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STORIES

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HE  
CONQUERED  
VENUS

by JOHN RUSSELL FEAR



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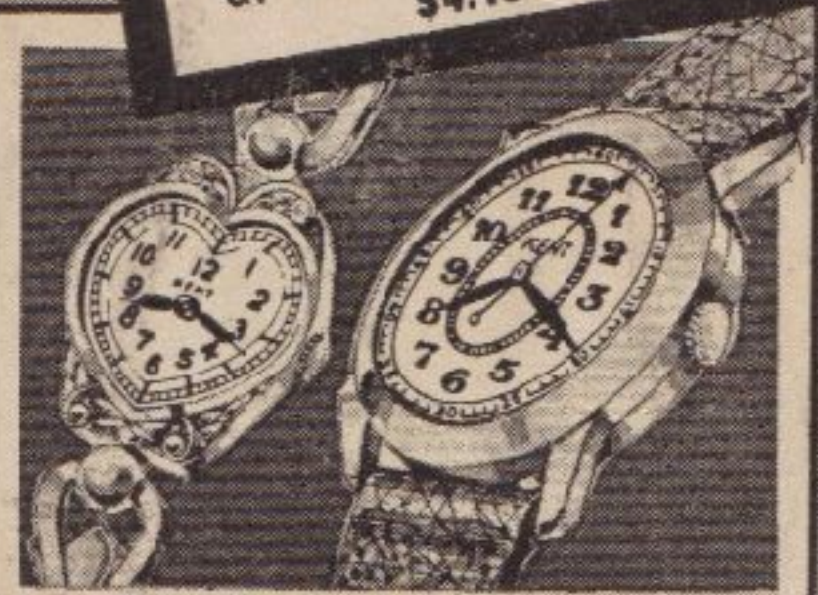
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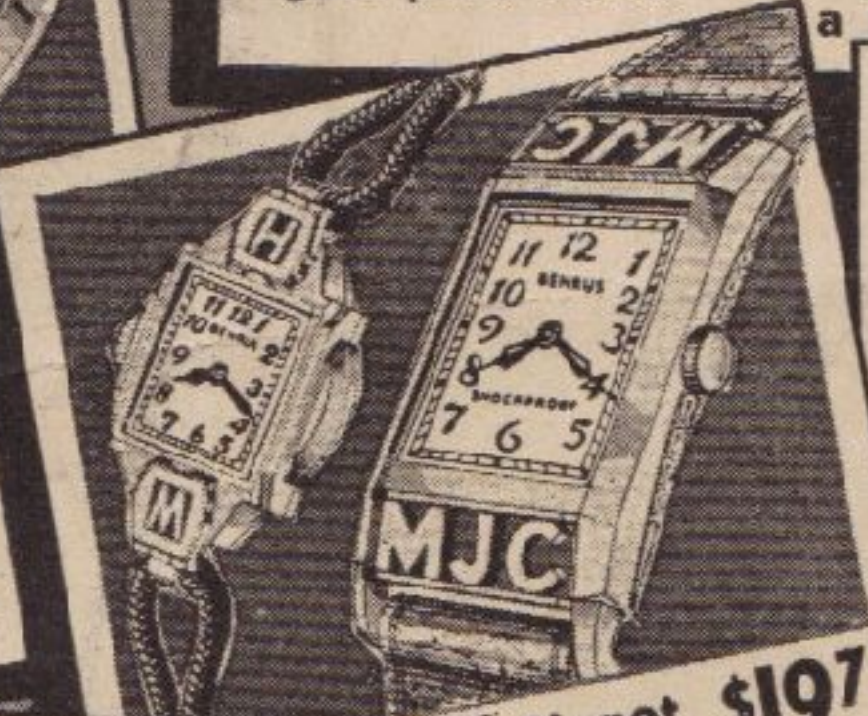
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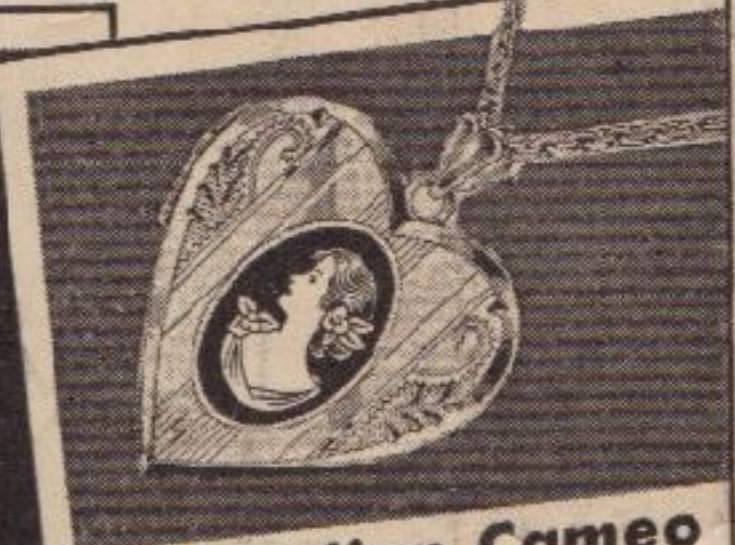
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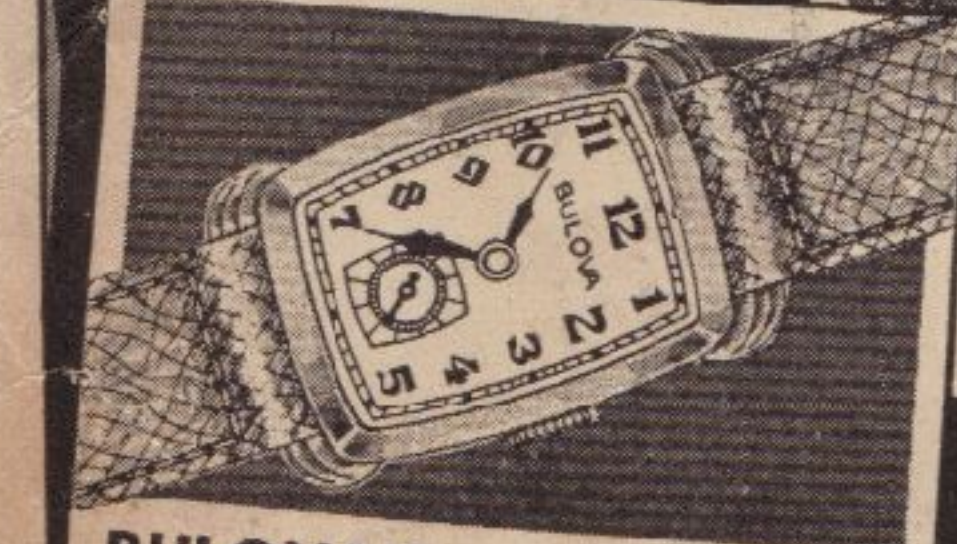
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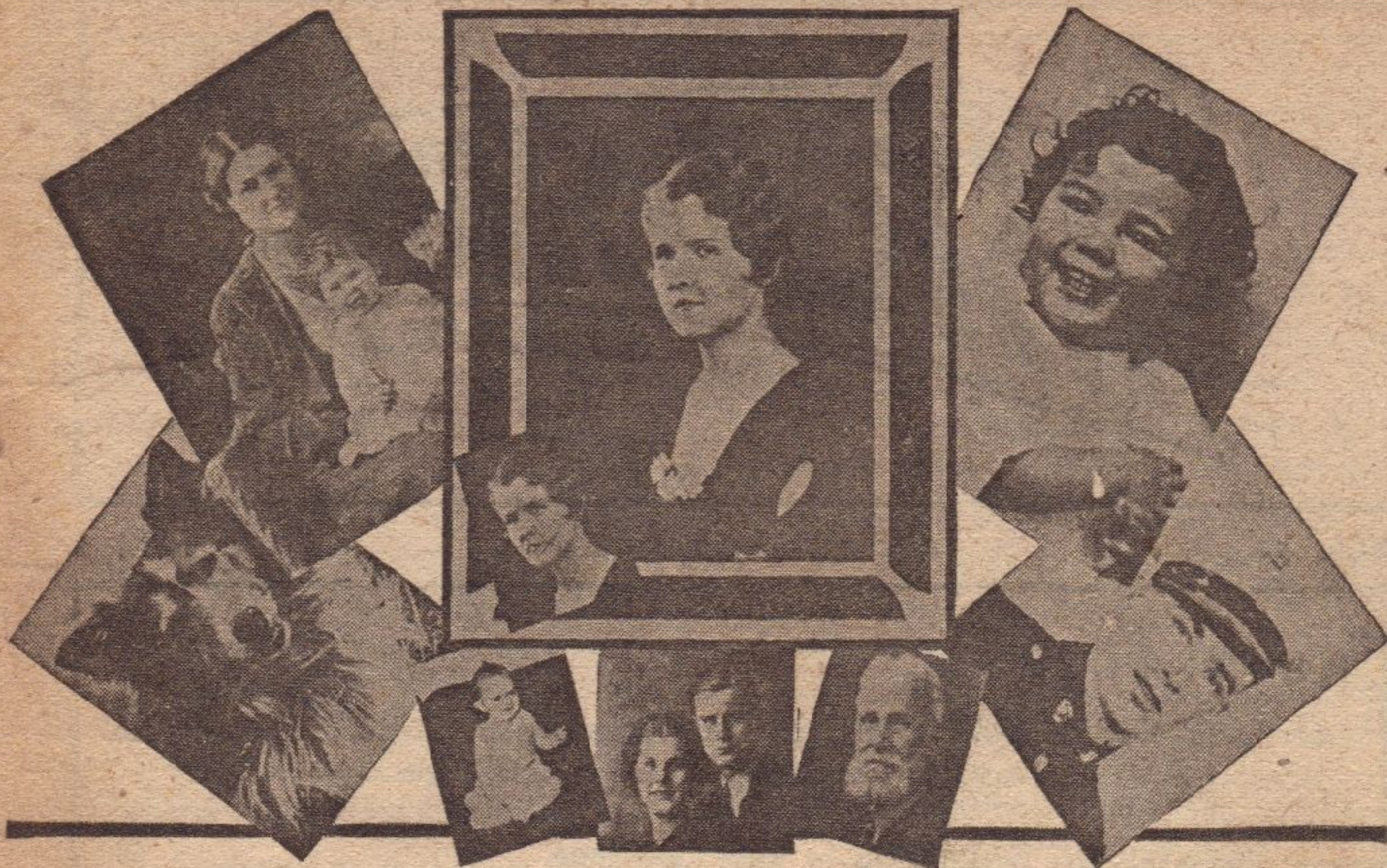
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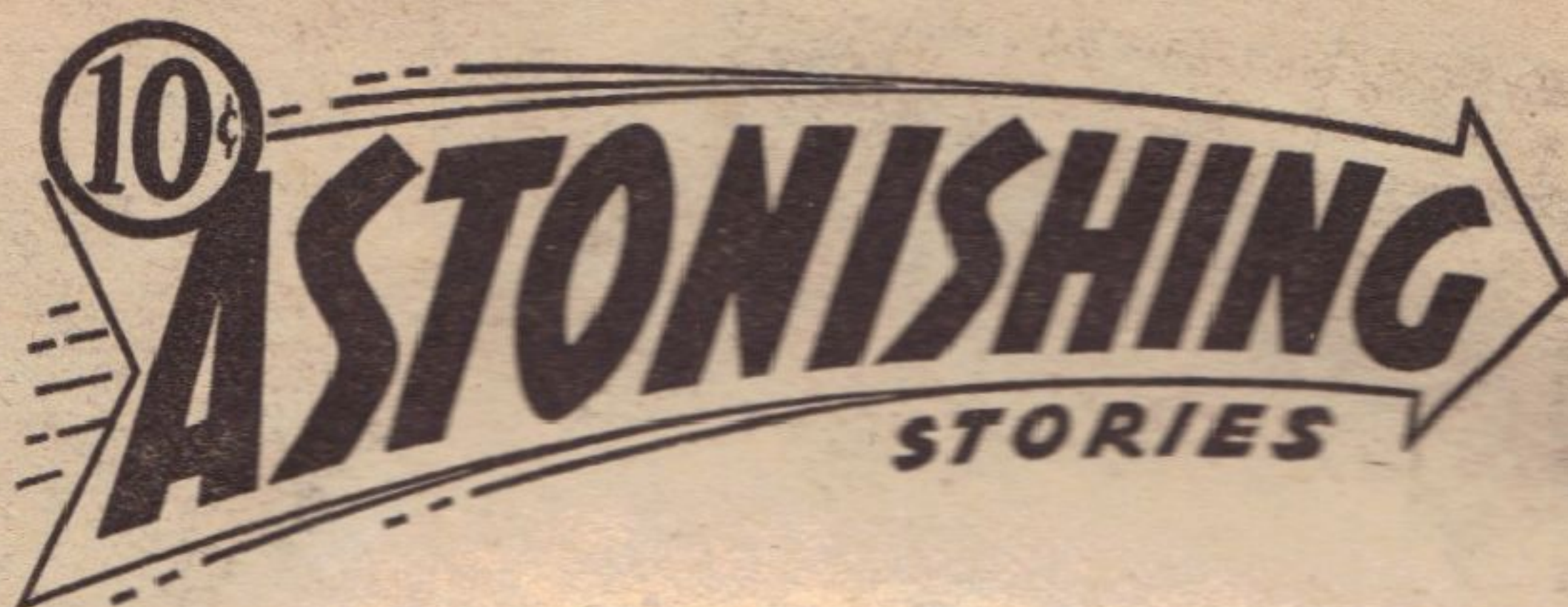
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NO. 3

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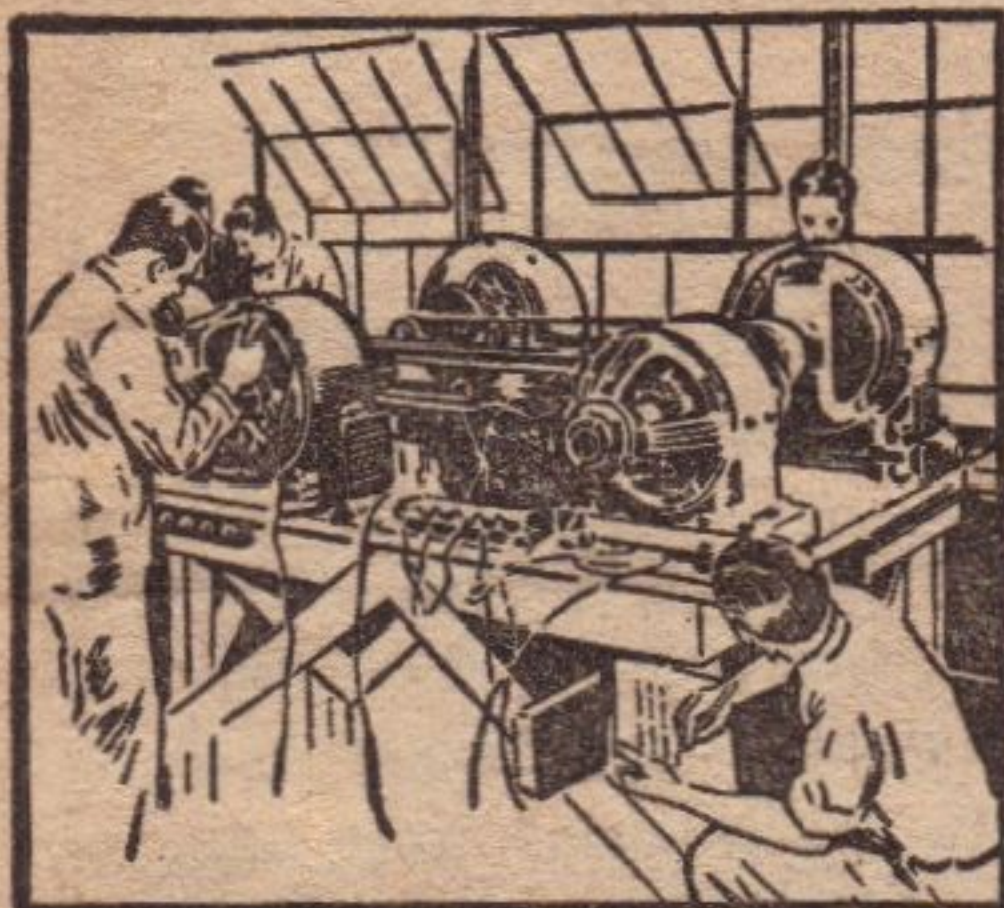


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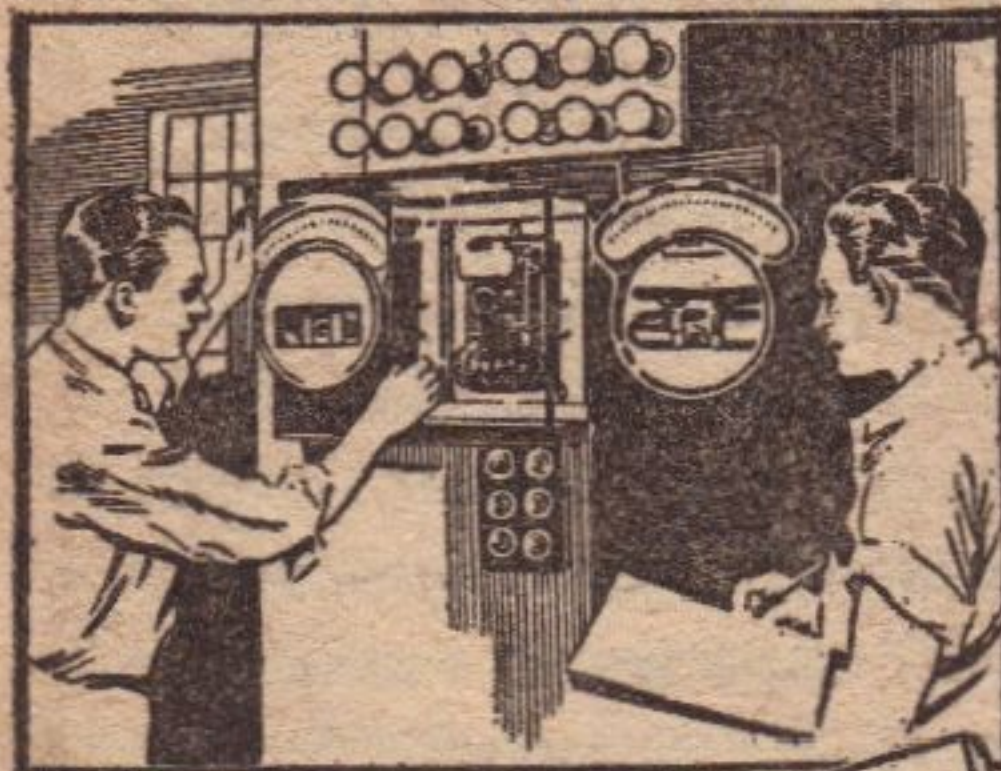
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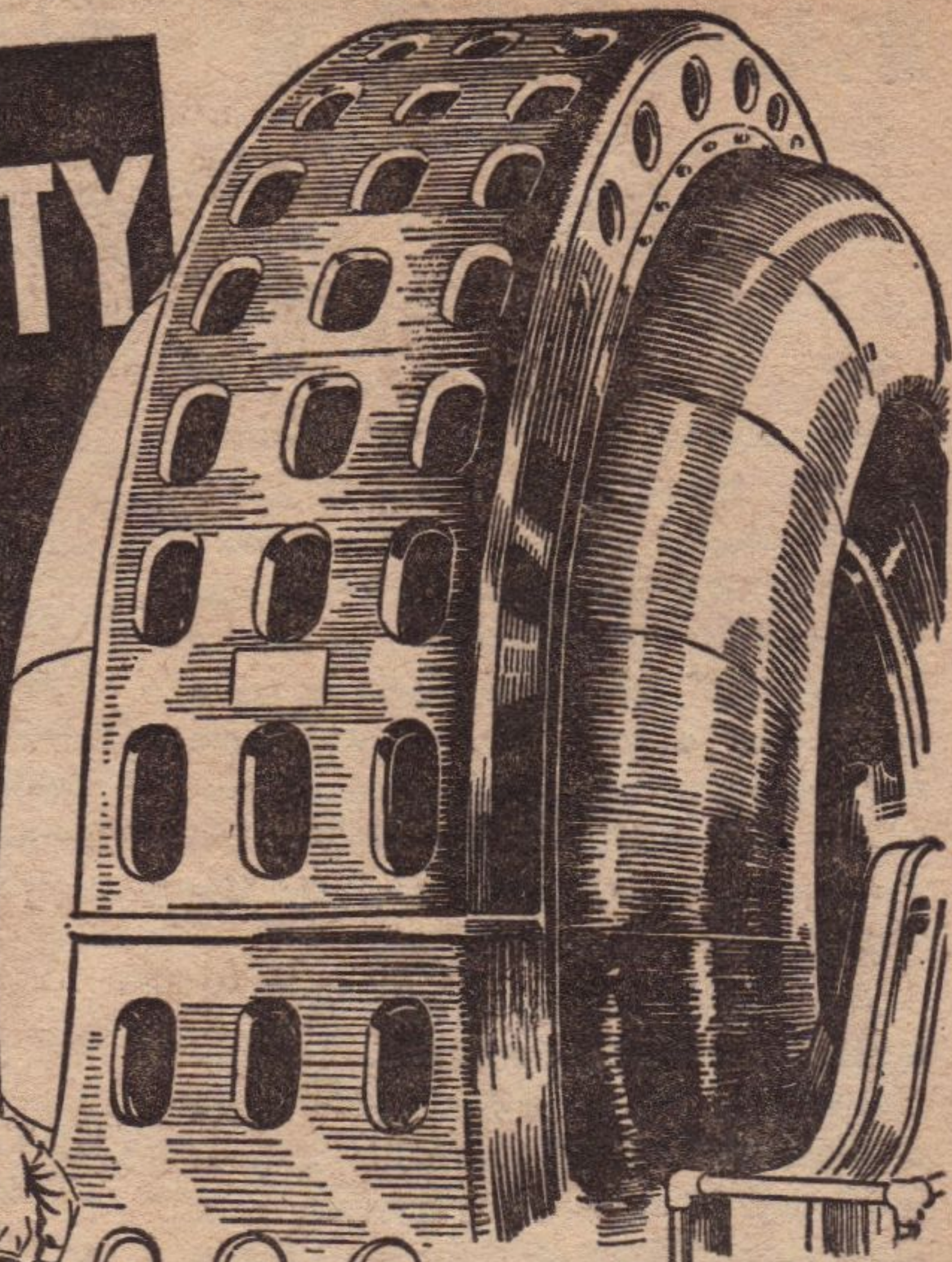
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# FANTASY

# REVIEWS

## Fantasy Films

**DR. CYCLOPS** A Paramount Production.

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A magic radium-ray permits the protagonist to master the mysteries of molecular structure, control the cosmic forces of creation, breaking down life and re-fashioning it on a much smaller scale. He makes midges of three men and a girl, who have terrifying adventures in a world gone Brobdingnagian to their senses. The illusion of Lilliputianism was realistic to your reviewer, who identified himself with the victims.

Technicolor enhances this impressive fantascience film which you will not want to miss—or I miss my guess!

—Forrest J Ackerman

**PINOCCHIO** A Walt Disney Production

"Pinocchio" is Walt Disney's successor to "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."

The story needs no re-hashing. In Disney's production, each character emerges rich, human, and warm. Pinocchio is the essence of a very much alive little boy; Gepetto is a kindly old man who thinks of Pinocchio, the puppet he has carved, as a son. Figaro, the pet kitten,

and Cleo, the goldfish, are entrancing. Mention must be made of Gideon the cat, who, as the stooge of J. Worthington Foulfellow (the villain of the piece), is a masterpiece. Monstro, the whale, comparable in size to a three-story building, will frighten you half to death. Monstro enraged is alone worth the price of admission.

You'll like them all. But you'll *love* the conscientious conscience of Pinocchio, brought to life as Jiminy Cricket.

—Leslie Perri

## Fantasy Music

**THE LITTLE SYMPHONY** Written by Erich Zeisl in four movements.

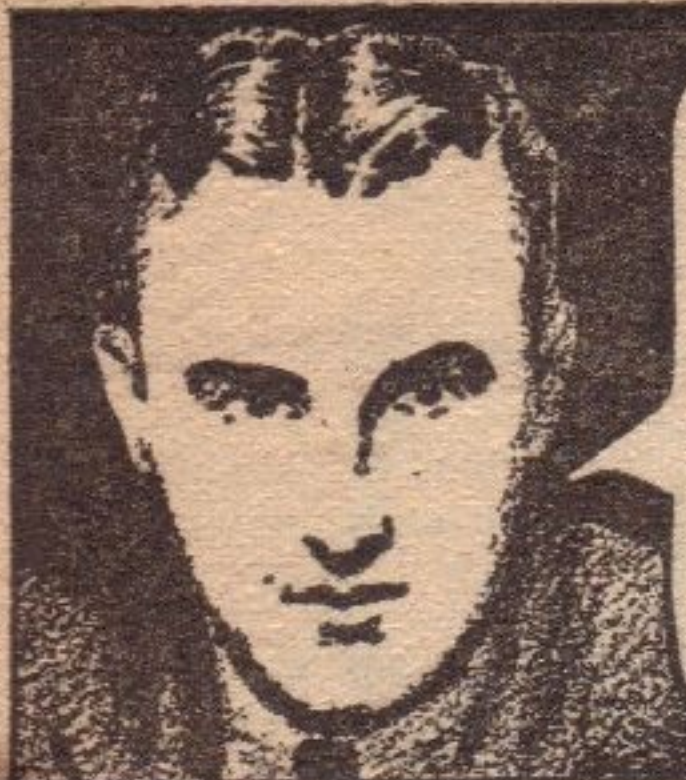
For the first time in America, Erich Zeisl's "Little Symphony" was performed by the Radio City Music Hall Symphony Orchestra a short time ago. The work met with such success that it was given another performance several weeks later.

It is of a fantastic nature, being inspired by the paintings of a fourteen year old mystic Austrian girl. The first movement, "Mad," depicts the weird dance of a condemned man. The second, "Poor Souls," is constructed somewhat along the lines of Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre;" the third section, with captivating themes for French horn and trombone, depicts hypocritical mourners at a wake. The fourth, last, and best section is a theme and variations, picturing Christianity and the powers that attempt to overthrow it.

The work, incidentally, is not too "Little," being nearly thirty minutes long.

—Harry Warner, Jr.





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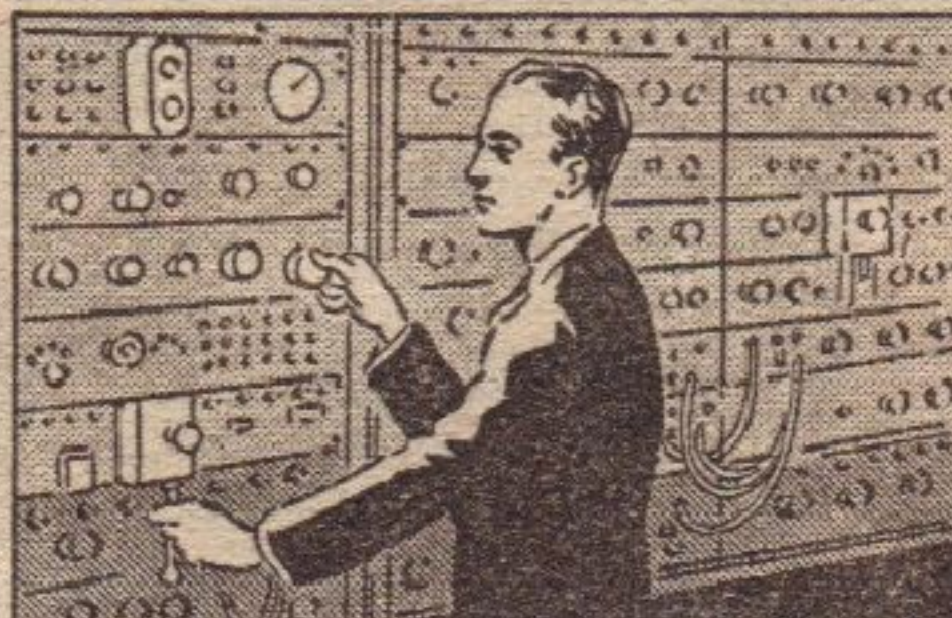
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# HE CONQUERED VENUS

By John Russell Fearn

Mark Tyme conquered the cannibalistic natives and the deadly jungles of Venus with ease, for all he needed there was strength and brains. But the "civilized" Earth conquered Mark Tyme!



## CHAPTER ONE

### Back to Earth

**A** WORLD on its toes. People in every country listening to their radios as stratosphere commentators kept a keen lookout for the ovoid expected from the depths of space. Newspapers splashing an inch-high headline:

### MARK TYME RETURNS!

Captain Mark Tyme, earthly explorer par excellence, was returning from Venus after a five year conquest. The first man ever to go out into space and return in one piece. And what a piece! The newspapers and telecasts carried endless photographs of the redoubtable Captain, complete with bullet head shaven all over, pillar of a





neck, open collar revealing a hairy forest of chest. He smoked Rope cigars in the wilds, wore a Deadrite watch on his thick wrist. . . Even his shorts were shown without a body and only a signature on the backs of slick magazines. Mark Tyme was a big shot, in more senses than one.

For five days now he had been expected, but to the people of 1980 five days was a drop in the bucket. Events moved so fast it seemed like five minutes. . . Then at 2:30 in the afternoon of August 6 the word was flashed from stratosphere to earth and rebounded over the world—



Mark Tyme's ship had been sighted!

Television transmitters swung to the ready and upon millions of screens there appeared a battered, sunlit silvery object like a cheap aluminum cigar case careering through the void.

New Yorkers gathered themselves for a supreme effort. Massed in tens of thousands throughout the city, noses in air and dark glasses on face, they scanned the blue heaven. The Mayor and civic authorities stood in an expectant, perspiring group on a bannered dais in the center of New York Airport, where the Captain had radioed that he intended to land.

The cheering from the myriads sounded like the explosion of a thousand steam safety-valves when the space ship was finally sighted. It came down on spouting rocket jets, incinerated a marquee in the process, and dropped with a none too comfortable thud to the grass north of the main landing field. The Mayor sucked his teeth in annoyance at finding himself a mile away from the point of welcome.

The people, sweeping over the police in their rush, flooded towards the machine, clamoring, yelling, waving rattles and blowing hooters.

THE space ship remained motionless and the door failed to open. The police, recovering themselves, forced a cordon around the people and struggled to re-erect the tumbled barriers. The Mayor puffed down the roughly created passage between the throngs then stood in uncertain silence before the airlock, speech all prepared in his hand and trickles of moisture running down his face.

Evidently the Captain had been waiting for this blissful moment for the airlock opened now and he slowly emerged. Over six feet tall, nearly ebony black from the blistering radiations of Venus' near sun, he stood appraising the people. His faded topee was cocked on one side: under its brim his light blue eyes looked like mar-

bles against his sun-blackened face. He wore the khaki shorts and shirt of his calling, and three belts. One for ray guns, of which there were six; one for gun charges, of which there were hundreds; and one to keep his pants up.

In the stunned awe-stricken silence which followed his appearance a lone voice yelled out—

"Three cheers for Mark Tyme!"

The Captain clasped his hands and waved them in the air over his head. His opening words were destined to go down to posterity. Sucking in a vast lungful of air he bawled them over the seething expanse.

"Hi ya!"

Microphones were suddenly superfluous. Tyme went on roaring with battering power.

"Thanks one and all for turning up to meet me and my boys"—he jerked his thumb to the sunburned men behind him. "We've seen Venus and we've brought back plenty." He grinned hugely. "We faced dangers, sure—but Mark Tyme isn't afraid of danger of any sort. . ." He patted his guns affectionately. "Now I—"

"One moment, Captain," the Mayor broke in anxiously. "Do you mind if I make a speech of welcome?"

"Eh? Oh, no—sure. Here—come up!" Tyme reached down a hand like a dinosaur's forepaw and lifted the Mayor bodily to the airlock. Dishevelled and embarrassed he began talking into the microphones—but he only managed four sentences before Tyme burst into a bellow of laughter.

"Aw, to heck with the speeches, Mr. Mayor! I'm a plain American, see, and I don't like fancywork. I know I'm welcome: there'd be the hell of a row if I wasn't. Space travel isn't all that wonderful: just a matter of being strong enough and smart enough to take it—"

"Cars are waiting, Captain, to take you to the Administration Building," the May-



or went on hurriedly. "Will you come along, or—"

"Sure I'll come along! O.K., boys"—Tyme glanced back inside the ship—"grab the specimen cases!"

The crowd watched with interest as the Captain's three comrades emerged with heavy packing cases on their shoulders. They descended to the grass, then Tyme locked the airlock's combination switches from outside and turned to head the procession through the crowd. The Mayor and his men stumbled along in the rear trying to keep up with the vast strides.

WITH complete disregard for ceremony and upholstery Tyme had the cases dumped in the last of the six waiting cars. Then he took up his position in the first one. He remained standing, gazing round with hands on hips. He was still standing and shaking hands with himself over his head as the cars crawled like black slugs up banner-streamed Broadway. The contents of thousands of wastepaper baskets descended on his bullet head and were unheeded. He beamed through paper shreddings and his voice boomed thanks to the rooftops.

The Mayor was heartily thankful when the cars drew up outside the Administration Building. Personalities of high society, members of the Upper Ten and Lower Five stood on plush carpets and gave mechanical smiles. Senators beamed stiffly over tight collars.

Beyond his historic "Hi ya!" Tyme took no notice of them and thereby ruined months of carefully planned rehearsal. Clanking like an armored knight he took the granite steps four at a time and marched into the vast entrance hall. Suddenly he came to a stop.

