneasily in their chairs.

"As a matter of fact," said the engineer, rising, "I think I better check those sutures now—"

"Do you have to?" said the reporter. He got to his feet, somewhat unsteadily. The liquor was taking effect. "I mean, this is all very fascinating, Mr. Trotter. Do you think you might be interested in—"

"No," said Trotter coldly.

"I haven't made any statements to the press, and I don't intend to. You can get all the information you want from the Public Relations office in Detroit."

"I didn't mean anything," said Chester apologetically. "I just thought—"

"Don't mind him," said McElvoy, reaching over and slapping the back of the engineer's leg fondly. He laughed. "Doc's a little touchy, that's all. But he sure knows his business, let me tell you."

"Yes," said Trotter. "Nice to have met you, Mr. Chester." He excused himself, and left the room by the way he had come.

"Funny chap, eh?" said McElvoy, when the engineer was out of sight. "Homely as they come. But smart," he added, tapping his forehead. "Got it up here, all right. Never blinked an eyelash when I told him my specifications; not even that devotion clause."

Chester blinked.

"You know," McElvoy prompted. "That's the first thing I wanted built in. I wanted that girl to really *love* me, you know what I mean?" He puffed on his cigar vigorously. "And she does. Believe me. Really loves *me*, you un-



derstand. Not my dough. No, sir."

The reporter nodded sympathetically. "I shee," he said, a maudlin tear springing up in the corner of his eye.

"When you get to be my age—I'm sixty-two, you know—that gets pretty important," said McElvoy wistfully. "Those other dames I married—pfah!" His lips curled with disgust. "They'd rather sleep with my bank-book..."

Chester's face wore a pained expression. McElvoy noticed it, and reached over to pat him on the knee in a reassuring manner.

"Don't you worry, though," he said comfortingly. "I'm okay now, believe you me. I may have started a whole new way of life, Mr. Chester. A whole new approach to marriage. It won't be long before every disappointed man in America will begin to think that I didn't have such

a bad idea after all. You just wait and see..."

He straightened up and beamed at the reporter. "Have another drink!" he said.

Trotter tiptoed into the darkened bedroom.

"Asleep?" he whispered.

Her reply was muffled.

"No," she said.

He came to her side and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Kiss me," she told him.

"Wait a minute."

He pulled back the covers, exposing her naked stomach. He reached down and pulled the suture tight, closing up the gaping hole in her flesh. Then he bent down and took her in his arms.

"Tell me again," she said.

"I loved you the minute you came off the assembly line," he said hoarsely.

"He won't live forever."

"No," said Trotter. He kissed her once more, passionately.

**THE END**

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# Death To The Earthman

By RANDALL GARRETT.

*It was a foolproof method of murder because, after all, what detective can go centuries into the future looking for a solution? One point was overlooked, though. It seems guns and chickens have something in common. They both come home to roost.*

THETLANG D'BRON was looking out of the sealed window of his room in the Interplanet Hotel and the Martian equivalent of a smile crossed his face. It was a perfect set-up. The Earthman, Jessup, had the room directly across the courtyard; one shot with the K-gun, and zzzt!— There would be no more Jessup.

The alibi would be perfect, too. The police would know that Thetlang couldn't possibly get out of his room; it had been especially designed for Martians—low pressure and low gravity. The windows and doors were sealed. And Thetlang couldn't possibly walk unprotected in normal Earth atmosphere.

To Thetlang, the temperature of seventy degrees, the

tremendous pressure of fifteen pounds per square inch, and the gravitational pull—nearly three times what he was used to on Mars—combined to make an unbearable environment.

The police could be quite sure he had never left his sealed room.

Therefore, if they didn't find a K-gun in his room, they would never suspect him of killing Jessup. And—Thetlang smiled again—that little detail was all taken care of.

Thetlang sat by the window, fingering the weapon idly and waiting.

Martian patience is long; the seven hours that slipped by while Thetlang waited meant nothing to him. When Jessup finally entered his room, the Martian lifted the





Success or disaster was now a matter of seconds.



K-gun, aimed carefully, and fired. The soundless, invisible, lethal vibrations passed harmlessly through the window, across the courtyard, through Jessup's window, and into the Earthman's brain. He dropped as though he'd been hit with an axe.

Quickly, Thetlang walked over to a small box-like machine on his desk, slipped the K-gun inside, and pressed a button on the top of the apparatus. There was a momentary glow of light, and the weapon disappeared. Then, unhurriedly, but efficiently, he took the machine apart. When it was finally disassembled into its component parts, he packed them away in his luggage; they would be unrecognizable now, especially since the Earth police didn't even dream of the existence of such a machine.

Then Thetlang lay down on his bed and relaxed, waiting for the knock that would come at his door.

Louie Broderick saw something blue flash downward an inch in front of his nose. He leaped backward as it struck the ground, bounced once, and lay quietly on the bricks of the alley pavement.

Broderick stared at it, then looked up. The walls on both sides of the alley were blank, and there was a roof over the alley, formed where the two buildings met at the second floor. He frowned and looked back down at the blue object. His frown became deeper as he bent over to pick it up.

It looked somewhat like a 9 mm. Luger automatic, but the blue color, although it had a metallic sheen, was not at all the blue of blued steel. It looked like a kid's toy gun at first, but a closer look showed that it couldn't possibly be, unless it were a very expensive, special-made job. The workmanship was too good. The thing was precision-made, like a fine watch. Or a fine gun.

Broderick was a big man, not much taller than average, but a good deal wider in the shoulders. He was built like a heavyweight boxer or a professional wrestler, which was not odd, because he'd done both. Neither had made him famous or made him money. His broad, heavy face was best known to the police of New York as that of Louie "The Knife" Broderick, killer. The police had yet to get a conviction, but they were waiting; eventually,



Broderick would slip up, and that would be that.

Broderick knew it, too. Nobody's perfect, and a professional killer can find it extremely difficult to go about his business when there is a police tail on him day and night.

Still, the gun gave Broderick an idea. If he painted it black, it might pass for the real thing in a dim light. He had never used a gun before, and stick-ups weren't in his line. The cops would never figure on a change in his *modus operandi*. He grinned and stuck the odd-looking pistol into the inside pocket of his shabby overcoat. Then he strolled on down the alley toward the subway.

Half an hour later, he was in his own room, a dingy little cold-water walk-up on West End Avenue. After carefully locking the door, he pulled out the blue gun, tossed it on his unmade bed, and shucked his overcoat. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and began to examine the thing he'd picked up in the alleyway.

The first thing he discovered was that it wouldn't come apart. He could find no buttons to push or knobs to turn that would unlock the thing. At last, he arrived at

the conclusion that the thing was one solid piece. Only the trigger would move, evidently. He pointed the thing at the floor and squeezed the trigger. It moved a fraction of an inch, and the gun hummed very slightly for a fraction of a second. Otherwise, there was no response. Broderick shrugged and opened the can of black paint he had bought on the way home. He dipped in a brush and began to apply the liquid to the peculiar weapon.

That was when he discovered the second odd thing about the gun. The paint wouldn't stick to it. It simply rolled up into little spheres like water on greased glass and fell off on the floor. Broderick swore and tried again. The same thing happened. Then he dipped his finger in the paint and tried to rub it on. He got plenty of paint on his hands, but none on the gun. It was as blue as ever.

He wondered what in the devil was going on when he heard a familiar sound. It was a police siren.

Detective Manetti sat quietly in the dingy little coffee shop and sipped slowly at his third cup of coffee. He kept his eyes unobtrusively



on the front door of the apartment house across the street. He felt tired; his eyes felt like they were burning holes in his head.

Manetti was small, wiry, dark-haired, and olive-skinned. He had a penchant for pin-stripe suits and pin-stripe shirts with French cuffs. He looked, in fact, more like a small-time hood than most small-time hoods ever looked, outside of the movies.

He tasted the cooling coffee and wondered when Knife Broderick would get hard up enough to try for another job. One attempt at another knifing, and they'd pin Broderick down tight for a long time. Until then, they'd follow him. Right now, it was Manetti's shift. Back in the alley behind the apartment where Broderick was staying, another detective was watching the only other exit.

Broderick, Manetti reflected, must be getting hard up already. Less than an hour ago, he'd stooped over in an alley and picked up something; Manetti assumed it was a cigar butt. Still, it might have been a coin or a bill; Manetti had been too far behind to be sure.

The little detective frown-

ed and looked up the street when he heard the sirens. What the hell was going on?

When the ambulance rolled up in front of the building across the street, Manetti had paid for his coffee and was already crossing West End Avenue.

He flashed his badge on the ambulance driver and identified himself. "What's going on in there?" he asked.

The driver shrugged as he got out. "Who knows, pal? Some old lady named Ludovico called and said her husband was sick. Come on in and take a look."

Manetti followed the driver and his assistant into the building. The first floor hall was full of people. The detective glanced around, but he didn't see Broderick in the crowd.

A short, well-upholstered, elderly woman was crying in the arms of another, equally well-upholstered, who was trying to comfort her. The interne who had been riding up front with the ambulance driver had followed the detective into the building, and now he was asking what had happened. The fat lady who was crying tried to say something, but her English was poor, and the doctor couldn't understand her. She



was pointing toward an open door nearby which led into one of the apartments.

"What is the matter, *signora*?" Manetti asked in Italian.

"It is my husband, *signore*," she said between sobs. "Are you *il dottore*?"

Manetti shook his head. "*Polizia*. What happened to your husband?"

"He fell," she sobbed. "My Pietro was standing by the bed, smoking his pipe, smiling, talking—then he fell to the floor and did not move. He—" She couldn't go on.

The interne had already gone into the room. Manetti went in and cleared the crowd away from where the man was lying. The interne looked up. "He's dead. We'll have to check to make sure, but I'd say it was either his heart or cerebral hemorrhage."

The old man looked very peaceful, as though he had just gone to sleep painlessly.

Manetti nodded. "Okay, Doc. I'll let you take care of it, then. Want me to call the cop on the beat?"

The doctor nodded and went back to his examination.

Manetti waited until a squad car had come and then went back across the street.

Broderick was his job. If the old man had died of a knife wound, Manetti would have been interested. But natural causes? Manetti dismissed it from his mind.

Louie Broderick sat on the edge of his bed and smoked a cigar nervously. There seemed to be some sort of commotion downstairs, but he didn't feel like investigating. Evidently the cops weren't after him. A glance out the window told him that someone was being taken out in an ambulance. Somebody sick, he supposed, or hurt or dead. It didn't matter.

He sat down on the bed again and took out his wallet. He opened it and looked inside. Three dollars. Three lousy dollars. And in his pocket were two subway tokens and a dime. He had to get some loot fast. He *had* to.

He picked up the blue gun and glared at it. Damn fat lot of good it would do him as long as it was that silly color. Nobody but a guy who was half blind would—

Wait a minute! Wa-a-a-it a minute! Half blind!

What was it Izzy the Ice-man had said about his father?

"The old guy is color-blind.



But I mean *total*. Not one color from another can he tell."

Yeah. And the old man ran a kosher delicatessen on Third Avenue. That ought to be enough of a stake to move on and get the cops out of his hair. The old man would never recognize him because Broderick had never met Izzy's dad; he'd only seen him vaguely through the store front. And Izzy was in no condition to finger anyone for the job; he was making shoes for the state, up at Ossining, for accidentally picking up seven grand worth of somebody else's diamonds.

The first thing to do was ditch his tail. He knew there was a cop around, probably more than one. He hadn't tried to ditch them before this because he hadn't needed to, and there was no use letting them know he was aware of the tail. But tonight would be different.

Broderick shrugged himself into his worn, brown overcoat and put on his battered hat. He looked at himself in the stained mirror that hung on the wall. Not good. Not the old, well-dressed Broderick at all. He looked at his hands. At least they

were clean. What else could they be, after washing dishes for ten hours a day in a cheap hash house? But he couldn't take that any longer. He'd quit a week before when the cook had told him off—jumped down his throat for something he hadn't done. One more day with that cook, and Broderick would have taken a butcher knife to him.

He picked up the blue gun and slid it into his pocket. He grinned as he walked out his door and locked it carefully behind him. One thing about carrying a phony gun—the cops couldn't arrest you for it, not when it was colored blue.

He walked down the hall to the stairway and started down. He didn't get far; Mrs. Garfinkle was coming up.

"Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Broderick," she said. "You are having the rent?" She was a bouncing, pleasant woman, with a broad smile on her chubby face.

"It isn't due 'til tomorrow, Mrs. Garfinkle," Broderick reminded her.

"That's so. I thought . . ." Her face suddenly became grave. "Isn't it sad about Mr. Ludovico, poor man? Mrs. Ludovico, she's almost crazy from grief."



"What happened?" he asked, finding himself actually interested.

"You didn't hear? He dropped dead! He's standing there, talking just like always, and—" She slapped her palms together. "—suddenly, he's dropping dead. The doctor said his heart."

Broderick shook his head slowly. "That's too bad. He was a nice old guy."

"That's so. Still, if you are asking me, I think its the wine. Always the wine he's drinking. Not that he ever is getting drunk, you understand, but—"

Broderick held up his hand. "Please, Mrs. Garfinkle—not just now. I'll talk about it tomorrow, when I bring the rent. Right now, I've got business."

She nodded, and her smile came back. "That's good. Okay. Tomorrow, then, Mr. Broderick."

Broderick tipped his shapeless hat and went on down the stairs and out the building. He didn't know where the cop was staked out, and up 'til now he hadn't cared. But now it was imperative that he make sure who and how many were following him.

He walked along the ave-

nue, heading uptown, moving not too slow and not too fast. He walked two blocks and went into the bar on the corner.

The big clock behind the bar said 6:05. That gave him plenty of time. "Beer," he said.

The bartender pushed the glass out in front of him and took the dollar Broderick handed him. He slid back eighty-five cents change as Broderick leaned against the bar and glanced idly out the window while he sipped his beer.

There were several people on the street, and Broderick took a good look at all of them. He knew the cop would have to keep him in sight, and that meant that the cop would be in sight, too.

He finished the beer and walked out, heading for the next joint, down the street. Here he ordered beer also.

Broderick repeated the trick five times before he was absolutely sure. Only one face had been outside nearly every time. A little guy in a pin-stripe suit was tailing him. He was doing a good job of keeping out of sight, but not good enough to fool Louie Broderick.

Broderick left the fifth bar and started walking cross-



town. After a few blocks, he headed uptown again.

It was 7:22 by the time he came to the place he was looking for. The sign on the door said: FARLEY'S BAR & GRILL.

As usual, there was a fair crowd inside. Broderick picked a seat near the rear, ordered a beer from the waitress, and waited. He knew the cop couldn't see him from outside; he'd have to come in. Sure enough, Pinstripe Suit strolled in less than a minute later. Broderick didn't even bother to look directly at him; he knew that suit by now.

He drank his beer quietly and ordered another. It was time to pull his disappearance act. He felt in his pockets for a cigarette. He felt his shirt pockets first, then his coat pockets. There was a pack there, but he ignored it. He got up, walked over to the cigarette machine, stuck in a quarter, and punched for his brand. Then he walked back over to his seat and opened the pack. He lit a cigarette and stared quietly at his beer, leaving the freshly-opened pack on the table. He drank about a quarter of the beer, then stood up and made his way toward the men's room.

The rest room had a door labelled "Employees Only" just inside. As soon as the rest room door closed behind him, Broderick opened the "Employees Only" door. It led down to a basement where the janitor's supplies were kept. Broderick walked across the basement to the stairs that led to the kitchen. Nobody in the kitchen said anything as he walked out the back door. They looked up, and then went back to work. Broderick grinned to himself as he ran down the dark alley and turned the corner. He knew Farley's from way back when Farley himself had owned it.