The hall was lined with guests, civic and high authorities specially contrived to extend cordiality.

"Say, what's all this about?" Tyme swung to the Mayor.

"Reception party, Captain. Your rooms are ready for yourself and associates. Later, the banquet—"

"How much later? I'm hungry."

The Mayor winced. "In about two hours."

"Long enough, but I guess it will have to do. . ." Tyme glared round on the people, rubbed his nose uncertainly, then jerked his head towards the staircase. "Let's go, boys," he said briefly to his associates.

"But Captain, a few words—" The Mayor looked despairing.

"Fewer the better," Tyme roared back. "Out in the spaces men don't talk. They fight their way—they tear the living soul of space with their thoughts. They look at stars, not faces. They look on big things, not on folks who smirk and smile with hate in their hearts. Either Earth people have changed, or else I have. . . You mugs are here because it's the right and proper thing to do. I've learned to ignore what's right and do only what's necessary instead. So—go home and hate me in private. I know what you're thinking—that I'm loud-voiced and vulgar, that I never had any education, that I was an East side newsboy. So what? I conquered Venus, didn't I? And that's more than you could do! Later, mebbe, I'll tell you more about it. . ."

"Mad!" the Mayor groaned, as he saw the shocked faces staring at the figures going up the staircase. "The man's demoralized. Utterly and completely demoralized. . ."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hero Worship

DESPITE the misgivings of the Mayor and the guests, the Captain turned up two hours later for the banquet in the vast dining hall, with his companions on either side of him. In a tuxedo he looked rather



like a civilized West African, but from the way he boomed his observations as the meal proceeded there were some who wondered if he was even civilized. He addressed his remarks entirely to his associates. The table might have been empty of guests otherwise for all he seemed to care.

Only when the Mayor stood up to make his speech of welcome and thanks did Tyme look at the head of the table.

"In the past we have paid tribute to the men and women who have conquered air, sea, and stratosphere," the Mayor said. "We have let each pioneer see that we admire his courage and resource—but here we have a man—nay, men—of surpassing valor, men who braved the abysses of space to prove to us it is possible to go to another world and come back alive. Of Venus I can say nothing, not having been there—but of Earth I can say this: Captain Tyme, we welcome you. In the eyes of the world you are the greatest hero in history to date. . . Ladies and gentlemen, a toast—to Captain Mark Tyme!"

Tyme sat in silence while everybody drank, then he got to his feet and hitched a belt that wasn't there. Sucking in his breath as usual he bellowed:

"I'm obliged for all this welcoming stuff, but—" He broke off and moderated his voice. "Sorry," he apologized. "I got that way from shouting in Venusian jungles. Kind of hard to get out of it. . . Well, I suppose I'm expected to say a thing or two about what we did there, way out in space? I guess there isn't much to tell—not that you folks would understand anyway. Besides, you'll read the full reports and see the films we took. . . But I could tell you about swamps like sewers, that crawl with all the filth a devil ever put on a planet; I could tell you about heat that makes Death Valley look like the Arctic Circle; I could tell you of life that lives in trees, of strange animals just aching to feast on your giblets. I could tell you of the guts an Earth-

man needs to battle with them things—the kind we had to have to get back here alive. And for what?" Tyme looked round on the frozen faces. "If I'm keeping you folks up late, say so," he finished sourly, resting two ebony fists on the table.

"We are deeply interested, Captain," the Mayor hastened to assure him.

"Yeah? Maybe things look different from your side of the table. . . But I'll go on talking because I've things to do in my holiday here and I might as well get things moving by talking about them right now. . . . Most of you folks are not interested in me—you're jealous at what I've done; but you might be interested in the souvenirs. I've brought back films, plants, chemicals, things to interest the scientific guys. That expedition put me back plenty in money and I'm going to clean up in return, or else. Also, I believe—"

"Tell me, Captain, is Venus populated?" asked a bewhiskered man at the foot of the table.

Tyme laughed shortly. "Yes, it's populated—by a race of bipeds, people on two legs like us. They represent the civilization of Venus, but they are about as civilized as our cannibals. Cunning little devils, worship pagan gods and things and barter in old stones. I sold 'em a pair of broken field-glasses for a handful of pebbles. . ."

"**P**ERHAPS," said the hatchet-faced woman with glasses who represented the World Enlightenment League, "we might be able to do something about that? I mean, encourage these poor souls to the amenities of civilized life?"

"If you call it civilized to monkey around in a lot of boiled shirts and eat burned meat, you might at that," Tyme admitted laconically.

"I was thinking of the value of them learning Latin!" the hatchet-faced woman retorted. "Such an uplift, you know. . ." She gushed all over the Mayor. "The poor people *must* be educated: it is our



business as civilized people to raise them up—and up! Certainly I shall put the matter before my Committee.”

Tyme swallowed something. “Lady, if people in the past had stopped poking their noses in other peoples’ business under the excuse of uplifting them, there wouldn’t be a world with warlike nations today! You will start uplifting Venusians only over my dead body!”

“But, Captain, think of—”

“I am doing; and if you don’t mind I’ll get on with my talking. I want to get it finished and get outside for a chestful of air. I get kind of cramped inside. . .” Tyme glanced round. “If any of you ladies or gents here is interested in starting a new type of drink see me tomorrow morning. I’ve brought a chemical back from Venus which when mixed with water will knock your head off. It’s got a kick like a choked jet. . . I’d also like to see anybody who has an interest in flower shops. Botanists. I’ve some Venusian roots which give flowers shaped like dumbbells. They smell like hundred per cent carnation. On Venus there’s a hundred-mile carpet of them—hundred miles of dumbbells. Think of that. I tell you, folks, the place stinks.”

The Mayor coughed unnecessarily. Tyme looked at him sharply.

“Mr. Mayor, did I understand you to say that the rooms in this building are mine until I choose to scam out into space again?”

“Certainly, Captain. You have the entire freedom of the city, for that matter.”

“I don’t want the city; only the rooms. Just so as you gents who are interested in a spot of business will know where to find me. Make it tomorrow morning. . . And now”—Tyme kicked his chair back forcibly—“I’m out to grab a walk, to plant my feet on God’s solid earth for an hour or two. Thanks for the feast: I enjoyed it.”

He nodded briefly, glanced round with

his cold eyes, then departed with long strides. The Mayor gave a sickly smile as he surveyed the astounded faces filing away on each side of him.

“We must forgive the Captain his eccentricities,” he muttered. “Venus, you know— After all, remarkable achievement!”

Nobody answered the observation directly. The party began to break up, divided into little groups to discuss the departed guest of honor. Then perhaps fifteen minutes later there came the sound of heavy boots in the marble hall outside and Tyme burst in, attired this time in open necked sports jersey and heavy tweed pants.

“Who the heck’s taken my hat?” he demanded, drooping a menacing eyelid.

“H-hat?” stammered the Mayor, astounded. “*What* hat?”

“My topee, of course! I always wear it. Worn it for five years and never wear anything else. And don’t start telling me it isn’t conventional in New York. I don’t give a hoot for convention: I want my hat. Somebody’s frisked it. It was on the table by the door and—”

Tyme stopped with dilated nostrils, then he glared round as a youngish woman emerged from the crowd of guests and looked at him demurely under her curling lashes.

“I—I took it, Captain.” Her confession came in a low voice. “I’ve always sort of—of admired you. In your pictures and things, I mean, and—I wanted a souvenir. We all wanted a souvenir,” she finished boldly, looking at him with china blue eyes.

“*We?*” Tyme bellowed. “Who the heck’s ‘we’?”

“I’m talking about the Mark Tyme Girls’ Association. I’m the President, you see. I’m Monica Verity. My father is Dudley Verity, and I was born in—”

“Hang it all, girl, I don’t want a history book; I want my hat! And what in blazes



is the Mark Tyme Girls' Association? I never heard of it. . ."

"No, you won't have. We formed it while you were away. About five hundred of us girls banded ourselves together and we meet twice a week to talk about you—I took your hat because *you* had worn it. Venusians had *touched* it! It is something sacred to us—so while you were upstairs with that manservant of yours I watched my chance, bobbed in your room, and took it. Oh, don't you *see*?"

Tyme inwardly consigned Barrett, his associate, manservant, and second eye, to the devil.

"Where's the hat now?" he snapped abruptly.

"Enshrined." Monica Verity sounded ecstatic. "Our headquarters are a room in Talford Building, three hundredth floor. Your hat is there. I gave my best friend it to take away quickly. She was on the steps of the building outside. Right now, Captain, your hat will be under a glass dome on top of a little pedestal. Now we can all revere it. . . You don't really mind, do you? There are plenty of topees, but only one that we can cherish. I—I was going to ask you to come and address us girls. We'd so like to have our hero with us for an hour. . ."

"Five hundred girls? Me?" Tyme gave a visible tremor. "Thanks all the same, Miss Verity—but I'd sooner you kept the hat. All the same, I wish— Aw, heck! Guess the best thing I can do is step out and buy me a new lid."

He turned back to the doorway and vanished in the hall.

"Can you beat it?" he asked the granite-faced commissionaire. "A kid pinches my hat and puts it under a glass cover so she and a lot of other dames can worship it. . . Just gives you an insight onto what fame can do to a guy, doesn't it?"

The commissionaire sucked his teeth. "I seem to recall my old lady kept cheese under a glass cover too," he said—but

because he was so big Tyme stepped out into the street without saying a word.

IT SEEMED to Tyme that the ardor of the populace in general had cooled a good deal next morning—but for the life of him he could not figure out why. So far as he knew he had said nothing offensive. It puzzled him too why all his colleagues—excepting Barrett—had left him to his own devices in order to return to their families until he should need them again for a further expedition. Barrett had no place else to go anyhow.

Slamming down the morning papers, Tyme said grimly, "I don't like these headlines, Barrett! One says 'Is Tyme a Nut'? Another describes me as 'The Admirable Piecan'. Still another seems to think it's hellish funny to have a topee under a glass dome three hundred floors from the ground. Do *you* think it's funny?"

"Hardly that, sir. A trifle unusual, perhaps—but not funny. After all, you know what newspapers are. Always jealous of great men. . ." It was not by accident that Barrett had been in Tyme's employ for fifteen years.

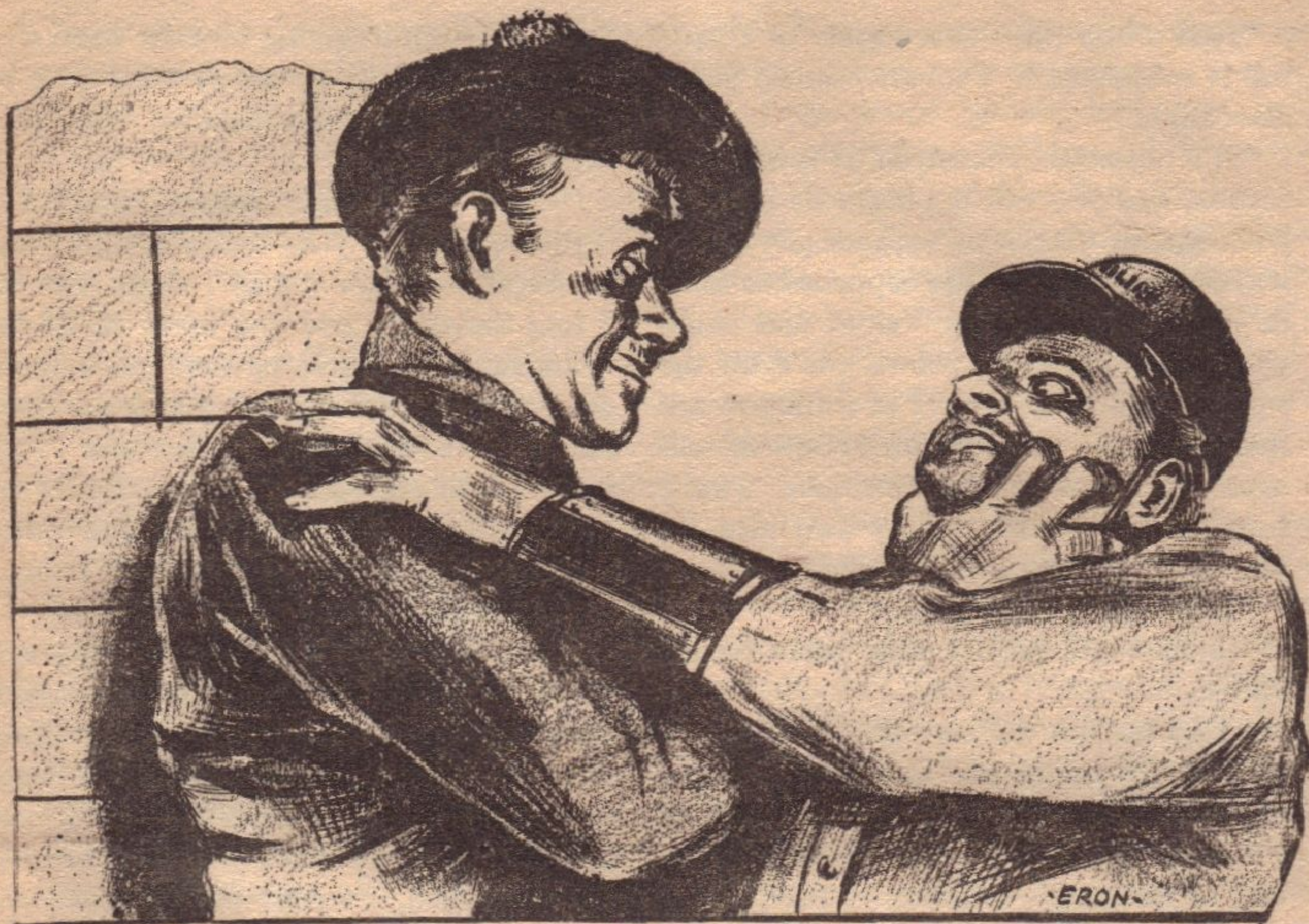
"Damn fools, all of 'em!" Tyme snorted. "Sooner we take off on another expedition and the better I'll like it. All a matter of getting the money to do it. We've got to sell those plants and minerals, Barrett."

"Yes, sir. Of course, you could make a vast fortune if you cared to sell the formula for your space ship fuel and the design of the ship itself. You—"

"And have Governments strangling each other to fly into space and frisk worlds? Not if I know it! I'm the only guy with the key to space right now, and until I pass out it stays my property. I prefer first claim."

Barrett's haggard expression showed he was thinking, then he turned to the door at a sudden knock. It was a tall, elegant individual with hair matching his french-gray suit who came in. He walked so ele-





gantly he was nearly a female impersonator.

"Ah, Captain. . . !" He held out his hand warmly. "I am Cornelius Vanhart, President of the International Beverage Corporation. I was present at the banquet last night. . . You mentioned a chemical drink."

"Sure I did. Grab yourself a seat."

Tyme paced slowly round the room as Vanhart complied. Barrett, understanding mystic signals, vanished in the neighboring room and came back with a phial of salts and a glass of water.

"Here we are, sir!" Tyme swept them up and nearly spilt water on the immaculate trousers. "The fizzwater of the gods—and then some!" The water boiled like hell as he emptied a few salts into it. "There you are. Drink that. . . The stuff's dynamite. If you buy the formula you'll have every other fizzwater king by the schnozzle."

Vanhart sipped experimentally, smiled

fatuously, and sipped again. He ignored the bubbles that fell and popped on the unmentionable pants. He took longer sips—gulps—swallowed the glass' entire contents. He handed the glass back then slapped his knees violently.

"I have the pronounced conviction that I am flying," he observed at length. "Flying—flying—"

"A bottle full of this and you'd be the China Clipper," Tyme grinned.

"But, Captain, so confoundedly odd. But confoundedly pleasant— Ah! The telephone!"

"That's no telephone; just bells in your ears. The chemical reacts on the brain, see? It doesn't make you intoxicated. It produces a state of perfectly sober merri-ment. You're drunk, but you're not—that's the advantage. You sort of feel you'd like to hop out and ring the President's doorbell. What's more, the more you have the more you want. Get it? Business without end?"



"And when this—this supply of chemical is exhausted?" Vanhart beamed like a searchlight.

"It'll never be exhausted! It is basically carbon, and you can duplicate its makeup from earthly chemicals without any effort, without any end. It just happened to form in this combination on Venus, and you'd work a million years before you'd hit the right combination here. I'm willing to sell this chemical—and your own chemists will soon work out the full formula. I've a rough formula made by my own men I'll sell as well. That's fair trading."

"How much do you want?"

Vanhart still played mute tunes on his knees.

"Two million dollars—and you can afford it. If you're not interested I know plenty who will be. If nobody is interested I'll start myself and wipe the rest of you out of business. Lemonade, beer, wine, 'Angel's Kiss,' 'Satan's Eyeball,' and all the rest— They'll go out like a light!"

Vanhart only beamed all the more. "Two million dollars? Cheap enough. I'm in no mood to argue. Pleasure—that's my idea. Give pleasure to everybody. Make my Board of Directors dance with merriment. That's what I'll do. Get me the rest of this mineral."

**T**YME thrust the phial in the waving hand. He flipped his fingers and Barrett retreated and returned with a hastily scribbled formula. That went in the other hand. Vanhart stuffed both in his pockets, smoothed the heavenly trousers, then snatched out his checkbook abruptly. Tyme watched in silence as the fountain pen flew over the mottled paper.

"There!" Vanhart handed it over and got to his feet. "The legal document will follow later in the day. I'll attend to it. . . Thanks for the flight!" He turned uncertainly to the door and went out, chuckling over an obscure joke.

"I suppose," Barrett said doubtfully,

"you did right in giving him the stuff, sir? It makes a person so happy they can't be responsible for their actions. Do you think—?"

"I got two million dollars, didn't I?" Tyme snapped. "And the analysis of that chemical will show it's all I claim it to be. I told the truth, and you know it. If the drink made him give two million without even trying to bargain, that's his look out. . . That's victory number one. Two million will see us well away. Better go cash it into bonds, securities and notes before it gets stopped. You never know."

"Right away, sir. . ."

But evidently Vanhart was entirely satisfied, for during the afternoon—by which time the effect of the water must certainly have evaporated—he forwarded the legal interpretation of the transaction and even added a note of thanks. The chemists were satisfied. Vanhart proposed launching Venusfizz within a week. He nearly drooled over the possible profits—so much so indeed that the faint pricks in Tyme's conscience changed to a gathering doubt as to whether he had charged enough. The thought that he had perhaps gypped himself was too horrifying to contemplate. . .

It so happened, however, that he had little time to think about the matter further. His belief that the public had forgotten all about him was dispelled completely when he received an earnest deputation from the exhibitors handling his film of Venusian life. Would he make a personal tour with the film? Would he—and this nearly demanded knee-bending—be gracious enough to start that very evening? A stratospherical fee would be paid, of course. Would he mind being in full exploring kit even to the portable stove?

He agreed. Complete with three belts, shorts, khaki shirt, and several odd hundred pounds of accoutrements, the old original indeed except for his new topee, he appeared that night at the Astoria. He boomed and roared his way through a



commentary on his film, filling the great hall with his thunderous tones. The film did more to offset the offensive notions of the news reporters and scandalized guests of the previous night's banquet than anything else.

The general public took this sunburned tough egg to their hearts. He was sensational, eccentric, a strong man, an idiot, and a genius—all depending on where you sat in the hall.

For his own part he was fairly certain that the first three rows of the cinema were filled with five hundred young women who never took their callow eyes off him all the time he ranted. They never seemed to look at the picture. Some of them even took notes. . . . By the time he had worn himself hoarse and retired to the dressing room backstage, he found the room filled with all manner of weird gifts. There were flowers without end—some inscribed "To the divine Captain." Somebody with misguided wit had sent an enormous onion to which was tied a label. It said "This smells. Figure it out." And there were chocolate boxes, horseshoes, miniature space ships made out of almond paste and coconut, cards, boxes of cigars, pairs of socks—

"The place looks like a chain store!" Tyme snorted at last, slamming the door. "Get this damned junk outa here. Give it to the orphanage, or something. . . ."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Business Dealings

FOR SOME time he stood watching the bell hops sweeping up the stuff into their arms; then he turned as the door opened cautiously and Monica Verity came in slowly. Behind her in the passage loomed the grinning, snickering four hundred and ninety nine.

Tyme glanced helplessly at Barrett, then back to the girl. Automatically his gaze

shot to her hat. He hadn't seen it in the darkened theater. It was a topee—a small, ridiculous little topee perched on one side of her blonde hair. He just couldn't take his eyes off it.

"Captain, we wanted—wanted to express our appreciation for tonight," she said coyly, and pursed her red lips so much Tyme wished to God he were a younger man. "You were divine—just as we'd always imagined you would be. In that kit, I mean. . . ." She looked at his blocklike legs and massive, knotty arms.

He said gustily, "Oh, that's O.K. I—"

"There's something else I wanted to tell you, Captain. We've started a movement to commemorate your exploration. You see, I'm sort of—of a fashion plate—socialite, I think they call me. What I wear is usually copied, so I had this little hat modeled after yours. Now all the girls will wear one. . . ! Don't you think that's marvelous?"

"Yeah—marvelous." Tyme made the admission uncomfortably. "I guess it's a swell idea—better than those soapdishes and fried eggs you girls usually stick on your noodles. . . . You mean all the Association is going to wear topee hats?"

Monica Verity looked surprised. "Oh, not just the Association—every smart woman and girl in this country—and Britain, and France. We've done our part to commemorate your voyage, Captain. . . . All we want you to do now is sign this letter."

"Letter?"

She produced a sheet of typewritten paper from her ornamental bag and gave it to him to read. It was pretty much the same as the endless letters he had signed for socks, cigars, and suspenders.

*"I think Topee Hats are the last word. No smartly dressed woman can afford to be without one. The fashion has my fullest and complete approval. Signed. . . ."*



"Simple enough, isn't it?" Monica smiled naively.

Tyme nodded as he signed it and handed it back. She gave him another wistful look with her big eyes, then went out quietly and joined the other girls. Talking among themselves they retreated down the corridor.

"Peculiar young lady, sir," Barrett observed thoughtfully. "I thought at first she was young and shy, but now I dare to wonder if—"

"Yeah, you might well wonder!" A languid figure strolled through the doorway and pushed up his soft hat. "I'm Taylor of the *Voice*. Captain. I'd like a personal angle on your reactions to Earth. And say—you know who that dame is, don't you? That Monica Verity?"

"A socialite, she said."

Taylor grinned. "Well, yes, I guess that's right, but she's also the chief buyer for her father's millinery establishment—biggest in town. She's a socialite, sure—always hunting for new hat ideas. You know—what Verity wears today the world wears tomorrow."

"**B**UT—but she's only a kid!" Tyme exploded. "A kid with a bad hero-complex."

"Thirty years of kid," Taylor observed. "Cosmetics have upped a bit while you've been away, Cap. Putting it bluntly, I'd say you gave her the exclusive right of using your hat for a model by signing that letter. Now you can sit back and watch hat designers go cross-eyed trying to keep up with things. . ."

"It's an outrage!" Tyme exploded. "I won't have my hat worn by women. It's effeminate! It reflects on me! I'll break up this Mark Tyme Girls' Association! I'll force that girl to—"

"You can't." Taylor was infuriatingly calm. "This is New York, and we've got laws—of sorts. You signed away your hat and the admiration stunt was just build

up. Monica Verity is sort of slick that way until you get wise to her. . . And there isn't such an organization as the Mark Tyme Girls' Association. Those girls were probably part of her staff, put there to help the deal through."

Tyme sat down with a thud. The iron-mongery on his back forced him to rear bolt upright.

"There ain't no justice," he muttered. "Now I come back to Earth I'm made a fool of—made to look like a cheap adventurer. I risked my life out in space, and what do I get for it? I get played for a sucker."

"That's life," Taylor admitted pessimistically; then with sudden keenness, "But I'm prepared to give you a real build-up, Cap. I want to show the world the *man*, not the loud voiced buffoon the world thinks you are. . ."

Tyme got slowly to his feet again, his massive jaw set like a rock. "*What* did you say?" he asked, with volcanic calm.

Taylor moved hastily. "That's what the *world* thinks, Cap—not me. I think you're swell—"

"*You* think I'm swell, and every paper in the blasted city plasters headlines about me being a nut?" Tyme bellowed. "You'll only make it worse with your damned personal angle. Give a guy a free meal, then make his face red forever, eh? Not if I know it! *Out!*"

"But look, I can help you—"

"And I can help *you!*" Tyme's hands shot out. Before he could get to the doorway Taylor found himself lifted by pants and collar and hurled outside like a cannon ball. He crashed into the midst of the officials and scattered people who had gathered in the passage preparatory to entering the dressing room.

Tyme himself appeared in the doorway and glared round.

"Well, what in heck do you people want?"

"You remember me?" A woman with



hatchet face and gleaming glasses squirmed out of the gathering. "The World Enlightenment League? I've seen my Committee and we wondered if you would finance an expedition of ten space ships to carry us to Venus. My committee agreed with me that the natives of Venus should learn civilized ways and means. . ."

"On how to two-time an honest man doing his best for progress, eh?" Tyme inquired sourly. "Well get this, lady. . ." He advanced so suddenly that she cowered back. "I wouldn't finance a row of salmon tins for you or your outfit. What's more, if you were a man I'd kick you downstairs. *Now get out!* The whole two-faced lot of you!"

The effect of the blast was sufficient to send most of the gathering, Hatchet Face included, scattering like chaff—but one remained, a smallish man with a huge flower in his buttonhole. His cheeks were floppy, his eyes large and moist like those of a Peke. His hair dripped brilliantine.

Tyme narrowed one eye and hitched his belts.

"Maybe you didn't hear what I said?" he asked with a grave calm.

"Oh, I heard," the man admitted nervously. "But—but I've come to talk business. Here's my card." He darted out with it and darted back. Tyme scowled at the pasteboard.

Fortesque J. Gillibrand  
Horticulturist  
Times Square N. Y. C.

"You mentioned a plant at the banquet. I'd like to know all about it. Buy it if possible. . ."

Tyme hesitated briefly, then nodded. "O.K., Mr. Gillibrand. Come back with me and I'll show you everything. If I seemed sort of rude with those other mugs don't let it bother you. They think I'm a fool."

"Quite—quite," Gillibrand said ambiguously—then he became quiet as with Tyme on one side and Barrett on the other he was whirled through the rear exits to a waiting car.

TO TYME, there was something repulsive about the way Fortesque Gillibrand finnicked around the flower pot containing the Venusian weed. With hands like a manicurist he flicked the little tendrils, toyed with the delicate buds. He monkeyed about with forceps, magnifying glasses, and sap-extractors. He sniffed and squinted and meditated—then said.

"One hundred dollars."

"Ha!" Tyme laughed derisively.

"Well, a hundred and fifty. . ."

"One thousand and not a cent less," Tyme snapped. "Don't you realise that this plant will grow like a grape vine in earthly soil? Grow infernally fast too. This is Venusian swamp soil in this pot, but put these roots in earthly loam and—Boy, they'll spread like chain lightning. I proved that on Venus when I transplanted some into a box of earth soil. Something to do with earthly nitrates, according to my pet botanist on the expedition. . ."

"But a thousand dollars! A thousand dollars for a weed!"

"Orchids and edelweiss are weeds, but their rarity makes 'em valuable. Compared to this stuff in the pot edelweiss is as plentiful as clover. For the exclusive right of using Venus Dumbells I want a thousand dollars. And if I bring any more back you can have 'em free. Nobody else—just you. Take it or leave it."

"Of course I could graft. . ." Gillibrand meditated. Then he looked up. "I'll advise you in the morning. I must think about it. . ."

"O.K., but if anybody else turns up I shan't hold it for you."

Gillibrand turned to the door, then he swung back and clicked his teeth.

"You make it too irresistible, Captain!"



he exclaimed, yanking out his check book. "I'll take it. . . You are perfectly sure it won't die when transferred to earthly soil?"

"Not a chance! I'll sign a guarantee to that effect if you want. Money back if dissatisfied, you know. . ."

Gillibrand nodded as he handed the check over. "I'll send a guarantee for your signature tomorrow. . . Thank you, Captain—thank you." He cuddled up the pot Barrett had wrapped up for him and went out eagerly.

"Hell!" Tyme gave a sniff like a vacuum cleaner. "Open that window! Place smells like a cheap actress. . . Well Barrett, my lad, that makes two million one thousand dollars. Call the thousand expenses. And I guess that's about all we've got to sell."

"I still think something might be done with Miss Verity, sir," Barrett pondered. "She got exclusive rights to imitate your hat without it costing her anything beyond eye-rolling. I think by the exercise of a little legal strategy I could make her pay something. If I have your permission to. . .?"

"Go to it—first thing in the morning," Tyme nodded. "I'd like to take the wind out of that dame's sails. Once we've finished that I guess we're all set for another expedition. . ."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Conquered Hero

WHEN Tyme had dressed and arrived for breakfast next morning he found everything ready on the table, with a brief note. Barrett had departed to execute legal strategy. Tyme started on his egg, glancing at the morning paper—then he forgot all about the egg in a sudden rush of fury. The paper—the *Voice*—had the headline devoted to reporter Taylor's article—

### WHY DOES MARK TYME MARK TIME?

Wading through a resumé of the Captain's fêting since his arrival back on Earth, the article went on with vitriolic fury to explain how Taylor had been kicked out the previous night. Taylor averred, just within the law of libel, that the Captain was a fraud, that he was a guest of the taxpayers and openly gypped and insulted the citizens in return.

Matters like fizzwater, where he could be sure of a return, he had been eager to pursue—but where it meant *him* giving money for advancement, as in the case of the World Enlightenment League, he had threatened violence. And what sort of a trick was he trying to play on poor, innocent Monica Verity, a young girl who just worshipped him? Curious how Taylor had amnesia regarding Monica's true profession.

*" . . . and we have got to know why Mark Tyme continues to mark time,"* the article concluded. *"We are not keeping him if he is anxious to start off on another expedition. The least a conquering hero can do is to be civil."*

Tyme swallowed rage and breakfast together. Then he snatched up the telephone and spent a busy fifteen minutes contacting the rest of his associates. In each case he got a similar answer. None of them was ready to follow out his orders and leave for space again within two days. They wanted a month's rest and enjoyment before they would be at his service once more. . .

It was not surprising then that Barrett found a very disgusted employer when he returned, rather sheepishly, around dinner time.

"Well?" Tyme looked up rather despondently.

"I regret, sir, that I have to report fail-



ure." Barrett looked crestfallen. "I saw an attorney, sir, and it seems you have no chance of forcing Miss Verity to pay anything for the use of your topee. That endorsement you signed for her was sufficient legal guarantee of your approval of the whole thing. . . I am deeply sorry, sir."

"Oh, forget it!" Tyme growled. Getting to his feet he went moodily to the window. "Like the rest of 'em she's a twister. . . They're rotten, Barrett—everybody's rotten. The bigger you are the more they soak you. Even our own boys aren't anxious to take my orders any more. I had sort of figured we could take off again in a couple of days—get away from this damned planet into the peace of space. They want a month."

"Well, frankly, I can't blame them. . . However, if you wish it, sir, I will have the ship loaded up with five years' provisions and give the necessary orders for fuel manufacture. We can afford it now. We may as well be ready. . ."

"Yeah—you'd better do that."

Tyme lighted a cigarette moodily—then swinging round he snatched up the *Voice* again and ripped it savagely into shreds, finally flung himself in a chair to browse over the delights of being a hero.

IF TAYLOR had sought to stir up public opinion against Tyme by his leader in the *Voice*—which was followed by oth-

ers of even more violence in the ensuing days—he certainly succeeded.

Tyme found himself left alone in the Administration Building. The officials were perfectly polite, but they left no doubt about the fact that they would not object to vacating of the rooms whenever convenient. Which only served to make Tyme all the more determined to stay in them—at least until the month was up and he could collect his crew for departure into space again.

Certainly he was convinced that fame was not worth having. He kept to his rooms most of the time, only seeing people who desired to add his name to advertisements. For such privileges he demanded stunning fees—and got them. He began to appear in all sorts of magazines in all kinds of different attires, advertising anything from shoes to skyscrapers.

He noted too, with a sort of detached interest, the furore being caused by the arrival of Venusfizz and topee hats simultaneously. In the smart magazines his own endorsement of topee hats appeared with utter shamelessness. He read too of passionate outbursts by New York, London, and Paris hat designers against the craze. Women, from the servant girl to the highest in the land, were bending to the fashion of the topee hat—and because Verity's possessed the original exclusive design it seemed likely that dozens of lesser designers would find themselves in bankruptcy





unless they found a way round the problem.

Tyme began to receive shoals of impassioned entreaties, urging him to use his influence to make the concession of topee hat design apply to other designers as well. He refused for the simple reason that he was powerless to go back on his word. Hat designers began to call at the Administration Building. Men and women in scores insisted on seeing him, threatened prosecution because he had refused to deal with a new creation in the correct trade fashion.

It gave him a sour pleasure to see a few people smarting at last.

With the case of Venusfizz he was faced with a different sort of problem. Manufacturers of fizzwater, distillers, and brewers rose to heated action. The *Voice*, eager for details, published the glaring fact that Mark Tyme had deliberately ruined the drinking trade of the world. He had sold a secret to Vanhart of the International Beverage Corporation: Vanhart was likely to make millions out of it, and because of the druglike effect of the drink would continue to do so forever. Yet, by legal statute, Tyme had had no right to sell his formula without first getting the assent of the Board of Beverages.

Far from having their assent he did not even know they existed. Before he realised what had happened he found a summons slapped in his hand; and not an hour after it he got a second one. The hat designers had found a clause whereby they could sue him for fraudulent conversion of trade rights. That was what they called it, anyway.