He figured he had at least ten minutes before the cop got suspicious. Who would think that a guy who was down on his luck would walk off and leave a fresh pack of cigarettes, a nearly full glass of beer, and fifteen cents in change in a bar?

He went to the nearest subway and took a downtown train, standing near the door. At the next stop, he just stood there, waiting for everyone else to get off. Then, just as the doors started to slide shut, he jumped off. The doors slammed, and the train shot off



into the darkness of the tunnel. No one else had jumped off after him.

Broderick was sure he had shaken his tail.

Nevertheless, he kept trying every trick of the trade as he moved cautiously across the city to Third Avenue. It was nearly nine o'clock when he arrived at the delicatessen.

Broderick had had Manetti figured almost to a T. Nearly nine minutes had passed before the detective decided he'd better check to make sure his man was still in the rest room.

At the end of the twelfth minute, he realized that he'd lost Broderick. He grabbed a pay phone and dialed headquarters.

Detective Lieutenant Fenwyck was—to put it mildly—none too happy.

"Manetti, that guy is the worst knife killer since Jack the Ripper, and you've let him get away from you! If there's a knifing tonight, it'll mean that another poor slug got his because you were careless."

"I know, Lieutenant," Manetti said tonelessly. "But if I'd had someone with me . . ."

"Yeah, yeah, sure. I know

how you feel. The Commissioner says we're to get this guy and then won't let me assign more than two men at a time to him."

"Look, Lieutenant," Manetti said, "nobody's contacted Broderick; that I'll swear to. He's a professional; he won't kill for nothing. Now, I figure it this way: He gave me the slip to see if he could get some business for himself. He's a smart cookie, and he won't take on a job until he's cased it pretty well. Now, suppose he gets a job tonight; he'll be back to his room before he goes out to case it. I don't think he knows I was tailing him; I think he just wanted to make sure that no one traced him from here. In the two months we've been on the job, he hasn't paid any attention to a tail, and he didn't tonight. I think if we stick it out—"

"Okay," Fenwyck said. "I see your point. But meanwhile, I'm putting out a pick-up order for him. On suspicion."

There wasn't a soul in the delicatessen except the old man behind the counter. Broderick put the handkerchief over his face and walked in. He simply pointed the



gun at the old man and said: "This is a hold-up, Pop. Empty the till."

The old man's eyes widened. "Don't shoot. I'm opening up the till." He punched the No Sale key on the register and pulled out the drawer to its fullest extent after it shot open. He began to fumble with the big bills in the back. His free hand was feeling under the counter, Broderick was watching him closely, and when the old man jerked his hand suddenly and came up with a .32 revolver, a sudden fear went through the big killer. What a fool he had been to use a toy gun for a hold-up! Instinctively, his hand squeezed the butt of the blue gun.

The trigger moved.

The blue gun hummed.

The old man crumpled to the floor and lay there without moving.

Broderick didn't hesitate. He shoved the gun in his pocket and began emptying the cash register with both hands.

Less than an hour later, he was down in Greenwich Village, drinking tea in a little basement coffee shop. He had better than three hundred dollars in his pocket. But he wasn't thinking about that;

his mind was on something else.

He could feel the weight of the blue gun in his overcoat pocket. It felt like half a ton of lead.

*What kind of gun is this?* he thought. He stared at his Oolong tea as he stirred it with a spoon, watching the tea get cold and not caring. *What did it all mean?*

Izzy the Iceman's pop was dead, and the blue gun had killed him. There was no doubt in Broderick's mind about that. And what about old Pietro Ludovico? Hadn't the gun killed him, too, when Broderick fired it at the floor?

There was one thing he had to be sure of. He had to be absolutely positive it wasn't a coincidence. There was nothing to connect him with either of the killings so far, so—

Broderick got up, paid for his tea, and went out into the streets again. This time, it was very simple. He just walked along until he saw a target. Just something to test the gun on. It was a cat in an alley, sitting on a garbage can. Broderick fired, and the cat fell, satisfactorily dead.

There was no coincidence in that.



Broderick knew his fortune was made already.

Angela Manetti neatly slid two eggs, sunny side up, into a plate and put them on the table by the cup of coffee. Raimondo Filippo Manetti grunted his gratitude and speared them with a fork.

"But I don't understand, Ray," Angela said. "Three weeks ago, you arrested him after he'd sneaked away from you. Then you had to let him go because he didn't actually do anything. Now he's got a good job, and you still have to follow him. Maybe he didn't kill those people after all."

Manetti swallowed a mouthful of egg. "Don't be silly, Angy. We know Broderick has knifed at least seven men; we just can't prove it. We're just waiting for him to slip up again.

"And this job he's got. We don't know what it is he's doing, but he's working for Maxie Borden, so it can't be what you'd call strictly honest.

"We don't know where he went that night, or what he did. Apparently, he didn't knife anybody, because there were no knifings that night. But we know Broderick's a shiv man; he's afraid

of guns. A professional rub-out man makes good money as long as he doesn't get caught. Therefore, Broderick will eventually use that blade again. Makes sense, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so," his wife said. "But, honey, you've been on this detail for four months now. It's getting on your nerves. Couldn't you get a transfer to another job?"

Manetti snorted. "After I let him slip through my fingers that night? Fat chance! If I don't get Louie Broderick, and get him good, I won't make Detective First Class 'til about 1990. By then I'll be dead."

Angela sighed and looked at the kitchen clock. "You'd better hurry, dear; it's almost time."

Maxie Borden's *Golden Unicorn Club* in upper midtown Manhattan was veddy, veddy swank. The place didn't have a headwaiter; it had a *maitre d'hotel*. It didn't serve food; it served *cuisine*. And Maxie himself was a well-known *raconteur*. But the cops pronounced it "racketeer."

In an office on the first floor, Louie Broderick leaned back in an expensive chair and smoked an expensive cigar. All it takes to be suc-



cessful, he reflected, is brains and luck. The set-up was neat, and was satisfactory both to him and to Maxie Borden. Theoretically, Broderick was working for Maxie; actually, the cafe proprietor was acting as Broderick's agent for a one-third cut.

The door opened, and Maxie Borden came in. He was a short, fat, jolly-looking man with a perpetual smile that never quite reached his hard, black eyes.

"Louie, my boy! I have another wager for you! Very good one, too. A gentleman bet me five thousand dollars that a chap by the name of Bentmann would *not* be dead within two weeks. Naturally, I bet that he *would* be. Do you think I'll win?"

"Maybe," Broderick said. "Who is this Bentmann?"

Borden gave full particulars: full name, home address, business address.

Broderick looked thoughtfully at the end of his cigar. "Sounds like a good bet to me, Maxie. I'll bet you two-thirds of that five grand that this Bentmann is cold turkey within twelve hours."

"Taken," Maxie said. Then his eyes grew shrewd. "How do you do it, knife?"

We make these bets, and every time, some poor chap dies of a heart attack. What do you do? Drop poison in their tea?"

Broderick looked hurt. "Me? Maxie, you wrong me. I can't help it if I'm clairvoyant, can I? Can I help it if a guy drops dead of natural causes?"

"When a man wins the Daily Double," Borden said evenly, "he's lucky. When he wins every race, he's doping the horses."

Broderick leaned forward across the desk. "The less you know, Maxie, the safer you are. You attend to your end of the business, and I'll attend to mine."

Maxie Borden shrugged and beamed happily, showing perfect examples of prosthetic dental art. "How can I lose? But a man can't help being curious, can he?"

"A man can't help having heart trouble, either," Broderick pointed out, "but it's not good for him."

"I understand perfectly," Maxie said, still smiling.

"I'm sure you do. Now scram, Maxie. I've got some thinking to do." He grinned at the cafe proprietor. "Hard thinking."

Maxie Borden nodded. "Fine. I'll see you, my boy."



He strolled out of the room and closed the door behind him.

Broderick went to the door and bolted it. Then he changed his clothes. Instead of his usual blue serge, he put on a dark flannel suit. A pair of elevator shoes replaced his regular ones. The beard that covered his face was the expensive product of a very excellent and exclusive toupee maker. The ensemble was topped off by a black overcoat and a black hat. Then he walked over to the wall and slid open the panel. The doorway led into the cigar store next door, an opening in the back of a stall of the men's room that was always marked "Out of Order." He made sure there was no one else in the room, then he stepped into the stall and slid the door shut behind him.

The detectives who were watching the *Golden Unicorn* paid absolutely no attention to the Orthodox Jewish rabbi who walked out of the cigar store next door.

In a city of eight million people, a few extra deaths of "natural causes" don't even excite the curiosity of the insurance companies. One or two a week—say seventy-five

a year—would hardly cause a wiggle on the graphs.

Murder? Of course not. How could it be? No one ever even thought of it.

Luck and brains had brought Louie "The Knife" Broderick a way to make a tidy fortune. The luck and brains of another were to take it away.

Ray Manetti was no Sherlock Holmes, but he wasn't stupid, either. In his stake-out in a small hotel across the street from the *Golden Unicorn*, he had waited for a month to find out what was going on inside. Twice the Department had tried to plant dictaphones inside the building, and they'd been discovered both times. The telephone was tapped, but nothing of any importance had come over the wires.

Manetti had seen the rabbi come out of the cigar store perhaps a dozen times and had never noticed it. Possibly he would never have noticed it if it hadn't been for the hamburgers.

The detective had been getting his suppers prepared for him at a nearby restaurant, so that he could eat his meal in the hotel room. The order was placed regularly, and the restaurant knew by now what he wanted. But



this one time, they slipped up.

It was Friday evening, and Manetti was hungry as a bear in the springtime. He opened the parcel that contained his supper while he watched the cafe across the street. The rabbi stopped in the cigar store, bought two cigars, and strolled on out into the night.

Manetti looked at his supper. Hamburgers! That meant no supper for him this Friday. He'd distinctly ordered fish, but—

Friday!

Quickly, he glanced down the street. The rabbi was half a block away. What was an Orthodox Jewish rabbi doing out after sundown on Friday? And buying cigars to boot!

Manetti was moving fast, and thinking faster.

Luck was really against Broderick that night. His "appointment" was in Brooklyn, and so were a bunch of teenage mugs who called themselves the Happy Tigers. When Broderick was leaving the Flatbush subway station the Happy Tigers decided to pull their caper. A few minutes later, Broderick actually saw six of the young hoods stationing themselves

around a candy store a block away. The dim sign said: THEOTOKES — Candy — Sundries. Broderick grinned and took a detour.

Detective Manetti was furious with himself. For the second time, Broderick had eluded him. By this time, Manetti was positive that the phony rabbi was Louie "The Knife." Still, it wasn't hopeless. Broderick had gone out in that disguise before; he would do it again. And the next time . . .

He was explaining all this to two uniformed officers in a squad car. "I lost him at the Seventy-second Street station. He took the IRT express downtown, but I couldn't get to him in time to catch the same train. We'll wait until he comes back. I have a hunch that there's some connection between that cigar store and the *Golden Unicorn*. If we—"

At that moment, a voice came over the radio. Manetti didn't pay much attention until the voice mentioned a knifing in Brooklyn. Then he grabbed the microphone and identified himself. "Tell those men in Brooklyn to keep an eye open for a man masquerading as a



rabbi! I've got a hunch that it might be Louie Broderick!"

Broderick's mark lived in a little house crowded between two other houses. It was one of those neighborhoods where every house is blessed with maybe eight square feet of lawn, which gives an apartment-dweller the feeling that he lives in the country.

The man who lived there was a night worker who left for his job every evening at eleven. Somebody wanted him dead. Broderick didn't care who the man was or why his death was necessary; it was just another job.

Broderick wanted to make sure he got the right man. He had looked long and carefully at a Kodacolor print of the guy before he'd left the *Golden Unicorn*. The thing to do was make sure the mark's face matched the photo. He saw just the place to wait. The man had a garage where his car was parked. To drive to work, he'd have to come in the garage.

It was so simple, Broderick thought, so very simple.

He went into the garage to wait.

The cop who saw Broderick enter the garage thought

nothing of it until a prowler car rolled by several minutes later. The officer in the car stuck his head out and said: "Seen anything of a rabbi around the neighborhood?"

The beat patrolman nodded. "Sure. He just went into that garage over there."

"Does he live there?"

The patrolman shrugged. "I don't know; I'm new on this beat."

"What's that address?" asked the other officer in the prowler car.

The patrolman told him, and the man in the car checked with headquarters. Headquarters checked with the phone company and came up with the name of the man who lived there—James Patrick O'Hanahan.

Broderick stood in the shadows of the garage and fingered the butt of the blue gun in his pocket while he thought of the money he had piled up in the last two months. No high spending for Broderick, by Judas. No, sir. That dough was stashed away where he could use it. Why, hell, he could get himself up a good nest egg, skip to the West Coast, change his name and go straight. Buy a business of some kind, maybe—like a restaurant or a



bar. Or maybe open up a gambling joint in Reno or Las Vegas. He could—

Suddenly, without warning, light blazed through the crack in the garage door.

"All right, Broderick!" boomed a voice from a loud-speaker. "We'll give you the count of ten to come out of there with your hands in the air. The place is surrounded. You don't stand a chance." There was a pause, then the voice went on. "Don't be a fool and try to fight it, Broderick. You don't have to get yourself killed. You won't get the chair. You botched the job; the Greek's gonna live. When he wakes up, he can identify you, but attempted murder isn't something they can burn you on."

Broderick almost laughed with relief. The kid gang! They'd stabbed the candy store man and run away, and somehow the cops thought he did it! But when the Greek woke up and said it was a bunch of kids, the cops wouldn't have a case.

"Come on out," said the voice. "We want the candy store man to get a good look at you alive, we don't want to have him identify a corpse."

"I'm coming out!" Broderick yelled. "Don't shoot!"

Then, quite suddenly, he thought of the blue gun. If they found it on him, they'd eventually find out what it did. And that would surely mean a murder rap.

Hide it? Impossible. There was no place in the garage to hide it, and even if there were, the cops would search the place. They would be looking for his knife, and when they didn't find one on him, they'd search the garage. And any search designed to uncover a shiv would find the blue gun sure as hell.

"I'm starting to count, Broderick," said the cop at the loudspeaker. "One—"

Broderick thought fast. If the gun were smashed so that it wouldn't work, they'd never find out what it was. If he just wrecked it and tossed it into a corner, they'd figure it was a busted toy.

"Two—"

It was his only chance. He hated to lose that gun, but after all, nobody's luck runs forever. Besides, he'd made a good pile off the thing. Better be free with no magic gun than go to the little chamber at Sing-Sing.

"Three—"

Broderick looked around. There were some tools on a



shelf nearby. He picked up a heavy ball-peen hammer.

"Four—"

He put the blue gun on the cement floor of the garage, raised the hammer high, and regretfully brought it down on the fantastic weapon.

Thetlang D'bron sat in his room at the Interplanet Hotel, carefully putting an odd, box-like machine together. It had been two months since Jessup had been killed. With all the patience of his long-lived race, the Martian had waited until the hue and cry over the murder of the Ter-ran Ambassador to Mars had died down. Actually, no one had ever suspected Thetlang, although a check of his room had been made. It was well known that Jessup was universally loved by the Martians. But Jessup had nearly discovered Thetlang's designs on the Martian Government, so, regretfully, Jessup had to die.

The Martian finished putting the apparatus together. He smiled at it. A time machine. A small one, true, but it was the only one which had ever been built. Not even Thetlang understood how or why it worked; it had been discovered by his ancestors a hundred thousand years be-

fore. The Martian race had been old, even then.

But of what use was a time-machine? Well, for one thing, it was very useful for getting rid of unwanted K-guns. Thetlang had sent it nearly three hundred years into the past. Then he had waited until the time had come to get it back again. As a race, the Martians are not only patient, but penurious; nothing must be wasted. It was a heritage from long millenia of saving every drop of water, every breath of air on their dessicated planet.

The machine was ready to work; now Thetlang would get back his useful and valuable K-gun. No matter where it was in the past, when he pressed the button again, it would reappear in the little box.

Thetlang pressed the button.

Ray Manetti sat in a squad car outside a garage in Brooklyn, his .38 Police Special in his hand, listening to a sergeant count over a microphone. In a way, he rather hoped Broderick wouldn't come out; the world was better off without men like Broderick alive.

The explosion happened just before the sergeant hit



the count of five. There was a brilliant flare of light within the garage that literally seemed to shine *through* the wooden walls. Then the walls collapsed outward.

There wasn't much left of the garage, and almost nothing left of Louie Broderick.

The explosion in the Martian Wing of the Interplanet Hotel brought the police in a matter of minutes. The police lieutenant found that the explosion had taken place in the room of one Thetlang D'bron, registered as a tourist from the Red Planet.

When the lieutenant arrived, one look told him what had happened.

"It looks like someone was tampering with the energy magazine of a K-gun," he said. "Who in the devil

would be dumb enough to pull a stunt like that? Surely not the Martian."

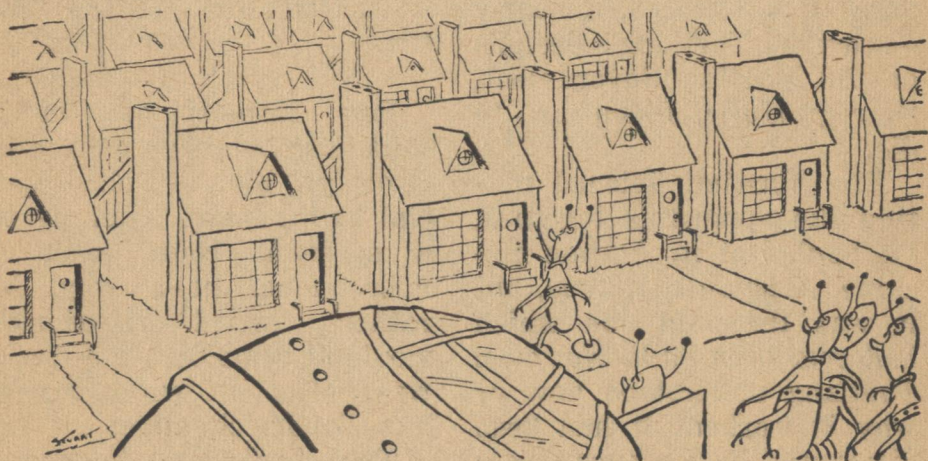
The technicians bustled around the room for several minutes before the head technician reported to the lieutenant.

"There's something funny here," he said. "The damage done is just about half what it ought to be from a K-gun charge, and the energy dispersal pattern is queer—as though the gun were half here and half elsewhere?"

"Somewhere else? That's silly; how could a gun be in two different places?"

"I don't know. Queer."

He was echoing, almost verbatim, the words that Detective Raimondo Manetti had said nearly three hundred years before. **THE END**



"Take me to your leader."



## THE REVOLVING FAN



IT'S A PRETTY rough job putting out any kind of publication. It takes a lot of experience, plenty of effort and imagination. Go to any library and you'll see rows of shelves of books giving information on how to do it. But even if you're doing it for fun, as many fans are, there are some basics that shouldn't be left out, whether you're sweating over a gluey hectograph or cursing at a mimeo that won't feed right. One such basic is a masthead, and another is a table of contents. A large number of the fan publications that come to this desk lack both, and we hope their editors will take the matter in hand. It's really not so much extra work doing up a neat masthead and table of contents, especially when you consider the enormous amount of honest effort and loving care that goes into most of the fan jobs. Nuff said—on to the dissecting table.

\* \* \*

TRANSURANIC. Vol. II, No. 3. CARSCIFOC, Al Alexander, Apt. 8, 2216 Croydon Rd., Charlotte 7, N. C. 10¢ or 6/50¢. 33 pp.

There's a book review by George Cole here, and then an article on Cole (who's a grandfather) by a fellow-member, both of which are fine. The outstanding feature of the 'zine is a Colefolio of BEM's, which are well-executed. So-so con-



tributions by Falasca and Madle fill the "original" output, the rest is padded with chatty letters.

\* \* \*

SATA. #3. *Dan L. Adkins, P. O. Box 258, Luke Air Force Base, Glendale, Arizona. 14 pp.*

A striking cover is followed by an equally striking editorial in which Adkins expresses a general fed-up-ness and promises us something All NEW next time around—we'll be looking. The art work is generally good in this 'zine, too bad it isn't tied to something with more meat than letters and reviews—well done, by the way. A lively article by Larry Shaw on writing letters to the editor—well, he asked for it!

\* \* \*

PITTSBURGH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION BULLETIN. *Vol. IV, No. 1. Robert Troetschel, 1201 Carson Street, Pittsburgh 3, Pa.*

Bob Troetschel says a) PSFA is interested in contacting fans in its region and b) copies can be had for the asking by those interested. Although this effort lacks journalistic refinements, the PSFA Bulletin is an excellent job content-wise. There's no folderol or frippery here, rather, a simply, neatly done bulletin that is interesting, information and businesslike from cover to cover. Evidently, a lot of experience has gone into it, and it bears the stamp of a well-run organization. Just initial by-lines, so we don't know who should get the laurel wreaths.

\* \* \*

NFFF TRADER. *No. 1. Bi-monthly, Ray Schaffer, Jr., 4541 Third Street, NW, Canton, Ohio. Ad rates from 10¢ to 50¢ per issue. Cost is 10¢ or 3/25¢.*

This is a serious and neat first effort—good luck to the conscientious editor, who says, "I decided to publish a trade mag to fill in the gap left by the disappearance of Kaymar Trader." In addition to neatly laid out ads, TRADER contains



the most lucid information on the TAFF we've come across. (Hey, Ray, now can I get some ads in for free?)

\* \* \*

TRIODE. #7. *Editor is, apparently, Terry Jeeves, 58 Sharrad Drive, Intake, Sheffield 12, U. K. Business manager appears to be Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis Street, Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire, U. K. U. S. Agent is Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn., who sells TRIODES at 7/\$1. Nonterrans go to John Berry, 1 Knockeden Crescent Flush Park, Belfast, Ireland, who acts as moneychanger.*

If you're going away for a long weekend, TRIODE is what you ought to take. "Atom" is a little off his stride here on the cover—McIntyre beats him all the way to back the issue up. Most of the 'zine is taken up by an opus Stapletonedly titled *Last And First Fen*, by Renee MacKay and John Owen, which has a limited intratribal appeal, a symphony esoterica, but there are REAL pix of the production for us provincials. The Bentcliffe and Jeeves columns make for good reading (as usual). An article by Alan Bramhall on UFO's is okay, but old hat for ufopen; for serial eaters Willis goes on with his fantastic history.

\* \* \*

MAGNITUDE. *Spring 1956, Vol. I, No. 3. Horizons Enterprises, 409 West Lexington Drive, Glendale 3, Calif., in cooperation with the Chesley Donovan Foundation (note the name change here). 10¢ or 6/50¢. 20 pp.*

Here's an unusually attractive and neat job with a number of professional-looking touches, bearing out the promise of its predecessors. The featured fiction, by Tad Duke and Paul Arram we found a shade on the pretentious side. Articles by Urban and Stapenhorst are interesting, but not outstanding and Clinton's speech was probably better as a speech. *However*, the collaboration of Lackey (lettering), Cobb (illustration) and Brownson (prose) on a special called *Ye Traversal of the Skyes by Missile Unto the Surface of the Veree Moone*



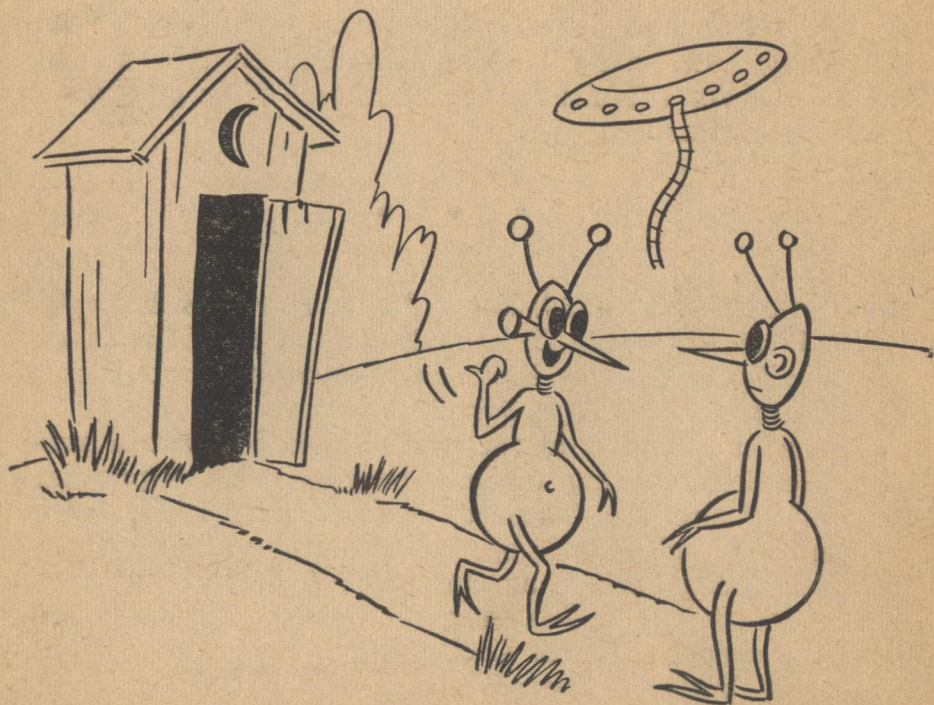
is, alone, worth twice the price of the issue—it is, to risk going out on a limb, delightfully different.

\* \* \*

FANTASY TIMES. #248, *First June 1956 Issue*, Fandom House, P. O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey.

Like Ol' Man River, FT rolls along and The Indestructible now has a book review column by Blish, and a tribute to Bob Olsen by Ackerman. The thing that caught our eyes here was a short bit on a Japanese super SF 'zine, JEWEL—of many carats at 322 (not a misprint, 322) pages. FT calls it a tremendous item for the collector and we don't doubt *that*. Also, there's a piece of Moskowitz's latest sales in the field.

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"I'd say they're tall and thin!"



# LOST ON A PLANET OF WOMEN!



What's it like to be marooned in a world where only women exist...women who have never before seen an earth-man? Three spacemen find themselves in this situation when they become lost in a galaxy. Read their adventures in "THE WORLD OF WOMEN" . . . featured in February FANTASTIC. It's a story typical of the excitement and entertainment which has made FANTASTIC a leader in the field of science-fiction.

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# A WORLD OF HIS OWN

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

*You've got an itch for conquest. You want to go out in space and find a new planet where you'll be the Great White God. It can be done, but here's a tip—take the little wife along.*

THE head of the Central Colonization Bureau put the papers in front of me on his desk. I riffled through them casually and reached for my pen.

As I started to put my name to the papers, he said, "Before you sign, Mr. Kolvin, I hope you're considering all the aspects of what you're going into. It's a dangerous business, traveling out there to live on a completely unexplored world. No telling what you'll find."

I laughed. "Let me worry about that, Mr. Secretary. I'm not afraid, so why should you be?"

"It's not a laughing matter, Mr. Kolvin," he said fussily. He was a small man, with the pinched, pushed-together look you get from liv-

ing all your life on teeming Earth.

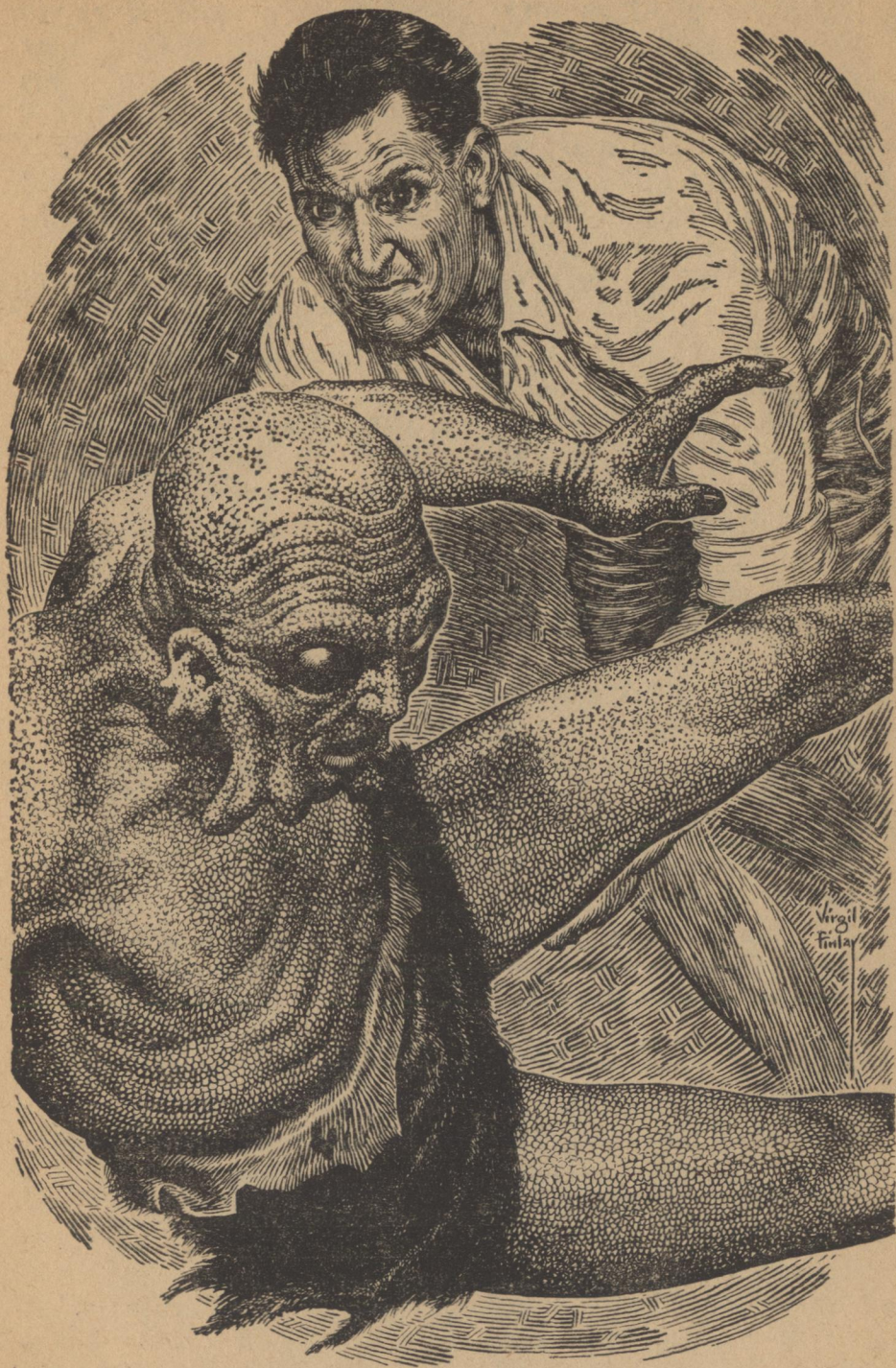
"You and your wife will be risking your lives out there, and it's only fair to warn you—"

"Consider me warned," I said. I was aching so hard to get out there, out among the stars where I could have some breathing space at last, that I didn't want to have to put up with any more red tape.

"Look," I told him. "You have a sky full of planets that you want to give away to anyone willing to colonize them. You're desperate to get people off Earth. If I'm crazy enough to want to go, why try to stop me?"

"All right, Mr. Kolvin," he said, standing up and shoveling the papers together. "If





The alien went down with a scream of rage.



you'll sign, then, I'll arrange for your transportation."