“THIS,” Tyme bellowed, waving the summons in the air, “is gratitude! First one—then the other. But they won’t get away with it, Barrett! If they want me that badly they can chase me into space. I’m having nothing to do with it. These cases will frisk me of all the money

I’ve cleaned up. . . I’m going to make the boys see reason and leave early if it’s the last thing I do. You’d better come with me.”

He slammed on his topee and led the way to the door. Barrett followed discreetly behind him. Glaring as he strode along, Tyme went down the main street amidst the shoppers and walkers, thumbs tucked by habit in the edges of his revolver belt. He took no notice of the various glances cast towards him.

“We’ll try Chris first,” he snapped out at length. “We can cut across Times Square. No use talking to the boys on the phone. They only understand one language, and it’s this!” He doubled his mighty fist.

He stopped at the traffic lights, waiting for the change in signal—but before it came he was aware of a wild hubbub from somewhere on his left. It was followed immediately afterwards by a smashing and slamming of glass and the shriek of a man.

“What in—?” His hands flew automatically to his guns—then he turned and raced with Barrett and the people along the sidewalk, stopping at last before a shattered shop front. Women screamed, men shouted, police turned purple blowing whistles. Tyme slid to a stop and shot Barrett an astounded glance.

Thrusting through the broken window, the struggling form of a man in its tendrils, was a titanic green arm—the arm of a plant, its buds shaped like dumbbells. Even as the baffled people watched the arm grew.

“It’s—it’s Gillibrand!” Barrett gasped in horror, as the suspended man raised a limp and sweating face for a moment. “That plant you sold him. Earthly soil. . .” Barrett stopped, looking at the name “Gillibrand” over the broken window.

“Hell. . .” Tyme whispered, watching the twining green. Thing must have grown like the devil in the passing days. Then at



that moment Gillibrand caught sight of him and uttered a hoarse shriek.

"He sold me this! Him—Captain Tyme! It's a mad plant—been growing and growing out in the back conservatory. Can't kill it!—Ouch!"

Gillibrand finished with a shriek as the sappy branch holding him snapped precipitately and dropped him with a resounding thud on the sidewalk—but like dense ivy speeded up a hundred times the ropy arm of vegetation began crawling steadily up the building block, exuding a swimmy, sickening odor of heavy acacia.

The people swung round and regarded Tyme with grim eyes. The police too prepared themselves and tugged out their guns—but in that instant Tyme's hands flashed to his own guns and leveled them.

"O.K.," he said bitterly, Barrett behind him. "Come one step towards me and I'll blast the living daylights out of you. I mean it! How the heck was I to know that the weed would do *that*? I knew it grew fast—but not *that* fast. You can't blame me for it—any more than you can blame me for bringing new drinks and new hats to public notice—"

"You've been a public nuisance ever since you came back, Tyme," snapped one of the officers. "It's our job to run you in as a desperate character."

"Yeah? Try it!" Tyme grinned bitterly. "I'm through, you hear? Through! I've done my best and you've all tried to gyp me for it. O.K., I'll go somewhere else. . ."

**H**E BACKED away as he spoke, said briefly to Barrett, "The airport. Only half a mile away. Got to run for it."

"But the rest of the boys—?"

"To hell with 'em. We'll manage. Return later maybe, in secret. You loaded up with provisions and fuel?"

"Yes, I—"

"Right. Let's go!"

Tyme swung suddenly, plunged into the midst of the crowd behind him with such force that they bowled backwards before the onrush. By the time they had recovered their balance he was streaking like a trackrunner down the sidewalk, able to move at demoniacal speed through long practise. He whirled Barrett along beside him with one hand on his collar.

Twisting and dodging, ignoring the blaring of traffic as he tore across main streets, the hero of Venus pelted like the wind from the yelling throng pursuing him. He was not even panting by the time he and Barrett plunged to the airfield. Barrett was not panting either; he was half dead.

Without a pause Tyme went straight on, reached the airlock of his space machine and twisted the combination screws. He hurled Barrett through the opening like a sack of coals, clambered in himself as the crowd surged onto the field. A police officer's flame gun charge struck the massive door futilely as it closed.

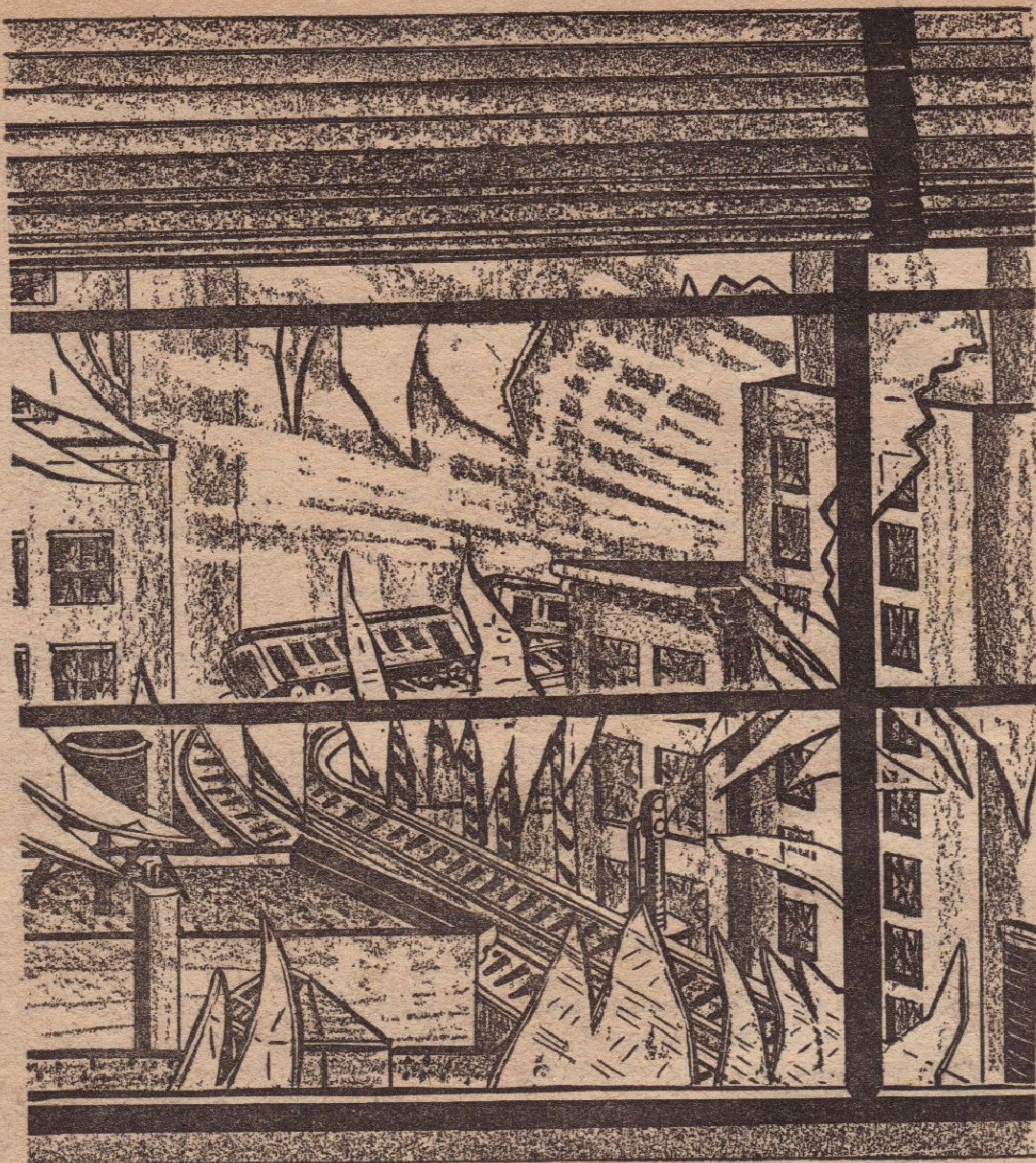
One flick of the buttons and the rockets roared into life. Instantly the crowd pressed back before the blasting, searing discharge. Within the ship Tyme stood looking down on the people as he hurtled the vessel upward to the clouds.

"Appear in court!" he breathed venomously. "Responsible for a mad tree! Been made a sucker of all along the line. . . Forced to leave a cool two million dollars behind—but it's in my name and nobody can touch it. One day I may collect. . . The conquering hero! Guess it's the last time we try and become prophets in our own country, eh, Barrett?"

Barrett nodded slowly, recovering himself. "I agree with you, sir. Though it will be difficult without a full crew, I do believe the solitude of space is preferable to the solitude of a cell."

Mark Tyme turned to the instruments which plotted out the course.





# **JOSHUA'S BATTERING RAM**

The Sonomagent was an air-conditioner salesman's dream of perfection. There wasn't an office in the torrid city of New York that could afford to get along without it. But, like most other things in an imperfect world, it had its little faults.



## By Malcolm Jameson

“COME in here a minute, Charlie. I’ve got something pretty slick to show you.”

Charlie Hanscom had started for the elevator when Sam Burpel, Sales Manager for the New Era Air Conditioning Company, called to him. Wondering what bright idea his boss had hatched overnight, Hanscom flung his brief-case down on the nearest desk and went into

his chief’s private office. Near the window stood a crude looking cabinet, suggesting a home-made combination radio and phonograph. On the front face of it was the mouth of a horn, resembling a loud speaker, and a tuning dial.

“Now here’s something that has everything else on the market backed off the boards. Boy, have a look!” Burpel, always radiating professional enthusiasm,





was outdoing himself this morning. He lifted the cover of the machine and twiddled a moment with something inside. Then he gave the control knob on the outside a twirl that put it hard over. "It has a safety stop in here to keep the customers from freezing themselves to death. That's what I just released. Now keep your eye on that thermometer."

Charlie Hanscom glanced at the thermometer on the wall. It was at its customary seventy, although outside it was already approaching ninety. The thin red line began shrinking fast. In a moment Charlie shivered and turned up his coat collar. He did not have to keep on watching the thermometer; frost was beginning to form on the window. Cold!

"A couple more minutes of that," chuckled Burpel, triumphantly, "and you could see a brass monkey start to come apart right before your eyes!"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Hanscom, as Burpel turned the knob back to normal and reset the safety catch. "How far will that go?"

"I'd hate to find out," answered his boss, exuberantly, "absolute zero, I guess. At least that's what the inventor says. But that's not half of it. Sit down over there and listen."

**B**URPEL walked around between the window and the new air-conditioning unit. He picked up a large dish-pan that lay on the window sill, and began banging on it with a wooden ruler he had carried from his desk. Hanscom could see the ruler smacking against the bottom of the pan, but the clatter that should have been heard was simply not there. He could see, also, that Burpel's mouth was open, twisting into various shapes, and from the redness of his superior's face, Hanscom judged he was trying to shout. Yet there was no sound audible. The show he was putting on had the appearance of pantomime.

Burpel walked slowly forward, coming out from behind the unit, keeping up his facial contortions and the drubbing. As he came abreast of the machine, Hanscom began to be aware of a faint humming, and what sounded like a distant hallooing. Another step, and the loud clatter of the pounded dish-pan and his boss's shouts rang out in full normal volume. Burpel stopped, grinning from ear to ear.

"That's what it does to noise. I tell you, we've got something here. Why, if we can't sell these things, we couldn't sell parachutes on a burning air-liner!"

It was a convincing, but mystifying demonstration. Charlie looked at the three big windows through which the full morning sun was pouring. He knew the room had an enormous heat load, for he had computed it. Apparently this machine could handle any quantity of B. T. Us. Yet, except for the cord to the electric outlet, there were no connections of any sort, no intake nor exhaust ducts. Furthermore, the complete annihilation of the noise was positively uncanny. Even with the windows closed, as they were, there had been considerable noise from outside. Now the room was almost oppressively silent. The words spoken by Burpel were hushed and echoless. The room was as "dead" as a radio studio.

"But where does the heat go?" demanded Hanscom. "It's got to go somewhere."

"Search me!" replied Burpel, "but who cares? Your prospect don't care a rap *how* it's done; *will* it do it, is what he wants to know."

Hanscom knew the truth of that well enough, but still he was a little troubled. Heat was energy of a definite and measurable kind. It couldn't be dismissed with a wave of the hand. The disposal of the heat removed from the air had always been a problem in air-conditioning. But here there did not appear to be anything in the nature of a condenser, with



its circulation of fluid to carry away the heat. And no less puzzling was the way in which sound disappeared within the room. It was as if a sound wave bounced but once, straight into the machine, where it vanished—was gobbled up, so to speak. The name-plate bearing the word SONOMAGNET suggested a definite attraction for sound waves—a preposterous proposition.

"Let the engineers wrangle over the technicalities," continued Burpel, "our job is to make a market for them."

"That ought to be easy," agreed Hanscom, thinking of the miraculous properties of the conditioner. He had observed that it not only cooled and silenced the air, but was recirculating it vigorously, apparently purifying the air of the closed room as it passed through. But still. . .

"What's the catch?" demanded Hanscom. He had seen Burpel tread the clouds before.

"Well," admitted Burpel, "in the first place there are only three or four dozen of these machines assembled. And Haggledorn, the inventor, doesn't want to sell those, but rent 'em."

"What's the idea of that?"

"As near as I can find out, he is afraid to try for a patent. Says he'd rather keep it secret. Between you and me, I think he's a sort of a nut, but then again, he may be smarter than I give him credit for. If you'll take a look inside that cabinet, you'll see that all the inner works are locked up inside a steel chest. It's practically burglar proof—has a lock like a safe-deposit box. He wants us to distribute them, and he promises to go every week and service them. He says they get clogged up with heat and noise, and if he doesn't remove the excess, they won't work."

"Holy Cats! You talk about heat and noise like they were sand."

"He does! I've already said he's a little goofy, but you can't laugh off what

the machine does. It eats up calories like nobody's business—and the loudest racket, too. His idea is sound enough. If he keeps title to them, and the keys, nobody can take one apart to see what makes it tick. All you have to do is lease 'em, and collect your commissions."

"Yeah, I get it. An experiment. If it works, he goes into production and sales on his own. If they flop, or blow up. . ."

"That's his worry. You and I get ours on the barrelhead every time you bring a signed lease in. So look the thing over and make up your spiel, because you're the boy I've picked to handle 'em."

BY THE time Hanscom left the office, the world looked rosier to him. The rental asked was high, but considering the performance, that did not matter. The commission rate was good and Hanscom's only regret was that there were so few machines available.

July had just begun and the town was rapidly becoming air-conditioning conscious. What appealed most to Hanscom was the silencing feature of the Sonomagnet. In some parts of town noise conditions were almost unbearable. On his way to the elevator, he thought over his calling list and began marshaling his arguments. For the moment, he dismissed from his mind his perplexity as to what became of the abstracted heat units or how the sound came to be damped out so completely.

Outside it was muggy and steamy. The sidewalk were crowded with unhappy people shuffling along, listless in their damp, clinging garments. Ignoring the blast of superheated air that struck him as he emerged from the building, Hanscom stepped out briskly in the direction of Sixth Avenue.

That had always been his favorite territory. Over there, in the tall buildings that towered above the El structure, were many prosperous firms that were trying



to get their work done in the face of terrific odds. If they kept their windows open to keep from stifling, they let in all the clamor of the busy city, tearing at their jaded nerves in gusts of strident decibels.

The rattle and blare rose and fell, but it never was absent.

In the Chickasaw Building, on the third floor, were the law offices of Minsky, O'Hara, Palumbo, Lofgren, and Smith. They had a real problem in trying to carry on a law practice under conditions not unlike those in a boiler shop. Hanscom knew Smith, the junior partner, quite well. Earlier they had talked about air-conditioning, but Smith was unconvinced of its necessity. They had recently moved into the building and had not yet realized what a trial the summer could be.

Hanscom had hardly begun telling Smith about the wonderful Sonomagnet, when Smith made a signal to him to hold what he was saying for a moment. Smith was annoyed, but there was no help for it. Talk was impossible. The rumbling crescendo of noise outside had just reached its climax as an elevated train roared past the window, filling the office with dust and ear-splitting din. Hardly had the train drawn to a clattering stop at the station on the corner above, when Hanscom noted with a grin that a quartet of riveters in the frame of a growing building across the street had started heading up as many rivets. To add to the bedlam, an ambulance or a police car streaked through the street below, its siren wailing piercingly above the raucous medley of the usual traffic noises.

It was with many such interruptions and much yelling and gesticulating that Hanscom managed to get his sales talk across. He had met all of Smith's objection, one by one, and had reached the point of laying a contract form before him, tendering a fountain pen invitingly.

"But . . ." Smith tried to utter one more objection.

His words were drowned under the reverberations of another passing train, and before that clangor had begun to diminish, a succession of dull booms smote the air as a string of blasts were touched off in the subway under construction below the surface of the street outside.

"You win!" shouted Smith, in mock desperation, and reached for the pen. The first Sonomagnet deal was closed.

**B**EFORE the week was over, Hanscom had placed a number of the new machines. Their effect was nothing less than marvelous, as he learned when he called back to check up on their performance. Offices that had been practically useless during the summer on account of the inferno of noise about them were now quiet as the tomb, and as cool as the occupant desired. On one of his follow-up calls, Hanscom met Haggledorn coming out of his client's office. He *was* a queer looking person, exceedingly tall and stooped, and of a most repellent, sour visage. His long, curved nose and malignant expression made Hanscom think of the pictures in the children's books of evil witches on broomsticks.

Haggledorn made his rounds weekly, as he had agreed to do, followed by a husky porter carrying two large bags. Hanscom made several efforts to be present at one of the "servicings," but something always prevented. His friend Smith, though, told him that the operation seemed to be simple.

"First, he takes out a container—of water, I think—and empties it down the drain of the wash-room. Then he removes a big brick, then takes out a couple of reels or spools of silvery tape. They look a bit like reels of movie film, only one is wider and thicker than the other. Then he puts in fresh reels and a brick, and snaps the lid shut.



"I think the brick he takes out must be hot, because he wears gloves and handles it with tongs, and when it hits the air, it smokes. One of his bags is divided up into compartments to hold the bricks, and I judge the white stuff they are lined with is asbestos."

"So that's where the heat goes," thought Hanscom, but he was more puzzled than ever. It didn't make sense. A hot brick would give off heat, not absorb it. The emptying out of the water he understood readily enough. In chilling the air, it was forced to drop its moisture content. Otherwise, the Sonomagnet was an enigma.

A superficial examination revealed a big horn on the back side of it, next to the window, similar to the smaller one in front. They seemed to terminate in microphones attached to the inner steel box. Nothing could be seen inside the box, although Hanscom tried to peep through the louvres at its ends that per-

mitted the passage of the circulating air.

By the time July had almost gone, Hanscom had placed most of Haggledorn's units and was devoting his time chiefly to the old standard line of equipment. The experimental units had all worked perfectly, and there had been but one accident. Burpel took charge of that, pacifying the customer and shutting off his complaints by pointing out that the machine had merely done what it was designed to do, only had done it too well.

It was an instance where a customer, bragging about his new installation while showing it off to a friend, had removed the stop and put the control over as far as it would go. When the room got almost too cold to bear, the friend had jokingly suggested that a Tom and Jerry was in order. The two went down to the bar—and forgot to come back.

In an hour, there was an inch of ice clinging to the window panes, and all the water pipes passing through the office

**If shaving has you down, my man,  
Use Thin Gillettes—look spick-and-span!  
They'll give you smooth, quick shaves. What's more—  
They cost you just ten cents for four!**

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were frozen solid, and split. When frost began forming on the walls of adjoining offices, neighbors turned in an alarm.

Two hours later, Haggledorn came rushing into the building, white and shaking, and plunged into the arctic cold of the office to coax his unit back to standard performance. That afternoon, much agitated, he made the rounds of all his users and riveted the stops in so firmly that a repetition of the occurrence was made impossible. The next day, he had resumed his customary air of sullen aloofness.

"The old boy looked like he'd seen a ghost, when he dashed in there," Burpel told Hanscom, when he saw him after the incident.

"I keep telling you," observed Hanscom cynically, "that there's bound to be a limit. No machine can drink up an infinite number of B. T. Us. and not have something happen. The fact that the bird was so scared proves you can't overload even a miracle. It won't surprise me if one of these days you and I find ourselves on the wrong end of a whopping big damage suit."

IT WAS about a month after that that Hanscom found a memorandum on his desk saying that Mr. Smith of the law firm wanted to see him on an important matter. Hanscom went over at once, and was mildly surprised to find Smith meeting him at the door with his finger across his lips in the gesture of "Silence." Smith ushered him in, then went over to the Sonomagnet and deliberately pulled out the plug.

"It's cool enough in here, for a while, and we'll have to make the best of the noise. But I want to make sure we won't be overheard. *That thing can hear!*"

Hanscom looked at him in astonishment.

"At least, that's my reasoning. Now, I am going to talk plainly to you, because

I think I can trust you. Something has gone wrong, and maybe you can help out on it. Bluntly, there has been a leak of information, and one of my clients has been threatened with blackmail, and in a novel way. You appreciate that there may be conversations between a man and his attorney that would make very spicy reading if published. Such a conversation was recently held in this office, and must have been overheard. Now tell me, what do you know about this man Haggledorn?"

"Not much. But where does he come in? Is he the one who approached your client?"

"I can't say, but I suspect him by the process of elimination. My client received through the mail a phonograph record of what we said here. With it was a typewritten note saying that the record was a copy and demanding a large sum of money for the destruction of the master record, or else a second copy would be sent to a certain person mentioned who would surely make trouble.

"There was no stenographer present, and I have searched the place thoroughly for a concealed dictaphone. There is no explanation of the leak whatever, unless there is some device concealed in that machine. I would like to know why it is necessary to service it weekly, and whether those metallic ribbons on the spools have anything to do with this."

"What do the police say?"

"I have kept this to myself, so far. It is a delicate matter, and involves several prominent people. I would prefer to handle it informally, if possible."

"I don't know," said Hanscom, thoughtfully. "Haggledorn is an unprepossessing looking fellow, I'll admit. But he has a potential gold mine in this invention of his, and it's legitimate. Why should he cut corners and risk criminal prosecution?"

Smith turned the question over in his



lawyer's mind, then drily observed. "Unless his machine has some weakness that he knows and we don't—*yet*. Bear in mind that your whole campaign has been experimental, and the Sonomagnet itself is shrouded in mystery. Supposing he has found out that they won't stand up, or something, and has decided to make a quick clean-up before they are discredited?"

"Could be," grunted Hanscom, recalling Burpel's account of Haggledorn's obvious anxiety the day the machine went wild and froze an office. It was not an impossibility that some sound-recording device could be put in the machine. There were the horns and microphones in plain sight.

"I'll find out what I can, and let you know," promised Hanscom, as he left.

All afternoon he thought over what Smith had said. He found it hard to reconcile the notion of Haggledorn, the successful, if disagreeable, inventor, with the accusation of blackmail. Yet he himself had been suspicious and disgusted with the hush-hush policy of marketing the units. Admittedly, an electrically-operated cooling machine made an excellent mask for a dictaphone, if the man were inclined to use it as such, and a lawyer's office was an ideal spot to place it.

In the end, Hanscom resolved to take a couple of days off and do a little independent investigation. He knew where Haggledorn's shop was located, for on the lid of the locked chamber inside each Sonomagnet was a brass plate engraved "Warning. Do not attempt to open this box; serious damage may result. In emergency call Anton Haggledorn, Misco, N. Y."

**T**HE NEXT day, partially disguised by an old suit and a different type of hat than he usually wore, he trailed the inventor through town until the chase ended at Grand Central Station. Han-

scom watched him pay off his porter and take the two bags away from him. Then, seeing that he was on his way to the train, Hanscom bought a ticket to Misco, and followed.

That night, Hanscom crouched against the wall of Haggledorn's barn-like workshop in the woods about a mile beyond the limits of the hamlet of Misco. The shades over the windows were tightly drawn, but he found a crack under one through which he could see the whole of the interior.

Directly before him was a large masonry furnace, topped by a peculiarly designed uptake that coiled upon itself like the turns of a tuba, ending finally in a straight, slim stack that went up through the roof. To the left of it was a long trough, with a vapor hood over it, leading to another stack that went upward and was lost in the gloom of the rafters. To the right was a wooden work bench, and before that, on a high stool, perched Haggledorn, his back to the window.

He was slowly cranking a standing reel that was feeding the silvery ribbon to another table reel, in the manner of a man examining a length of picture film. Beyond him, Hanscom could see the turntable of a recording phonograph. An unearthly stream of queer sound seemed to be coming from where Haggledorn was. Hanscom listened intently, trying to identify it. Weird as its effect was, there was something suggestive of the human voice about it, although the words, if they were words, were garbled beyond recognition. Once when Haggledorn moved slightly, Hanscom saw that the moving metal ribbon was passing across the flame of a bunsen burner, and there apparently was the source of the sound.

When the reel was empty, Haggledorn rose, reached over and made some adjustments to the turntable in front of him. Then a record began to play back. What had been gibberish now came back as an



intelligible conversation. Hanscom could not hear more than snatches of it, but he gathered from the little he did pick up that the subject matter was a woman's recital of the wrongs done her by her husband, whom she was preparing to sue for divorce. A man's voice occasionally punctuated the narrative with a question or remark, and after hearing it several times, Hanscom recognized it as that of another of his Sonomagnet customers—also a lawyer.

As if satisfied with his recording, Haggledorn left the work bench and crossed the room to where his two big bags were lying. Using tongs, as Smith had described, he picked a brick from one of them and carried it to the trough. The brick was evidently still very hot, for it was smoking, and when it had been dropped into the trough and water turned on it, huge clouds of steam welled up, filling the hood overhead.

While the stream of water was cooling the brick, Haggledorn selected another reel from the other bag. This was a larger reel than the one on the work bench, and after a momentary examination of it, he took it to the side of the furnace. There he hung it on a frame and threaded the ribbon through a slot in the side of the furnace, and out through a corresponding slot on the other side and attached it to an empty reel. Then the inventor lit a bunch of oily waste and tossed it into the firebox, slammed the door shut, and turned a valve.

Hanscom could feel the thudding roar as the oil stream ignited, and no sooner had the gangling Haggledorn begun to wind the film through onto the empty reel than a tremendous trembling seemed to shake the whole fabric of the furnace. Outside the building where he was, Hanscom experienced a tickling sensation down the spine as he sensed faintly, as if it were muffled, some tremendous yet vaguely familiar sound. The eerie emo-

tion was heightened by failure to identify it. It was like the noise of a vast dream city—like New York, yet different—in a sense familiar, but strangely inverted.

Hanscom, fascinated by the resonant drumming, kept staring at the shuddering furnace. Could it be that the noise was in there, and the tortuous chimney a maze of baffles to dull and dampen the outpourings of sound?

THE MORE Hanscom saw, the more he was mystified. Burpel, that first day, had said that Haggledorn insisted that weekly servicing was needed to keep the units from becoming clogged with heat and sound. Did, then, these bricks "absorb" the heat, and the reels "absorb" the sound, and was the spectacle he was watching the process of ridding them of their load? It appeared so, certainly in the case of the brick, for the clouds of steam were still billowing up from it.

Granting countless calories were being washed out of it, how did they ever become concentrated there, the Second Law of Thermodynamics being what it is? And how could absorbed sound be coaxed out of the silvery ribbons?

Hanscom rode home that night on a late train. He had stayed long enough to see Haggledorn make another record, and cool more bricks. As to Smith's uneasiness about the attempt at blackmail, it was evident that here was the source of the trouble, although it was not equally evident what was the best course to pursue. Hanscom wanted to expose the man, but felt an embarrassment about doing it. People would laugh at him. If there had been an actual dictaphone, something that did not have to be reconciled with known physical laws, it would be easier. But to charge that a man got sound by passing a metal ribbon over a flame . . . that was absurd!

The next day he told Smith what he had seen. After he had said it all,



they both sat thinking awhile. Finally Smith broke the silence.

"That's what I expected. Now that it is confirmed, I am not sure what I want to do about it. I've already told you there are good reasons why I am unwilling to bring formal charges against him. I wish there was some way we could break up his little game—out of court, as it were."

"When is he due to come here again?"

"Monday of next week."

"All right. Lend me your machine for a couple of days. I think I can work out a little surprise for Mr. Haggledorn."

**T**HE FOLLOWING Monday night Hanscom took Smith with him to Misco. Lying outside the workshop in the same place where Hanscom had hidden before, they watched Haggledorn unpack his bags. He threw a hot brick into the trough and started it to cooling, then went on to the bench and began rigging one of the small reels for pulling across the flame. Both men outside watched him set the wax record on the turntable.

"Here," said Hanscom, handing Smith a wad of cotton, "stick this in your ears. If that's the one he took out of your machine this morning, you're going to need it."

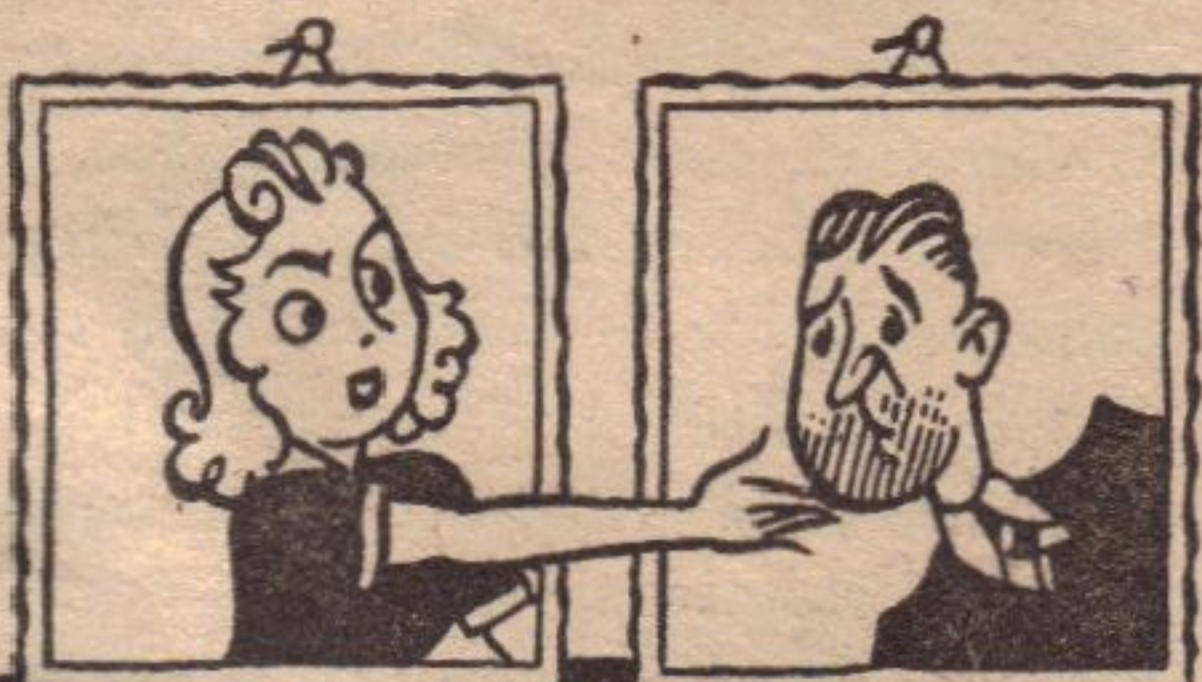
Haggledorn began slowly winding the tape across the flickering burner, and

again the same topsy-turvy conglomeration of scrambled human voices was heard. The film had nearly run to its end when . . . BOOM! The building and the whole countryside shook as if by earthquake. Haggledorn staggered back from the table, clutching at the sides of his head, then collapsed as if flung to the floor. The watchers outside had never let their eyes stray from the inventor from the moment he had begun his operations, yet they had seen not the slightest sign of a flash. They ran around to the door, which now hung half open, on one hinge, its lock broken. Inside they examined the prostrate Haggledorn. He was stunned, but alive.

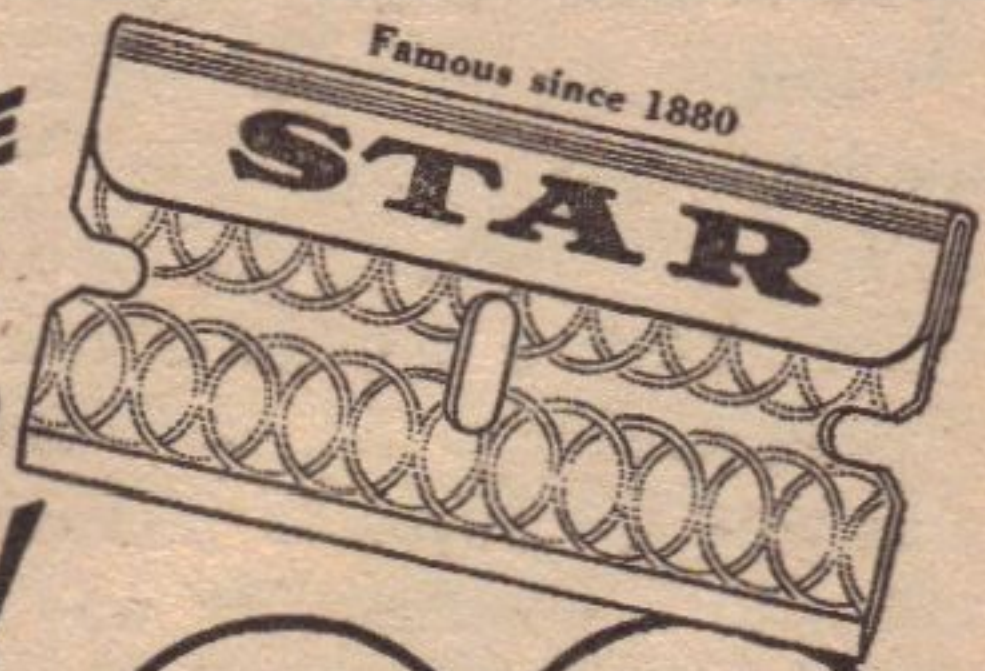
"He seems to be all right," muttered Smith. "While he's out, let's destroy those records."