"It's all set," I said when I got back to our one-room, two-by-four cubicle in Upper Appalachia that afternoon. I took out the deed and looked at it. It was the most wonderful piece of paper I've ever seen.

"What planet did they give you, dear?" Joyce asked.

"It's called New Croydon," I told her. "Discovered in 2435 by an English scout ship. It's about Earth size, very warm and moist, with a good hot sun. You won't need to take along much of an outfit."

She smiled. "Are you happy with it?"

"It's a great planet," I said. "And it's all ours! I can't wait to get out there."

"Fine," she said. "If you feel that way, I can't wait either!" She gave me a big hug and a kiss, but I knew that behind this show of happiness there was a certain reluctance on her part about leaving Earth. It wasn't that Joyce had any liking for the ridiculously overcrowded conditions of Earth, with its ten billion people, but I had the feeling that she was none too anxious to pull up stakes, leave our friends and our jobs, and

head out to the stars to pioneer on a rugged new world. Joyce doesn't come from old pioneer stock, so I hadn't mentioned the scout's report on our planet. It said that New Croydon was inhabited by primitive aliens, possibly dangerous. I decided not to tell her.

It might discourage her.

The next morning, we gathered up our few belongings—my guns, some of Joyce's booktapes, some clothing, not much—and caught a 'copter heading toward the spaceport. Whatever we didn't take with us, we just left behind. There was no time to give it away.

The agreement with the government included free transportation plus a generous Survival Kit. They'd supply us with a pre-fab temporary shelter, and a lot of other things to help us get started in our new life. In return, we promised to get a foothold on the new planet and prepare it for colonization; a second couple would be sent to our planet as soon as we requested one.

The ship taking us there was the *Rigel*, a long, sleek, black-hulled starship that specialized in faster-than-light hops all over the galaxy.



There were some other couples aboard, heading for this planet and that, but I kept pretty much to myself. I was busy planning my world.

It's quite a thing to have a world all your own. I was planning my system of government, once there was some population accumulating; I figured on a sort of enlightened monarchy, with myself as the benevolent boss. Since we were the first couple on the planet, it was all in my hands; I expected to request our second couple in about a year, but they'd be strictly second-fiddlers, and they'd know it.

Joyce had wanted that—for us to be the second couple down on some planet. But I vetoed it; first or nothing, for me. I can't see playing Jack to someone else's King. I like to hold all the picture-cards, and all the trumps as well.

After two or three stops at nearer stars, the *Rigel* arrived at the golden-yellow sun around which New Croydon revolved. The last few hours dragged on and on, as the big starship cut the overdrive and slid into a spiral landing orbit, from which a smaller ship popped out and took Joyce and me

down to the surface of our world.

Finally, we were there. The slick young SpaServ man who ferried us down made a last check of the atmosphere, pronounced it breathable, and slid open the airlock, depositing our entire worldly goods in a little clump on the ground.

"That's it," he said. "Best of luck, and all that."

"Thanks," I said, and jumped through the airlock. I landed feet first, feeling the soft, springy ground give a little beneath the impact. I looked around.

It was a glorious, warm, wonderful place.

It was mine.

I reached up and caught Joyce as she dropped through the airlock. Then we stood together, arms around each other, while the starship became a dwindling dot in the sky, and then our last link with Earth vanished beyond the horizon.

The little clearing was exactly as it had been described in the scout's report. We were on the edge of a thickly vegetated jungle, its foliage a riot of greens and striking blues, with the red and orange dots of immense blossoms bursting out here and



there. Off in the distance, rolling, tree-covered hills stretched upward, and over to the left of our clearing was a small lake, fed by a shimmering stream that wound around and into the jungle. The contrast with Earth, with its dull, soupy atmosphere and planet-wide forest of skyscrapers, was overpowering. This planet was like Eden. I almost felt like crying. Me, crying.

Joyce turned to me, as we stood there in the midst of our little pile of possessions. "It's a beautiful planet," she said, her eyes glowing. "And it's all ours!"

"Yes," I said. The thought of the report, with its sinister mention of possibly dangerous alien life bobbed up sourly in my mind. I was determined to hold the thing from Joyce until the creatures actually showed—if they ever did.

I drew her close, and we stayed that way for a while. Then I released her.

"We'd better get busy and set up our pre-fab," I said. "We'll need a place to sleep tonight. I'll begin building our home in the morning." I reached for the first packing-case, and started to jimmy it open. Joyce put her hand on my arm.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Jim—let's save the unpacking for a while. There's that lovely little lake down there; suppose we take a quick swim first? Just to freshen up, before we get down to work?"

I grumbled something, thinking that I wanted to get our shelter set up before any trouble with the native life could arise, but Joyce had already unbuttoned the top of her heavy space tunic and was wriggling out of her trousers.

"You talked me into it," I said. I was feeling a little reckless anyway, and I didn't want to seem overcautious. We ran down to the lake hand in hand.

It was just like Earth, but on Earth that hadn't existed for a thousand years. It was fresh, and unspoiled, and clean. We splashed around gaily in the cool, shining water for a while, letting the accumulated filth of our lifetime on Earth drop from us, and then I suggested we start getting down to work.

Reluctantly, Joyce followed me as I clambered out of the water. I shook myself dry, and the strong, warm sun finished the job in a matter of minutes. We didn't



bother getting dressed again until the sun's heat had started to redden our skins. We'd have to get used to the actinic exposure slowly.

The pre-fab shelter went up almost faster than it takes to tell it. Inside of practically no time, we had a sturdy and secure shelter erected. Joyce busied herself unpacking the synthotrates we were going to live on until I got the hunting and farming routine well under way, while I surveyed the area and blasted down a few trees to set up as a barrier around our shelter.

By nightfall, we had our new home well under control. It was going to be a rugged life, but I knew I was going to love it, and it looked like Joyce would too. We sat around our single small lamp—the big generator hadn't been set up, yet—and dreamed of what our brave new world would be like. After a while I stood up and walked to the window, and stared out reflectively at the twin moons that hung high above in the sky.

Then something in the forest caught my eye. I squinted to see what it was.

There was a ring of little glowing lights surrounding the shelter. Each one was a

torch, grasped by an unseen hand.

I turned to look at Joyce. She was stretched out, her eyes closed, a smile on her face. Suddenly I felt terribly, terribly guilty.

A moment later I heard a soft thrumming sound from outside, and a spear came thwacking into the outer wall of the shelter.

Joyce was on her feet and wide awake in an instant.

"What was that?" she asked, breathless. "What happened?"

"I'm afraid we're in for trouble," I told her. Another spear thudded into our wall, and this time it went deep; its razor-like point penetrated the two-inch thickness of the wall and showed, gleaming and deadly, jutting out of the inside of the wall.

Hastily, I doused the lamp, and reached for my blaster. Joyce was trembling, but she rummaged in one of the packing cases and took out the small Webley I had packed away for her use. We moved to the window together, and stared out.

They were massed out there on our clearing, each with a torch in one hand and a wicked-looking spear in the other. As near as I could see



in the flickering half-light of the torches, they were roughly humanoid in appearance, with the usual number of arms and legs; their skins were thick - looking and greenish-blue, with red wattles around their throats. Their eyes were big and goggly. They didn't look at all pleasant.

As we watched, one of the biggest, standing in the foreground of the group, spotted us at the window. He drew back his arm, cocked it, and let fly with his spear, straight at us.

It hit the window with a tremendous impact. The window, luckily, was made of flexiplast, so it gave beneath the blow and bounced back. The spear flipped away, but there was a thin scratch incised on the flexiplast that told me just what that spear could have done to a human being. They obviously made the things so sharp in order to be able to penetrate each other's thick hides.

"Jim—what are we going to do?"

I turned to face Joyce. She had ducked when the spear came, and she was huddled up, a miserable little bundle, on the floor. I pulled her up to me. Outside, the aliens

were beginning a savage, rhythmical chant, with a powerful repeated beat that almost had me keeping time despite myself.

"Don't worry," I told her. "A bunch of spear-throwing savages can't be any match for one Earthman with a little brains."

"But there are so many of them, Jim!"

"It's all right, baby. We'll beat them, and this world too. It's too good a place to waste on a tribe of frogmen, anyway."

I set my blaster for wide-beam and went back to the window. I didn't want to kill them; not yet. I wanted to roast them a little, just enough so they'd go running back and tell the rest of their tribe that it would be a good idea to keep away from that new building in the clearing.

Outside, the rhythmic chant grew in intensity, and every so often another spear would come thudding into the side of the shelter. They were stamping up and down, now, and shouting—obviously trying to frighten away the evil spirit that had landed in their midst.

Cautiously, I opened the window just a crack. The sound of the chanting drifted in.



"Eh-ah, ey-ah, ey-ah ah  
*Ey-ya!* Has! Has! *Ey-ah!*"

Joyce shuddered. "They  
sound like devils!"

"Just primitive savages,"  
I said. "Give me a few days  
and I'll have them eating out  
of my hand."

I slid the window open a  
little further and brought  
my blaster up, but before I  
could do anything one of  
them hurled a spear straight  
for the opening. I pulled  
away; the point of the spear,  
a gleaming blade three inches  
long, flew, true to its aim,  
into the open window, but  
the thick handle could not fit  
through, and remained out-  
side. I pulled in the spear  
and flicked my finger over its  
point.

It was sharp. Killing  
sharp. I heard Joyce's soft,  
frightened whimpering, and,  
oddly, it annoyed me in the  
midst of everything. I had  
thought she was tougher  
than this.

I slid the window open  
once again, taking care to  
remain down out of the way,  
and brought my blaster up  
to the opening. The aliens  
were milling around, still not  
crossing my barrier of logs,  
shouting, chanting, waving  
their torches. I checked the  
blaster, saw that it was set

for wide beam, and squeezed  
the triggering stud.

The gentle yellow beam  
licked out at the night. As it  
touched the first alien, I  
heard his chant turn to a  
yelp of pain, but he held his  
ground until he began to  
sizzle. Then they were all  
dancing and leaping as the  
heat started to get to them.  
Only one, the biggest of the  
lot, a huge fellow wearing a  
ribbon round his middle—  
the chief, I supposed—stood  
his ground, angrily snarling  
his defiance while the others  
retreated.

I kept the juice on him,  
and after a while the heat got  
the better of his stubborn-  
ness. He gave ground and  
edged away, not before hurl-  
ing his spear fruitlessly  
against the window. Then he  
turned and joined the general  
retreat to the jungle.

Some of them had jumped  
into our lake when I'd start-  
ed blasting. I directed my  
beam down there and held it  
till the water started to  
bubble. The outraged yelping  
of the parboiled aliens as  
they fled from the lake into  
the jungle was music to my  
ears.

I continued to blast away  
until there was no sign of  
them. The twin moons shone  
down on a quiet clearing,



somewhat burnt and grassless, on which there lay a few charred spears. All was quiet, as if nothing had happened. I shut off the blaster and closed the window.

I turned to Joyce. She was curled up on one of the packing cases, sobbing softly to herself. I walked over and took her in my arms.

"What are we going to do?" she asked. "What are we going to *do*?" Her face was streaked with tears.

"Don't worry," I said, trying to sound reassuring. "I'll beat them. We've won the first encounter hands down. Maybe they'll be so scared they won't come back."

"But they will come back," Joyce said. "They'll always be here, all over the planet. How can we ever be safe, knowing the forests are full of them. Our children—"

"They may really be a peaceful race, for all we know."

"Peaceful? After that welcome?" Joyce's eyes blazed, and I was glad to see some of the old fire come back into them. "They'll be a constant menace! We'll never have a moment's rest, here on this place."

"I didn't think they—" I began, then stopped.

"Jim!" She didn't need to hear the whole sentence to figure out what was about to come out. "Did you know there was alien life on this planet, before we came out?"

I hung my head. "Yes," I said, feeling guiltier than ever.

"And you went ahead with it! You brought me here anyway, knowing that there was dangerous life on New Croydon."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I just sat there, in the darkness of our pre-fab, with the silvery shadows of the twin moons casting eerie patterns through the windows. After a long while Joyce got up and came over to me.

"All right," she said. "So you were so anxious to get off Earth that you took a planet you knew might be dangerous, just because it was the first one available. Well, you're my screwball husband, and I'll have to put up with things like that. What do you plan to do next?"

I grasped her around the middle, pulled her down, and kissed her. "That," I said.

After she pulled away, she said, "You can't keep that up forever. What happens in the



morning, when the aliens come back?"

"We'll worry about that in the morning," I said, tapping the blaster significantly. "Let's get some rest now, huh? It's going to be a busy day."

It was an uneasy night. I awoke a couple of times, thinking I was hearing the terrifying "Eh-ah!" of the aliens coming from outside, but all was silent. Every time I awoke, though, I saw Joyce staring up, wideeyed and wide awake.

By morning, we were both pretty well frayed. Even the fresh, primeval glory of morning on New Croydon was wasted on us; from our point of view, it was going to be just another day of hard work and constant vigil.

We set to work in a hurry, finished unpacking the rest of the government's Survival Kit, and got everything set up pretty well. I was pleased to find a Translator included in the last packing case we opened; just in case we ever did get on friendly terms with the local populace, it would save a lot of time not to have to learn their language.

About noon, the aliens

came back. In broad daylight they looked a lot less fierce than they had in the dim light of evening. They were big and ugly, all right, but they looked less menacing than they had before. They ringed themselves around the shelter, keeping their distance—I saw a number of them showed marks of their encounter with the blaster ray the night before—and muttering to themselves.

It was a state of siege.

I reached for my blaster. "I'll give them another cooking," I said. "Eventually they'll learn to keep away." I turned the dial, increasing the intensity of the beam.

Joyce put her hand over mine and pushed the gun down. "Take it easy, mastermind," she said. "Let's think this thing through first."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're not going to get anywhere by shooting at them every time they show up. You'll only end up surrounded by more of them than you can blast at one time, and then what'll happen?"

I chewed at my lip. I had been thinking along the same lines myself, but I hadn't wanted to frighten her by showing her the true seriousness of our predicament.



ment. There was no need to spare her feelings, though. She knew.

"It's a rough spot," she went on. "Just two of us, and strangers, against a whole planet. We don't know how many of them there are, but here you're all set to declare war on them."

"What else can we do but blast at them?" I demanded. For the first time I began to feel that we were in a hopeless situation, as I watched the aliens milling around outside. They seemed to be preparing some new activity, a charge perhaps. I was angry; this was *my* world, and it seemed unfair that they should be allowed to spoil it.

"We've got a Translator," Joyce said. "We can talk to them. There's our way out."

"Talk? How?"

"We can pass ourselves off as gods. They look primitive enough to be that gullible. You can whip up a couple of fake miracles, and we can make a speech. If we impress them enough, they'll keep far, far away, and with a healthy respect for us."

"Sounds fine," I said. "But there's one catch. We have to be within ten feet to use the Translator. And they're keeping their distances, and we're going to keep ours. No

sense getting that close to them!"

"We'll have to take a chance, then," she replied. "We'll go out there with the Translator, both of us, and talk to them."

"No," I said emphatically. "Too risky." I glanced out the window, at the massed aliens. There were plenty more of them now, hemming us in on all sides, and though they didn't threaten any immediate direct action they were starting to become a pretty ugly-looking crowd.

They were all congregated on the far side of my log barrier. But as I watched, one of them—the big one, with the ribbon, the one who had defiantly endured the heat-beam the night before, climbed up on the logs, stepped proudly down over them, and marched up to our shelter.

"Door locked?" I asked.

"Yes," said Joyce. "He can't get in."

"This one's the chief, I guess. I think he wants to have a chat with us," I said.

The big alien walked ponderously up to our window, and rapped at it with a scaly, green, four-fingered fist. The flexiplast shook but withstood the strain. I knocked



back, and he replied with a single knock.