The master records and some copies were found in the drawer of a cupboard, and Smith began breaking and stamping them into little pieces. While he was doing that, Hanscom seized the opportunity to unravel some of the secrets of the Sonomagnet.

He found a completely assembled unit standing against a side wall, its lid standing open. He peered into it to see the arrangement within. He saw that the reels were operated much like typewriter ribbons, feeding from a full spool to an empty one. The fat, thick ribbon ran across the inner face of the microphone



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STAR  
WAY TO  
SHAVE!**



**STAR**

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LARGEST SELLING  
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25¢**



in the larger horn in the back of the unit, while the thin, narrow one was threaded behind the small opening in front. Between them lay a smaller box, and when he reached in, he found that its lid came off.

Both the box and its lid was lined with heat-resisting lagging, such as magnesia or asbestos. Inside the box lay the brick, in contact with the terminal of a cable that led from a series of wire grids elsewhere in the cabinet, standing in the stream of the circulating fan. Between each of the grids there was a small transformer-like electrical device.

Knowing that the noise of the blast would undoubtedly soon bring inquisitive neighbors, Hanscom thought they had better leave without further delay. Hurriedly, he snatched up a section of the wire grid from the unit he was examining, and broke off a yard of the metallic tape. He rolled up the specimen and thrust it into his pocket. Then, remembering the vital part the brick seemed to play, he chipped the corner off of it with a chisel and pocketed that also. The fragment was cold. The machine it came from had evidently not yet been used.

"Come on," he urged Smith, "we've done all we can do here. This fellow's little game is all shot now. Let's forget it, and get out of here before he comes to."

**T**HE MORNING papers mentioned briefly an unexplained explosion in the laboratory of one Anton Haggledorn, an eccentric inventor of Misco. The item reported that a number of windows were broken within a radius of several miles, and that the inventor himself had been taken to a hospital. It was understood that his ear-drums were ruptured and that he was suffering from general shock.

"Deaf, huh?" grunted Hanscom, as he read it, and thought how appropriate the punishment was for the crime attempted.

He took his samples that morning to an analytical laboratory and told the head chemist there part of the story. "I'll have the report in a week," said the chemist, adding hesitantly, "I hope. These specimens seem a bit unusual; it may take longer."

Hanscom was unusually busy the next ten days. A week after the Misco expedition, there were three annual conventions of nation-wide organizations staged simultaneously in New York. The resulting crowds, making merry in the streets, added the last straw to the burdens of many harassed business men. Some, who had heretofore resisted the appeal of air-conditioning, capitulated in the face of the all-pervading din. An inquiring reporter with a sound-measuring truck cheerfully reported that the mean level of noise in the city was only twelve per cent below that of a passing subway express. It was a prosperous week for salesmen in Hanscom's line, for the tumult coincided with the season's most unbearable heat wave, even if it was a belated "Indian summer" one.

In the midst of this activity, he received a letter from the chemist telling him that his analysis was ready, if he would kindly call for it.

"These ribbons are made of *audium*," the chemist said, "a little known element that has very limited use. So far as I know, it is only used by the army, in their airplane detectors. Audium is very nearly inert, chemically. When subjected to vibration, such as sound waves, in the presence of carbon-dioxide, a compound audium-carbide is formed. You can see that in the little grey spots on the strip. Sound is an unusual activating agency in chemical reactions, but it does occur, just as light affects silver salts in photography, or percussion initiates some explosions. The strip I have here actually acts as a sort of sound track, for one of the properties of audium carbide is that the elements



become disassociated if heated, giving back the sound."

"Only backward," suggested Hanscom, recalling the garbled nature of the negative record he had overheard at Misco.

"Yes, and possibly quite violently, if the carbide is sufficiently concentrated and sufficient heat is applied. As to the other substance, we do not recognize it. We have examined it, though, and find it has an astonishingly high specific heat. I should think it could be profitably employed anywhere where it was desired to store large quantities of heat in a limited space.

"The wire grid that accompanies it is evidently a part of some type of heat injector. It is an inverted-resistance step-up transformer, if I may coin an expression. I mean by that, that just as you make an electrified wire radiate heat by increasing its resistance, you can, by perfect inversion, cause it to absorb heat by making its resistance negative. In other words, the grid may be employed as a cooling coil, extracting heat from the air, and passing it on to the next grid, boosting it step by step until its pressure is sufficient to make it enter the storage brick, whatever its temperature."

"Good Lord!" shouted Hanscom, as the full import of the analysis began to unfold itself in his brain. He thought of the blatant hubbub of the past week's conventions superimposed on the usual clamor of the city, and of the excessive heat conditions. Visions floated before him of tapes loaded with concentrated audium-carbide, running alongside a little metal box that by now must contain an incandescent brick shielded only by a thin layer of lagging.

None of the machines had been touched for two weeks, since Haggledorn had been hurt. If he had paled at a single hour's overload, how would he behave if he knew the present situation? Hanscom shuddered.

ACTING swiftly, he grabbed a telephone and got Burpel on the wire.

"Quick! Get out your list of Sonomagnet users and phone them all to disconnect them—*right now!* . . . Never mind why, I'll tell you later. Put all the girls at it . . . I'm coming right over."

Hanscom bolted out of the office, leaving the gaping chemist without explanation or apology. He ran, twisting, through the congested traffic, eluding on-rushing taxis by a hair as he darted, half-stumbling across streets, as the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle began to fall into their places in his mind. Now he knew that the little reel was designed to absorb the office sounds, the fat one in the back the street ones. That was the one that was dangerous now. Now he understood why Haggledorn renewed these parts every week and took the saturated elements away with him. Hanscom had seen him strip the heat from the bricks by drenching under running water. Now he knew that the thunder in the furnace was the baking out of the trapped street sounds in the heavy noise reel. That elaborate stack was a muffler!

Breathless, he burst into Burpel's office.

"Keep your shirt on, kid, everything's under control," assured Burpel easily. "Got 'em all. That is, all but Doc Martin. No answer over there."

Hanscom heaved a sigh of relief. All but one!

"I'll go over there myself and get the building super. . . ."

It was not an audible explosion; it was too profound for that. It was something like a colossal diapason pipe in some vast cathedral that could only be sensed by the trembling air, rather than heard. Hanscom blinked as he pushed himself away from the wall against which he had been flung. An earthquake?

The sudden wave had half-stunned every one, sweeping them inward as the windfront of a hurricane. The startled



salesmen and clerks stared vacantly at their windows, now innocent of glass. The panes were scattered in twinkling fragments all over the room. Outside, there were confused crashes, as of walls tumbling, and the tinkling of shredded falling glass.

Still dizzy, and with the sensation of walking in a dream, Hanscom staggered to the window and looked out across the square. All the buildings he could see seemed to be as before, except that they had an ominous look of vacancy until he found the explanation of it in the fact that there was not a single windowpane left in them. Below, people were running madly in circles, like angered ants, holding their hands to their ears as if in pain.

Ten minutes later, Hanscom was trying to fight his way through the police lines to get to the building where Dr. Martin's office had been located. They would not let him by, but he managed to worm through until he got close to a fire chief's car. There were many ambulances, too, rolling up and away. Ahead, the street was full of debris.

In here there was more than broken glass. Office buildings had shed their outer walls in places. The refugees of the district, filing out, dazed looking, wore clothes that hung in strips. Coats or shirts were split in many places, and Hanscom saw trousers ripped down each leg, from waist band to cuff.

"It's a new one on me," he overheard a fire official tell a reporter. "No fire, no trace of any explosive I've ever seen, and I think I've seen 'em all. Just a big noise! The doctor told me that all he's found so far are ear cases—dished-in eardrums, forty-four cases so far. What do you know about that?"

"It sure raised hell with the glass!" replied the reporter, noncommittally, looking at the ankle-deep litter of silica shards littering the street.

HANSCOM backed away and sought out Smith. He was feeling a little guilty over the multitude of deafened victims, for he was the one who had distributed the sound-concentrating units throughout the town. If only Dr. Martin had been in, this might have been averted.

Smith was obviously nervous, having suspected that there was a connection between the frantic telephone warning he had received, and the devastating explosion a few minutes afterward. Hanscom noticed with relief that Smith's cooling unit was disconnected, but also that his office was carpeted with broken glass, like every other one in Manhattan. He accepted a cigarette from Smith's trembling hand and lit it. He felt jittery himself.

"Oh, well," he philosophized, "hindsight is always better than foresight. Just think what it would have been like if the whole damn forty had gone off together and let loose the accumulation of two weeks' noise at once! I never realized before how much power canned racket has."

Smith laughed shortly, but there was not much humor in it.

"No wonder Haggledorn tried to cash in quick. By the way, what did you load the tape with, the night he got his? And how did you know how to do it?"

"Hunch, pure hunch. I figured that if he was recording sound in the units, the proof of it was to plant some there, and check it as it came out. It had to be something I could recognize, and loud enough for me to hear, because I knew I would be outside. If you remember, I borrowed your machine a few days before that. I had noticed an item in the paper that morning announcing target practice for the Coast Artillery down at Sandy Hook. I took your Sonomagnet down there and set it up near the muzzle of a sixteen-inch gun."

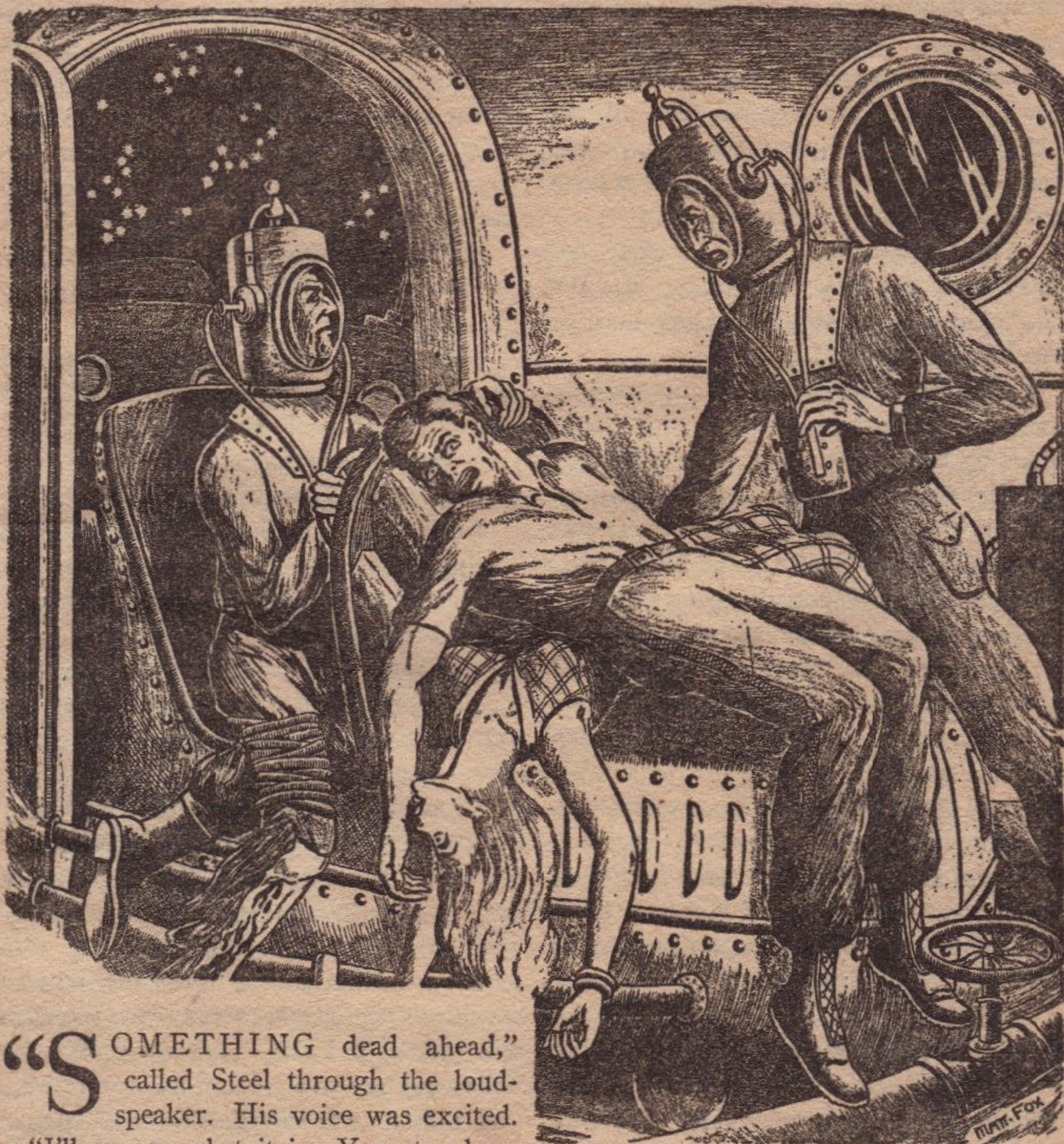
THE END



# THE DEVIL'S POCKET

An action-packed story of the dead who were yet alive, the ghastly homes of the tiny, malevolent Eyes of the Coal Sack.

By F. E. Hardart



**"S**OMETHING dead ahead," called Steel through the loud-speaker. His voice was excited.

"I'll go see what it is. You stay here and see if you can get these damned motors going," I called to Dumar, our engineer, and gloomily clumped up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Our motors had stopped inexplicably when we had first broken through into that black, foreboding emptiness in space, known as the Devil's Pocket.

Steel's small wirey body leaned like a flexible bow anxiously over the panorama screen on which was cast the weird view to be seen from all sides of the ship. His steady blue eyes were trying to penetrate the almost material blackness surrounding us to distinguish more clearly the outlines of a blacker bulk looming before us.



Tiny malevolent lights, startling in their contrast with the darkness, reflected scintillating shadows from its sides. In the past few hours we had come to hate and fear those coldly, staring eyes; they seemed to be watching us with avaricious patience.

"Looks like a space vessel," volunteered Steel. He was the crack pilot of the Douglas-Kramer Space Lines and had been offered a captaincy if he proved himself worthy in this venture.

"Yes," I agreed. "Pull in close but don't take any risk of bumping it. We don't know what might happen here in the Devil's Pocket."

I had the feeling that at any minute the heavy stellarite hull of our ship might break up beneath our feet, so precariously did the elements seemed to be balanced here in the coal-sack—one of those unfathomable black clouds in the Milky Way that had baffled astronomers for over five hundred years. Although man had already traveled to far galaxies the coal sacks were still rigidly avoided. They were known far and wide as the graveyards of space.

Many space vessels were known to have been drawn into this particular black maw by some unknown force and they had never been seen or heard of again so it had earned the nickname of the Devil's Pocket among spacemen.

I WAS beginning to wonder if entering this hellish place was worth the \$500,000 offered. True, it seemed the only way to save the Douglas-Kramer Space Lines from bankruptcy. Retrieving corpses from the *Anteres*, which had been scuttled by pirates and then allowed to drift into the Devil's Pocket, seemed hardly a decent way in which to raise money, but my brother had spent the best years of his life working hard to build up the line, and too, if relatives were willing to pay \$5,000 a head to prove that their kin were actually

dead so that they might collect immense insurance policies, who were we to say their motives were not of the highest?

"The motors are going again," shouted Dumar. His bellow needed no telephone to carry it through our small vessel. His massive head emerged from the hatchway leading from the engine room. His black, fierce eyes took in the two of us, in their inky, fathomless depths lurked an arrogant challenge to adventure. His immense bulk followed as he continued.

"The darn things started off practically by themselves. I hadn't fixed a thing on them."

"Must have been some reaction caused by our breaking through into this hellish place," Steel said as his fingers played over the control panel as an artist's fingers flash over the keys of a piano.

I anxiously leaned toward the screen to decipher the name in luminous letters on the hull of the vessel looming dark and shapeless before us.

"It isn't the *Anteres*," I said and cursed in disappointment. I was anxious to get our job finished and get out of this queer hole—if possible.

"Shall we board her and find out what happened?" Dumar queried hopefully.

"No," I answered. "You'll probably get the edge knocked off that urge for adventure when we find the *Anteres*."

Soon the dim outline of the derelict was swallowed up by swarms of those fantastic pin points of light. They seemed to be following us like a pack of hungry wolves.

I didn't want to tell Steel and Dumar what was in my mind, that perhaps a man couldn't live in that alien space. There might be radiations among those coldly staring, malevolent eyes that would suck a man's life from his body even through a space suit. But as I furtively measured the endurance of each of my companions I knew by the cold, calm light gleaming deep in Steel's eyes that he was thinking the same.



"Let's try to capture some of those damnable little staring eyes," Steel suggested in quick, clipped words.

I assented, so Dumar released the torpedo-like test box through the small air-lock fashioned for that purpose. It was controlled by radio so it kept pace with our ship as its door hung open like the jaw of a monster of the deep, waiting for some hapless victim to swim into its maw. A swarm of the staring, unblinking lights closed about it as though to examine it. Dumar's great finger swooped down upon a key of the small control box held in his hand. The door of the transparent test box flew shut but there was nothing held captive within it. Those strange, bright little creatures had fled with the speed of light.

For minutes we fished and angled for specimens of the impossible beings. It was constantly becoming more evident how intelligent and clever were the eyes of the Devil's Pocket. But snap again went the jaws of the box and there inside were four bright tiny prisoners, darting like fireflies against the transparent sides. Dumar drew the test box through the air-lock.

**F**OUR faintly visible lights, dimmer now in the brilliantly lit interior of our ship, beat against the quartz sides of the box. We could see no material bodies, no form whatever, only four unblinking, disembodied pin points of light. They

seemed wholly oblivious to us, seeking only to escape; but perhaps they were seeking escape so that they might destroy us.

"Let's allow a little air from the ship into the box to see what happens," Steel suggested.

"Excellent idea," I said and nodded to him.

He leaned over and opened a small door on the side of the box. The four beings of light flew faster than our eyes could follow to that corner. But the door allowed things to enter only through a series of passages, the doors of which opened automatically in succession after the first. As the last door sprang open one of the lights flew into the compartment. There were four blinding flashes. The brilliance stabbed into my eyes painfully. It was half a minute before I could again see clearly. The four tiny, faint lights had burst into sudden violent combustion and were falling slowly to the bottom of the quartz box. The four flames sputtered several times then died out, leaving only pin points of reddish ash resting on the quartz bottom.

I picked up the test box and headed toward the laboratory, determined to discover the nature of that ash, but a bell sounding insistently beside the control panel stopped me.

Steel ran toward the controls. Again his tireless fingers played swiftly over the keys. His long flexible fingers were in

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constant motion, not from nervousness—he didn't know what nervousness was—but from unceasing, restless energy.

"It's another space ship," he called.

In two strides I was before the panorama screen and leaning forward to decipher the name through the constantly changing, formless patterns of lights. Those steady, tiny eyes seemed like needles of cold flame being driven into my brain by some dark, phantom hand. I could make out some of the letters—A and T-E-R and S. I could have shouted for joy. The utter silent black monotony of this place was getting on my nerves.

"It's the *Anteres*," I called. "Get ready to board her, Steel. Dumar, you take over the controls. Steel, you had better wear one of those extra heavy duty suits we brought along. It will be heavier to work in but there may be dangerous rays running rampant in this God forsaken place."

I was sending only Steel at first because I didn't want to risk the lives of both men to the unknown dangers which might await them among those evil, staring eyes. Steel's quick decision and thin, wirey form would permit him to escape where Dumar's lumbering bulk would be hopelessly trapped.

I threw out a couple of tractor beams, caught the *Anteres* in their grasp, and pulled it toward our ship. Dumar cut the rocket blasts to a minimum. Unresisting, the larger vessel floated toward us. It moved so effortlessly that I had to cut the tractor beams quickly to prevent it bumping our ship fatally. Even then the shock sent a slight shiver through our light vessel.

Again I threw out the tractor beams to hold it fast. The *Anteres* moved forward beside our ship cutting twin paths through those masses of unholy lights.

The two ships clung together, bumping gently. Quickly we prepared to board the *Anteres*.

STEEL went out through the air-lock. I heard him throw the catwalk across to the other ship. Dumar's broad figure stood before the radio, legs straddled, anxiously waiting Steel's reaction to this alien place.

"Everything O. K. Am now boarding *Anteres*," came Steel's voice cheerfully over the radio.

"Am now on board *Anteres*. Everything is in disorder. That is evidently the work of the pirates." There was a few minutes silence, then Steel continued in a calm, steady voice: "All dead on board. There is a gaping hole through the shell in the main promenade. Don't see any of the crew."

"Get into one of those heavy duty suits and go help Steel cart those bodies over here," I ordered Dumar.

"Don't see why I have to wear one of those tanks. Steel doesn't seem to have needed one," Dumar growled to himself but obeyed.

"Better find the fuel, Steel," I called over the two-way radio. "You had better bring it aboard first. I am afraid we are going to need lots of it to get out of here."

"Yes, sir," Steel acknowledged.

Dumar went clumping across the deck to the air-lock. I could see his lips still working behind his helmet. Dumar liked to grumble, but his thunder was like the rumble of wheels across a bridge, inevitable yet doing no harm. I ran after him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Turn on your radio," I motioned. I still wasn't confident that everything was going to continue to run as smoothly as it had. Dumar snapped a button on the exterior of his suit.

"Yes, sir," came through the loud-speaker on the other side of the room.

The inner air-lock sprung open and Steel guided a motor dolly into the room. On it was a great fuel drum.

"Bring another drum of fuel, then start carting over those bodies."



The port hole of one of the store rooms had been opened, turning it into a natural refrigerator. The coldness of space would enter and preserve the bodies until we arrived back on earth.

Both of the men were gone back through the air-lock. An overwhelming loneliness descended upon me like a smothering blanket. We had all forgotten our fears and apprehensions in work but now as I stood motionless before the radio waiting for their voices, I thought: What if something should suddenly strike both men dead? Perhaps I had forgotten how to navigate a space ship. Could I get out of the Devil's Pocket? Panic seized me and I wanted to run, to run blindly and aimlessly just to put my muscles into action.

I pulled myself together and started humming, "The Ten Little Cosmic Rays," a chanty known to every spaceman. I tried to make it sound gay and carefree but failed miserably. My voice came to my ears weak and strained. It only helped me to recognize my fears, so I stopped.

The silence around me seemed more oppressive than ever, crushing against me from all sides. Breathing was becoming difficult.

"THEY'RE after me! They're fighting me! They'll get me, Captain!" came over the radio in Dumar's bellowing voice.

I rushed to the radio. "What's wrong?" I yelled. "I thought everyone on board was dead."

"They *are* dead. But they're fighting me!" Dumar panted.

"The passengers?" I called, still not comprehending.

*Spfft* went the radio. It was like the air suddenly released from a space suit. That was the sound of a blast being released from a heat tube.

"Pull yourself together, Dumar," I commanded sternly. "You're letting your

nerves get the better of you. Do you want the authorities to think we shot those passengers so we could bring them back as corpses?"

"Steel," I called. "Where are you? Are you all right?"

"Here I am, sir. Is anything wrong?" I heard behind me. I whirled. Steel had just rolled another fuel drum through the airlock.

"Yes! Get over there and help Dumar. He says something is attacking him."

Spacemen are not always big fearless men. Often they're badly frightened, so often that they can not merely endure it, but must defeat it. Fear itself; uncontrolled, panic-spreading fear, is their greatest danger. Let it seize them and it will thrash them to death with mental and physical agony. Dumar was in that state.

"Help me! Damn you, leaving me here at the mercy of these things!" Dumar's voice panted over the radio. "Swine! Abandoning me here to save your own dirty hides. They're strangling me! They're sucking the breath from my body!" His voice was becoming labored, jerky like the staccato bark of a dog.

I heard scuffling over the radio, bangs and thuds. Two men were fighting! Maybe each other; maybe one was a raving, inhuman lunatic. Maybe both were fighting some horrible spawn of this black, cold hell.

I didn't dare leave our ship. It was pitching and lurching as though tossed about by a stormy sea. The pull on the tractor beam jumped. Our ship seemed to be straining away from its companion as from a thing loathsome and unholy. I glanced at the screen and saw repulsor beams, stabbing out from the ship, pushing with almost as much force as our tractor beams pulled.

"It's the passengers," Steel's voice panted to me through the radio. "They're alive. But I know they're dead. They had Dumar down. Run, Dumar!"



LESS than a minute later Dumar burst through the air-lock. His great black eyes stared empty, unseeing, straight ahead. His mouth, behind his helmet, gapped loosely. He seemed not to be breathing. He was as one dead, yet moved forcibly by a soul-strangling fear. Oblivious of my presence he rushed past me straight toward the bunkroom.

Once through the door he turned to shut it. Only for a few seconds did I see his face. His strong, broad features were twisted in a grimace of mental anguish, soul-searing fear beyond description, as though some devil were twisting his entrails into knots. With fury he slammed the door shut behind him.

I ran to the bunkroom door and hammered on it.

"Come out here, Dumar," I yelled. "Come watch the motors. I'll go help Steel."

Harsh racking sobs were my only answer. It was useless to think of his helping us now.

Again I rushed back across the room to the radio. "Steel," I called. "Steel, are you all right?"

"Yes," came over the radio weakly, yet fiercely. "But one foot is pinned under the control panel. It fell on me. I can't move it. And these passengers! They're attacking more furiously. Better pull away before they board our vessel. Get away while you can."

"Shut up, Steel. You know I won't leave you there like that. Can't you burn the panel in two with your heat gun? Can't you shoot the passengers down?"

"*They're already dead,*" Steel's voice was low and steady with savage determination. "Can't you help me? I've destroyed a lot of them with the heat ray, but there are so damned many! The heat tube is almost exhausted."

There was a wrench behind me of metal scraping across metal. The tractor beam indicator had broken loose and was again

whirling around to "Release". Through the porthole I could see the other vessel hurtling away from ours. I yanked the tractor beam indicator over to "Full Strength" again and quickly wired it there with a bit of metal cable hanging on a hook nearby. The tractor beam steadily, but slowly, pulled that shadowy hold of unknown horrors back again.

I turned to the radio. "I can't help you, Steel. That ship is trying to throw ours off with repulsor beams. I have to hold the tractor beams at full strength. Dumar has cracked. Can't you get away somehow?"

"It's now or never!" I knew that grating sound was Steel gritting his teeth. "Hang on, I'll be there in a minute."

I waited breathless, apprehensive; and clung to the tractor beam indicator as it strained against the cables. I was afraid that the bars controlling the tractor beam apparatus might break.

THE air-lock door swung open slowly, and through it rolled one of the motorized dollies. Piled on it was Steel. One leg was folded under him; the other hung limply over the side of the dolly. Below the knee that leg of his space suit flapped empty, sodden and dripping with blood. Above the knee coil after coil of blood-stained cable was wound about his leg. Bulging with horror, my eyes traveled up his rigidly held body to the face behind his helmet. It was death pale, drops of blood squeezed between his teeth as he bit into a colorless lower lip.

In front of him over the dolly hung two limp bodies, one attired in feminine clothes, the other masculine. They hung there, no space suits on them, like two bags of wheat.

I rushed to Steel's side. He tried to pull himself up. I put out my arm to help, but he brushed it aside. His mouth opened and little trickles of blood ran down his chin. Again his mouth opened and shut,



but no sound issued from it. He tried again with superhuman determination. I snapped open his face plate and leaned over with my ear almost touching his lips to catch the faint words.

"Pull away—quickly—Captain. They'll board us—I had to burn off my foot—to get away." With that he collapsed, falling over the dolly limply like the two bodies beside him.

I jumped to the control panel and quickly jerked the cable from the tractor beam indicator and pulled it over to "Release". I shoved the motor levers to "Full Blast". Our ship jerked ahead and just as suddenly jerked backwards again. My stomach felt as though it had been yanked up into my chest. I glanced at the visi-screen. Tractor beams from the other ship had caught our vessel and were now trying to pull us to it again. Thousands of those tiny devilishly dancing lights were streaming from the gap in the hull of the *Anteres* toward our ship.

I flung the under rocket jets into motion. Perhaps they would lift the ship quickly enough to release us from the powerful tractor beams of the passenger ship. Again our ship gave a sudden creaking lurch; this time upwards. Our vessel was off like a bullet, forward and upward. I snapped off the under jets.

Through the visi-screen I saw the tractor beams of the dead passenger ship fishing for us, but we were already too far away for them to catch us. I set our course toward the nearest side of the Devil's Pocket and locked the controls. The rocket motors of the passenger vessel had not been running. Even if the things inhabiting it could start them, it would take too long for those immense motors to warm up for it ever to catch us.

Quickly I pulled Steel's inert body over to our first aid chest. I sprayed liquid thrombin over the raw stump of a leg, to stop the stream of blood. He had already lost a dangerous amount of blood. Then,

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as best I could with my slight knowledge of first-aid I hurriedly bandaged the awful, black-rimmed stump. While I worked I thanked God that I had brought along a man like Steel.

I stripped the heavy space suit from his body. His eyes blinked drowsily several times, then were flung wide open, horror pouring from their depths. From the cabinet I took a flask of raw, strong whisky and poured a little between his lax lips. Coughing and strangling, he attempted to sit up.

"Did we get away from them?" he asked wearily.

"Yes, but now tell me what they were. You said all the passengers were dead, then you said they attacked you."

"The passengers were all dead. But it was those infernal staring lights that were doing all the dirty work. The ship was swarming with them. They were coming in through that hole in the hull. They seem to be some sort of immaterial, intelligent beings. Evidently they have no offensive weapons of their own but somehow entered the bodies of the dead passengers and made them fight us."

"Look!" Steel screamed, pointing a weak arm toward the control panel.

THE dead girl, whom Steel had dragged into our ship, stood before the control panel manipulating the levers. I ran across the room. Her white stiff fingers were changing the course of our vessel, heading it back into the Devil's Pocket, back toward that hellish passenger ship from which we had just escaped.

"Throw them off the ship," Steel called weakly, trying to pull his limp body erect.

I grappled with the girl, pinning her resisting arms against her sides. Her body was cold and clammy, yet not rigid. For the first time she suddenly seemed aware of me. Her arms twisted and writhed with maniacal strength, trying to wriggle from my grasp. I looked into her

eyes. In their unseeing, glassy depths, danced two pin-points of light. It was impossible to believe she was dead.

A strong, cold hand grasped my arm like a band of steel and tried to yank me away from the girl. I glanced sideways at the stiff figure of the dead man whom Steel had brought from the other ship. In his eyes too burned sparks of flame.

Wrestling with two maniacs was more than I could long endure. My resistance was weakening as both clawed and tore at me. I smelled burning flesh. The hair on my right hand was singed and smoking but the ripping, tearing, and flaying of fists had ceased suddenly on my right. I glanced sideways. What had been the body of the man was only a pile of ashes and a severed, bloodless arm. A few yards away Steel swayed weakly on his knees, a smoking heat tube in his hand.

It was no great task to lift the clawing, fighting body of the girl in my arms and fling her into the air-lock compartment. As I was about to slam the door shut, four bright lights emerged swiftly from her body and flew at me. Involuntarily I stepped backward. In mid-air the four lights burst into sudden, blinding torches. Sparks flashed in all directions from the brilliantly burning, infinitesimal bodies. Again I stepped back to avoid those flying sparks, but too late. Several struck my upflung hand. They burned tiny, excruciatingly painful holes in my skin. Then the flames were dead, the tiny bodies lay on the floor specks of reddish ash.

Swiftly I swung the door shut and pulled a lever beside it. The lever would open the outer air-lock door, throwing the girl's body out into space. I felt like a murderer. It still seemed impossible that the struggling, lithe body of that lovely girl could have been dead.

With my clothes flapping in tatters around my body I quickly stepped to the control panel and again set our course out of the Devil's Pocket.



I TURNED to see how Steel was faring. He had collapsed laxly against the wall. Slipping one arm around his body, beneath his arm, I helped him into a chair.

"I brought those two along because they hadn't moved. I thought that we could collect for them at least. Those little dancing devils must have been hiding quietly inside the two bodies," Steel's voice hissed between clenched teeth.

He must have been suffering agonies; I turned to get a hypodermic needle from the cabinet.

"Let's see your hand," Steel clutched at my arm. As he examined my hand he gripped it harshly, trying to hide the pain he was suffering.

"Just as I thought. *Phosphorus burns!* The bodies of some of the passengers laying about the ship looked as though their bones and teeth had been eaten away. Those lights are living entities of phosphorus. This hellish black cloud has been their home for lord only knows how many thousands of years."

Steel winced, stopped speaking for a moment. His teeth were clenched in pain. I rushed to him with the hypodermic, bared his arm, swabbed it with iodine. I squeezed a drop from the needle, and said, "Hold on a moment."

He grinned at me. I injected the sedative. It took almost immediate effect. He was dropping off to sleep even as he said:

"Evidently they have never had a planet of their own, but when man began traveling in space some of the rocket ships blundered into their dark universe here. They learned how much more convenient and efficient a material habitation and human bodies were that now, like the grave, they have never enough, especially since they destroy the bodies by devouring all parts containing phosphorus. Evidently they can't enter living bodies. When I finally escaped they realized how near

done for we were so they tried to pull us back.

"But they might yet drill through the hull of our ship. See if they're trying."

He was almost unconscious by now, holding on by sheer will-power.

I rushed to the panorama screen to see if we were still surrounded by gleaming myriads of those horrible phosphorus beings. But stars stared from a friendly, familiar sky about us and I knew that we had finally escaped from the Devil's Pocket.

"We're safe, Steel," I cried. "They're gone—" But he was asleep. That was my opportunity; I stripped the tattered clothing from his wound, and began to cauterize it, to prevent it from becoming infected. I had no antiseptics, at least none powerful enough to be of any use. My surgical equipment—for our medicine chest had been damaged in the struggle with the living-dead passengers—consisted of strips of cloth for bandages and a tourniquet and a heat-tube to cauterize the wound.