"Knock twice," Joyce said. I did so, and the alien responded. I knocked three times, and so did he.

"They're intelligent," Joyce said. "He's trying to communicate with us. It's our chance, now. Where's the Translator?"

"No," I said. "I refuse to go out there; it's nothing more than suicide. I'm going to blast him as he stands."

Joyce turned to me incredulously. "You can't do that, Jim! He came up to the window in good faith. If you shoot him down, they'll swarm all over us."

"That's where you are wrong," I said firmly. "If they see me knock off their chief so calmly, that'll awe them. They'll be afraid to come near us."

"And we'll spend the rest of our lives in a state of perpetual siege, with the aliens camped just on the other side of our barrier, waiting for our synthotrates to run out. Sounds almost as appealing as living on Earth!" Her tone was pure acid.

"Let me manage this, Joyce," I said. I turned away from her and cocked my blaster. The alien outside the window was watching calm-

ly, emitting deep, hoarse grunts from time to time. I reached for the window, planning to slide it open, blast him down at full force, and slam the window shut before any of the others could move. It was sneaky, but it was the kind of situation where you're not too fussy about how you get your neck out of the noose.

Suddenly I heard a click behind me. I whirled just in time to see the door swing shut.

"Joyce!" I looked around. There was no sign of her in the cabin. And then I saw her.

The crazy girl was standing outside on our porch, the small brown metal Translator box in her hands, and she was talking to the big alien!

Horror stricken, I opened the window and called to her. "Joyce! Get back in here before he kills you!"

She didn't listen, but went on talking. The green monster stood facing her, listening patiently and with evident interest as she spoke. My blood ran cold as I saw her standing there coolly, and I pictured her soft body being rent and torn by the assembled aliens out there.

I didn't know what to do.



If I blasted the alien, the others might get to her before she could get back into the cabin. If I went out there myself, that would leave both of us out in the open, unprotected except by my blaster. A dozen alternate plans coursed through my mind in a brief instant, and just as quickly I rejected them all. I cursed vividly, angry at the aliens and at Joyce and at myself most of all.

"We are gods from beyond the sky," I heard her say to the alien. "We have come here to be kings over you."

The alien grunted something, but apparently the Translator didn't pick it up. Joyce went on. "You and your people must bow down to us!" She signaled to me, as if expecting me to produce some miracle to awe them.

I glanced around the shelter, keeping one eye cocked on Joyce and the alien. All I could find handy was a small Very flare, and I decided to use that. I'd throw it out into the clearing, and make the day a little brighter for them. I found myself praying for Joyce, hoping her crazy stunt would come off. There was nothing else I could do.

But before I could throw the flare, the alien started backing away until he stood in the center of the clearing. He beckoned to Joyce, and she came forward to stay within Translator range of him. They stood together, about eight feet apart, and my blood froze as I saw the other aliens edging down over my barrier to form a ring around the two of them.

They stared at each other for a long moment. Then the big alien reached out a powerful paw and slapped Joyce to the ground!

That was enough for me. I dropped the flare and dashed out of the cabin, bursting through the tightly-packed ring of aliens. Just as I reached the center, the alien chief picked up Joyce and dumped her, like a sack of clothes, and picked her up again. I saw his fist go back for another blow. She was screaming hysterically.

I pushed my way between them and took the blow myself. Then I shoved Joyce away. The ring opened and widened, and I found myself facing the alien king in single combat. We circled around each other. A red haze of anger and hatred fogged my eyes. I heard



Joyce's cries dimly in the background.

She must have picked up my fallen blaster, because I felt radiant warmth for a moment as I traded blows with the alien. Then I heard her shout, "Come on, Jim! I've cleared a path back to the cabin!"

But I ignored her. I was wild with rage, wild with the desperate need to battle with the monster who had attacked my wife. "I'm going to finish this fight," I grunted. I landed a heavy blow on the alien's jaw, and his rough scales scraped my knuckles bloody. I figured it had hurt him worse, though.

"Don't be insane, Jim!"

But I wasn't listening. We came together in a clinch and rocked back and forth; I sensed the strange, weird smell of the animal, the alien smell of an alien life-form, and then we broke, reeling back from each other. I caught a quick glance of the scene. The other aliens were ringed around us as if they were at a prize-fight. Joyce was standing by our door, holding the blaster, not knowing what to do.

I moved toward the alien slowly. He was about my height, but much wider and

heavier—probably close to three hundred pounds. He wasn't a very craftsmanlike boxer, but he could punch, and punch hard.

He grabbed for me with an outstretched hand. I ducked away, and he changed the hand into a fist and tattooed my ribs with it. I darted inside his guard and landed a solid one on the flat pair of nostrils that passed for his nose. That didn't faze him at all, but when I followed with a left to the soft mass of red wattles at his throat he staggered backward.

I heard the ones ringed around us beginning their chant again, "Eh-ah, Ey-ah!" The ring had closed again; there was no way for me to get back to the shelter, and Joyce couldn't dare use the blaster with me out there. The way it looked, they'd have me fight first one, then another, until I was exhausted. It would be a fight to the finish—my finish.

I circled around, looking for an opening, and suddenly got rocked off my feet by a tremendous stiff-armed blow to my stomach. I crumpled up, and the burly monster was on me. The chanting grew to a deafening crescendo.

I struggled to push him off



me, but it was no go. He had me flattened, and was bearing down. Then I realized my mistake. I had been matching force for force, lowering myself to the level of the savage, and that was why I was coming off second best; I wasn't a match for him. But I wasn't making use of my big advantage, the one attribute I had that he didn't—my brain.

I began to scream and moan, not allowing myself to worry about the effect my act would have on Joyce, and then relaxed utterly. The alien fell for the decoy and got up to survey his handiwork, and as he did I sprang up, pistoned him into a judo hold, and sent him flying over his surprised back. The watchers abruptly grew silent.

He started to rumble to his feet, but I got his leg, levered him up, and flipped him neatly against the pile of logs, head first. He landed hard, and I heard the crack of bone against wood. *The bigger they are, I thought to myself, the harder they fall.*

He rolled over and lay still, and I caught my breath for the first time in five minutes. I complimented myself on a neat, if elementary, job

of leverage. Then I turned and faced the mob of them.

"All right," I barked. "Who's next?" There were about a hundred of them, and I figured I could handle two or three more before I ran out of steam. I gestured toward the biggest one near me. "Come on," I said. "Let's go!"

But he didn't make a move. The whole bunch of them backed up two or three paces, staring first at me, then at the shattered skull of my erstwhile opponent, then back at me. Then they began to chant again, a new and different chant.

"You don't want to fight?" I yelled.

Apparently they didn't. They were down on their scaly knees, now, still chanting. Then Joyce left the safety of the shelter and came running out to me.

She had a gorgeous shiner hung on one eye, and looked generally battered, as, no doubt, did I. But she was wet-eyed with relief, and she appeared radiant with some new happiness I didn't know about yet.

"Thank God it's over," she said.

"I don't understand what's happening," I told her, pointing to the prostrate aliens.



They were still chanting away for all they were worth.

She pointed to the corpse of the former chieftain, and held out the Translator to me. "Listen to what they're saying, Jim! It must be a sort of King of the Hill kind of society, where the fellow who licks the boss becomes boss himself!" She held out the Translator; I took it, and listened to what they were chanting.

It came through clear as a bell.

"Oh, king, live forever! Live forever, oh, king!"

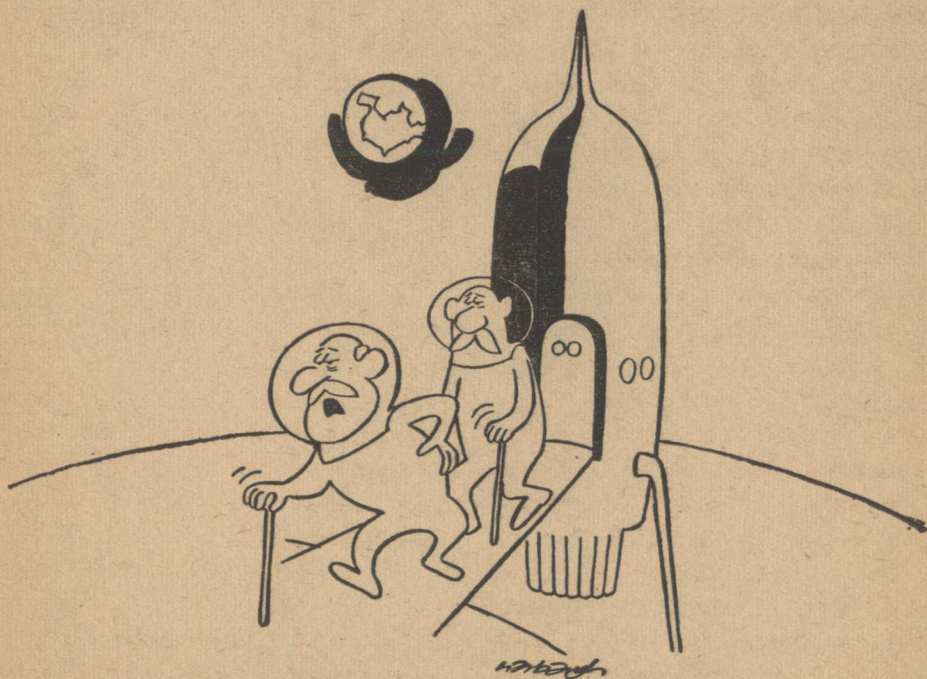
When the old king had

thrown Joyce down, he was simply challenging the newcomer to single combat, by the code of his people. I had taken up the gauntlet for her, and had won the crown.

They continued to hail the conquering hero. "Oh, king, live forever!"

I raised my hand in a gesture of acceptance, placed one foot on the corpse of my late adversary, and grinned. It was my world, now—mine and Joyce's. We would start building the next day, as soon as I could get around to teaching my new subjects how to chop down trees.

#### THE END



"That took a little longer than I expected!"





The kladnars thundered on. The stands went wild.



# THE GREAT KLADNAR RACE

By RICHARD GREER

*Maybe you've bet on horses, or greyhounds, or even frogs jumping out of a circle. Then too, there have been cockroach races and even raindrops running down a window. But until you've had a wager on a kladnar race you really haven't begun to gamble!*

I DON'T know whose idea it was to hold the *kladnar* race. There were twelve of us in that miserable trading-post on Gornik VII, all sweating out the year that would have to pass before we could apply for transfers to some less deadly-dull planet.

There wasn't much action on Gornik VII—so we manufactured some. It happened one morning, as the bunch of us were sitting outside the Terran encampment, waiting boredly for the natives to show up with their produce.

Someone—I wish I knew who it was—pointed to the galumphing form of a *kladnar* approaching in the distance, and said, "Hey! I've got a great idea! Why don't we organize a *kladnar* race?"

I remember the idea

amused me tremendously. If you haven't ever seen a tridim of a *kladnar*, you've never seen one of the silliest-looking beasts that ever infested an alien world. They're long and low-slung, with six knob-ended, spindly legs, and broad backs that would be marvelous for carrying passengers or cargo, if it weren't for the ridge of spines running along them. The natives use the *kladnars* as beasts of burden—they don't mind sitting on the spines, it seems—and every morning we were accustomed to seeing a dozen or more purple-and-green *kladnars* stabled at our outpost while their masters haggled with us over the exchange value of some trinket or gewgaw.

Within a few minutes, we



were huddled together in an excited group, discussing the project. At last, something to take the curse of boredom from Gornik VII!

"We can set up a tote-board," Hamilton said. "Lord knows we've got plenty of loose cash!"

"Should we get out a *Racing Form*?" asked Demaret waggishly. "And who'll print the scorecards?"

Lieutenant Davis stared out at the plain before us. "We can hold the race out there," he said. "A two-mile course, straightaway. There's room for a dozen *kladnars* to run, easily."

"Will the natives lend us the animals?" I asked.

Davis nodded. "They won't mind. It'll be a novelty for them, too."

"It ought to be something," Willis said.

The Great *Kladnar* Race became the biggest thing the insignificant world of Gornik VII had experienced since the day Earthmen had first landed there.

The natives—small, furry humanoids who were friendly and cooperative at all times—took to the race with great enthusiasm, once we explained what it was all about.

Gummun Lugal, the local

chieftain, was the man we had to get it across to.

He frowned, wrinkling his furry brow. "I don't quite understand. You want to borrow *kladnars* and let them run in that field?"

I nodded. "That's right."

"But—*why*?"

"It's a sport we Earthmen enjoy. We start all the *kladnars* from the same place, and let them run toward another given place. Then we bet money on which *kladnar* will get there first."

"Bet?" Gummun Lugal said, in hopeless confusion. "What is that?"

"I mean," I said, "that each of us puts down a certain sum of money to support the *kladnar* of his choice. Then the man who backed the winning *kladnar* collects some of the other men's money."

"I think I understand," the alien said dimly. "Go through it once again, will you?"

I outlined the scheme to him a second time. Comprehension finally broke through his small brain, and he nodded happily. "I see! I see! It is a game, you might say."

"You might say indeed," I said.

"The twelve *kladnars* will be ready whenever you want them," the chieftain said.

We swung into activity



with an enthusiasm you'd hardly expect from twelve Earthmen stuck on a back-water planet. We measured off a two-mile course, built a starting gate, chalked in a finish line. Our radio tech cooked up a photo-timer in case of a close heat. We decorated the racing grounds with bright-colored cloth from our endless stock of trading goods, cutting out banners and streamers galore. It looked just like home by the time we were finished.

The day of the race, the natives started filing into the stands we had erected, and old Gummun Lugal and some of his sons came galumphing in riding a dozen *kladnars*, which they brought around back to our tent.

We equipped each one with a silk of a different color, with a large number emblazoned on it, and the native jockeys each had an armband of the same color. An armband was the best we could do, since they wouldn't wear anything else.

The day before, we had looked over the twelve *kladnars* they were supplying. Each of us had a chance to go down the row, peering at teeth and forepaws, trying to judge the things. We had no record of previous perform-

ances, of course. The *kladnars* were simply beasts of burden, not racing animals. It was a familiar sight on Gornik VII to see a long string of them trudging along Indian file carrying bundles of goods. So we had to guess which one might be the fastest. There was no sure thing.

Naturally, we kept our conclusions to ourselves. I picked Number 5 myself, a sturdy-looking animal with a glint of fierce determination in his eye. He seemed a sure thing to come through first, since the rest of the *kladnars*, it seemed to me, were much sadder creatures—and one of them, Number 9, was so decrepit-looking that I was sure he'd drop dead after the first furlong.

Computer technician Flaherty dragged his small Mark VII job out of the ship and set it up at the track, and radio tech Dombrowski hooked the computer to a video-screen to make an improvised parimutuel board.

We opened a betting-window. Lieutenant Davis stood behind it and took the money, while the crowds of natives watched with keen interest from the stands. All eleven of us lined up, credit-pieces in hand, to bet.



"Four credits on Number 3," Demaret said.

"I'll put my dough on Number 7," said Dombrowski.

"Mine's Number 6," said Willis.

"Same here," said Flaherty, and the two Irishmen glared unhappily at each other. Naturally, two bets on the same *kladnar* reduced the possible winnings on the creature.

"I'll take 5," I said.

The odds on the screen flickered and changed with each bet. When we were all through, I glanced up at the board to see how things stood.

Three *kladnars* led the list at 12-1. No one at all had put money on Numbers 2, 4, or 9, and they rated as longshots. From there the odds trailed away. My *kladnar*, Number 5, had proved popular; I stood to pick up only a couple of credits in the event of a win.

"Okay," Lieutenant Davis said. "The bets are all in. Let's get the race under way."

"One moment please," said a thin voice. We all glanced down in surprise, and saw the small form of Chieftain Gummun Lugal. He elbowed his way to the betting window and peered up at the lieutenant.