But it was sufficient, for Steel lived, and walks around today on his artificial legs as though he had never known a moment's illness.

IT WAS great to get back to the Earth again—it always is, but never as much as when the trip has been difficult. I was practically a nervous wreck on the way back, but one night's sleep in a terrestrial bed put me in tip-top shape.

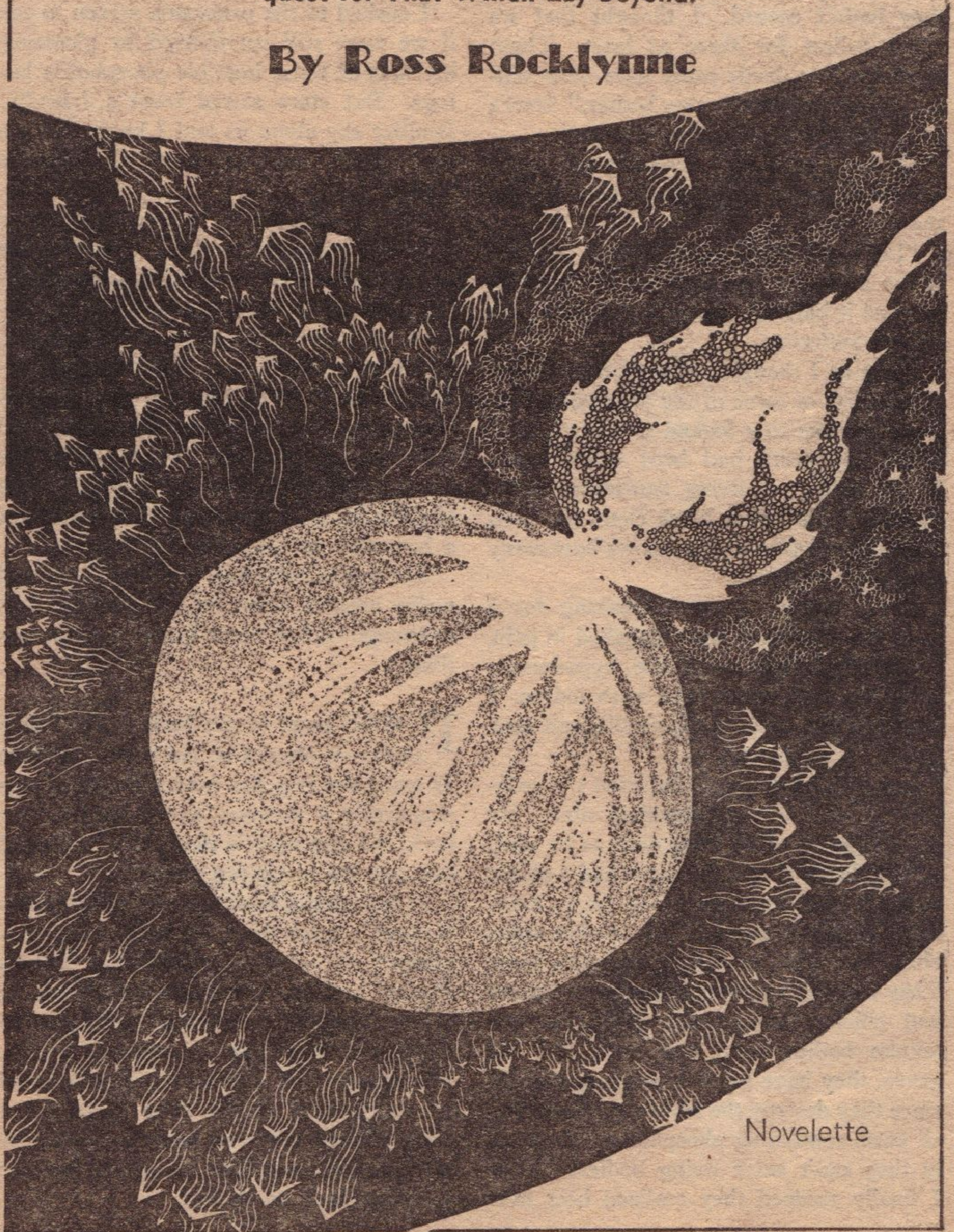
A few weeks later a dozen of Douglas-Kramer's space ships, equipped with compressed air sprays, entered the Devil's Pocket and the other similar clouds in space, and in a blazing conflagration wiped out those alien, dangerous beings. We earned the everlasting gratitude of all the planets of the solar system, but what pleased me even more was that the salvage was more than enough to put our company back on its feet.



# INTO THE DARKNESS

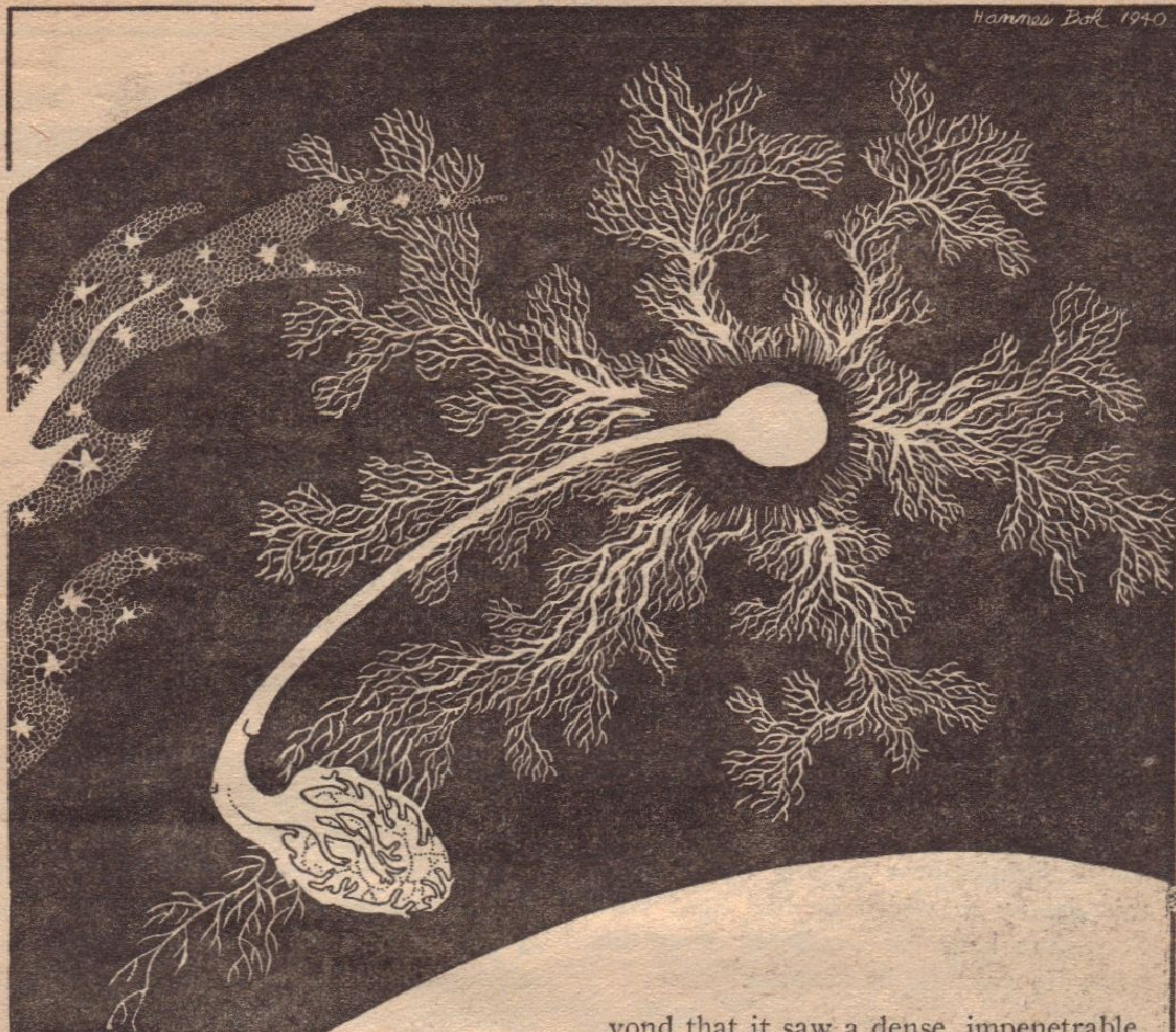
The incredible story of science fiction's newest and most utterly strange hero, Darkness, the great globe of pure force, on the vast quest for That Which Lay Beyond.

By **Ross Rocklynne**



Novelette





## The Strangest Story Ever Published!

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Birth of "Darkness"

**O**UT in space, on the lip of the farthest galaxy, and betwixt two star clusters, there came into being a luminiferous globe that radiated for light-years around. A life had been born!

It became aware of light; one of its visions had become activated. First it saw the innumerable suns and nebulae whose radiated energy now fed it. Be-

yond that it saw a dense, impenetrable darkness.

The darkness intrigued it. It could understand the stars, but the darkness it could not. The babe probed outward several light-years and met only lightlessness. It probed further, and further, but there was no light. Only after its visions could not delve deeper did it give up, but a strange seed had been sown; that there was light on the far edge of the darkness became its innate conviction.

Wonders never seemed to cease parading themselves before this newly-born. It became aware of another personality hovering near, an energy creature thirty millions of miles across. At its core hung a globe of subtly glowing green light one million miles in diameter.



He explored this being with his vision, and it remained still during his inspection. He felt strange forces plucking at him, forces that filled him to overflowing with peacefulness. At once, he discovered a system of energy waves having marvelous possibilities.

"Who are you?" these waves were able to inquire of that other life.

Softly soothing, he received answer.

"I am your mother."

"You mean—?"

"You are my son—my creation. I shall call you—Darkness. Lie here and grow, Darkness, and when you are many times larger, I will come again."

She had vanished, swallowed untraceably by a vast spiral nebula—a cloud of swiftly twisting stardust.

He lay motionless, strange thoughts flowing. Mostly he wondered about the sea of lightlessness lapping the shore of this galaxy in which he had been born. Sometime later, he wondered about life, what life was, and its purpose.

"When *she* comes again, I shall ask her," he mused. "Darkness, she called me—Darkness!"

His thoughts swung back to the darkness.

For five million years he bathed himself in the rays that permeate space. He grew. He was ten million miles in diameter.

His mother came; he saw her hurtling toward him from a far distance. She stopped close.

"You are much larger, Darkness. You grow faster than the other newly-born." He detected pride in her transmitted thoughts.

"I have been lying here, thinking," he said. "I have been wondering, and I have come to guess at many things. There are others, like you and myself."

"There are thousands of others. I am going to take you to them. Have you tried propellents?"

"I have not tried, but I shall." There was a silence. "I have discovered the propellents," said Darkness, puzzled, "but they will not move me."

She seemed amused. "That is one thing you do not know, Darkness. You are inhabiting the seventeenth band of hyperspace; propellents will not work there. See if you can expand."

ALL these were new things, but instinctively he felt himself expand to twice his original size.

"Good. I am going to snap you into the first band. . . . There. Try your propellents."

He tried them, and, to his intense delight, the flaring lights that were the stars fled past. So great was his exhilaration that he worked up a speed that placed him several light-years from his Mother.

She drew up beside him. "For one so young, you have speed. I shall be proud of you. I feel, Darkness," and there was wistfulness in her tone, "that you will be different from the others."

She searched his memory swirls. "But try not to be too different."

Puzzled at this, he gazed at her, but she turned away. "Come."

He followed her down the aisles formed by the stars, as she accommodated her pace to his.

They stopped at the sixth galaxy from the abyss of lightlessness. He discerned thousands of shapes that were his kind moving swiftly past and around him. These, then, were his people.

She pointed them out to him. "You will know them by their vibrations, and the varying shades of the colored globes of light at their centers."

She ran off a great list of names which he had no trouble in impressing on his memory swirls.

"Radiant, Vibrant, Swift, Milky, Incandescent, Great Power, Sun-eater, Light-year. . . ."



"Come, I am going to present you to Oldster."

They whirled off to a space seven light-years distant. They stopped, just outside the galaxy. There was a peculiar snap in his consciousness.

"Oldster has isolated himself in the sixth band of hyper-space," said his Mother.

Where before he had seen nothing save inky space, dotted with masses of flaming, tortured matter, he now saw an energy creature whose aura fairly radiated old age. And the immense purple globe which hung at his core, lacked a certain vital luster which Darkness had instinctively linked with his own youth and boundless energy.

His Mother caught the old being's attention, and Darkness felt his thought-rays contact them.

"Oh, it's you, Sparkle," the old being's kindly thoughts said. "And who is it with you?"

Darkness saw his Mother, Sparkle, shoot off streams of crystalline light.

"This is my first son."

The newly-born felt Oldster's thought-rays going through his memory swirls.

"And you have named him Darkness," said Oldster slowly. "Because he has wondered about it." His visions withdrew, half-absently. "He is so young, and yet he is a thinker; already he thinks about life."

For long and long Oldster bent a penetrating gaze upon him. Abruptly, his vision rays swung away and centered on a tiny, isolated group of stars. There was a heavy, dragging silence.

"Darkness," Oldster said finally, "your thoughts are useless." The thoughts now seemed to come from an immeasurable distance, or an infinitely tired mind. "You are young, Darkness. Do not think so much—so much that the happiness of life is destroyed in the over-estimation of it. When you wish, you may come to see me.

I shall be in the sixth band for many millions of years."

Abruptly, Oldster vanished. He had snapped both Mother and son back in the first band.

She fixed her vision on him. "Darkness, what he says is true—every word. Play for awhile—there are innumerable things to do. And once in great intervals, if you wish, go to see Oldster; but for a long time do not bother him with your questions."

"I will try," answered Darkness, in sudden decision.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Cosmic Children

**D**ARKNESS played. He played for many millions of years. With playmates of his own age, he roamed through and through the endless numbers of galaxies that composed the universe. From one end to another he dashed in a reckless obedience to Oldster's command.

He explored the surfaces of stars, often disrupting them into fragments, sending scalding geysers of belching flame millions of miles into space. He followed his companions into the swirling depths of the green-hued nebulae that hung in intergalactic space. But to disturb these mighty creations of nature was impossible. Majestically they rolled around and around, or coiled into spirals, or at times condensed into matter that formed beautiful, hot suns.

Energy to feed on was rampant here, but so densely and widely was it distributed that he and his comrades could not even dream of absorbing more than a trillionth part of it in all their lives.

He learned the mysteries of the forty-seven bands of hyper-space. He learned to snap into them or out again into the first or true band at will. He knew the delights of blackness impenetrable in the



fifteenth band, of a queerly illusory multiple existence in the twenty-third, and an equally strange sensation of speeding away from himself in an opposite direction in the thirty-first, and of the forty-seventh, where all space turned into a nightmarish concoction of cubistic suns and galaxies.

Incomprehensible were those forty-seven bands. They were coexistent in space, yet they were separated from each other by a means which no one had ever discovered. In each band were unmistakable signs that it was the same universe. Darkness only knew that each band was one of forty-seven subtly differing faces which the universe possessed, and the powers of his mind experienced no difficulty in allowing him to cross the unseen bridges which spanned the gulfs between them.

And he made no attempts toward finding the solution—he was determined to cease thinking, for the time being at least. He was content to play, and to draw as much pleasure and excitement as he could from every new possibility of amusement.

But the end of all *that* came, as he had suspected it would. He played, and loved all this, until. . . .

He had come to his fifty-millionth year, still a youth. The purple globe at his core could have swallowed a sun a million miles in diameter, and his whole body could have displaced fifty suns of that size. For a period of a hundred thousand years he lay asleep in the seventh band, where a soft, colorless light pervaded the universe.

He awoke, and was about to transfer himself to the first band and rejoin the children of Radiant, Light-year, Great Power and all those others.

**H**E STOPPED, almost dumbfounded, for a sudden, overwhelming antipathy for companionship had come over him. He discovered, indeed, that he never wanted to join his friends again. While he had slept, a metamorphosis had come

about, and he was as alienated from his playmates as if he had never known them.

What had caused it? Something. Perhaps, long before his years, he had passed into the adult stage of mind. Now he was rebelling against the friendships which meant nothing more than futile play.

Play! Bouncing huge suns around like rubber balls, and then tearing them up into solar systems; chasing one another up the scale through the forty-seven bands, and back again; darting about in the immense spaces between galaxies, rendering themselves invisible by expanding to ten times normal size.

He did not want to play, and he never wanted to see his friends again. He did not hate them, but he was intolerant of the characteristics which bade them to disport amongst the stars for eternity.

He was not mature in size, but he felt he had become an adult, while they were still children—tossing suns the length of a galaxy, and then hurling small bits of materialized energy around them to form planets; then just as likely to hurl huger masses to disrupt the planetary systems they so painstakingly made.

He had felt it all along—this superiority. He had manifested it by besting them in every form of play they conceived. They generally bungled everything, more apt to explode a star into small fragments than to whirl it until centrifugal force threw off planets.

"I have become an adult in mind, if not in body; I am at the point where I must accumulate wisdom, and perhaps sorrow," he thought whimsically. "I will see Oldster, and ask him my questions—the questions I have thus far kept in the background of my thoughts. But," he added thoughtfully, "I have a feeling that even his wisdom will fail to enlighten me. Nevertheless, there must be answers. What is life? Why is it? And there must be—another universe beyond the darkness that hems this one in."



Darkness reluctantly turned and made a slow trail across that galaxy and into the next, where he discovered those young energy creatures with whom it would be impossible to enjoy himself again.

He drew up, and absently translated his time standard to one corresponding with theirs, a rate of consciousness at which they could observe the six planets whirling around a small, white-hot sun as separate bodies, and not mere rings of light.

They were gathered in numbers of some hundreds around this sun, and Darkness hovered on the outskirts of the crowd, watching them moodily.

One of the young purple lights, Cosmic by name, threw a mass of matter a short distance into space, reached out with a tractor ray and drew it in. He swung it 'round and 'round on the tip of that ray, gradually forming ever-decreasing circles. To endow the planet with a velocity that would hurl it unerringly between the two outermost planetary orbits required a delicate sense of compensatory adjustment between the factors of mass, velocity, and solar attraction.

When Cosmic had got the lump of matter down to an angular velocity that was uniform, Darkness knew an irritation he had never succeeded in suppressing. An intuition, which had unfailingly proved itself accurate, told him that anything but creating an orbit for that planet was likely to ensue.

"Cosmic." He contacted the planet-maker's thought rays. "Cosmic, the velocity you have generated is too great. The whole system will break up."

"Oh, Darkness." Cosmic threw a vision on him. "Come on, join us. You say the speed is wrong? Never; you are! I've calculated everything to a fine point."

"To the wrong point," insisted Darkness stubbornly. "Undoubtedly, your estimation of the planet's mass is the factor which makes your equation incorrect. Lower the velocity. You'll see."

COSMIC continued to swing his lump of matter, but stared curiously at Darkness.

"What's the matter with you?" he inquired. "You don't sound just right. What does it matter if I do calculate wrong, and disturb the system's equilibrium? We'll very probably break up the whole thing later, anyway."

A flash of passion came over Darkness. "That's the trouble," he said fiercely. "It doesn't matter to any of you. You will always be children. You will always be playing. Careful construction, joyous destruction—that is the creed on which you base your lives. Don't you feel as if you'd like, sometime, to quit playing, and do something—worthwhile?"

As if they had discovered a strangely different set of laws governing an alien galaxy, the hundreds of youths, greens and purples, stared at Darkness.

Cosmic continued swinging the planet he had made through space, but he was plainly puzzled. "What's wrong with you, Darkness? What else is there to do except to roam the galaxies, and make suns? I can't think of a single living thing that might be called more worthwhile."

"What good is playing?" answered Darkness. "What good is making a solar system? If you made one, and then, perhaps, vitalized it with life, that would be worthwhile! Or think, think! About yourself, about life, why it is, and what it means in the scheme of things! Or," and he trembled a little, "try discovering what lies beyond the veil of lightlessness which surrounds the universe."

The hundreds of youths looked at the darkness.

Cosmic stared anxiously at him. "Are you crazy? We all know there's nothing beyond. Everything that is is right here in the universe. That blackness is just empty, and it stretches away from here forever."

"Where did you get that information?"



Darkness inquired scornfully. "You don't know that. Nobody does. But I am going to know! I awoke from sleep a short while ago, and I couldn't bear the thought of play. I wanted to do something substantial. So I am going into the darkness."

He turned his gaze hungrily on the deep abyss hemming in the stars. There were thousands of years, even under its lower time-standard, in which awe dominated the gathering. In his astonishment at such an unheard-of intention, Cosmic entirely forgot his circling planet. It lessened in velocity, and then tore loose from the tractor ray that had become weak, in a tangent to the circle it had been performing.

It sped toward that solar system, and entered between the orbits of the outmost planets. Solar gravitation seized it, the lone planet took up an erratic orbit, and then the whole system had settled into complete stability, with seven planets where there had been six.

"You see," said Darkness, with a note of unsteady mirth, "if you had used your intended speed, the system would have coalesced. The speed of the planet dropped, and then escaped you. Some blind chance sent it in the right direction. It was purely an accident. Now throw in a second sun, and watch the system break up. That has always amused you." His aura quivered. "Goodbye, friends."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Oldster

HE WAS gone from their sight forever. He had snapped into the sixth band.

He ranged back to the spot where Oldster should have been. He was not.

"Probably in some other band," thought Darkness, and went through all the others, excepting the fifteenth, where resided a

complete lack of light. With a feeling akin to awe, since Oldster was apparently in none of them, he went into the fifteenth, and called out.

There was a period of silence. Then Oldster answered, in his thoughts a cadence of infinite weariness.

"Yes, my son; who calls me?"

"It is I, Darkness, whom Sparkle presented to you nearly fifty million years ago." Hesitating, an unexplainable feeling, as of sadness unquenchable, came to him.

"I looked for you in the sixth," he went on in a rush of words, "but did not expect to find you here, isolated, with no light to see by."

"I am tired of seeing, my son. I have lived too long. I have tired of thinking and of seeing. I am sad."

Darkness hung motionless, hardly daring to interrupt the strange thought of this incredible ancient. He ventured timidly, "It is just that I am tired of playing, Oldster, tired of doing nothing. I should like to accomplish something of some use. Therefore, I have come to you, to ask you three questions, the answers to which I must know."

Oldster stirred restlessly. "Ask your questions."

"I am curious about life." Oldster's visitor hesitated nervously, and then went on, "It has a purpose, I know, and I want to know that purpose. That is my first question."

"But why, Darkness? What makes you think life *has* a purpose, an ultimate purpose?"

"I don't know," came the answer, and for the first time Darkness was startled with the knowledge that he really didn't! "But there must be some purpose!" he cried.

"How can you say 'must'? Oh, Darkness, you have clothed life in garments far too rich for its ordinary character! You have given it the sacred aspect of



meaning! There is no meaning to it. Once upon a time the spark of life fired a blob of common energy with consciousness of its existence. From that, by some obscure evolutionary process, we came. That is all. We are born. We live, and grow, and then we die! After that, there is nothing! Nothing!"

SOMETHING in Darkness shuddered violently, and then rebelliously. But his thoughts were quiet and tense. "I won't believe that! You are telling me that life is only meant for death, then. Why—why, if that were so, why should there be life? No, Oldster! I feel that there must be something which justifies my existence."

Was it pity that came flowing along with Oldster's thoughts? "You will never believe me. I knew it. All my ancient wisdom could not change you, and perhaps it is just as well. Yet you may spend a lifetime in learning what I have told you."

His thoughts withdrew, absently, and then returned.

"Your other questions, Darkness."

For a long time Darkness did not answer. He was of half a mind to leave Oldster, and leave it to his own experiences to solve his other problems. His resentment was hotter than a dwarf sun, for a moment. But it cooled and though he was beginning to doubt the wisdom to

which Oldster laid claim, he continued with his questioning.

"What is the use of the globe of purple light which forever remains at my center, and even returns, no matter how far I hurl it from me?"

Such a wave of mingled agitation and sadness passed from the old being that Darkness shuddered. Oldster turned on him with extraordinary fierceness. "Do not learn *that* secret! I will not tell you! What might I not have spared myself had I not sought and found the answer to that riddle! I was a thinker, Darkness, like you! Darkness, if you value—Come, Darkness," he went on in a singularly broken manner, "your remaining question." His thought rays switched back and forth with an uncommon sign of utter chaos of mind.

Then they centered on Darkness again. "I know your other query, Darkness. I know, knew when first Sparkle brought you to me, eons ago.

"What is beyond the darkness? That has occupied your mind since your creation. What lies on the fringe of the lightless section by which this universe is bounded?

"I do not know, Darkness. Nor does anyone know."

"But you *must* believe there is something beyond; cried Darkness.

"Darkness, in the dim past of our race, beings of your caliber have tried—five of





them I remember in my time, billions of years ago. But, they never came back. They left the universe, hurling themselves into that awful void, and they never came back.

"How do you know they didn't reach that foreign universe?" asked Darkness breathlessly.

"Because they didn't come back," answered Oldster, simply. "If they could have gotten across, at least one or two of them would have returned. They never reached that universe. Why? All the energy they were able to accumulate for that staggering voyage was exhausted. And they dissipated—died—in the energyless emptiness of the darkness."

"There must be a way to cross!" said Darkness violently. "There must be a way to gather energy for the crossing! Oldster, you are destroying my life-dream! I have wanted to cross. I want to find the edge of the darkness. I want to find life there—perhaps then I will find the meaning of all life!"

"Find the—" began Oldster pityingly, then stopped, realizing the futility of completing the sentence.

"It is a pity you are not like the others, Darkness. Perhaps they understand that it is as purposeful to lie sleeping in the seventh band as to discover the riddle of the darkness. They are truly happy, you are not. Always, my son, you over-estimate the worth of life."

"Am I wrong in doing so?"

"No. Think as you will, and think that life is high. There is no harm. Dream your dream of great life, and dream your dream of another universe. There is joy even in the sadness of unattainment."

Again that long silence, and again the smoldering flame of resentment in Darkness' mind. This time there was no quenching of that flame. It burned fiercely.

"I will not dream!" said Darkness furiously. "When first my visions be-

came activated, they rested on the darkness, and my new-born thought-swirls wondered about the darkness, and knew that something lay beyond it!

"And whether or not I die in that void, I am going into it!"

ABRUPTLY, irately, he snapped from the fifteenth band into the first, but before he had time to use his propellents, he saw Oldster, a giant body of intense, swirling energies of pure light, materialize before him.

"Darkness, stop!" and Oldster's thoughts were unsteady. "Darkness," he went on, as the younger energy creature stared spellbound, "I had vowed to myself never to leave the band of lightlessness. I have come from it, a moment, for—you!"

"You will die. You will dissipate in the void! You will never cross it, if it can be crossed, with the limited energy your body contains!"

He seized Darkness' thought swirls in tight bands of energy.

"Darkness, there is knowledge that I possess. Receive it!"

With new-born wonder, Darkness erased consciousness. The mighty accumulated knowledge of Oldster sped into him in a swift flow, a great tide of space-lore no other being had ever possessed.

The inflow ceased, and as from an immeasurably distant space came Oldster's parting words:

"Darkness, farewell! Use your knowledge, use it to further your dream. Use it to cross the darkness."

Again fully conscious, Darkness knew that Oldster had gone again into the fifteenth band of utter lightlessness, in his vain attempt at peace.

He hung tensely motionless in the first band, exploring the knowledge that now was his. At the portent of one particular portion of it, he trembled.

In wildest exhilaration, he thrust out



his propellents, dashing at full speed to his Mother.

He hung before her.

"Mother, I am going into the darkness!"

There was a silence, pregnant with her sorrow. "Yes, I know. It was destined when first you were born. For that I named you Darkness." A restless quiver of sparks left her. Her gaze sad and loving. She said, "Farewell, Darkness, my son."

She wrenched herself from true space, and he was alone. The thought stabbed him. He was alone—alone as Oldster.

Struggling against the vast depression that overwhelmed him, he slowly started on his way to the very furthest edge of the universe, for there lay the Great Energy.

Absently he drifted across the galaxies, the brilliant denizens of the cosmos, lying quiescent on their eternal black beds. He drew a small sun into him, and converted it into energy for the long flight.

And suddenly afar off he saw his innumerable former companions. A cold mirth seized him. Playing! The folly of children, the aimlessness of stars!

He sped away from them, and slowly increased his velocity, the thousands of galaxies flashing away behind. His speed mounted, a frightful acceleration carrying him toward his goal.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Beyond Light

IT TOOK him seven millions of years to cross the universe, going at the tremendous velocity he had attained. And he was in a galaxy whose far flung suns hung out into the darkness, were themselves traveling into the darkness at the comparatively slow pace of several thousand miles a second.

Instantaneously, his vision rested on an immense star, a star so immense that he

felt himself unconsciously expand in an effort to rival it. So titanic was its mass that it drew all light rays save the short ultra-violet back into it.

It was hot, an inconceivable mass of matter a billion miles across. Like an evil, sentient monster of the skies it hung, dominating the tiny suns of this galaxy that were perhaps its children, to Darkness flooding the heavens with ultra-violet light from its great expanse of writhing, coiling, belching surface; and mingled with that light was a radiation of energy so virulent that it ate its way painfully into his very brain.

Still another radiation impinged on him, an energy which, were he to possess its source, would activate his propellents to such an extent that his velocity would pale any to which his race had attained in all its long history!—would hurl him into the darkness at such an unthinkable rate that the universe would be gone in the infinitesimal part of a second!

But how hopeless seemed the task of rending it from that giant of the universe! The source of that energy, he knew with knowledge that was sure, was matter, matter so incomparably dense, its electrons crowding each other till they touched, that even that furiously molten star could not destroy it!

He spurred back several million of miles, and stared at it. Suddenly he knew fear, a cold fear. He felt that the sun was animate, that it knew he was waiting there, that it was prepared to resist his pitiable onslaughts. And as if in support of his fears, he felt rays of such intense repelling power, such alive, painful malignancy that he almost threw away his mad intentions of splitting it.

"I have eaten suns before," he told himself, with the air of one arguing against himself. "I can at least split that one open, and extract the morsel that lies in its interior."

He drew into him as many of the sur-



rounding suns as he was able, converting them into pure energy. He ceased at last, for no longer could his body a giant complexity of swarming intense fields sixty millions of miles across, assimilate more.

Then, with all the acceleration he could muster, he dashed headlong at the celestial monster.

It grew and expanded, filling all the skies until he could no longer see anything but it. He drew near its surface. Rays of fearful potency smote him until he convulsed in the whiplash agony of it. At frightful velocity, he contacted the heaving surface, and—made a tiny dent some millions of miles in depth.

He strove to push forward, but streams of energy repelled him, energy that flung him away from the star in acceleration.

**H**E STOPPED his backward flight, fighting his torment, and threw himself upon the star again. It repulsed him with an uncanny likeness to a living thing. Again and again he went through the agonizing process, to be as often thrust back.

He could not account for those repelling rays, which seemed to operate in direct contrariness to the star's obviously great gravitational field, nor did he try to account for them. There were mysteries in space which even Oldster had never been able to solve.

But there was a new awe in him. He hung in space, spent and quivering.

"It is *almost* alive," he thought, and then adopted new tactics. Rushing at the giant, he skimmed over and through its surface in titanic spirals, until he had swept it entirely free of raging, incandescent gases. Before the star could replenish its surface, he spiraled it again, clinging to it until he could no longer resist the repelling forces, or the burning rays which impinged upon him.

The star now lay in the heavens dimin-

ished by a tenth of its former bulk. Darkness, hardly able to keep himself together, retired a distance from it and discarded excess energy.

He went back to the star.

Churning seas of pure light flickered fitfully across. Now and then there were belchings of matter bursting within itself.

Darkness began again. He charged, head on. He contacted, bored millions of miles, and was thrown back with mounting velocity. Hurling back into space, Darkness finally knew that all these tactics would in the last analysis prove useless. His glance roving, it came to rest on a dense, redly glowing sun. For a moment it meant nothing, and then he knew, knew that here at last lay the solution.

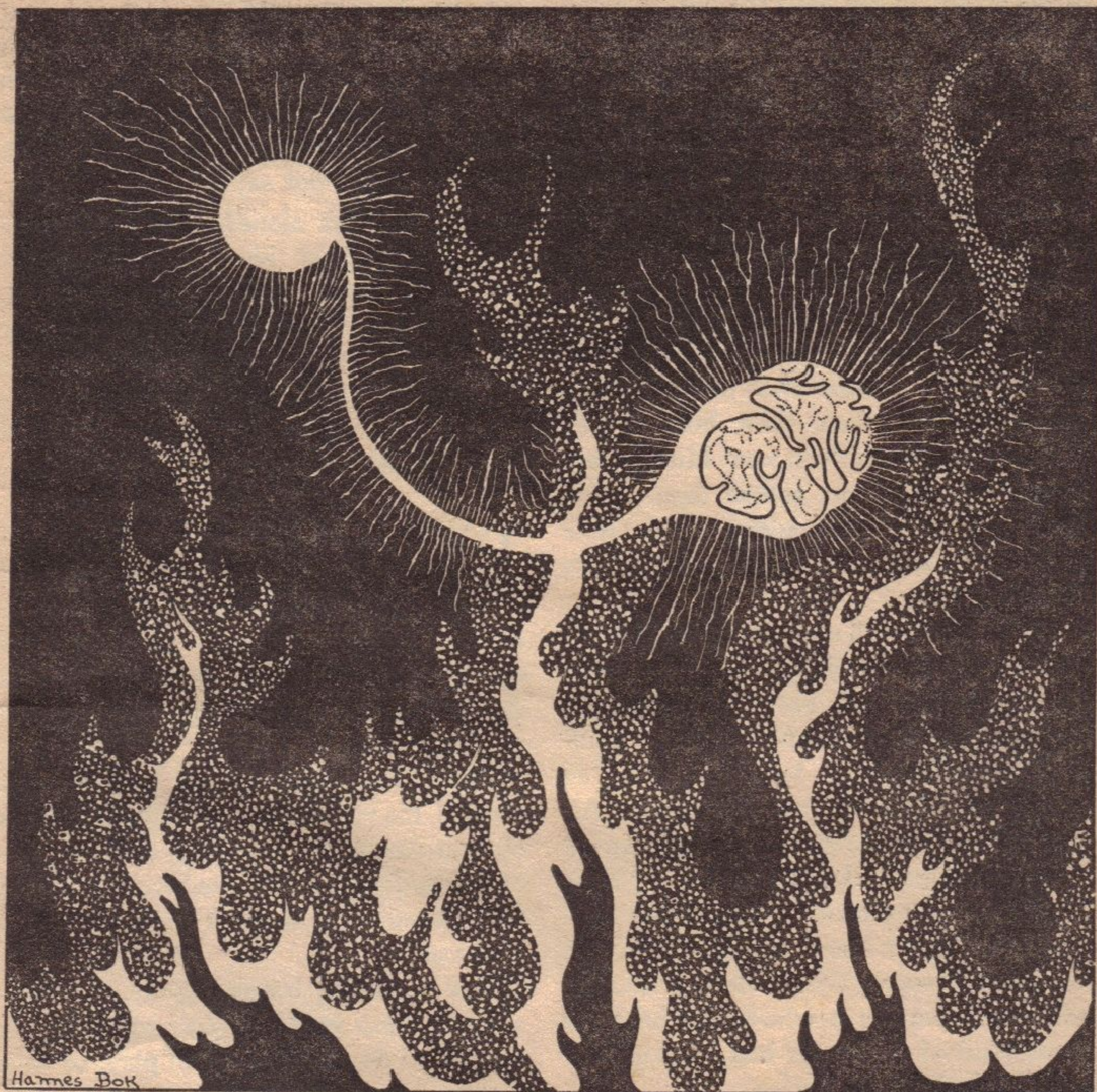
He plucked that dying star from its place, and swinging it in huge circles on the tip of a tractor ray, flung it with the utmost of his savage force at the gargantuan star.

Fiercely, he watched the smaller sun approach its parent. Closer, closer, and then—they collided! A titanic explosion ripped space, sending out wave after wave of cosmic rays, causing an inferno of venomous, raging flames that extended far into the skies, licking it in a fury of utter abandon. The mighty sun split wide open, exhibiting a violet hot, gaping maw more than a billion miles wide.

Darkness activated his propellents, and dropped into the awful cavity until he was far beneath its rim, and had approached the center of the star where lay that mass of matter which was the source of the Great Energy. To his sight, it was invisible, save as a blank area of nothingness, since light rays of no wave-length whatsoever could leave it.

Darkness wrapped himself exotically around the sphere, and at the same time the two halves of the giant star fell together, imprisoning him at its core.





THIS possibility he had not overlooked. With concentrated knots of force, he ate away the merest portion of the surface of the sphere, and absorbed it in him. He was amazed at the metamorphosis. He became aware of a vigor so infinite that he felt nothing could withstand him.

Slowly, he began to expand. He was inexorable. The star could not stop him; it gave. It cracked, great gaping cracks which parted with displays of blinding light and pure heat. He continued to grow, pushing outward.

With the sphere of Great Energy, which was no more than ten million miles across,

in his grasp, he continued inflation. A terrific blast of malignant energy ripped at him; cracks millions of miles in length appeared, cosmic displays of pure energy flared. After that, the gargantua gave way before Darkness so readily that he had split it up into separate parts before he ever knew it.

He then became aware that he was in the center of thousands of large and small pieces of the star that were shooting away from him in all directions, forming new suns that would chart individual orbits for themselves.

He had conquered. He hung motionless, grasping the sphere of Great Energy



at his center, along with the mystic globe of purple light.

He swung his vision on the darkness, and looked at it in fascination for a long time. Then, without a last look at the universe of his birth, he activated his propellents with the nameless Great Energy, and plunged into that dark well.

All light, save that he created, vanished. He was hemmed in on all sides by the vastness of empty space. Exhaltation, coupled with an awareness of the infinite power in his grasp, took hold of his thoughts and made them soar. His acceleration was minimum rather than maximum, yet in a brief space of his time standard he traversed uncountable billions of light years.

Darkness ahead, and darkness behind, and darkness all around—that had been his dream. It had been his dream all through his life, even during those formless years in which he had played, in obedience to Oldster's admonishment. Always there had been the thought—what lies at the other end of the darkness? Now he was in the darkness, and a joy such as he had never known claimed him. He was on the way! Would he find another universe, a universe which had bred the same kind of life as he had known? He could not think otherwise.

His acceleration was incredible! Yet he knew that he was using a minimum of power. He began to step it up, swiftly increasing even the vast velocity which he had attained. Where lay that other universe? He could not know, and he had chosen no single direction in which to leave his own universe. There had been no choice of direction. Any line stretching into the vault of the darkness might have ended in that alien universe. . . .

Not until a million years had elapsed did his emotions subside. Then there were other thoughts. He began to feel a dreadful fright, a fright that grew on him as he left his universe farther behind.

He was hurtling into the darkness that none before him had crossed, and few had dared to try crossing, at a velocity which he finally realized he could attain, but not comprehend. Mind could not think it, thoughts could not say it!

And—he was alone! *Alone!* An icy hand clutched at him. He had never known the true meaning of that word. There were none of his friends near, nor his Mother, nor great-brained Oldster—there was no living thing within innumerable light-centuries. *He* was the only life in the void!

**T**HUS, for almost exactly ninety millions of years he wondered and thought, first about life, then the edge of the darkness, and lastly the mysterious energy field eternally at his core. He found the answer to two, and perhaps, in the end, the other.

Ever, each infinitesimal second that elapsed, his visions were probing hundreds of light-years ahead, seeking the first sign of that universe he believed in; but no, all was darkness so dense it seemed to possess mass.

The monotony became agony. A colossal loneliness began to tear at him. He wanted to do anything, even play, or slice huge stars up into planets. But there was only one escape from the phantasmal horror of the unending ebon path. Now and anon he seized the globe of light with a tractor ray and hurled into the curtain of darkness behind him at terrific velocity.

It sped away under the momentum imparted to it until sight of it was lost. But always, though millions of years might elapse, it returned, attached to him by invisible strings of energy. It was part of him, it defied penetration of its secret, and it would never leave him, until, perhaps, of itself it revealed its true purpose.

Infinite numbers of light-years, so infinite that if written a sheet as broad as



the universe would have been required, reeled behind.

Eighty millions of years passed. Darkness had not been as old as that when he had gone into the void for which he had been named. Fear that he had been wrong took a stronger foothold in his thoughts. But now he knew that he would never go back.

Long before the eighty-nine-millionth year came, he had exhausted all sources of amusement. Sometimes he expanded or contracted to incredible sizes. Sometimes he automatically went through the motions of traversing the forty-seven bands. He felt the click in his consciousness which told him that if there had been hyper-space in the darkness, he would have been transported into it. But how could there be different kinds of darkness? He strongly doubted the existence of hyper-space here, for only matter could occasion the dimensional disturbances which obtained in his universe.

But with the eighty-nine-millionth year came the end of his pilgrimage. It came abruptly. For one tiny space of time, his visions contacted a stream of light, light that was left as the outward trail of a celestial body. Darkness' body, fifty millions of miles in girth, involuntarily contracted to half its size. Energy streamed together and formed molten blobs of flaring matter that sped from him in the chaotic emotions of the moment.

A wave of shuddering thankfulness shook him, and his thoughts rioted sobbingly in his memory swirls.

"Oldster, Oldster, if only your great brain could know this. . . ."

Uncontrollably inflating and deflating, he tore onward, shearing vast quantities of energy from the tight matter at his core, converting it into propellent power that drove him at a velocity that was more than unthinkable, toward the universe from whence had come that light-giving body.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Colored Globes

IN THE ninety-millionth year a dim spot of light rushed at him, and, as he hurtled onward, the spot of light grew, and expanded, and broke up into tinier lights, tinier lights that in turn broke up into their components—until the darkness was blotted out, giving way to the dazzling, beautiful radiance of an egg-shaped universe.

He was out of the darkness; he had discovered its edge. Instinctively, he lessened his velocity to a fraction of its former self, and then, as if some mightier will than his had overcome him, he lost consciousness, and sped unknowingly, at steady speed, through the outlying fringe of the outer galaxy, through it, through its brothers, until, unconscious, he was in the midst of that alien galactic system.

First he made a rigid tour of inspection, flying about from star to star, tearing them wantonly apart, as if each and every atom belonged solely to him. The galaxies, the suns, the very elements of construction, all were the same as he knew them. All nature, he decided, was probably alike, in this universe, or in that one.

But was there life?

An abrupt wave of restlessness, of unease, passed over him. He felt unhappy, and unsated. He looked about on the stars, great giants, dwarfs fiercely burning, other hulks of matter cooled to black, forbidding cinders, inter-galactic nebulae wreathing unpurposefully about, assuming weird and beautiful formations over periods of thousands of years. He, Darkness, had come to them, had crossed the great gap of nothing, but they were unaffected by this unbelievable feat, went swinging on their courses knowing nothing of him. He felt small, without meaning. Such thoughts seemed the very apostasy of sense, but there they were—



he could not shake them off. It was with a growing feeling of disillusionment that he drifted through the countless galaxies and nebulae that unrolled before him, in search of life.

AND his quest was rewarded. From afar off, the beating flow of the life-energy came. He drove toward its source, thirty or forty light-years, and hung in its presence.

The being was a green-light, that one of the two classes in which Darkness had divided the life he knew. He himself was a purple-light, containing at his core a globe of pure light, the purpose of which had been one of the major problems of his existence.

The green-light, when she saw him, came to a stop. They stared at each other.

Finally she spoke, and there was wonder and doubt in her thoughts.

"Who are you? You seem——alien."

"You will hardly believe me," Darkness replied, now trembling with a sensation which, inexplicably, could not be defined by the fact that he was in converse with a being of another universe. "But I am alien. I do not belong to this universe."

"But that seems quite impossible. Perhaps you are from another space, beyond the forty-seventh. But that is more impossible!" She eyed him with growing puzzlement and awe.

"I am from no other space," said Darkness somberly. "I am from another universe beyond the darkness."

"From beyond the darkness?" she said faintly, and then she involuntarily contracted. Abruptly she turned her visions on the darkness. For a long, long time she stared at it, and then she returned her vision rays to Darkness.

"So you have crossed the darkness," she whispered. "They used to tell me that that was the most impossible thing it was possible to dream of—to cross that

terrible section of lightlessness. No one could cross, they said, because there was nothing on the other side. But I never believed, purple-light, I never believed them. And there have been times when I have desperately wanted to traverse it myself. But there were tales of beings who had gone into it, and never returned. . . . And you have crossed it!"

A shower of crystalline sparks fled from her. So evident was the sudden hero worship carried on her thought waves, that Darkness felt a wild rise in spirits. And suddenly he was able to define the never before experienced emotions which had enwrapped him when first this green-light spoke.

"Green-light, I have journeyed a distance the length of which I cannot think to you, seeking the riddle of the darkness. But perhaps there was something else I was seeking, something to fill a vacant part of me. I know now what it was. A mate, green-light, a thinker. And you are that thinker, that friend with whom I can journey, voyaging from universe to universe, finding the secrets of all that is. Look! The Great Energy which alone made it possible for me to cross the darkness, has been barely tapped!"

Imperceptibly she drew away. There was an unexplainable wariness that seemed half sorrow in her thoughts.

"You are a thinker," he exclaimed. "Will you come with me?"

She stared at him, and he felt she possessed a natural wisdom he could never hope to accumulate. There was a strange shrinkage of his spirits. What was that she was saying?

"Darkness," she said gently, "you would do well to turn and leave me, a green-light, forever. You are a purple-light, I a green. Green-light and purple-light—is that all you have thought about the two types of life? Then you must know that beyond the difference in color, there is



another: the greens have a knowledge not vouchsafed the purples, until it is . . . too late. For your own sake, then, I ask you to leave me forever."

He looked at her puzzled. Then slowly, "That is an impossible request, now that I have found you. You are what I need," he insisted.

"But don't you understand?" she cried. "I know something you have not even guessed at! Darkness—leave me!"

He became bewildered. What was she driving at? What was it she knew that he could not know? For a moment he hesitated. Far down in him a voice was bidding him to do as she asked, and quickly. But another voice, that of a growing emotion he could not name, bid him stay; for she was the complement of himself, the half of him that would make him complete. And the second voice was stronger.

"I am not going," he said firmly, and the force of his thoughts left no doubt as to the unshakable quality of his decision.

She spoke faintly, as if some outside will had overcome her. "No, Darkness, now you are not going; it is too late! Learn the secret of the purple globe!"

**A**BRUPTLY, she wrenched herself into a hyper-space, and all his doubts and fears were erased as she disappeared. He followed her delightedly up the scale, catching sight of her in one band just as she vanished into the next.

And so they came to the forty-seventh, where all matter, its largest and smallest components, assumed the shapes of unchangeable cubes; even he and the green-light appeared as cubes, gigantic cubes millions of miles in extent, a geometric

figure they could never hope to distort.

Darkness watched her expectantly. Perhaps she would now start a game of chopping chunks off these cubed suns, and swing them around as planets. Well, he would be willing to do that for awhile, in her curious mood of playfulness, but after that they must settle down to discovering possible galactic systems beyond this one.

As he looked at her she vanished.

"Hmm, probably gone down the scale," thought Darkness, and he dropped through the lower bands. He found her in none.

"Darkness . . . try the . . . forty-eighth. . . ." Her thought came faintly.

"The forty-eighth!" he cried in astonishment. At the same time, there was a seething of his memory swirls as if the knowledge of his life were being arranged to fit some new fact, a strange alchemy of the mind by which he came to know that there *was* a forty-eighth.

Now he knew, as he had always known, that there was a forty-eighth. He snapped himself into it.

Energy became rampant in a ceaseless shifting about him. A strange energy, reminding him of nothing so much as the beating flow of an energy creature approaching him from a near distance. His vision sought out the green-light.

She was facing him somberly, yet with a queerly detached arrogance. His mind was suddenly choked with the freezing sensation that he was face to face with horror.

"I have never been here before," he whispered faintly.

He thought he detected pity in her, but it was overwhelmed by the feeling that



The fear-crazed villagers swore to rend those lovely, death-bringing moon maidens limb from limb, swore that my beautiful wife was one of them. And I—God forgive me—had seen evidence that they were right!

LURE OF THE MOON MAIDENS

By Francis James

**STARTLING**  
**15¢ MYSTERY** MAGAZINE  
June issue on sale April 25



she was under the influence of an outside will that could not know pity.

Yet she said, "I am sadder than ever before. But too late. You are my mate, and this is the band of—life!"

Abruptly while he stared, she receded, and he could not follow, save with his visions. Presently, as if an hypnotist had clamped his mind, she herself disappeared, all that he saw of her being the green globe of light she carried. He saw nothing else, knew nothing else. It became his whole universe, his whole life. A peacefulness, complete and uncorroded by vain striving, settled on him like stardust.

The green globe of light dimmed, became smaller, until it was less than a pinpoint, surrounded by an infinity of colorless, white energy.

Then, so abruptly it was in the nature of a shock, he came from his torpor, and was conscious. Far off he still saw the green globe of light, but it was growing in size, approaching—approaching a purple globe of light that in turn raced toward it at high velocity.

"It is my own light," he thought, startled. "I must have unwittingly hurled it forth when she settled that hypnotic influence over me. No matter. It will come back."

But would it come back? Green globe of light was expanding in apparent size, approaching purple which, in turn, dwindled toward it at increasing speed.

"At that rate," he thought in panic, "they will collide. Then how will my light come back to me?"

He watched intently, a poignantly cold feeling clutching at him. Closer . . . closer. He quivered. Green globe and purple globe had crashed.

THEY met in blinding crescendo of light that brightened space for light-years around. A huge mistiness of light formed into a sphere, in the center of which hung a brilliant ball. The misty

light slowly subsided until it had been absorbed into the brighter light, that remained as motionless as Darkness himself. Then it commenced pulsating with a strange, rhythmic regularity.

Something about that pulsing stirred ancient memories, something that said, "You, too, were once no more than that pulsing ball."

Thoughts immense in scope, to him, tumbled in his mind.

"That globe is life," he thought starkly. "The green-light and I have created life. That was her meaning, when she said this was the band of life. Its activating energy flows rampant here."

"That is the secret of the purple globe; with the green globe it creates life. And I had never know the forty-eight band until she made it known to me!"

"The purpose of life—to create life." The thought of that took fire in his brain. For one brief, intoxicating moment he thought that he had solved the last and most baffling of his mighty problems.

As with all other moments of exaltation he had known, disillusionment followed swiftly after. To what end was that? The process continued on and on, and what came of it? Was creation of life the only use of life? A meaningless circle! He recalled Oldster's words of the past, and horror claimed him.

"Life, my life," he whispered dully. "A dead sun and life—one of equal importance with the other. That is unbelievable!" he burst out.

He was aware of the green-light hovering near; yes, she possessed a central light, while his was gone!

She looked at him sorrowfully. "Darkness, if only you had listened to me!"

Blankly, he returned her gaze. "Why is it that you have a light, while I have none?"

"A provision of whatever it was that created us, endows the green-lights with the ability to replace their lights three



times. Each merging of a purple and green light may result in the creation of one or several newly-born. Thus the number born over-balances the number of deaths. When my fourth light has gone, as it will some day, I know, I too, will die."

"You mean, I will—die?"

"Soon."

Darkness shuddered, caught half-way between an emotion of blind anger and mental agony. "There is death everywhere," he whispered, "and everything is futile!"

"**P**ERHAPS," she said softly, her grief carrying poignantly to him. "Darkness, do not be sad. Darkness, death does indeed come to all, but that does not say that life is of no significance.

"Far past in the gone ages of our race, we were pitiful, tiny blobs of energy which crept along at less than light speed. An energy creature of that time knew nothing of any but the first and forty-eighth band of hyper-space. The rest he could not conceive of as being existent. He was ignorant, possessing elementary means of absorbing energy for life. For countless billions of years he never knew there was an edge to the universe. He could not conceive an edge.

"He was weak, but he gained in strength. Slowly, he evolved, and intelligence entered his mind.

"Always, he discovered things he had been formerly unable to conceive in his mind, and even now there are things that lay beyond the mind; one of them is the end of all space. And the greatest is, why life exists. Both are something we cannot conceive, but in time evolution of mental powers will allow us to conceive them, even as we conceived the existence of hyper-space, and those other things. Dimly, so dimly, even now I can see some reason, but it slips the mind. But Darkness! All of matter is destined to break down to an unchanging state of maximum

entropy; it is life, and life alone, that builds in an upward direction. So . . . . faith!"

She was gone. She had sown what comfort she could.

Her words shot Darkness full of the wild fire of hope. That was the answer! Vague and promissory it was, but no one could arrive nearer to the solution than that. For a moment he was suffused with the blissful thought that the last of his problems was disposed of.

Then, in one awful space of time, the green-light's philosophy was gone from his memory as if it had never been uttered. He felt the pangs of an unassailable weariness, as if life energies were seeping away.

Haggardly, he put into effect one driving thought. With lagging power, he shot from the fatal band of life . . . . and death . . . . down the scale. Something unnameable, perhaps some natal memory, made him pause for the merest second in the seventeenth band. Afar off, he saw the green-light and her newly-born. They had left the highest band, come to the band where propellents became useless. So it had been at his own birth.

He paused no more and dropped to the true band, pursuing a slow course across the star-beds of this universe, until he at last emerged on its ragged shore. He went on into the darkness, until hundred hundreds of light-years separated him from the universe his people had never known existed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Dissipation

**H**E STOPPED and looked back at the lens of misty radiance. "I have not even discovered the edge of the darkness," he thought. "It stretches out and around. That galactic system and my own are just pin-points of light, sticking



up, vast distances apart, through an unlimited ebon cloth. They are so small in the darkness they barely have the one dimension of existence!"

He went on his way, slowly, wearily, as of the power to activate his propellents were diminishing. There came a time, in his slow, desperate striving after the great velocity he had known in crossing the lightless section, when that universe, that pin-point sticking up, became as a pin-point to his sight.

He stopped, took one longing look at it, and accelerated until it was lost to view.

"I am alone again," he thought vaguely. "I am more alone than Oldster ever was. How did he escape death from the green-lights? Perhaps he discovered their terrible secret, and fled before they could wreak their havoc on him. He was a lover of wisdom, and he did not want to die. Now he is living, and he is alone, marooning himself in the lightless band, striving not to think. He could make himself die, but he is afraid to, even though he is so tired of life, and of thinking his endless thoughts.

"I will die. But no . . . ! Ah, yes, I will."

He grew bewildered. He thought, or tried to think, of what came after death. Why, there would be nothing! He would not be there, and without him nothing else could exist!

"I would not be there, and therefore there would be nothing," he thought starkly. "Oh, that is inconceivable. Death! Why, forever after I died, I would be—dead!"

He strove to alleviate the awfulness of the eternal unconsciousness. "I was nothing once, that is true; why cannot that time come again? But it is unthinkable. I feel as if I am the center of everything, the cause, the focal point, and even the foundation."

For some time this thought gave him

a kind of gloating satisfaction. Death was indeed not so bad, when one could thus drag to oblivion the very things which had sponsored his life. But at length reason supplanted dreams. He sighed. "And that is vanity!"

Again he felt the ineffably horrible sensation of an incapacity to activate his propellents the full measure, and an inability to keep himself down to normal size. His memory swirls were pulsating, and striving, sometimes, to obliterate themselves.

Everything seemed meaningless. His very drop into the darkness, at slow acceleration, was without purpose.

"I could not reach either universe now," he commented to himself, "because I am dying. Poor Mother! Poor Oldster! They will not even know I crossed. That seems the greatest sorrow—to do a great thing, and not be able to tell of it. Why did they not tell me of the central lights? With Oldster, it was fear that I should come to the same deathless end as he. With Mother—she obeyed an instinct as deeply rooted as space. There must be perpetuation of life.

"Why? Was the green-light right? Is there some tangible purpose to life which we are unable to perceive? But where is my gain, if I have to die to bring to ultimate fruition that purpose? I suppose Oldster knew the truth. Life just is, had an accidental birth, and exists haphazardly, like a star, or an electron.

"But, knowing these things, why do I not immediately give way to the expanding forces within me? Ah, I do not know!"

CONVULSIVELY he applied his mind to the continuance of life within his insistently expanding body. For awhile he gloried in the small increase of his fading vigor.

"Making solar systems!" his mind took up the thread of a lost thought. "Happy



sons of Radiant, Incandescent, Great Power, and all the others!"

He concentrated on the sudden thought that struck him. He was dying, of that he was well aware, but he was dying without doing anything. What had he actually done, in this life of his?

"But what can I do? I am alone," he thought vaguely. Then, "I could make a planet, and I could put the life germ on it. Oldster taught me that."

Suddenly he was afraid he would die before he created this planet. He set his mind to it, and began to strip from the sphere of tight matter vast quantities of energy, then condensed it to form matter more attenuated. With lagging power, he formed mass after mass of matter, ranging all through the ninety-eight elements that he knew.

Fifty-thousand years saw the planet's first stage of completion. It had become a tiny sphere some fifteen-thousand miles in diameter. With a heat ray he then boiled it, and with another ray cooled its crust, at the same time forming oceans and continents on its surface. Both water and land, he knew, were necessary to life which was bound by nature of its construction to the surface of a planet.

Then came the final, completing touch. No other being had ever deliberately done what Darkness did then. Carefully, he created an infinitesimal splash of life-perpetuating protoplasm; he dropped it aimlessly into a tiny wrinkle on the planet's surface.

He looked at the finished work, the most perfect planet he or his playmates had ever created, with satisfaction, notwithstanding the dull pain of weariness that throbbed through the complex energy fields of his body.

Then he took the planet up in a tractor ray, and swung it around and around, as he now so vividly recalled doing in his childhood. He gave it a swift angular

velocity, and then shot it off at a tangent, in a direction along the line of which he was reasonably sure lay his own universe. He watched it with dulling visions. It receded into the darkness that would surround it for ages, and then it was a pinpoint, and then nothing.

"It is gone," he said, somehow wretchedly lonely because of that, "but it will reach the universe; perhaps for millions of years it will traverse the galaxies unmolested. Then a sun will reach out and claim it. There will be life upon it, life that will grow until it is intelligent, and will say it has a soul, and purpose in existing."

Nor did the ironic humor of the ultimate swift and speedy death of even that type of life, once it had begun existence, escape him. Perhaps for one or ten million years it would flourish, and then even it would be gone—once upon a time nothing and then nothing again.

He felt a sensation that brought blankness nearer, a sensation of expansion, but now he made no further attempts to prolong a life which was, in effect, already dead. There was a heave within him, as if some subconscious force were deliberately attempting to tear him apart.

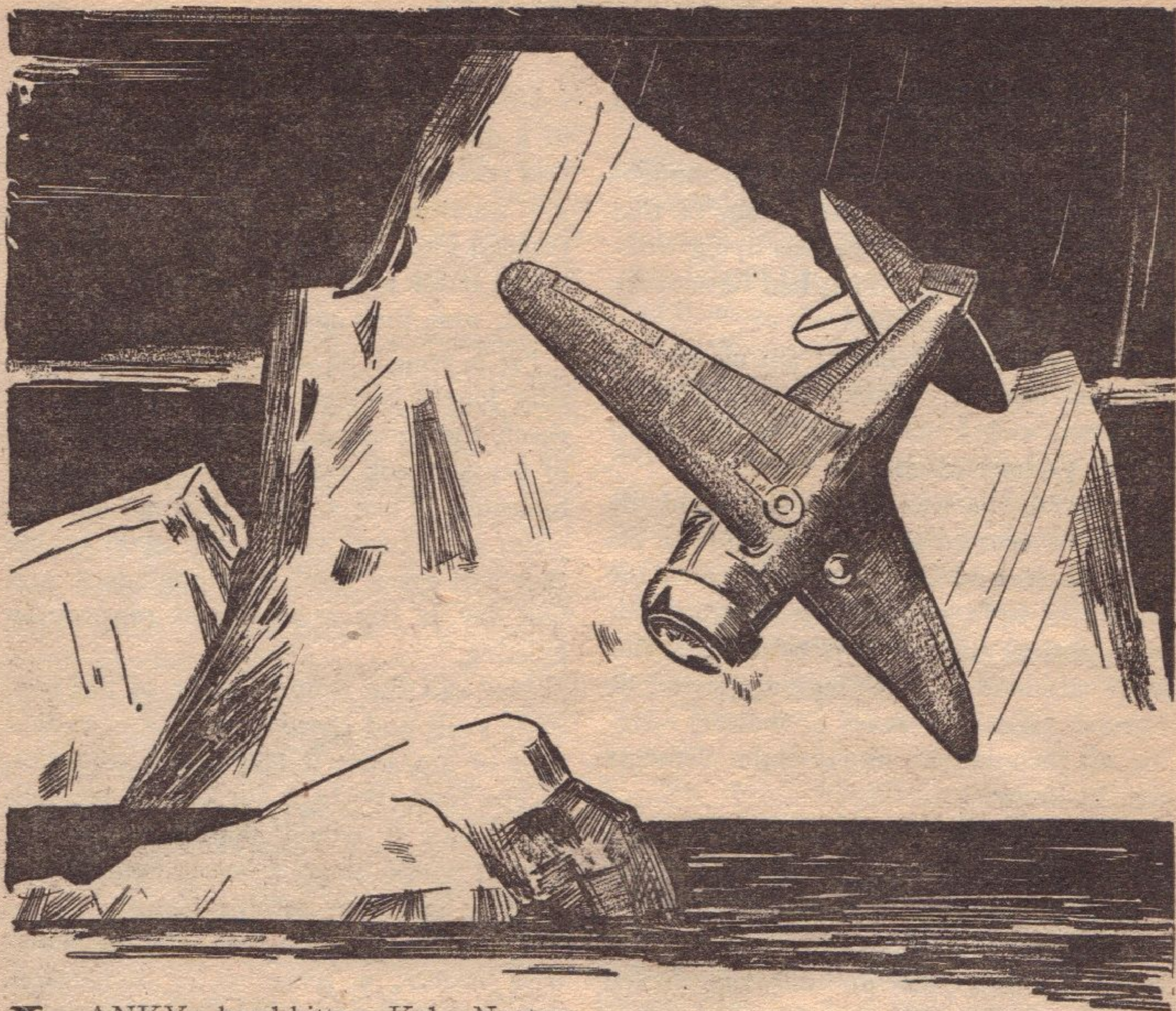
He told himself that he was no longer afraid. "I am simply going into another darkness—but it will be a much longer journey than the other."

Like a protecting cloak, he drew in his vision rays about him, away from the ebon emptiness. He drifted, expanding through the vast, inter-universal space.

The last expansion came, the expansion that dissipated his memory swirls. A vast, compact sphere of living drew itself out until Darkness was only free energy distributed over light-years of space.

And death, in that last moment, seemed suddenly to be a far greater and more astounding occurrence than birth had ever seemed.





**L**ANKY, hard-bitten Kels Norton was afraid. It showed in the tenseness around his mouth and his quick effort to sit up. Then he lay back with a groan. The grating pain from his right arm told him that it was broken.

The pitiless Antarctic cold congealed little icicles from his breath and they hung from the fur of his parka like tiny fingers. Dimly he remembered the sudden lurch as the snow cruiser broke the frozen crust over a giant crevasse then the long drop downward. He lifted his head and looked around. It seemed to him that it was becoming lighter . . . and there was a curious sense of floating.

He saw four motionless bodies in the dim twilight of the control cabin of the snow cruiser. Short, fat Lacy Hoff lay in a corner with his body curiously shrunken. Jack Kelly, red-headed and Irish-tempered, and somber-eyed Niels

Lachmann, both of whom should have been aft with the engines, lay on the floor. And beyond them lay Louis Fusari, the dignified but explosively tempered doctor of medicine who had from the first objected to this sneak prospect.

But Fusari's objections had been smothered by the enthusiasm of the others when Kelly had come back from checking the weather station on Mt. Maddux with his pockets full of quartz that was threaded thickly with wire-gold. They had taken the snow cruiser and sped to Mt. Maddux, found the quartz vein Kelly had discovered on a bare, wind-swept flank of the mountain. In three days they had blown down all the picture rock they could carry. They had even jettisoned food to provide more space for the precious quartz. Then, on the return trip to the base, they had found the crevasse.



# CHILDREN OF ZEUS

The story of the madness of an invisible Student, the watchfulness of his invisible Scribe, and the twin wives of Kels Norton.

By E. A. Grosser



With his left hand, he hooked the fingers of his right in his clothing, then painfully dragged himself from one to the other of his companions. It was no use. All four were stiff and cold with death.

The cruiser heeled over with a jolt, then was still. Even the sensation of

floating was gone. Norton looked around nervously.

"Please continue," said a strange voice. "I became tired of waiting, so I assisted you out of the crevasse."

Norton stared around. There was no one that could have spoken.



"Scribe! Please note—Mentally inflexible!"

"Yes. 'Mentally inflexible!'"

"—and unadaptable," added the strange voice.

"And unadaptable," echoed the other.

Norton sat perfectly still, staring into nothingness. He had gone mad! The word echoed and re-echoed in his mind like the tolling of a bell. Again he felt that he was under observation.

"No. You are not mad," assured the voice. "In fact, I don't think that is possible. It would be—Well, in words that you might use—It would be like trying to short circuit a dead battery. As for my being able to speak your language, both my Scribe and I found your mind easy to pick. Please continue!"

Norton leaned back against the wall, but otherwise was motionless.

"Just as a matter of record, will you tell me how you intended to extricate yourself from that crevasse. It appears to be quite impossible with that crude machine."

"What the hell!" Norton exploded. "Do you think we did that on purpose?"

"Didn't you?"

"Awww," The sound faded into silence and Norton's face showed his disgust of himself. Talking to himself already! It was too bad he couldn't have died peacefully and sane as had his companions. He regarded their unmoving bodies with something akin to envy.

"Scribe! Note!" The strange voice sounded excited. "Accidents still happen . . . positive proof of a low order of intelligence!"

THE other voice repeated the words and to Norton they were positive proof of his own madness. He wondered if everybody felt as alone and as mad just before dying as he did now. He wished that he could hurry the process of dying. There was absolutely no hope

for life, and these last minutes were becoming unpleasant. The end, and oblivion, would be a welcome relief.

"Do you mean to think," asked the strange voice, "that death is extinction for you?"

"Certainly," Norton chuckled. "How about you?"

"Certainly *not*!" was the reply. "That is, unless I wish it to be. Death is merely a momentary indisposition. My friends re-assemble and re-animate me. It has happened twice already, and I am as yet only a student.

"Scribe! Note: Death to them is a matter of the utmost finality and, therefore, never having lived after they have died, they can not be said to have lived at all.

"Can you imagine that, Scribe? Living, or calling it that, and having no memories of the supreme thrills of dissolution and resolution."

"I am positive that they are as far below us as inanimate stones are below them," was the reply of the Scribe.

"Exactly!" agreed the first. "My thoughts on the matter exactly—and very nicely put, too. Record that, please."

"Yes, sir. Shall I credit you with having said it?"

"Of course."

"You are both wrong," Norton objected, laughing. "I said it. I imagined both of you, so anything you say is to be credited to me. I insist that I be credited."

"Hmmm. Delusions," cogitated one voice. "I wonder if he can be dying, as he so crudely put it a few minutes ago."