"What is it?" Davis asked.

"We'd like to know," the chieftain asked hesitantly, "if it's all right for our people to place bets too."

Davis frowned. "You want to bet?"

Gummun Lugal nodded.

We held a hasty conference outside the window. "Why not?" I said. "Their money's good, isn't it? And it increases the total kitty tremendously."

"It confuses things, though," Demaret objected. "If we mix their money and ours—"

"We can equalize it later," Davis said. "I think it's a good idea to let them bet."

So did the rest of us, and we told Gummun Lugal that it was all right. He turned and yelled something to the stands, and what looked like an endless stream of aliens descended from the bleachers and formed a long line in front of the betting window.

Fifteen minutes later, we were very worried indeed.

I stared up at the parimutuel board. "They're all betting on Number 9," I said. "Every last one of them! And Number 9's a dog. It'll keel over before the race can start."

"If it does we'll be lucky," Davis said. "If 9 should win we'll have to pay out a for-



tune, even with the odds as low as they are."

Demaret scowled. "There's something funny going on. There must be some reason why the natives are all going for the same *kladnar*. You think the race is fixed?"

"I don't know," the lieutenant said. "Let's go see Gummun Lugal again."

We ringed ourselves around the chieftain and Davis said, "Gummun Lugal, we want to make a change in the nature of the race."

"Lieutenant?"

"We want to change things a little bit. Instead of having your people ride the *kladnars*, we'll be the jockeys."

The Chieftain was silent for a moment, and Davis added, "If you won't agree to that, we'll have to call off the race."

Immediately he begged us to reconsider. "No, no, we'll be deeply honored to have the Earthmen ride our lowly beasts!" he said. "By all means!"

"You don't object?"

"Not at all," Gummun Lugal said.

"Very good. We'll start the race immediately. The board's closed, and no more bets will be accepted."

Davis called us together. "All right, men. We're going

to ride these beasts ourselves, and we're going to ride them fairly. I'll assign you to mounts at random, and if you happen to be riding the wrong horse, ride it as if you've got your pension bet on it. We can't afford to look dishonest in front of these natives."

Dombrowski raised his hand. "Fine, sir—but I have a suggestion. Suppose you let me ride Number 9—just as a precautionary measure?" The radio tech patted his 300-pound girth and chuckled. "I may slow the beast up a bit, you know."

"Go ahead," Davis said. "The rest of you take these slips of paper, and get aboard. We've got to get the race going."

I drew Number 3. Demaret, who had bet on 3, smiled and said, "Give her a run, will you? I've got four credits riding on her tail."

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll be in there all the way." I glanced over at Number 5, and saw Lieutenant Davis climbing aboard. *Make it a good run, Lieutenant*, I thought silently.

But I didn't intend to hold Number 3 back. I'd ride it with all I had, even if it meant beating out my own horse in a photo-finish.



I climbed aboard 3 and guided it slowly to the starting-gate. The course was a two-mile straightaway, and so position didn't much matter. Next to me, Dombrowski sat athwart poor bedraggled old 9, carrying with him the hopes—and cash—of the whole native village.

Since all twelve of us were needed to ride, Davis handed the starting gun to Gummun Lugal and told him what to do.

I grabbed the reins.  
"Go!"

The shot resounded loudly and we were off. My *kladnar* broke badly, and I found myself in the back almost at once. To my horror, I saw Dombrowski and Number 9 several paces in the lead.

I urged my mount on. It wasn't pleasant, riding that beast. The row of blunt three-inch spines down its wide back didn't make for a pleasant cushion, and its six spindly legs went up and down like a set of out-of-phase pistons. I knew I was going to get awfully seasick before the race was over.

"Giddyap!" I yelled, not knowing an appropriate command for a *kladnar*. And, gradually, my animal started to move. I passed into the

bunched pack, threaded past, emerged neck-and-neck with Lieutenant Davis aboard 5 and Demaret on 7. The *kladnars* weren't moving at much more than a fast crawl, and I turned to wave at Davis as I pushed past.

His face was set in a grim line. He gestured up ahead, and I gasped.

Old Number 9 was ten paces ahead, jogging along placidly without worrying about Dombrowski's bulk in the slightest. The race was coming to the halfway point—and Number 9 was in the lead!

"Let's go, boy!" I crooned. My mount edged past Number 7, then past my own favorite, 5. *Good-bye, sweet money*, I thought. I knew it was up to me to catch Number 9.

I could see the ancient beast plodding along just ahead. He wasn't moving very quickly—but my own mount was going even more slowly. I thudded my heels into the *kladnar's* side, tried to urge him onward.

No soap. I got up within about two paces of Number 9 and then my *kladnar* fell into an obliging trot. It was lickety-split, lickety-split, all the way to the finish line. Dombrowski and Number 9 cross-



ed first. I came over right after to place.

I turned and looked back. The other ten *kladnars* were stretched out in a long line.

The crowd was roaring. I thought of the cash we'd have to pay out to cover those hundreds of bets on Number 9, and felt sick.

It took nearly two hours to pay off all the natives. They hadn't bet much individually, but there were a hell of a lot of them.

We had to pay them, naturally. It wasn't only a matter of honor; the company would have raised holy hell if we'd welched our bets and lost face to the local populace.

We exhausted our own kitty pretty quickly. We'd made the damn fool mistake of guaranteeing a profit, so we had to pay out more than we took in. When our own money was gone, we had to dig into company money. Luckily, it held out to the end. We were bankrupt and in debt to our employers, but we'd paid off on the race.

Gummun Lugal was near the betting window as Lieutenant Davis sourly paid out the bets. He kept bobbing his head and smiling, showing his toothy, rust-red smile. "What wonderful men you

Earthmen are!" he cried. "Distributing all this wealth to us!"

"It's not our idea," I said. My voice must have sounded surly, because the old chief-tain's smile faded.

"But—I—I don't understand—"

"Look here, Gummun Lugal," I said, trying to keep from sounding too nasty, "just how in blazes did all your people know that Number Nine was going to win? That decrepit old creature couldn't outrun a man with two broken legs."

His eyes widened in utter astonishment. "You mean—you didn't know? But—"

"What is this? How did you cheat us? And why?" I was really boiling and it took every bit of self-control I had to keep my voice even.

"Cheat? Why, no. We thought you were well aware that Number Nine was the lead animal of the caravan."

"*Caravan?*" My voice must have cracked there; it sounded like a parrot-screach. "You gave us a trained caravan team?"

He smiled happily. "Of course. Otherwise they would not have run together. Unless they are trained together, the *kladnar* will shy away from each other and fight."



"And Number Nine was the lead animal?"

"Oh, yes. We think it was a fine race. It showed the training of the animals. Yes; a very fine race. We must try to run another sometime."

I turned away. "Sure. As soon as Hades freezes over, we'll let you know. We'll have another race then."

"Thank you. It was fine of you; very fine."

It was very plain now. The caravan teams were trained to follow each other in a certain order—or else. No *klad-*

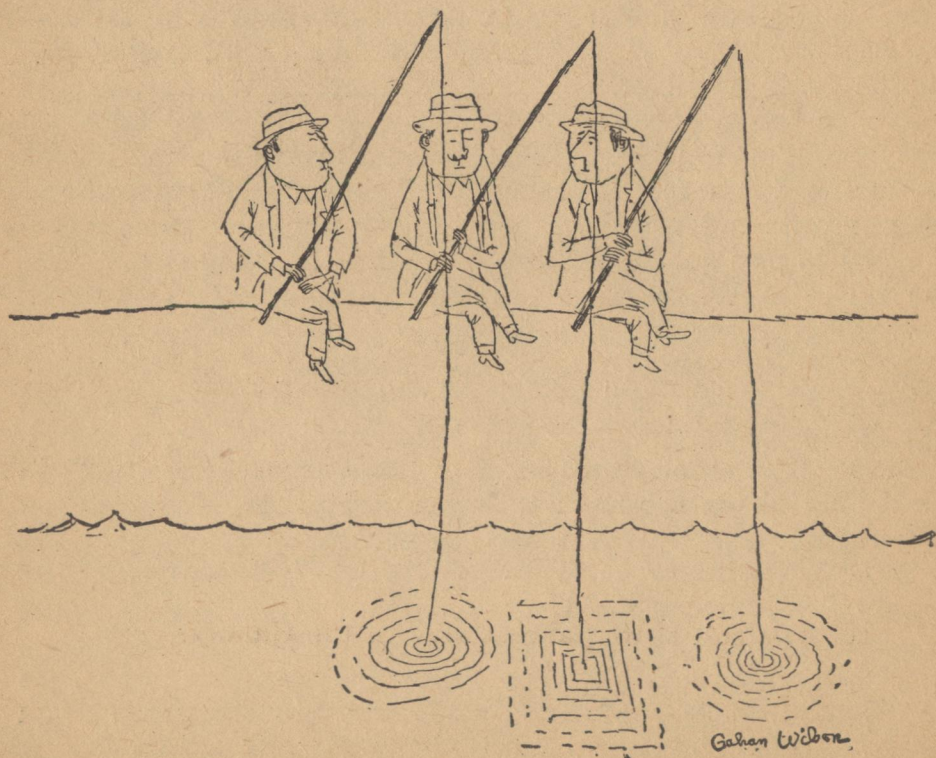
*nar* would have gone against his lifelong training and tried to pass his leader.

It cost us more than mere money to pay off that race; we lost our transfers, because we had to stay on Gornik VII an extra year to make up our losses.

We managed not to get bored, though. We didn't run any more *kladnar*-races.

And I wish I could remember who the bum was who thought of the idea in the first place!

**THE END**





# Test Your Space I. Q.

Here is a twenty-question quiz that will test your knowledge of science fiction, astronomy, physics, and kindred subjects. Check them off—true or false—and then total up your score, checking your answers against the correct ones on the following page. Give yourself five points for each correct answer. Miss two and you're still an expert. Miss five and you can hold your head up in most any company. More than that and you may need a little coaching. Good luck.

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- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. The escape velocity of a space ship leaving the Earth would have to be 7 miles per minute.          | T<br>F |
| 2. The weight of a body on Mercury would be lighter than its corresponding weight on Earth             | T<br>F |
| 3. Every person on Earth is attracted to every other person on Earth by a force which can be computed. | T<br>F |
| 4. The period of time for a revolution of Jupiter about the Sun is more than 400 days.                 | T<br>F |
| 5. Heinlein's "Green Hills of Earth" first appeared as a serial in <i>The Saturday Evening Post</i> .  | T<br>F |
| 6. Nitrogen is heavier than carbon.  | T<br>F |
| 7. The arrival of comets in our Solar System is always predictable by astronomers.                     | T<br>F |
| 8. The definitive experiment on the speed of light was conducted by Michelson and Morley.              | T<br>F |
| 9. Polaris is one of the largest constellations visible from Earth.                                    | T<br>F |
| 10. The sun is the largest star in the Galaxy.   | T<br>F |
| 11. Absolute zero is the temperature at which water freezes.   | T<br>F |



- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 12. Human beings require an atmosphere with an oxygen content of at least 50%                               | T<br>F |
| 13. The first issue of <i>Amazing Stories</i> was dated June 1927.  | T<br>F |
| 14. The escape velocity of a space ship leaving Earth would have to be approximately 26,000 miles per hour. | T<br>F |
| 15. Infra red radiation can be detected at distance beyond five miles.                                      | T<br>F |
| 16. E MC is a key equation in atomic physics.   | T<br>F |
| 17. Gravitational forces do not exist outside the Earth's atmosphere.                                       | T<br>F |
| 18. The whale is the largest animal that ever lived on Earth.   | T<br>F |
| 19. It takes light about one hour to travel from the Sun to Earth.  | T<br>F |
| 20. "The Demolished Man" was written by H. G. Wells.  | T<br>F |

## ANSWERS

1. F 7 miles per second is approximately the speed necessary to overcome Earth's gravitational force.
2. T Weight on a planet is a function of the mass of the planet as well as the mass of the body. The mass of Mercury relative to Earth is .037. The weight of a body on Earth would therefore be lighter than the weight of a body on Mercury.
3. T All objects everywhere are attracted to each other in accordance with the universal law of gravitation.
4. T Jupiter is located in space at a greater distance from the Sun than Earth. Its orbit is larger. Time for revolution is 11.8 years.
5. F It did appear in *The Post* but as a short story.
6. T Nitrogen has an atomic number of 7; atomic weight of 14. Carbon has an atomic number of 6; atomic weight of 12.



7. F By their very nature many comets do not have predictable patterns. Most of them cannot be detected prior to arrival in our Solar System.
8. T They experimentally verified that the velocity of light is a constant independent of any motion of its source.
9. F Polar is the scientific name for "The North Star." It's not a constellation at all.
10. F Difficult as it may be for the unenlightened to comprehend, the Sun is one of the smallest stars in the Galaxy.
11. F Water freezes at 0 degrees centigrade and 32 degrees fahrenheit. Absolute 0 is 0 on the Kelvin scale which is actually minus 272 degrees centigrade, the temperature at which all motion including molecular motion ceases.
12. F The Earth's atmosphere at sea level is only 20% oxygen, more than enough to live on.
13. F This might seem difficult, but anyone who read our 30th Anniversary issue in April could quite easily establish that the first issue was in 1926.
14. T 7 miles per second is the speed necessary to overcome the Earth's gravitational force.
15. T Infra red radiation can be detected at distances limited only by the strength of the radiation and the sensitivity of the detection device.
16. T This is the fundamental equation of the interchangeability of matter and energy. E stands for energy; M stands for mass; C stands for the velocity of light.
17. F The law of gravity is completely universal and is operative between all masses regardless of position in the universe. It is true that gravitational forces in interstellar space are slight because of the great distance between bodies.
18. T Yes, even bigger than the Dinosaur and Brontosaurus.
19. F It takes about 8 minutes. There is nothing faster.
20. F It was written by Alfred Bester.



# TRACKING LEVEL

By HARLAN ELLISON

CLAYBOURNE'S headlamp picked out the imprint at once. It was faint in the beam, yet discernible, with the tell-tale mark of the huge, three-toed foot. He was closer than ever.

He drew a deep breath, and the plastic air-sack on his breather mask collapsed inward. He expelled the breath slowly, watching the diamond-shaped sack expand once more.

He wished wildly for a cigarette, but it was impossible. First because the atmosphere of the tiny planetoid would not keep one going, and second because he'd die in the thin air.

His back itched, but the loose folds of the protective suit prevented any lasting relief, for all his scratching.

*How much can you hate a man?  
Enough to track a terrifying  
beast on a far planet in order  
to make your dream of murder  
come true? Perhaps, but a word  
of caution: Be sure first that  
there is no hatred in existence  
greater than your own.*

The faint starlight of shadows crossing the ground made weird patterns. Claybourne raised his head and looked out across the plain of blue sawgrass at the distant mountains. They looked like so many needles thrust up through the crust of the planetoid. They were angry mountains. No one had ever named them; which was not strange, for nothing but the planetoid itself had been named.

It had been named by the first expedition to the Antares Cluster. They had named it Selangg—after the alien ecologist who had died on the way out.

They recorded the naming in their log, which was fortunate, because the rest of them died on the way back.





Only hatred remained to drive him forward.



Space malady, and an incomplete report on the planetoid Selangg, floating in a death ship around a secondary sun of the Partias Group.

He stood up slowly, stretching slightly to ease the tension of his body. He picked up the molasses-gun and hefted it absently. Off to his right he heard a scampering, and swung the beam in its direction.

A tiny, bright-green animal scurried through the crewcut desert saw-grass.

*Is that what the fetl lives on?* he wondered.

He actually knew very little about the beast he was tracking. The report given him by the Institute at the time he was commissioned to bring the *fetl* back, was at best sketchy; pieced together from that first survey report.

The survey team had mapped many planetoids, and only a hurried analysis could be made before they scuttled to the next world. All they had listed about the *fetl* was a bare physical description—and the fact that it was telekinetic.

What evidence had forced this conclusion was not stated in the cramped micro-report, and the reason died with them.

"We want this animal

badly, Mr. Claybourne," the Director of the Institute had said.

"We want him badly because he just *may* be what this report says. If he is, it will further our studies of extra-sensory perception tremendously. We are willing to pay any reasonable sum you might demand. We have heard you are the finest wild-game hunter on the Periphery.

"We don't care how you do it, Mr. Claybourne, but we *want* the *fetl* brought back alive and unharmed."

Claybourne had accepted immediately. This job had paid a pretty sum—enough to complete his plans to kill Carl Garden.

The prints paced away, clearly indicating the tracked beast was heading for refuge in the mountains. He studied the totally flat surface of the grassy desert, and heaved a sigh.

He'd been at it three weeks, and all he'd found had been tracks. Clear, unmistakable tracks, and all leading toward the mountains. The beast could not know it was being tracked, yet it continued moving steadily.

The pace had worn at Claybourne.



He gripped the molasses-gun tighter, swinging it idly in small, wary arcs. He had been doing that—unknowing—for several days. The almost-hush of the planetoid was working on him.

Ahead of him the towering bleakness of Selangg's lone mountain range rose full-blown from the shadows of the plain. Up there.

Twenty miles of stone jumbled and strewn piece on piece; seventeen thousand feet high. Somewhere in those rocks was an animal Claybourne had come halfway across the galaxy to find. An animal that was at this moment insuring Carl Garden's death.

He caught another print in the beam.

He stooped to examine it. There was a faint wash of sand across it, where the wind had scurried past. The foot-long pawprint lay there, mocking him, challenging him, asking him what he was doing here—so far from home, so far from warmth and life and ease.

Claybourne shook his head, clearing it of thoughts that too easily impinged. He'd been paid half the sum requested, and that had gone to the men who were now stalking Garden back on Earth. To

get the other half, he had to capture the *fetl*. The sooner that was done, the better.

The *fetl* was near. Of that he was now certain. The beast certainly couldn't go *over* the mountains and live. It had to hole up in the rocks somewhere.

He rose, squinted into the darkness. He flicked the switch on his chest-console one more notch, heightening the lamp's power. The beam drove straight ahead, splashing across the gray, faceless rocks. Claybourne tilted his head, staring through the clear plasticloth of the hood, till a sharply-defined circle of brilliant white stabbed itself onto the rock before him.

That was going to be a job, climbing these mountains. He decided abruptly to catch five hours sleep before pushing up the flank of the mountains.

He turned away, to make a resting place at the foot of the mountains, and with the momentary cessation of the tracking, found old thoughts clambering back into his mind.

Shivering inside his protection suit—though none of the chill of Selangg could get through to him—he inflated the foam-rest attached to the back of his suit. He lay down,



in the towering ebony shadows, looking up at the clear, eternal night sky. And he remembered.

Claybourne had owned his own fleet of cargo vessels. It had been one of the larger chains, including hunting ships and cage-lined shippers. It had been a money-making chain, until the inverspace ships had come along, and thrown Claybourne's obsolete fuel-driven spacers out of business.

Then he had taken to blockade-running and smuggling, to ferrying slaves for the out-world feudal barons, gun-running and even spaceway robbery.

Through that period he had cursed Carl Garden. It had been Garden all the way—Garden every step of the way—that had cast him to this disgusting end.

When they finally caught him—just after he had dumped a cargo of slaves into the sun, to avoid customs conviction—they cancelled his commission, and refused him pilot status. His ships had been sold at auction.

*That* had strengthened his hatred for Garden. Garden had bought most of the fleet. For use as scum-ships and livestock carriers.

Garden it had been who had invented the inverspace drive. Garden it had been that had started his fleet, driving Claybourne under. And finally, Garden it had been who had bought the remnants of the fleet, the fleet that had made Claybourne a man of power, and now led him to poverty and disreputability.

He hated Garden with a fierceness he had never known.

He nurtured the hate—feeding it with his own misery.

Lower and lower he sank; three years as a slush-pumper on freighters, hauling freight into shining spacers on planets which had not yet received power equipment, drinking and hating.

Till finally—two years before—he had reached the point where he knew he would never rest easily until he had killed Garden. Though the closest he had ever been to the man was at the auction, he despised him. It was obsession. Garden epitomized for him the anguish in which he rooted. Taking care of Garden would be a climax—and a new awakening.

Claybourne had saved his money. The fleshpots of the Periphery had lost him. He gave up liquor and gambling.



It was, if anything, even greater a punishment than before, for the Periphery's greatest enemy was Boredom. But he had done it, and the wheels had been set in motion.

People were working, back on Earth, to get Garden. He was being pursued and harried, though he never knew it. From the other side of the galaxy, Calybourne was hunting, chasing, tracking his man. And one day, Garden would be vulnerable. Then Claybourne would come back. Then . . .

To reach that ultimate end, Claybourne had accepted the job from the Institute.

In his rage to acquire money for the job of getting his enemy, Claybourne had built a considerable reputation as wild-game hunter. For circuses, for museums and zoos, he had tracked and trapped thousands of rare life-forms on hundreds of worlds.

They had finally contacted him on Bouyella, and offered him the ship, the charter, and exactly as much money as he needed to complete the job back on Earth.

Arrangements had been quickly made, half the pay had been deposited to Claybourne's accounts (and immediately withdrawn for de-

livery to certain men back home), and he had gone out on the jump to Selangg.

This was the last jump, the last indignity he would have to suffer. After Selangg—back to Earth. Back to Garden.

Back to retribution!

He wasn't certain he had actually seen it! The movement had been rapid, and only in the corner of his eye.

Claybourne leaped up, throwing off the safeties on the molasses-gun. He yanked off the inflation patch with stiff fingers, and the foam-rest collapsed back to flatness in his pack.

He took a tentative step, stopped. Had he actually seen something? Had it been hallucination or a trick of the weak air blanket of Selangg? Was the hunt getting to him at last? He paused, wet his lips, took another step.

His scarred, blocky face drew tight. The sharp gray eyes narrowed. Nothing moved, save the faint rustling of the blue saw-grass. The world of Selangg was dead and quiet. Nothing moved.

He slumped against the rock wall, his nerves leaping.

He wondered how wise it had been to come on this jump. Then the picture of



Garden's fat, florid face slid before his eyes, and he knew he had had to come. This was the ending. As he tracked the *fetl*, so he tracked Garden. There must be an end to both hunts.

He quickly reviewed what he knew of the *fetl's* appearance, matching it with the flash of movement he had seen:

A big, bloody animal—a devilish-looking thing, all teeth and legs. Striped like a Sumatran tiger, six-legged, twelve-inch sabered teeth, a ring of eyes across a massive low brow, giving it nearly one hundred and eighty degrees of unimpaired straight-line eyesight.

Impressive, and mysterious. They knew nothing more about the beast. Except the reason for this hunt; it was telekinetic, could move objects by mind-power alone.

A stupid animal—a beast of the fields—yet it possibly held the key to all future research into the mind of man. A strange beast.

But the mysteries surrounding the *fetl* were not to concern Claybourne. His job was merely to capture it and put it in the custody of the Institute for study.

However . . .

It was getting to be a slightly more troublesome hunt now. Three weeks was a week longer than he had thought the tracking would take—if that long. He had covered most of the five hundred miles that comprised Selangg's surface. Had it not been for the lessened gravity and the monstrous desert grasslands, he would still be searching. The *fetl* had fled before him. Somehow it had known it was being tracked.

He would have given up had he not found prints occasionally.

It had been all that had kept him going. That, and the other half of his pay, deliverable upon receipt of the *fetl* at the Institute. It seemed almost uncanny. At almost the very instant he would consider giving up and turning back to the ship, a print would appear in the circle of lamplight, and he would continue. It had happened a dozen times.

Now here he was, at the final step of the trek. At the foot of a gigantic mountain chain, thrusting up into the dead night of Selangg. He stopped, the circle of light sliding like cool mercury up the face of the stone.

He might have been worried, were it not for the



molasses-gun. He cradled the weapon closer to his protective suit.

The gun-fired grapple had hooked itself well into the jumbled rock pieces piled above the smooth mountain base. Claybourne had tested it, and begun climbing, bracing his feet against the wall, hanging outward and walking the smooth surface.

Finally he had reached the area where volcanic action had ruptured the stone fantastically. It was a dull, gray rock, vesiculated like scoria, and tumbled and tumbled. He unfastened the grapple, returned it to its nest in his pack, and tensing his muscles, began threading up through the rock formations.

It soon became tedious. Stepping up and over the jumbled rock pieces he turned his thoughts idly to the molasses-gun. This was the first time he had handled one of the new solo machines. Two-man molasses-guns had been the order till now. A solo worked the same way, and was, if anything, deadlier than the more cumbersome two-man job.

He stopped for a moment to rest, sliding down onto a flat stool of rock. He took a closer look at the weapon.

The molasses-gun; or as it was technically known, the Stadt-Brenner Webbing Enmesher. He liked molasses-gun better; it seemed to describe the weapon's function so accurately.

The gun produced a steel-strong webbing, fired under tremendous pressure, which coiled the strongest opponent into a helpless bundle. The more he struggled to free himself, for the webbing was an unstable plastic, the tighter it clutched him. It would be a futile struggle.

"Very much like the way I'm enmeshing Garden," Claybourne chuckled to himself.

The analogy was well-founded. The molasses-gun sucked the victim deeper and deeper into its coils, just as Claybourne was sucking Garden deeper and deeper into his death-trap.

Claybourne smiled and licked his lips absently. The moisture remained for an instant, was swept away by the suit's purifiers.

He started up again. The rocks had fallen in odd formations, almost forming a passage up the summit. He rounded a talus slide, noting even more signs of violent volcanic activity, and headed once more up the inky slope



toward the cliffs rising from the face of the mountain.

The *fetl's* prints had become less and less distinct as it had climbed, disappearing almost altogether on the faceless rocks.

Occasionally a claw-scratch would stand out brightly in the glare of Claybourne's headlamp beam.

The hours slid by tediously, and though he forced himself to stop twice more to rest, the slight gravity caused him little fatigue for all his labors.

Once, as before, he thought he caught a splinter-fast movement of striped body, up on the cliffs, but as before, he could not be certain.

The faint starshine cast odd shadows, little blobs of black and silver, across the mountains. From a distance it had looked as though millions of diamonds were lying on the black surfaces. As though the mountain were riddled with holes, through which a giant sun inside the rock was sending pinpoints of light. It was weird and beautiful.

*A fitting place for me to bow off the Periphery*, he thought; thoughts returning to Earth—and Garden. He thought of Earth.

*His world.*

When he slow-flashed the hood-beam across the rocks twenty feet above him on the cliff wall, Claybourne saw the cave.

A small incline rose up into the deeper blackness of the cave's mouth. That *had* to be it. The only place within a mile of the last claw-scratch that the *fetl* could have used to disappear into. The scratches had been clear for a time, leading him up the mountain, but then they had disappeared.

His tracking had been quiet—for sound didn't carry far on Selangg. His tracking had been stealthy—for it was always dark on Selangg. Now his efforts would pay off. His hunt was over. Back to Earth—to finish that other hunt.

He was banking the other hallucination he had seen was the real thing.

Claybourne stopped under a rock lip overhang and flat-handed the compression chamber of the molasses-gun open, peering inside. His hood light shone down on the steel-blue plastic of the weapon. It was full, all the little gelatin capsules ranged row on row behind the airtight transparent seal, filling the chamber to the seams. He flipped it shut, and looked



once more toward the summit, and the cave.

A star gleamed directly over the ragged peaks, directly above him. He hefted the rifle once more, blew a thin stream of breath through his pursed lips, and started up the incline.

The tiny rock bits tumbled away under his boots, the crunch of pebbles carrying up through the insulated suiting. He kept a wary watch as he climbed, not expecting the beast to appear, but still taking no chances.

He was certain the *fetl* did not know he had followed it here to its lair. Else it would have turned back in a circle, kept running across the grasslands. His tracking had been subtle and cautious. Claybourne had learned on the Periphery, how to be invisible on a hostile world, if the need arose. This hunt would end as all the others had ended: successfully.

*The hunt for Garden, too,* he mused tightly.

The ragged cave mouth gaped before him.

He surveyed it closely, inclining his beam not directly into the opening, but tilting it onto the rock wall just inside, so that light spilled over the rockway and he could check for ledged rises over

the entrance, inside. Nothing but a huge pile of rocks wedged tightly in place by some miscue of the volcanic action.

He flipped a toggle on the chest-console, and the beam became brighter still, spraying out in a wider, still sharply-defined circle.

He stepped in.

The cave was empty.

No, *not* empty.

He was three steps into the high-ceilinged cave before he saw the *fetl*. It was crouched small as its huge bulk would allow into a corner, dim in the back of the cave. Hunched as far as it could go into a niche in the wall.

Smalled in as far as its ten-foot hulk permitted, still the beast was huge. Its monstrous ring of weed-green eyes all staring at him malevolently, almost smolderingly.

Claybourne felt a sudden shock as he stared into those eyes. They so much reminded him of Garden's eyes at the auction. Hungry.

He shook off the feeling, took a step forward. The *fetl* was limned clearly in the beam of the helmet torch. Somehow he knew it was a he. It was an impressive animal, tightly coiled at the rear of the night-pitched hole.



*The beast twitched slightly.*

Its flanks quivered in the glare of the lamp. Muscles all over its body rippled, and Claybourne drew back a step to fire. The beast twitched again.

He felt the tiny stones in the pile over the entrance clatter to the cave floor. He could barely hear them tinkle, but the vibrations in the stone came to him.

He turned his head for a moment, to see what was happening. His eyes opened wide in terror as he saw the supporting rubble drop away, leaving the huge rock tottering in its place. With a thunderous roar the great stone slid gratingly out of its niche and crashed to the floor of the cave, sending clouds of rock-dust roiling, completely blocking off the mouth of the cave. Sealing it permanently.

Claybourne could only stand and watch, horror and a constriction in his throat.

His light remained fixed on the cave-in, reflecting back glints of gold as the dust from the slide swirled itself into small pillars, rising into the thin air.

Then he heard the rumble.

The sound struck him like a million trumpets, all screaming at once. He turned,

stumbling, his torch flicking back toward the *fetl*.

The *fetl* sat up on its four back legs, contentedly washing a front paw with a long red tongue that flicked in and out between twelve-inch incisors. The lighter black of a small hole behind him gave an odd illusion of depth to the waiting beast.

Claybourne watched transfixed as the animal slowly got to its feet and pad-pad-padded toward him, the tongue slipping quickly in and out, in and out . . .

Suddenly coming to his senses, Claybourne stepped back a pace and levelled the molasses-gun, pulled the trigger. The stream of webbing emerged with a vibrant hiss, sped toward the monstrous *fetl*.

A foot short of the beast the speeding webbing lost all drive, fluttered in the still cave for a moment, then fell like an ownerless length of rope. On the floor it quickly contracted itself, worm-like, into a tight, small ball—completely useless.

The *fetl* licked its chops, the tongue swirling down and across and up and in again.

Before he could pull the trigger again, Claybourne felt the gun quiver in his hands. At the same moment



he saw the beast's flanks quiver again.

An instant later the gun ripped itself from his grasp and sent itself crashing into the wall. Parts spattered the cave floor as the seams split, and capsules tumbled out. The molasses-gun's power compartment emitted a sharp, blue spark, and the machine was gone.

He was defenseless.

He heard the roar again. *Telekinetic!* After he had done what he wished, the animal would leave by the hole in the rear of the cave. Why bother untumbling the rocks!

The *fetl* began moving again. Claybourne stumbled back, tripped on a jutting rock, fell heavily to the floor.