"Quite unlikely," offered the Scribe. "He has only a broken arm, and that doesn't look as though it could be fatal."

"Hmmm. Scribe, you have accompanied students before, haven't you?"

"Often," was the dry answer. "Ambition is not rare, though realization and acceptance into the Minority, is."



"Then, with your experience, what would you do if you were in my position?"

"Transport them back to their base," was the prompt reply. "Heal this man—he is an unsatisfactory subject as he is—and revivify the others. They are even more unsatisfactory."

"True! Very true! Assist me, please."

The snow cruiser lurched upward, then rocked gently, though Norton had the impression that it was traveling at a great speed. He dragged himself up to his feet and peered out the windshield, then crumpled to the floor and lay still. The cruiser was traveling at a great speed, but a thousand feet in the air above the frozen surface of the Antarctic continent.

WHEN he awoke, he was in his own bunk. Somewhere in the darkness another person was snoring lustily. He remembered the trip to Mt. Maddux, the gold, the return—and the crevasse. His stomach ached at the memory of the fall. He remembered four dead bodies. Then, for God's sake, who was snoring?

He threw his blankets back and sat up. As he swung his feet to the floor, the door opened. Lacy Hoff came in. He looked at Norton and a grin bisected his moon-face.

"Better get some more sleep," he suggested. "You look terrible."

Norton watched, open-mouthed, while Hoff went to the oil heater and checked the fuel intake valve. Then the chubby man looked at Norton again. Norton's mouth opened and closed as though he were speaking, but all that came forth was a choking, gasping sound.

The fat man's eyes grew serious with concern.

"I'll send Doc," he said, and dashed out of the room.

"Gh-ghosts!" Norton's lips co-ordinated with his thoughts for a brief moment. Then he hastily pulled on his clothes and stumbled into the passage-

way with but a single thought in his mind. He jerked open the door of the hospital room, selected a bottle from one of the cases, pulled the cork and applied the neck of the bottle to his lips.

The choking burn of the fiery liquid brought tears to his eyes, but it also brought warmth to his stomach. He regarded the bottle fondly. He knew now that either one of two things had happened: Either they had fallen into the crevasse and everybody but himself had died, and he had in some way made his way back to base—in which case Hoff and that snorer were ghosts; or he had dreamed the whole damned thing. In either case those voices he remembered were not real. That's what happened to a man when he spent two years in Antarctica. He shrugged philosophically and up-ended the bottle again.

The gurgling of the bottle was beginning to sound hollow when a voice interrupted.

"Quit chiseling!" it snapped.

He looked around and saw red-headed Jack Kelly standing in the doorway, rubbing his knuckles raspily over a red stubbly beard and watching him with reproachful eyes.

"G'way," Norton waved, and returned his attention to the bottle. That, at least, was satisfyingly real.

Kelly snatched the bottle away. Norton watched him pound the cork back into its neck. The red-head was real, also—*dissatisfyingly* so.

"It was a dream," Norton mumbled. "All a dream."

Kelly looked at him sharply. "Come on, Kels! Snap out of it! We all owe you a hell of a lot for pulling us out of that crevasse. Do your damndest to hang onto yourself for another twenty-four hours, and we'll be in Magallanes. Lachmann has decided we can take our ore to the States. The plane is already loaded."



Norton stared at the red-head. "Then we did find a bunch of gold ore?"

Kelly nodded, but his eyes showed a new doubt.

"Then it *wasn't* a dream!" Norton exploded.

Slim, dark-haired, olive-skinned Louis Fusari stalked into the small room and took the bottle from Kelly's hand.

"Hoff said you were sick," he said to Norton, accusingly, as he replaced the bottle in the case, "But you look drunk. Did you get all that whisky, or did Kelly have time to swipe some?"

"He got it all," Kelly announced a trifle mournfully.

Fusari looked Norton over carefully. Norton flushed under the penetrating eyes, then straightened his shoulders with the realization that they must both be ghosts.

"Yes," Fusari agreed. "He looks it."

Norton chuckled, then stopped with a hiccup. A moment later he began to laugh. "Quite obshervant," he approved heartily. "Very good. *Very* good—for a ghost. Now vanish, please!"

He waited for them to comply with his request, but they weren't so inclined. They stared at him. He was getting a wallop from the whisky and suddenly their expressions seemed very funny. He laughed.

That made things seem even funnier, so he continued to laugh.

Kelly and Fusari looked at one another, then leaped at him and grasped his arms. Norton struggled angrily. But he couldn't quit laughing.

He was still laughing, but rather shrilly, when they took him to Lachmann.

Lachmann gave him one searching glance, sniffed the air, and said, "Confine him in the bunkroom until we are ready to leave."

Kelly and Fusari shoved him into the dimly-lighted bunkroom, then locked the door on him. The heater took care of

the temperature so they were sure he wouldn't freeze to death as long as he stayed there. Norton reeled across the room, then leaned against his bunk and looked around the room. At last he concluded that the snorer must have been Kelly, and he dropped onto his bunk and shut his eyes to see if that would make the room stop spinning.

"I wish you would co-operate," complained the strange voice. "Your perversity is really ingratitude when you consider that I mended your arm and restored your friends."

Norton's eyes snapped open. He had forgotten that broken arm. He moved it experimentally. Nothing wrong with it now, anyway. He closed his eyes contentedly. That proved the whole thing was a dream. But there was a tinge of regret to his content. It was too bad that the gold wasn't real.

"I only wish to study you," continued the voice persuasively.

"Why?" Norton asked unthinkingly.

"Every student must submit some contribution to the totality of our knowledge of the universe before he can be admitted to the Minority. This planet has been investigated before, but as this, the most attractive portion, was uninhabited, it was assumed that the rest was a heat-withered waste. I can be sure of acceptance to the Minority if I merely can submit a full report."

Norton decided he was drunk, tucked the blankets around himself with an exaggerated care. And closed his eyes with a determination to go to sleep.

"If kindness won't secure your assistance I can use force," the voice offered threateningly. "I can—"

"It's all a lie," Norton stated carefully, "but if you're still hanging around when I wake up, I'll be glad to . . . only too glad . . . to . . . help . . . you." Hardly had the last word passed his lips when he was sound asleep.



HE WOKE with an aching, throbbing head and sat on the edge of the bunk to cradle it tenderly in his hands. The ache was like a round ball of fire in the base of his skull, but with every heartbeat the ball of fire burst like a rocket and spread all through his head.

He groaned. The last time he had gone off the deep end like this had been the night before leaving New York. That was the night Joan had promised to wait for him, and the next morning she had helped by giving him some concoction of wine and egg. Boy! What he could do to one of those now!

Someone knocked on the door and he lifted his head groggily with surprise. Then came the strange voice: "I hold you to your promise. You have assisted me immeasurably already by thinking of the female. I had concluded that you reproduced asexually.

"Scribe! Have you finished the energy-matter conversion?"

"If you would trouble to look, you would see that the result of the energy-matter conversion is at the present moment beating her knuckles on the portal."

"Please refrain from sarcasm," requested the first voice. "I shall of course, include that remark in my report."

"Please do," the Scribe countered. "It will corroborate my report of your lapse from infallibility. You have been taught that direct observation is more reliable than hearsay evidence. Why do you disregard that teaching?"

"You presume to question my conduct?"

"And why not? I am one of the Minority, and *the* one appointed to judge your fitness, if any."

"Attaboy!" Norton approved. "Give him hell! I don't like the way he talks, either."

"Give who hell?" asked a cool voice from the doorway.

Joan Witmer stood in the doorway, her

dark blue eyes snapping angrily in spite of the coolness of her voice. Beside her stood grinning, moon-faced Lacy Hoff. Joan extended her arm, offering him a glass of thick, dark yellow liquid. He took it numbly and stared at her stupidly.

"Well, drink it!" she scolded. "You asked for something to straighten you out and that'll make you feel better in the end, though you don't deserve to. Why must you make such a fool of yourself?"

Norton had been holding the glass, quite undecided whether to treat her as a new acquaintance or an old friend. Now he gulped the drink down hastily. The bitter brown taste of the vile fluid spread through his mouth and throat, making him shudder as he passed the glass blindly back to Joan. When he could see again he found that they were watching him expectantly.

He wondered why. Then ceased to wonder a moment later and brushed them aside to dash for the lavatory. When he returned he was weak and pale, but the headache had receded to a dull throbbing.

"That was a dirty trick," he reproached. "Joan would never have done a thing like that."

"Well, I did," stated the false Joan sturdily, "and it served you right."

Round-faced Lacy Hoff's fat cheeks showed two angelic dimples from his broad smile. "A punishment to fit the crime," he rumbled with evident satisfaction. "How do you feel now?"

"Hungry," Norton snapped.

"Well, maybe Joan will cook you something."

Joan prepared a breakfast for Norton, then sat down across the table. She watched, chin in hands, while he ate. After a few minutes, with the edge of his hunger dulled, her steady gaze made him nervous.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Kels. Do you still feel the same about



me as you did when we were in New York?"

He looked at the stillness of her oval face, framed by her small hands and brown hair, as she waited for an answer. He replied huskily:

"Joan, if anything, being away from you has made me love you more."

Her eyes glowed with pleasure, then became puzzled. "What do you mean? 'Away from me.'"

"Well—ah—" Dammit! How did a person go about telling a ghost she wasn't real?

Joan's eyes widened with fright. Jack Kelly stepped quietly into the room. His arm went around her protectively as she covered her face with her hands in an attempt to hold back the tears that were close. Norton started up angrily, then sat down again, grumbling.

After all, it wasn't really Joan. He was sure of that. Joan wouldn't have given him an emetic. The real Joan was fun-loving and had a well-developed sense of humor, while this facsimile was pretty much of a prude.

He remembered that they were soon to start back to civilization. He would soon see the *real* Joan—be able to hold her in his arms. The thought did wonders for his appetite and he finished his breakfast with silent satisfaction.

"THE experiment is proceeding splendidly," the bodiless voice began again exultantly. "But don't do anything which will cause them to imprison you again."

Norton conquered his momentary, instinctive fright. "Are you real?" he asked. "Or am I mad?"

Norton was aware of the presence of the disapproving Scribe as the voice replied: "We are inhabitants of a world far out in interstellar space, a dark, sunless world which broke away from its primary ages ago, and of which your

astronomers have not the slightest knowledge. Life is one of the stubbornest, most adaptable elements in the galaxy. As the changes to my world were gradual, life accustomed itself to them. As our sun cooled we were forced to become less dependent on the natural production of foods, and with the gradual darkening we developed new senses. To a person with all your corporeal restrictions we are invisible. We are living energy, instead of energized matter."

"But, my friends?" Norton pressed. "And Joan? How did they get here. My friends died. I was injured. And I left Joan in New York."

"You say your friends died, but do you know *when* is death—the dividing line past which restoration is impossible? I healed their injuries, as I did yours, and restarted the life processes. So they live.

"She whom you call Joan was more difficult. The intense heat of your world hampered me severely."

Kelly stepped into the doorway and looked at Norton. Norton watched him while the strange entity continued speaking.

"But I succeeded in securing a pattern and was able to convert energy into the required matter."

"Correction: *I* did," interrupted the Scribe.

"Please!" the first voice begged of its companion, then continued, "And in the minds of all of them I impressed memories that would make their presence logical to themselves. And in the case of Joan, it was necessary to erase the memories of the time between your departure and the present."

Norton was sure from Kelly's expression that the redhead couldn't hear the stranger. Then the stranger answered his thought.

"And to them I am non-existent. It is necessary to my report that they act naturally, which they wouldn't do other-



wise. Theirs is the normal reaction to comparative normality; yours, the comparatively normal reaction to abnormality."

Kelly was watching suspiciously, then he spoke: "Come on. Lachmann asked me to get you. We are ready to leave." His tone said that he would have liked to leave Norton to someone else; that he didn't relish escorting a man he considered mad. And there was something else in his manner, an evident dislike that hadn't been there before, that caused Norton to wonder if the stranger had further experiments in human behavior in mind.

A trifle more than a little uneasy he followed Kelly to the plane. The others were already aboard. Hoff was at the controls with Lachmann at his side. Fusari and Joan were seated in the cabin. Joan looked up when they entered and seemed to expect Norton to take possession of the unoccupied seat at her side. He did.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked.

"Fine," Norton lied.

The motors roared to a louder song of power and the plane nudged forward. Then Lachmann turned her loose and they darted over the laboriously smoothed snow. There was a sudden smoothness of motion and Norton knew that they were in the air. Hoff pulled the plane into a rapid climb and they headed into the north.

Norton looked down at the vast snow-bound continent below. Of one thing he was sure—he would never return. He had found enough trouble this time. He was forced to the conclusion that wine and song were essential to his mental well-being. He looked at Joan's primly held head and knew that women were not.

THE STRANGER had said it had impressed logical memories in the minds of the created and recreated beings. The statement persisted in recurring to his

mind until it had acquired a troubling note of threat.

"How did you get the Antarctic?" he asked at last.

"Why, I stowed away," she said as though reminding him. "Jack found me the first day out. You see, after we were married, I couldn't bear the thought of having you leave me for years."

"Married!" Norton echoed. Oh, God! And another Joan awaiting him in New York!

"You haven't forgotten that too, have you?" she asked.

He saw Kelly and Fusari look at one another. Kelly nodded and Fusari got to his feet and went to speak with Lachmann.

"Have you?" Joan repeated.

"Oh, no—no," he assured her. Damn that stranger, anyway. He was too logical. "I just forgot—uh—I mean so many things have been happening that I don't know what is true and what isn't."

She still regarded him with suspicious eyes, but he hardly noticed. There was another question that bothered him.

"Have you—we any children?" he asked bluntly.

She shook her head negatively, but didn't speak. She was staring at him with frightened eyes. She paled and looked appealingly to Kelly.

Norton felt sorry for her. He put out his hand to comfort her, but she leaped to her feet with a shriek.

"Don't touch me! You're mad!"

She hurried to Kelly who took her in his arms.

"Oh, Jack!" she moaned. "You were right. He *is* mad. Don't let him touch me."

"I won't," Kelly promised.

Norton stood up slowly, eyes blazing angrily. So Kelly had been shooting off his mouth! And to Joan, or rather the false Joan. But it was just as bad. Kelly thought she was his wife.



Kelly shoved Joan behind him and crouched to meet Norton's advance.

Norton lashed out and felt his knuckles become satisfyingly numb as they contacted Kelly's chin. Kelly staggered backward and fell to the floor.

Joan knelt at his side, crying. But he pushed her away and climbed back to his feet. Norton stepped closer, drove a fist toward the other's head, but Kelly caught it on his forearm and countered with a left that drilled through Norton's guard and exploded in his midriff.

Norton folded over and went to his knees. While he struggled to get a little air into his deflated lungs, he heard the Scribe say angrily to the strange student, "Stop it! This is your third mistake."

"Third mistake?" repeated the stranger questioningly.

"Third," the Scribe said again. "First, you interfered with the natural course of events on a planet not your own; second, you assumed credit for what you had not done; third, you have incited violence. You have failed!"

Norton saw Fusari coming with a hypodermic. He scrambled to his feet. Kelly thought he was returning to the attack and pushed a heavy fist at him. Norton took it because he had to, and offered one of his own. Kelly accepted ungraciously with a grunt, then clinched.

Fusari was right beside them and Norton felt the prick of a hypodermic needle in his arm. He struggled to free himself, but Kelly clung tightly to his arms.

"No! No! I cannot have failed!" he heard the strange voice object. "It is impossible."

"But true," insisted the Scribe. "Your report alone probably would have been satisfactory, but your conduct is execrable."

Norton agreed silently, but heartily.

"But you say I have interfered. I can efface the results of that interference."

"And now you would destroy. No!"

Norton was unresisting as Fusari and Kelley forced him toward a seat, made him sit down.

"Then," said the strange voice, "if my report alone would have been satisfactory—it shall be. You and they shall be destroyed!"

THE plane lurched, then shot downward like a leaden weight. He caught one glimpse of the sky and saw it blaze with color. Red and green sheets of color intermixed with all the other colors of the spectrum and some hues Norton could not identify, gathered at the zenith, then extended in pulsing waves to the horizon.

The gray water of the ocean below was coming closer with every passing second. The cabin of the plane was a shambles. Hoff and Lachmann fought the controls, but though the motors roared throatily with power, they couldn't pull the plane out of the terrifying dive.

A cyclopean laugh reverberated throughout the plane. . . . a laugh of madness. Then the fall ended with a wrenching jerk and the mad laugh became a shriek of hate.

"They must be destroyed! And you must be destroyed. All must be destroyed. No one shall live to thwart me!"

But the plane was lifted as rapidly upward as a moment before it had fallen. The voice of the unseen stranger became a mad gibber of hate. Norton felt the clash of titanic forces. The colors in the sky became more vivid and writhed as though with pain.

Then at the zenith a red globe formed. The mad gibbering died immediately and the plane settled to an even flight toward the north. The redness of the globe high above shaded to a violent crimson. The globe floated slowly downward.

The colors flickered out of the sky as the red sphere settled to the ocean. As the vast ball of color touched the water



it disappeared abruptly. Seconds later the plane rocked to a gigantic explosion.

"I am sorry," said the voice of the Scribe. "My companion was entirely unfit. I was forced to destroy him."

The danger had held off the effects of the drug Fusari had administered, but now it was taking effect with paralyzing speed. Norton's eyes drooped, but he forced them open again.

"You may proceed in perfect safety," assured the Scribe. "There are so many worlds in the galaxy that it is extremely unlikely that I, or any like myself, shall ever visit you again."

Norton mumbled a thankful prayer, then saw Joan at Kelly's side. "But what about me?" he asked. "This Joan thinks she is married to me and another one waits for me in New York."

The Scribe chuckled. "My companion created a love between these two which is real unless I remove it. Choose the one you wish and I will arrange matters.

Norton took one look at the prim, humorless face of the woman at Kelly's side, and said, "I want the real Joan."

"This creation of my companion lacks something which appeals to you?" it laughed. "He lacked the same thing. Well, sobeit! I erase all memory of her having been married to you. It was only a memory of something that never happened. Goodbye."

Norton tried to answer, but before he could force his sleepy mind to form the farewell, he had an abrupt sense of loss and knew that the Scribe was gone. His eyelids closed and he sank into a drugged slumber.

WHEN he awoke he was lying in a bed—the first he had seen in over two years. It was much more comfortable than a bunk. And someone stood at the bedside. He turned to see who it was.

It was Joan. But which one?

"Are you real?" he asked, then knew that was no good. They both would naturally think they were real. "Where's everybody?" he asked quickly. "And where am I?"

"Hmmm," the young woman hummed speculatively. "I guess they were right. You *are* mad. Worse than usual."

"Say! What is real, and what isn't?" he demanded.

"Well, I'm real." She stooped to kiss his lips and prove it. He caught and held her. When she had released herself she announced a little breathlessly, but certainly, "And you are real."

"How about that gold? Or was that a dream?"

"The customs men seemed to think it was real—and the treasury," she said.

He stared at her. A mocking smile curved her lips. She sat on the edge of the bed.

"How's Kelly?" he asked anxiously.

"Fine—but he's married. Good-looking girl though, even if she can't see a joke."

"Conceited," Norton taunted, forgetting himself.

She looked at him innocently.

"I just can't believe it. Are you really real?"

She straightened suddenly, and the glow in her eyes was not good humor. "Kels! Stop that!" she said angrily. "I'll slap your face if you pinch me again."

THE END



In the JUNE issue—

TONG TROUBLE, an Ed Jenkins novelette by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, plus other thrilling stories by ROGER TORREY, JOHN LAWRENCE, H. H. STINSON, DONALD S. AITKEN, PAUL ALLENBY, etc.

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# IMPROBABILITY

Any girl would fall in love with a man who could knock out two bigger men and a 45-calibre bullet with one punch. Even if it did happen just by chance.

By Paul Edmonds



WHEN the bald-headed little man came into the *Tribune's* press room nobody paid any attention to him. The typewriters kept on snapping; copy-boys continued to answer the yelps of the rewrite gang; and the guy stood there in a dazed sort of way, with his eyes as big as saucers. I'd just finished a story, and as I tossed the flimsies to a boy, I noticed that Baldy, after hesitating a while, was heading for the publisher's office. I went after him and pulled him back as he had his fingers on the knob.

He turned pale blue blinking eyes on me. "Oh," he said faintly. "I want to see—"

"You don't want to go in there," I said. "You'd be murdered. How'd you get past the desk girl outside?"

"She was busy, so I just walked in. I'm a member of the staff," he said proudly, and showed me a little brown card. He was a Rural Correspondent. He told me so, and I could hear the capital letters in his voice as he said the words. Sending in a story once in a while to the *Tribune*, and maybe getting paid space rates—lousy



ones at that—meant a lot to Baldy. His name, I saw on the card, was Lew Hillman.

"I've got a big story for you," he said. "Too important to write in. I came down myself. It's about Doctor Fabrin." He stopped as though I ought to know the guy.

"Yeah," I said. "Well, that's the fellow you want to see." I pointed, and he left me. Ten minutes later I looked up from my typewriter to see Baldy beside me again, looking sick.

Before I could say anything he burst out, "He wouldn't believe me! He said I'd faked it. But I've got photographs—look at these!" He spilled a lot of pictures on my desk. There were a few shots of a sprawling, low building—"Palmview Hospital," Baldy said, stabbing his finger down on the prints—and about a dozen views of a chunky, ordinary-looking man. The only funny part was this: in some of the pictures the guy had two legs, but in others he had only one.

"We don't buy accident shots," I said, "unless there's some new angle involved. I can't—"

"You don't understand," Hillman broke in. "I got those pictures of Dryer two months ago, when he first came to the Palmview Hospital. I always take pictures of visitors, you know—so I'll have 'em on file in case anything breaks. Two months ago Dryer had only one leg. But now he's got two—a new leg grown right on the stump. I've seen it!"

The guy was crazy. I almost told him so. But he was so serious about the whole thing that all I said was, "You've got to have proof. These photos aren't enough."

"Proof!" he said. "Dryer's proof, isn't he? I got a sworn statement from him, and one from Doctor Fabrin." He tossed them on my desk.

I looked them over, but of course they didn't mean much. Either fakes, or written for publicity.

Then I happened to remember something I'd seen in the paper about Palmview Hospital. I told Hillman to wait a minute and went down to the morgue. There wasn't much stuff on Palmview, but I dug it all up.

The place was owned by Doctor Fabrin, who wasn't such a big shot, apparently. He leased out part of the hospital to various people from time to time, for his few patients weren't making him rich. I gathered Fabrin was an eccentric, rather incapable fellow who didn't stand too highly in the profession.

According to the morgue, something had happened a few weeks ago at Palmview. A half-nutty physicist named Guy Naismith, who had leased the basement for experimental work, had managed to blow himself up pretty thoroughly. He was moved upstairs and put to bed in the hospital proper. Also there were some funny anecdotes from the neighborhood—the usual junk that every paper gets, about strange lights, inexplicable noises, and such. But the part that held my interest said that Doctor Fabrin had announced a discovery that would revolutionize medicine—something that would cure incurable maladies. That was all he said; no hint of his methods. But it was enough to give me a hunch that there was news to be had at Palmview.

HALF an hour later I was in Hillman's rickety car bouncing out of the city. He was grateful but worried.

"Listen," I said, "I'm not going to swipe your story. I'm going to do some investigation on my own. You may have something, but without proof nobody's going to believe you. I had to bet the boss a bottle of Scotch I'd get a headline exclusive story before he'd let me go."

"It's news, all right," Hillman said, his pinched face eager. "Funny thing, I've been keeping my eye on the hospital ever since I got to know Naismith—"



"He's the physicist that just blew himself up, isn't he?"

"Yep. I figured he was good for a story—I talked to him a while ago, and he said he was on the track of something big. I couldn't understand much about it, but he was working on—uh—" Hillman fumbled in his pocket, brought out a crumpled sheet, and thrust it at me. The car swung toward the ditch, but with a jerk at the steering-wheel he straightened it out. "I made a few notes—"

I couldn't make much of the scribbles. "Entropy. . . . Determinism is a dominant characteristic—see Eddington. . . . Causality fails in sub-atomic matter. . . ."

"Very nice," I said, stuffing the paper back in his pocket. "Maybe an atom blew up in his face."

Hillman was offended. He didn't speak again till we drew up before the Palmview Hospital. I recognized the place from the photographs. An ordinary type of sanatorium, rather run down at the heels. The grass needed cutting, and the windows were dirty. I followed Hillman into the office and the desk girl put down a magazine and stared at us.

"We'd like to see Doctor Fabrin," my companion said.

That was as far as he got, for a group of internes, patients, and nurses came racketing through a swinging door on the trail of a big beefy man with grizzled gray hair and a face like a bulldog's. Everybody seemed excited. Hillman hurried toward the big guy.

"Doctor Fabrin, I've brought a reporter from the *Tribune*—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Fabrin gestured impatiently at me. "Come along. A new case—"

He blew past me like a cyclone, trailing the crowd behind him, and Hillman and I followed. Up a flight of stairs, along a corridor, and before a door with a number on it—and there he turned around, big arms lifted.

His thick lips blew out in a noisy hiss.

"Quiet! Leave me, all of you! You, Hillman—and you—come!" He waved us through the door and into a room where a pale, thin youngster was propped up in a wheel-chair by the window.

I said, "Doctor Fabrin, my name's Hailey—of the *Tribune*. Can I get some dope on this leg-growing stuff you've invented?"

Fabrin blinked. "Eh? Oh—that, yes. That was nothing."

The patient in the wheel-chair piped up, "You a reporter? Here's something for you to print. When I came here I had hemophilia. Now I'm cured—Doctor Fabrin cured me. See?"

**H**E SLAMMED his arm down on his knee, held it up for my inspection. There was a slight reddening on the skin, but this vanished almost immediately. "See? A week ago if I'd done that my arm would have swollen up like a balloon."

Fabrin was nodding happily. "Yes, yes. He is right, Mr. Hailey."

"A bleeder, eh?" I said. "Seems to me they've found cures for hemophilia before, Doctor Fabrin. Snake venom or albumen to coagulate the blood—"

"I used none of these. D'you think albumen would grow a new leg on a cripple? I am not a faker or a publicity-seeker." Fabrin glared at me. I grinned placatingly.

"Okay, Doctor. The *Tribune* would appreciate any information you'd care to give."

"One moment." Fabrin made a perfunctory examination of the patient, patted his shoulder reassuringly. "You're in fine shape, lad. A few more days and you can go home."

He led us back into the corridor. "My office is this way."

But just as we reached the door—something happened. It was my first real



experience of the incredible thing that was taking place in Palmview Hospital. Later I was to realize its meaning, and to understand the frightful peril I had been in when a little tingling shock raced through my body, like a galvanic current, and made me stop short, wondering. I turned to Fabrin, and was astonished at his expression. There was real fear in that heavy, bulldog face—but it was gone immediately.

"Wait," he said shortly. "I'll be back—" He nodded toward the door and hurried away. After a moment's indecision Hillman went after him.

I lit a cigarette and went into Fabrin's office, wondering. There were papers scattered all over a big mahogany desk, and I glanced at them idly. But they were merely case histories and business letters; I turned away as a girl came running in.

She pulled up short at sight of me. I looked her over. A nurse, obviously, and a very pretty one, with auburn hair curling from under the white cap, and a round little face that was thoroughly frightened at the moment. Her blue eyes were desperate.

"Oh . . . where's Doctor Fabrin?"

I shrugged. The girl looked around frantically.

"I've got to find him. I—I—something's happened!"

"Can I help?" I asked, and without waiting for an answer I took her arm and steered her back into the hall. If there was any news breaking in Palmview Hospital, Bob Hailey was going to get it.

The nurse seemed scared to death. She hesitated a second, and then hurried back to the room which I had left a while ago, where the "bleeder" had been.

I got one look at the incredible thing there, and shut the door in a hurry, dragging the girl inside with me. My stomach started to jerk. The nurse's hand flew up to her mouth and she got even paler.

I didn't blame her. The wheel-chair was lying in crushed ruin, and beside it was—a head. The head of some animal, though I didn't recognize it. It was as big as the bed, covered with warty grayish hide, with a single huge eye glazing in death. That impossible monstrosity looked something like a toad's head, a toad grown to elephantine size, and out of the slobbering muzzle protruded a man's head and shoulders.

I recognized the poor devil—the bleeder, with an expression on his face that turned me sick. He was dead, and I hoped death had come quickly. His chest cavity, I could see, had been crushed and mangled by the jaws of the monster.

The nurse started to tremble violently; she was on the verge of hysteria. I pushed her out into the hall. "Wait a minute," I said. "Get a grip on yourself, for God's sake." But my own voice was unsteady.

THEN I went back into the room. I had a job to do, and I didn't like it. I examined that ghastly monstrosity thoroughly, and was no wiser when I had finished. At first I did have some crazy idea that Doctor Fabrin had removed the growth limitations from a frog or a toad—made it into a giant by glandular treatment, or something of the sort. Like in Wells' *Food of the Gods*. But that wasn't it. This creature wasn't a toad; it was something I had never seen before.

I did make one discovery. The thing's head had been sliced cleanly from its body; a sticky whitish sort of blood was oozing from the stump, and I could see the gray of cartilage and nerve-tissue, not torn, but cut as though with a razor. It was utterly impossible. For one thing, a head of that size couldn't have got in by door or windows. For another, the body would have been as big as a dinosaur's, and you couldn't hide such a gigantic mass of flesh under the bed. It just couldn't have happened.



The nurse was waiting outside the door when I went out. She'd managed to calm down a bit, though her eyes were wide and afraid. "Is—he's dead, isn't he?" she got out.

"Yeah," I said. "What happened."

"I heard the boy scream. When I went in, it was like that. Only he was still alive, and that thing was—chewing—" She started to shiver again. Before she could get hysterical I said:

"Just the head? No body?"

"Just as you saw it. That head—"

"We're going to find Fabrin," I grunted. An interne came along, and I called him over.

"Listen," I said. "You stay outside this door on guard. Don't let anybody go in—except Fabrin. And don't go in yourself. Get it?"

He looked at the nurse. "Is that okay, Jean—Miss Benson?"

She managed to nod, and I said, "Where's Fabrin, anyway?"

"With Humphreys."

Jean said swiftly, "That's upstairs." I followed her as she ran along, with a flashing of slim silken legs.

"Humphreys?" I asked as we hurried up the stairway. "The big-shot gambler?"

"Uh-huh. He was shot—"

I remembered. Humphreys had tried to horn in on too many rackets, and somebody had put six slugs in him a few months before.

"His lung was pierced," Jean told me. "The right lobe. He won't live, I'm afraid."

**WE FOUND** Fabrin with Humphreys, trying to calm the gambler. The patient, a short, chunky guy with stiff black hair growing down almost to his shaggy eyebrows, was scared to death. He was trying to get out of bed, and Fabrin was holding him back.

"I seen it, I tell you," Humphreys yelped. "Eyes, watching me—big staring

eyes, and crazy colors and lights. Doc, I can't stand it laying here not able to do anything. You gotta get me well—you gotta!"

"Hold on to yourself," Fabrin soothed. "A few more weeks and you'll be on your feet again." The doctor's beefy face was chalk-white as he glanced at us. "Miss Benson, help me! You too, Hailey."

The three of us managed to keep Humphreys in his bed. The gambler finally lay quiet, his frightened eyes following Fabrin.

"You can cure me, Doc. You grew a leg on that cripple—you won't let a few slugs kill me, will you?"

Fabrin said a few soothing words and I took him aside. I told him what had happened. For a minute he looked like a madman.

"Oh, my God! Again!" He grabbed my arm. "Don't write this up, Hailey! I've got to see you—explain. But this mustn't get in the papers!"

I didn't answer, and he rushed out, almost knocking over Hillman, whose bald dome was gleaming with sweat as he popped into the room. The Rural Correspondent was shaking with excitement. He tried to hold Fabrin, but the doctor shook him off. Hillman saw me.

"Hailey! Naismith's got away—I couldn't stop him. He's downstairs. Go after him, will you? I'll get Fabrin."

Without waiting for a reply he ran after the doctor. I turned to the nurse.

"What's he talking about? Naismith?"

Before she spoke I remembered. Naismith was the physicist who had leased the basement for his work, and blown himself up a while ago.

Jean glanced at the gambler, who was lying back with eyes closed, whispering to himself.

"We'd better go after Naismith. Humphreys is all right now."

And downstairs we went again. Apparently the elevators weren't working.



My legs were getting pretty tired running around this madhouse.

A labyrinth of underground corridors, badly lighted, lay under the hospital. Jean seemed to know where to go. "He'll head for his laboratory," she told me—and she was right.

The sound of cracking wood revealed Naismith's whereabouts. Along the passage we caught sight of a gaunt, tall man smashing his shoulder against a door. The panel gave as we ran forward, and Naismith plunged out of sight.

I reached the threshold in time to see the man run through a room cluttered with scientific apparatus, jerk open another door, and slam it behind him. I followed, Jean at my heels. I turned the knob quietly.

**B**UT there was no need for caution. Naismith was standing, a lean silhouette, against a blaze of bluish light that glared out from a spot about in the center of the room, halfway between two metal globes propped up on stilts. It looked like one of those gadgets for making artificial lightning. Naismith turned around and saw us. His sallow face, all pounces and hollows, twitched and jerked.

His voice surprised me. It was deep and cultured; I had expected the shrieks of a madman, though I don't know why; but Naismith simply said gently, "Where's Fabrin, Miss Benson?"

"Upstairs. You shouldn't be here, Mr. Naismith. You're still convalescent."

I was looking at the spot of light near by. Somehow I had a hunch. "Mr. Naismith," I said. "I'm a reporter from the—"

He stared, and then his worn face was suddenly hopeful. "A reporter! You're just the man—the one man who can help. Listen, the hospital's got to be evacuated. Right now. There's deadly danger here, and Fabrin's incapable of realizing it. I've

tried to tell him, but he sees a chance to make a fortune, and he won't believe me. He won't let himself believe."