The man backed away across the floor of the cave, the seat of his suit scraping the rock floor. His back flattened against the wedged rock in the cave mouth. He was backed as far as he could go.

"Oh, no, no . . ." he mumbled, feeling the froth rising to his lips. "Oh, no! Not here!

Not now! Not in a cave with an animal! Not before I get back—not before I can finish Garden! Not like this! Not here, my God, not here!"

He was screaming, the sound echoing back and forth in his hood, in the cave, in the night.

All he could see, all there was in the universe, was the *fetl*, advancing on him, slowly, slowly, taking all the time it needed. Savoring every instant.

Then, abruptly, at the precise instant he gazed deep into that ring of hate-filled green eyes coming toward him, he realized the truth. Even as he had tracked the *fetl*, even as he had been tracking Garden—so the *fetl* had been tracking him!

Then he knew: there are levels to tracking. And no one can tell when he is the tracker. Or the tracked.

The *fetl* licked his lips again, slowly.

He had all the time in the world . . .

*His world.*

**THE END**



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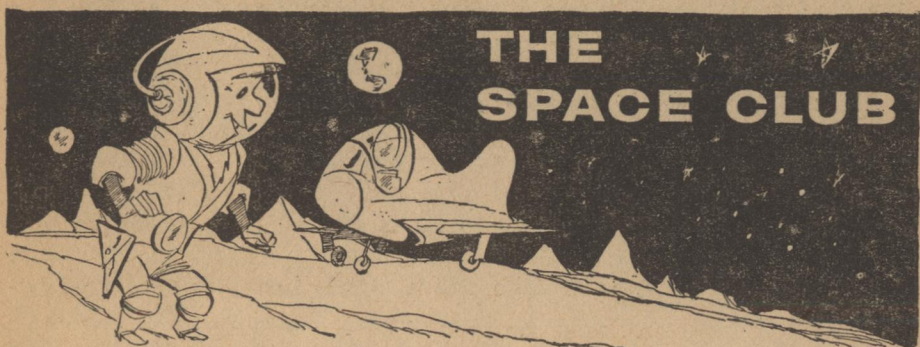
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*Here are eighteen more members of the Club. If your name is not included, don't be downhearted. It simply means that we weren't able to process all the names received by press time. So watch future issues for your listing. In the meantime, get your letters off to the pen friends whose names have appeared. Get those friendships started. You'll never know how rewarding friendship correspondence can be until you've received letters and answered them.*

---

**WALTER C. BRANDT, APT. N, 1725 SEMINARY AVE., OAKLAND 21, CALIFORNIA** . . . 41 years old, Walter is employed as a stationary supply clerk. His hobbies are all phases of astronomy, has own telescope. Reads all science-fiction and scientific publications. He builds model planes and rocket ships.

**OTIS LEE BROCK, 5903 88th ST., S.W., TACOMA 99, WASH.** . . . 35 years old, 5' 11", 153

pounds. Otis has been reading science-fiction of all kinds for over 20 years. He's now collecting s-f. After 10 years in service he is with the Civil Service in the Post Transportation office at Fort Lewis, Washington.

**DON BUTTON, 1001 BON-FOY, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.** . . . Don has been with the U. S. Air Force for nine years. He is 27 years old. A regular science-fiction reader, Don has a few other interests. They



are: photography, s-f movies electronics.

**HENRY CARTER, JR., 20015 MONTE VISTA, DETROIT 21, MICH. . . .** Henry is 36 years old. He is interested in the mystery of the flying saucers, extra-sensory perception and other unusual occurrences. He would like to learn of the experiences and interests of some of the other members of The Space Club.

**ANNE T. COREY, 160 OCEAN PARKWAY, APT. 4-H, BROOKLYN, N. Y. . . .** Anne says she is 22 years old and non-telepathic. Since her introduction to science-fiction in her freshman year of college five years ago, she has been an enthusiastic follower of telepathic and mind-over-matter type stories. Although she reads and enjoys almost every type of s-f, she is particularly interested in corresponding with others who like stories about telepathy, teleportation, telekinesis etc., especially as it applies to the "super child."

**PHILIP COTE, 3935 E. MARTIN AVE., CUDAHY, WISC. . . .** 15-year old Philip is a paper carrier for The Milwaukee Journal. His hobbies include science-fiction, astronomy, coin collecting.

**ARTHUR W. GREENOUGH, 946 23rd AVE., N.E., MINNEAPOLIS 18, MINNESOTA . . .**

35 years old, Arthur is an engineer with the city of Minneapolis Water Department. Hopes to hear from other s-f fans.

**ROBERT B. JESSEN, DELTA CHI, 1227 WENDELL AVE., SCHENECTADY 8, N. Y. . . .** Robert is a 21-year-old college student, majoring in sociology. He is extremely pleased to find that a pro-zine has finally made it possible for comparative newcomers in the field of science-fiction to correspond with other fans.

**WILFORD LEE, 716 LINDEN ST., BOISE, IDAHO . . .** 13-year-old Wilford has a collection of 119 magazines and pocket-books dealing with science-fiction, fantasy and horror. He's truly a devoted follower of s-f.

**ALBERTA LEEK, OAK RIDGE, NEW JERSEY . . .** 32 years old, Alberta has been married for 14 years and is the mother of 6 children. She belongs to the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club for which she is this year's trade manager. She has just finished taking fiction lessons with Palmer Institute of Authorship and is about to begin trying her hand at writing science-fiction stories. She is looking forward to hearing from other enthusiastic fans.

**MARVIN PFEIFER, R.R. 1, PAW PAW, ILLINOIS . . .** 21-



year-old Marvin sounds pretty thrilled with the idea of finding fellow s-f fans to correspond with. The members of The Space Club should keep him pretty busy.

**ROY RASMUSSE**, 3420 5th AVE., SO., MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. . . . The hobbies of this 17-year old include: radio, electronics, television and astronomy. He's a high school freshman.

**WILLIAM C. RICKHARDT**, 21175 GOLDSMITH, FARMINGTON, MICH. . . . The Space Club sounds like a darn good idea to this 17-year-old. Among his interests are: science and fantasy fiction, astronomy, tape recording, hi-fi, ham radio, cool jazz. He's most anxious to get a science-fiction club started in the Detroit area.

**WAYNE ROBERTS**, 1725 JENNIFER, HOUSTON 29, TEXAS . . . Wayne is 15 years old. He has been an enthusiastic reader of science-fiction for two years. He's a member of The S-F Book Club and The Library of Science.

**BRIAN ROSS**, 1216 W. 14th AVE., VANCOUVER 9, B. C., CANADA . . . A student in

10th grade, Brian is 15 years old. He has a science-fiction library of over 100 books and pulps. His hobbies are aircraft, photography and rocketry, He'd like some s-f fans living in Canada for his pen pals.

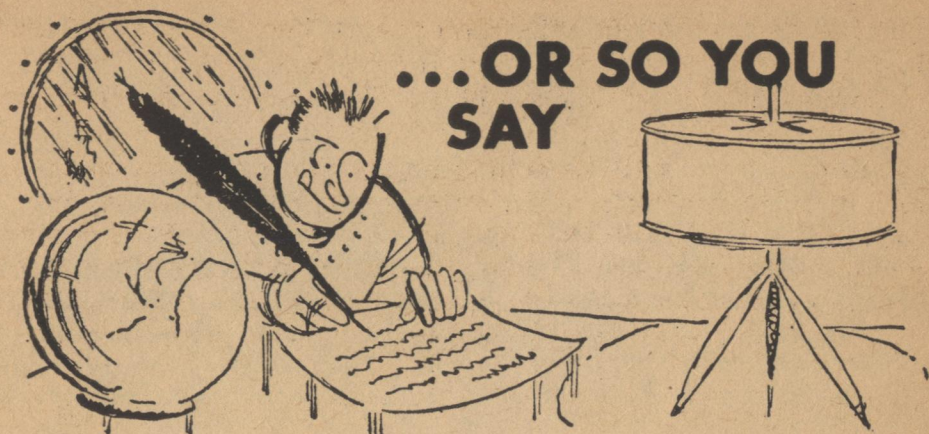
**BETTY ANNE SELBE**, 1921 N. 25th ST., KANSAS CITY, KAN. . . . 14-year-old student at Northwest Junior High School, Betty Anne has many hobbies: painting figurines, making baby shoes, making wire figures and writing. She belongs to the Girl Scouts.

**BILL SOKOL**, 4131 LAFAYETTE AVE., OMAHA 3, NEBR. . . . 18 years old, Bill is attending school now and working in a drug store afterwards. He has been reading s-f for the last four years and has some books that he would like to trade for ones that he wants that you may have.

**ROLAND WERNER**, 114 HENRIETTA ST., EAST SYRACUSE, N. Y. . . . Roland is 15 years old and entering his junior year of high school. He will take physics, intermediate algebra, and trigonometry. His hobby is building model airplanes. Of course he's a regular reader of science-fiction.



## ...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

The August issue of *Amazing* has finally crept across Lake Maracaibo to the oil fields where I reside. The first tale, "The Beast With Seven Tails" annoyed me sufficiently to inspire this note. I kept plowing on through the childish drivel while awaiting some "twist" to raise the story to your usual standards.

From scanning the letters you print I gather that you have a large following of teen-agers for which such stories and illustrations have a great appeal. However, there are lots of us old "fuddy-duddies" left who still read your magazine, and who would like to see you spend some of your money buying stories that show a little imagination, ability, and effort.

Mrs. J. H. Rick  
Apartado 3  
Cabimas, Zulia  
Venezuela

● *You're being real rough on us, Mrs. Rick. And rough on yourself too. You aren't an old "fuddy-duddy" at all. We're pretty proud of *Amazing* creeping across Lake Maracaibo and we're willing to gamble that you'll like every story in the next issue that manages to do likewise.*

Dear Editor:

Frankly, I thought "My Shipmate Columbus" was the best in October *Amazing*. "The Judas Valley" was second and



"Summer Snow Storm" was the exciting best short. The best illustration was on the first page for the lead.

I admired the title, "Heist Job On Thizar." Randall Garrett is a promising young writer.

I simply agree with Esmond Adams. You do give away too much of the story, but the main thing is to catch readers, first, I reckon.

James W. Ayers  
609 First Street  
Attalla, Ala.

• *We also admired Randall's title—also his story. We agree, too, that he's a promising young writer. He's been promising us a story for weeks.*

Dear Editor:

I received my copy of *Amazing Stories* yesterday and I see that you are calling all female readers. Well, I've been a faithful reader for years. To be truthful I'm a science-fiction fan from way back. I love the "Mayhem" stories and I don't like continued stories, but I suppose we must have them.

Virginia K. Watters  
Rear: 1165 Harrison Ave.  
Columbus, Ohio

• *Wait until you read the serials coming up in Amazing. Our first of the new series—"Quest of the Golden Ape"—starts in the January issue. Drop a line after you read it and tell us you've changed your mind. We know of course that you will have done so.*

Dear Ed:

Why not just come right out and admit it? You're sorry you brought the letter column back to *Amazing Stories* and now you're doing everything short of discontinuing it in an effort to get more space for other features. In the new October issue of *Amazing* you have barely two and a half pages devoted to letters, and most of those look condensed. Why not let two or three people have their say instead of presenting scraps of a dozen letters?

While I'm in a bad mood, another gripe. I'm all in a dither



about the new *Dream World*—anxious to find out about it—so you run a whole editorial about *Pen Pals*!

However, I do find the stories in *Amazing* about the best, (consistently) than in most other s-f magazines.

Roger Ebert  
410 E. Washington St.  
Urbana, Illinois

• *Ain't sorry at all, Roger. Look at it this way. The letters in the reader's column don't cost us a cent. So if we filled the book with them it would be a very cheap deal and we'd get a big jump on competition. But, while people like to read letters, we've got a hunch they buy Amazing mainly for the excellent story content. So you see our problem. Maybe we don't hit the right balance, but we sure try!*

Dear Editor:

This is my first letter to a science-fiction magazine and since I've been a fan for about two years now, I figured it was about time.

In your answer to Philip Chase's letter, you stated that your September issue is "the finest of all." Well, you're entirely correct! For once I enjoyed all of the stories. Especially the first one, "A World Called Crimson."

Browne was a good ed. and I must admit I was a little leary of anyone taking his place. But you certainly started out with a "bang" and I personally think you will make a fine editor.

Now as for the August issue. "The Beast With Seven Tails" was fair, and I thoroughly enjoyed "Vault of the Ages." But as for the rest of the book—not too good.

Keep throwing in a Johnny Mayhem story now and then. One likes to read about a "familiar hero" every once in a while.

I always enjoy the letter section, but I am wondering where are all the Cincinnati fans? Don't they ever write? Surely I'm not the only person in Cincy who reads s-f.

Mrs. Audie Meyer  
8358 Wiswell  
Cincinnati, Ohio

• *We have more Johnny Mayhem stories in the works.*



*Johnny has turned out to be one of the most popular series characters ever to run in Amazing.*

Dear Editor:

The October *Amazing Stories* was far better than the September issue, but still has far to go. The cover was a splendid job by Ed. The use of colors was just right. However, it's hard to believe that man will be descending from space ships by use of a ladder.

The best story was Garrett's gem, and the worst was the "Columbus" yarn Wilder tried to put over, but didn't. Ellison gave me a good laugh with "Gnomebody."

I notice the absence of *The Revolving Fan*. I take it then that there were no fanzines to review.

I can't say that I agree with you about that saucer film you hashed over in your editorial. I saw it and thought quite differently about it.

Larry Sokol  
4131 Lafayette Avenue  
Omaha 3, Nebraska

• *You say Amazing has far to go and you are right. We take comfort in this fact; that no matter how great the improvement, there will always be room for more. Absolute perfection would be a static level defeating its own purpose.*

Dear Editor:

Quite noticeable are the editorial changes that have taken place since the absence of H.B. Now there are more stories per issue, more Finlay illustrations, a Space Club for corresponding fans and shortened departments. As for story length, this isn't too important as long as they are good readable yarns, although I do prefer the longer ones. Good illustrations are a definite asset. The Space Club, although not a new idea, is definitely a good one and should strengthen the force of fandom. As for the departments, I'm sorry to see them allotted less space, but realize the stories come first.

Herbert E. Beach  
210 West Paquin  
Waterville, Minn.



Dear Ed:

As usual *Amazing Stories* outdoes previous issues. The October issue was excellent. Every story was enjoyable in its own way. My space appetite was satisfied with "Sitting Duck" and "A Place in the Sun."

Regarding The Observatory comments on *Earth vs. Flying Saucer*—it was well put together, not a dull moment during the whole run. But as you also stated, not as good as "The Day the Earth Stood Still." However, as a so-called "B" picture it stood up well.

I didn't care for the British picture "Satellite in the Sky." Nothing jived, the scientific aspects were haywire. The props were too conspicuous. Even the plot was jumbled.

W. C. Brandt

Apt. N

1725 Seminary Ave.

Oakland 21, Calif.

• "*Satellite in the Sky*" got mediocre reviews here in New York. No one here in the office saw it, so we can't comment.

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## THE OBSERVATORY

(Continued from page 3)

cordite, motivated by the suicidal drives we witnessed in World War Two, will soon have the power to poison the planet's atmosphere, as the waste accumulates.

This means that man now has to face something consciously that he has never faced in all his millennia of sub-conscious evolution. He has to face the task of living in peace with himself. In all the ages he has never been without war. If war is a moral matter, man is lower morally than all other animals which do live without war, and on a level with certain insects, which he parallels in his class struggles and exploitations, which apparently cannot live without war.

As the war drums roll beyond the oceans, there are signs that we will soon know whether man is kin to the insect and destined to die as under a spray, or whether he can rise in moral stature and step into the future a thousand years at a stride.—Sincerely, *Hal Annas*.





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