Naismith pointed at the gleaming point of light. "See that? It doesn't look like much, does it? But it's got more danger—more potential energy—than a billion tons of dynamite. It's a new type of matter. No—I shouldn't have said new, for it's always existed in the Universe, though nobody has ever before realized what it is. In that speck is the explanation of the breakdown of causality. The explanation of Charles Fort's mysteries."

I'd referred to the Fortean Society more than once in news stories, but I'd always been skeptical. "You mean Fort's yarn about the sky being a solid, with the stars explained away as volcanoes?"

Naismith made an impatient gesture. "Fort wasn't infallible. That's rot, of course. But he did collect a great deal of data that couldn't be explained away by known physical laws. Liquids appearing out of nowhere—that tree in Akron where water kept falling, without a cloud in the sky to account for it. Stones dropping out of nowhere, fantastic monsters appearing, creatures that couldn't be hybrids, the ultra-biological skull they found in Australia in 1846. The disappearance of the *Cyclops*. The woman found in her room burned to calcined bones, without her clothing or the carpet being scorched. The so-called fourth-dimensional gap in Bristol in 1873, when a man saw matter warped and twisted incredibly. Those aren't ghost stories! They seem impossible—but not when the key's found."

"Fantastic monsters appearing. . . ." I was remembering that toad-creature upstairs, the frightful head that had apparently sprung out of empty air. Yet I wasn't convinced. I listened skeptically as Naismith went on.

"The law of determinism has been broken down—that is, the rule of mathematical sequence of phenomena. One and



one don't always make two. Max Planck, Max Born, Weyl, Bohr—they've shown that, and Eddington has written a good deal about it. Perhaps you know his kettle analogy—the chance that if you put a kettle of water on the fire, the water will freeze. It isn't much of a chance; it's much more probable that the heat will flow from the fire to the kettle. But there *is* a chance that it'll flow the other way. Look here!"

**H**E SNATCHED a book from a nearby table, thumbed through it rapidly, pointed to a marked paragraph. "Here's Eddington's explanation—see that?"

I read, "If the event happens . . . there is no foundation for the system of physical law accepted by science, and the apparent uniformity of Nature observed up to now is merely a coincidence."

Naismith said, "Eddington refers to his kettle—he gives that as the most logical—or least illogical—explanation of a reversal of physical laws. But he's missed an important point. His 'apparent uniformity of Nature' is a misstatement. What of the known reversals of Nature—Peter Rugg, the man who vanished without a trace, Fort's data, that inexplicable poison gas that appears sometimes in a valley in—where is it? France or Belgium . . . it doesn't matter. The fact remains that physical laws are broken, and causality fails, as every scientist should realize."

Naismith pointed to the spot of light. "Our space-time continuum is stable, for the most part obeying stable laws. But there also exists a type of wave-motion that reverses stability. This vibration is diffused all through the Universe; we notice it in sub-atomic experimentation, but because of the diffusion this instability is usually confined to the sub-microscopic. We can't accurately plot the path of an electron because of this strange wave-motion."

I glanced quickly at the doorway, thinking I heard a rustle of movement. But it was not repeated. Naismith went on swiftly.

"Occasionally these instability waves may be compressed into a small area—crowded together, as the atoms in the interior of a star are compressed. When that takes place, causality is not only made invalid but reversed. Determinism fails, and indeterminism becomes the dominant characteristic. In such wave-eddies physical laws are based on instability instead of stability, and anything can happen. Liquids may appear from nowhere. Fantastic creatures may appear. A ship may be cleared of its crew but otherwise unharmed. A man—a Peter Rugg—may vanish."

Naismith turned to the girl. "Miss Benson, tell this man the circumstances of my accident, please."

The nurse said, "Why—I really don't know. We found you in the furnace room downstairs, with a few contusions and a slight concussion."

"Exactly. The furnace room was locked, wasn't it? From the outside?"

Jean nodded.

"Well, I'll tell you what happened. I attempted to concentrate these instability waves artificially—and I succeeded." He pointed again at the spot of light. "Immediately the laws of illogic prevailed. A submicroscopic accident occurred. My body is composed of electric charges—their combined bulk amounting to less than a billionth of my own. I'm mostly emptiness. So is this concrete floor. It's possible—but very improbable—that all the electric particles of the floor might just happen to miss all the particles of my body, and in such a case I'd simply slide down through it, as I'd drop through water."

"One chance of illogic in a world of logic. But under the impact of the instability waves, the chance was reversed."



It became one chance of logic in a world of illogic. I simply fell through the floor—and nearly killed myself.”

“Wait a minute,” I said sharply.

I WAS almost certain I heard movement in the adjoining room. I made a step toward the threshold—and suddenly the door slammed shut. I heard a key click in the lock. The sound of footsteps came, and grew fainter.

“Fabrin!” Naismith said. “He heard us!”

“Looks like it,” I grunted. “I’ll have to break down the door.” A thought made me turn to the physicist.

“Those miraculous cures—this instability wave of yours is responsible for them?”

“Of course. It was illogical for a man to grow a new leg, for a boy to be cured of hemophilia, but illogic is the dominant characteristic in this type of matter. Fabrin immersed the leg-stump in a saline solution, pumped in calcium, phosphates, iron—the elements that form the human body.” Now Naismith’s face was worried. “But occasionally there’s a pulsation—the thing throws out a wave of energy, some kind of quanta—and they spread out, like ripples on a pond, for a considerable distance. Everything in their path—”

“I get it,” I said, remembering the curious shock I had felt upstairs, just before things started to go haywire. “How far does this ripple of yours go?”

“Not far, I think. A few thousand yards before it’s diffused and dissipated into space. But everyone in this hospital is in deadly danger, subject to the instability laws.”

“Well, we’d better get out of here,” Jean said. “Can you break down the door?”

“I’ll try it,” I said. But just then the key clicked again, and the panel opened. A man stepped into the room and carefully shut the door behind him. It was

Humphreys, the gambler, in his pajamas, and he had an automatic in his hand. His little eyes were bloodshot, the pupils distended.

“Back up,” he growled. “All of you. Quick!”

Jean started toward him. “Mr. Humphreys, you shouldn’t be out of bed—”

He whipped out a hairy arm and thrust her roughly back. She fell against a table and nearly lost her footing. Humphreys said, “I’m onto you. The Doc told me what you was trying to do. You want to get me outa here, huh?”

Naismith said, “Listen, man, you’ve got to get out of Palmview. Everybody! You’re in danger—”

The gambler grinned angrily. “Yeah, the Doc was right. You’re all against me, trying to get me out so Fabrin can’t cure me. He says I’ll croak unless I stay here another week or two, with him tending to me.”

I realized that Humphreys’ mind had cracked. The fear of death, the fantastic things that had occurred, all these had made him a perfect tool for Fabrin.

“The Doc gave me this rod. Said he’d let me croak unless I got you—all three of you. So—”

I HEARD a scuffle from beyond the door. Something went over with a crash and a tinkling of glass. I heard Fabrin’s voice raised in a harsh shout—and the voice of little Hillman, the Rural Correspondent, shrill with fear and anger.

The gambler fired.

His hand was shaky; the bullet screamed past my ear, and a deep-toned vibration burst out behind me. Naismith cried, “The pulse—look out!”

From the corner of my eye I got a glimpse of the spot of light, its essence shaken and disturbed by the released energy of the bullet, expanding—spreading out in concentric ripples of radiance. But I was plunging toward Humphreys,



my skin crawling with expectation of a slug, seeing the gambler's gun swing in my direction. I heard the sound of a shot—

And again I felt the curious shock I had felt once before, the jolting, indescribable jar of Naismith's instability wave. My arm was flung out in front of me, and I felt something strike my hand—very lightly.

I cannoned into Humphreys. That was the word! I smashed into him like a pile-driver, driving him back against the door, and—through it!

I heard him scream, his voice knife-edged with agony, as he went down. I couldn't stop myself. There were two dark figures struggling before me, Fabrin and Hillman. Somehow I managed to swerve aside so I hit the doctor, but I saw little Hillman go spinning into a corner as my arm brushed him.

My shoulder drove into Fabrin. The man was a giant; I was no match for him physically. Yet under the impact of my rush he went plunging back, clear across the room, wrecking chairs and tables and equipment, and hitting the wall with a jolt that held him upright, unconscious, for seconds before he slid down in a heap.

I plunged at the wall, my arms outflung to break the force of the impact. My elbows cracked, nearly snapped. But I managed to halt, and stood there, gasping, trying to figure out what had happened.

Jean and Naismith ran out of the laboratory and stood staring at me. The girl had something in her hand, and she held it out wordlessly. A flattened little lump of lead that had once been a slug.

Naismith grabbed my arm, pointed at a red mark on my wrist. "Look at that! That's where the bullet hit you—or where you hit the bullet. My God, what energy!" He started to laugh crazily.

I said dazedly, "What happened?"

"Laws of illogic," Naismith said.

"Humphreys shot at you just when the instability waves spread out; and according to known laws the bullet had more energy than you—should have killed you. But there was a reversal—the instability waves gave you a tremendous surplus of potential and kinetic energy. You had so much more force than the bullet that you simply brushed it aside—and it looks like you've killed both Fabrin and Humphreys!"

Jean was on her knees beside Fabrin. "No, he's breathing. But Humphreys—"

"Dead," little Hillman said, wavering toward us. "His neck's broken. Lord, what a punch you've got, Hailey!"

Naismith glanced over his shoulder. "But there's still danger. That wave-pulse may have caused trouble upstairs. Hillman, phone the police. The hospital's going to be evacuated right now."

"But—"

I could see what he was thinking. "Go ahead," I said. "I'll phone the paper. The *Tribune* will run an exclusive, all right—I'll attend to that. And the story's going to have your by-line on it, Hillman."

And that was that. The Palmview Hospital was evacuated in a hurry, and after the news broke a scientific foundation bought the property and surrounded it with high-voltage fences and keep-off signs. Naismith's working with a dozen big-shot physicists out there right now, trying to control his instability waves. He seems to think it can be done, but I'm not so sure. Personally, I'd rather juggle with hand-grenades.

The Medical Board kicked Fabrin out; I don't know what happened to him afterwards. Hillman's got a regular job with the *Tribune* now, but he's never been able to equal his first big scoop, though he's turned in some pretty good stories.

Jean? Oh, I married her. She said she fell in love with me when I flattened two men and a bullet with one punch.



# A MIRACLE IN TIME

By Henry Hasse

Her crime: that she was a human being, as were the people of old. Her punishment: that she be torn from her own world and flung down the ages back to the days of which she dreamed.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Sentenced

**C**HYANA looked up calmly at the faces of the Council. There were seven of them, implacable and stern, like masks crudely carved in brass. The Master spoke first, a faint but cruel smile tightening his thin lips.

"There is still time," he said, "if you wish to reconsider. You need not persist in your atavism. You have only to shear off that unsightly yellow hair and submit in all other ways to the dictates of Science, your master, instead of persisting in the



thought that you are a free entity entitled to do as you please."

The lesser colleagues in the Council of Scientists nodded sagely at his words, and looked with pitiable contempt at the radiant creature standing so steadfastly before them.

"The Master is right," one murmured. "Such a thing as this is a disgrace to the Genetics Bureau!"

"Why don't they obliterate these—these freaks in their infancy?" another whispered to his neighbor, in a tone the girl could not hear.

The Master continued:

"And there is yet another matter. It has been reported that you have in your possession a book. You are aware, of course, that this is strictly against our dictates. What is this book, and how did it come into your possession?"

The girl spoke now for the first time, and her voice was a monotone:

"I suppose it can make no difference now. The book is Vahn's *The New Beginning*. I found it among the ruins of one of the old museums."

"*The New Beginning*," the Master repeated, frowning. "And why did you not submit your find to us? We have found many copies of this book, and it is by far the worst of all the rubbish we have destroyed. It is a preposterous fable, an insult to the intelligence—"

"It was a sort of—of imaginary history," Chyana stammered. "About the twenty-sixth century. I cannot see what harm—"

The Master turned slightly and smiled at his associates—a thin, purely mechanical smile. "History of the twenty-sixth century," he repeated. "She cannot see what harm."

"It—it was a romantic book," Chyana said hopelessly.

"Romantic! A word. Merely another proof of your atavistic tendencies. But I repeat, if you wish to reconsider, you have

only to put yourself under the surveillance of a committee for a period of three months, during which time we shall receive a report as to your conduct and habits. Otherwise—" He purposely left the alternative unspoken, and leaned forward, awaiting her reply.

SHE looked at them, returning their implacable stares. Then, realizing they were waiting for her to speak, her attitude changed. Her lips tightened. She took a step forward, arms stiffly at her sides and fists clenched.

"I can only say that for cold, calculating scientists which you claim to be, you are reacting to my case in a most emotional manner! Do you arrive at all your decisions governing state affairs with such hesitancy? You say I am atavistic. Surely you do not hesitate to spare the feelings of such an unfit subject as I? I demand to know my fate, for I tell you again I refuse to submit to be examined like a guinea-pig!"

The scorn in her voice stung the Master to action. He rose swiftly to his feet. The rest of the Council also rose as the Master pronounced sentence:

"Since you are a unique case, indeed the first to appear before the Council in nearly two hundred years, we have determined upon an equally unique and satisfactory solution. One of our scientists has recently completed a time-transportation device. It has not yet been actually tested, but he is sure it will behave strictly according to his theory. Since this is a dangerous thing, we have passed a decree forbidding any more time experiments. You, however, are to be sent back through time to a period of human evolution in which you more logically belong."

The Master paused and looked down at Chyana coldly, expecting her to show some emotion, but she remained silent.

"Since you seem so interested in the twenty-sixth century," he continued, "we



shall set the dials roughly at that remote era. Upon your arrival the device will automatically be disrupted, so you need not anticipate using it to return!"

"Return!" she exclaimed, and there was something like a fervent prayer of thanks in her voice. "May all the gods I believe in prevent that I should ever return!"

Chyana did not flinch when they led her to the time-device, a glassy box with bewildering mechanism in one end. Nor, when they had sealed her in, was she afraid at the sudden minatory whine that assailed her ears, like the drone of an angry, prodigious metal bee. She stood there tense, her hands upon the glassy walls, awaiting whatever sensation a flight through time might incur.

Then, overcome by a strange drowsiness, she felt herself slipping slowly to the floor. Her last glimpse of the world she hated was the pale white row of the Council's faces pressing close, peering in at her; and her last conscious thought was to wonder if this were not some diabolic trick. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Bizarre Friend

CHYANA was aware of silence and pleasant warmth. She opened her eyes. Bright sunlight hurt them and she quickly turned her head away. Blinking, she discovered that the crystalline time-

sarcophagus reposed in what seemed to be a green-walled canyon.

As she sat up and her gaze encompassed more of the surroundings, she discovered she was lying in a little alcove. It was formed on three sides by crumbling, lichen-covered walls. On the fourth side were tangled weeds.

She pushed at the glass door and it opened easily. She stepped out, but hadn't taken five steps when there was a splintering, tinkling crash behind her. She spun around and saw all that was left of the time-device: a heap of twisted metal and shattered glass. She had been a little bewildered, her mind far away somewhere. But now memory was flooding back swiftly, and with a little shock she remembered. A world she hated . . . the Council . . . they had sent her back, and they had indeed been thorough to prevent her possible return.

This, then, must be the twenty-sixth century. But how strange! She had not had time enough to know what to expect in the twenty-sixth century—but certainly not this! Something must be wrong.

Such were her thoughts as she stepped from between the walls and looked out upon a vast expanse of crumbled ruins! In every direction, as far as she could see, they extended—hideous remains of what must have been once a proud and glorious city. Many walls still stood, but none were more than three stories high; crumbling and cracked, and all green with climbing

# "I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the

invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 182, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 182, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.



vines. In some places bare steel girders reached higher, but these were corroded, and some of them drooped to the ground, giving the effect of huge spiders poised to spring. In other places only heaps of powdery masonry and tangled metal marked the spots where buildings had stood.

What had once been streets were long since blown over with the dust and dirt of ages, from which tall tangled grass flourished.

Not knowing which way to turn, Chyana walked straight ahead along what had been a wide thoroughfare. With a sudden shrinking of the heart she looked about her at this unexpected denouement to her time trip. But she tried not to be panicky, and as she walked along she tried to think. There was something else wrong here; she had felt it almost at once. And now suddenly she knew what it was.

In all the luxuriant, almost tropical vegetation she saw around her, there should have been something else: life. The flitting of birds and the tiny, scarce-heard insect noises. But here there was none of that. In all this deadly calm and ruin there was neither the moving nor sounding of any other living thing.

Chyana did not try to delude herself with any false hope. She could not be certain, but she considered it quite probable that she was the only person now alive on this world. These ruins around her were not the result of some sudden cataclysm. They seemed the final toll of relentless centuries. At least, whatever people had built this city must have long preceded it to dust. Could this really be, then, the twenty-sixth century? Might not the Master have set the dial wrong and sent her ahead into time instead of back? Chyana shrugged her shoulders and dismissed the question.

She walked aimlessly over to one of the ruins and stood peering down into a vast cavity that had once been a sub-foundation. Suddenly the crumbling stone be-

neath her feet gave way, and she clambered to safety just in time to escape being carried down with the minor avalanche she had caused. She sat upon a piece of masonry, chin in hand, and tried to take a calm cognizance of the immediate present.

It was then that she became aware of the sound behind her—the sound that was not the avalanche, for the avalanche had stopped. This was another sound from below that brink, a frantic, clawing, clambering sound. Chyana whirled around, facing the brink behind her. She felt her heart pounding the blood into her ears. Quickly she picked up a jagged piece of rock and held it ready as a possible weapon. The clambering sound became louder. She wondered what sort of thing this might be. Then Chyana saw a long arm reach up, and another, as the thing came clawing up from below and over the edge.

CHYANA had been ready to flee, or to scream, or to fling her weapon, but now she only stood there gaping. She was not quite sure she hadn't lost her sanity. The thing she faced was all of metal! It came up over the edge of the pit and moved clumsily through the ruins, then stopped.

Hesitantly Chyana walked over and looked at it. It seemed harmless enough, and was of very simple construction, merely a box-like affair upon four jointed, metal legs. At the rear of it a hexagon-shaped protuberance led downward, like a thick tail.

It now stood quite still, this clumsy, clambering contrivance. Chyana thought she knew what had happened. Her avalanche had dislodged it somewhere down there, and its mechanism, long dormant, had miraculously carried it up the side of the pit. But it did not quite seem like an accident, somehow! The thing's movement had been almost intelligent as it crawled over the rim from below.



Chyana walked around it. What on earth could it be? It looked so grotesque and clumsy standing there, that she wanted to laugh. Then, near the tapering rear of the thing, she saw a metal tag with a serial number, and the letters HEX—R. Near the tag were two buttons, one red and one white. Impulsively Chyana reached out and pressed the red button.

The absurd thing came to life so abruptly that Chyana nearly fell over backward getting out of the way. It took five steps forward, then stopped. The jointed legs buckled until the hexagonal tube touched the ground. It arose again, took five steps toward the retreating Chyana, squatted, arose, took five more steps, and repeated the process. And each time the machine walked forward it left behind it on the ground a red, hexagonal piece of tile perhaps six inches in diameter, firmly cemented! The process never varied, and no matter how fast Chyana ran before it, the machine came swiftly a few yards behind her, stopping every fifth step to lay a tile.

At last she stopped, and the machine stopped too. She walked slowly back toward it, and it didn't move. She walked away from it again, very slowly. It followed her, very slowly—and on the fifth step it squatted again and laid a tile. Thoughtfully Chyana walked back to it.

Again she examined the clumsy contrivance, but could see no mechanism except the two buttons. She pressed the white button this time but it seemed jammed.

"A mechanical tile-layer!" she laughed a bit wildly. "Fantastic! Clumsier than anything I ever saw in my century. Maybe I am back in the twenty-sixth century after all!"

Dismissing it from her mind she walked away, toward what she thought might be the edge of the city that she could see on the horizon. She wanted to see what lay beyond these ruins.

But the tile-layer came clattering noisily behind her down the grass-grown street!

Impatiently she stopped and faced it. It stopped too, a few yards behind, and laid a tile.

"Stop following me!" she said, annoyed. "Go lay your tiles somewhere else! Go home—if you have one." Then she laughed at her absurdity. She walked on, but again heard the clatter of it behind her.

"Well, I'll fix you," she muttered to herself. She walked over to a five-foot stone wall. The tile-layer followed. Chyana climbed over the wall and walked straight ahead. She looked back defiantly, and saw the thing climbing over the wall with ease! It stopped halfway down the side to lay a tile, then came on after her.

Chyana laughed, and gave a little shrug of resignation. "All right, my friend," she said as she walked back to the street, "come on then!"

But it didn't need her invitation. It came anyway.

HER encounter with this bizzare piece of mechanism should have prepared her for what happened next; but it came too suddenly for her to be anything but amazed.

First she was aware of a most raucous and fearsome sound, coming from down the street ahead of her. The sound was nothing but the barking of a dog, but Chyana did not know that; in her far century there had been no dogs. She stopped at the sound, and the faithful tile-layer stood still behind her.

Then she saw the source of the sound running toward her down the street, and she gave a gasp of surprise. Another thing of metal! It was really a robot-dog, but to Chyana it was merely a fantastic little metal creature from which issued a ferocious and discordant noise; and it might be dangerous.

But the robot-dog braced its feet and came to a stop a safe distance in front of Chyana. It cocked its jointed head quizzically and two intelligent, glowing eyes



looked up at her. They blinked. Chyana laughed at this. It barked sharply again and ran a little distance away, its jointed metal tail wagging. It stopped and looked back, and seeing she did not follow, barked again insistently. It trotted back to her and repeated the process.

After several such maneuvers Chyana comprehended. She had never seen a dog, not even a robot-dog, but such a language cannot be mistaken. She followed the creature down the street.

But she had forgotten the tile-layer. As she moved it followed her faithfully, laying its red hexagonal tile every fifth step. The dog stopped once and looked back—and seeing the clumsy thing plodding along behind Chyana, he ran back and circled it cautiously, growling in mock ferocity. But the tile-layer moved steadily, disdainfully along. The robot-dog was as puzzled as Chyana had been, and finally, with something like disgust, he trotted on ahead, looking back every once in a while to make sure Chyana was following.

Thus the strange procession moved for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Then the dog stopped before a ruin that seemed to have withstood the ages better than any edifice Chyana had yet seen. The four walls still stood, towering above anything around it.

The robot-dog stopped stiffly. It looked back and barked once. Then it scurried into a low entrance.

### CHAPTER THREE

Ral Vahn

CHYANA followed cautiously and stood just within the door to let her eyes become accustomed to the gloom beyond. She heard the metal creature bark again, and saw it standing before what seemed to be a low dais.

Chyana came closer. She stood looking down upon a square box-affair, perhaps seven feet in length. The material

was transparent, but within it she could only see a quiescent milky whiteness. Then, peering closer, she dimly discerned a vague, darker shape within that mistiness, a shape that lay prone and reminded her of—

Chyana's heart leaped to her throat as the realization came like a blow. The shape within this receptacle was a human being!

Quickly now she circled the dais, examining it carefully from all sides. Finally, at the farthest end she found a metal plate. It was green with verdigris, but there were words in raised metal letters. With handfuls of dirt she rubbed it clean enough to read:

TAHOR THIRD, EMPEROR OF THE AMERICAS, SENDS TO YOU RALPH VAUGHN, THAT HE MAY SEE THE LASTING GLORY OF TAHOR THIRD. A.D. 2087.

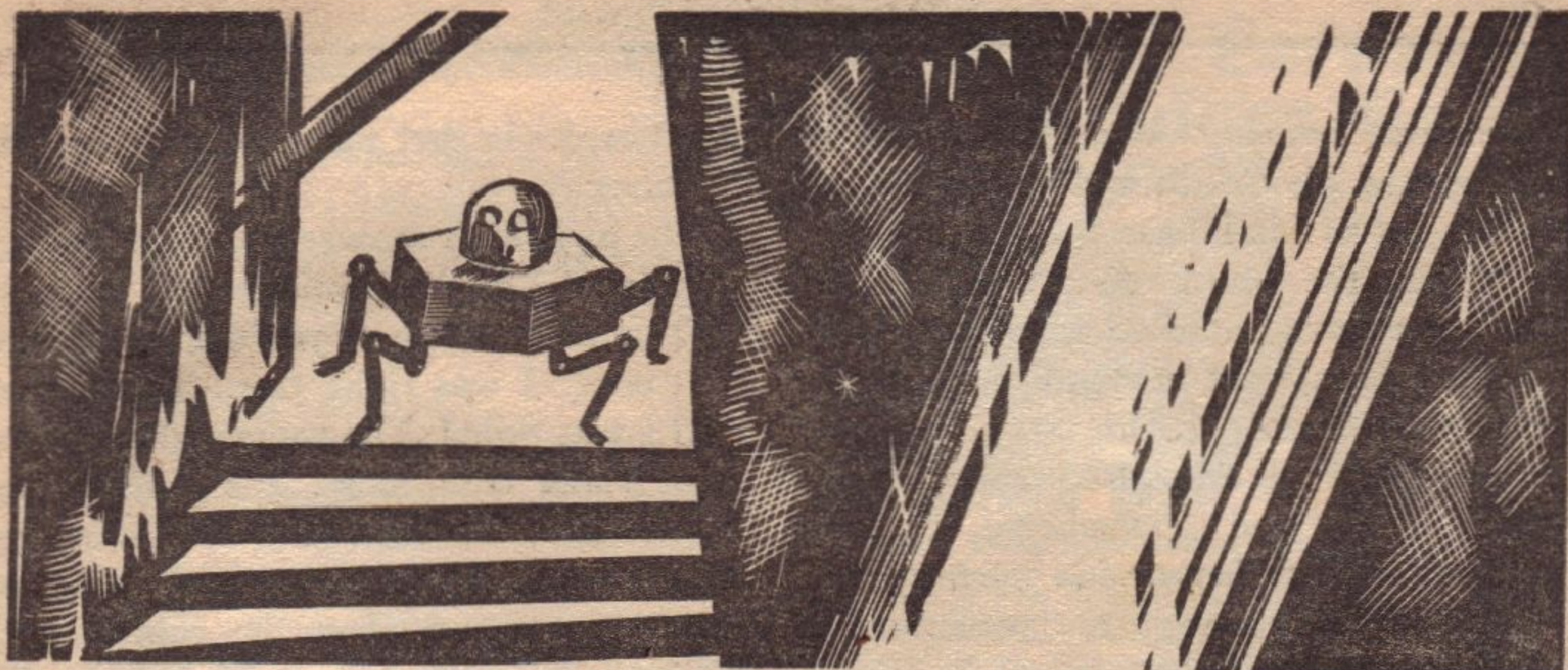
This was quite meaningless, and searching further, all she could find was a tiny wheel extending from a pipe at the base of the dais. She tried to turn it, but all her strength was to no avail. She found a heavy rock, and pounded at the wheel until it snapped off. She stood for several moments waiting for something to happen. Nothing did.

Then she was aware that something *was* happening. There was a slight swirling of the mistiness in the glass box, a faint hissing sound, and she was getting suddenly very drowsy. Just in time she staggered back to the entrance and breathed the clean, fresh air.

Even from where she stood she could now see the mistiness slowly swirling, dissolving. Within ten minutes the square receptacle was quite transparent and Chyana could clearly see the prone figure within it.

But she stood there quite still, just within the entrance of the ruin—watch-





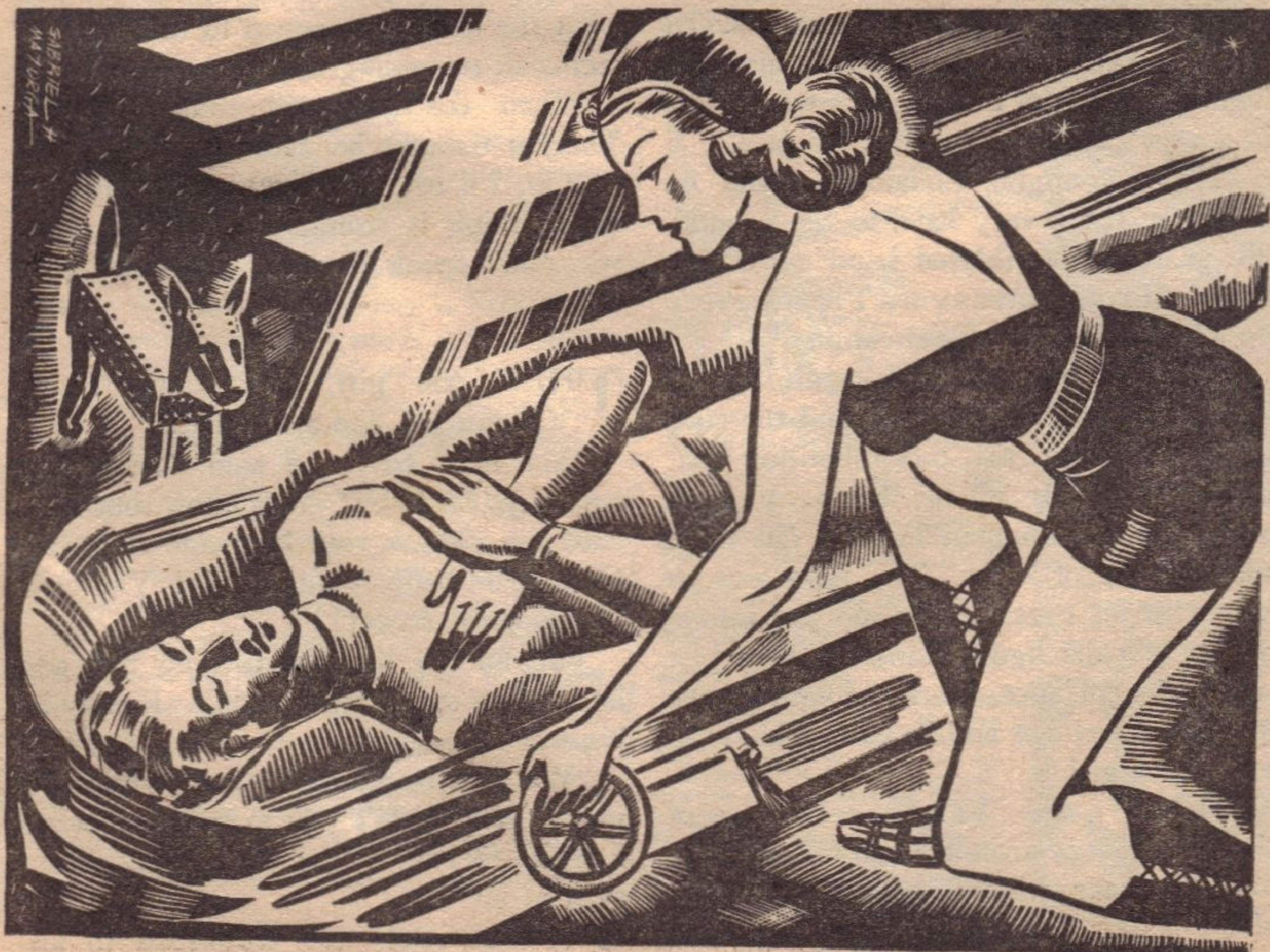
ing, not moving, waiting to see what was going to happen. . . .

**R**ALPH VAUGHN opened his eyes and looked up into a vague, dusky place. He turned his head. How dark it was in here! Off to the left, however, he could see an entrance through which bright sunlight fell.

This was funny! Just a moment before all the others had been here, gathered

around him; one sneering, haughty face in particular.

Then it burst upon him. It hadn't been just a moment before. It had been many moments, many years before! He raised his hands and touched the heavy, glassy lid above him. He pushed, and it lifted slightly. He lay back, gathering his strength; then with a mighty heave he lifted the lid so that it shifted and slid to the ground. He climbed out and stood





a moment, listening. What a vast silence! He opened his mouth and yelled with all the power of his lungs:

"Tahor the Third was a tyrant! May his name have vanished with the dust!"

The words went rebounding about the walls, and finally faded away. Vaughn grinned, and felt a hundred percent better already. He had remembered his final resolution, just before his memory had slipped entirely away: the resolution to shout those words the moment he awoke.

As the words died away he heard a sharp, joyful bark near at hand.

"Pete!" he exclaimed. "So they sent you too, as I asked! I didn't think they would. Where are you? It's so damn gloomy in here I can't see much. Come on, Pete! Here boy!"

Vaughn heard the bark again, and a moment later he received the shock of his life. He saw a blurred shape catapulting through the air toward his arms. It struck him with such force that he was nearly bowled over, and he thought a rib cracked where something hard struck. In his arms he held a thing of metal which was trying in a very canine way to lick his face.

"Hey!" Vaughn exclaimed. And he flung the thing very hard to the ground. He passed a bewildered hand across his brow. "I could have sworn I heard Pete's bark! Maybe I'm still dreaming."

He didn't hear the bark again, and as he walked over to the door and the sunlight, he didn't see the robot-dog that trotted faithfully at his heels. Vaughn stood there a moment looking out upon the expanse of ruins. The light was so bright in his eyes that he did not immediately see the figure standing there just within the entrance. Then the figure made a slight movement and he turned his head and saw a girl.

"Hello!" said Vaughn. "I'm glad there's someone around I can talk to. Say, did you hear what I yelled just then, about Tahor the Third? But of course

you heard. Is that name familiar to you —Tahor?"

The girl didn't answer and didn't move.

"Well," Vaughn continued, "I guess it isn't familiar to you or you'd acknowledge it at once. I was right, then. Damn, I'm glad I was right! The name and the power of Tahor is no more. It's vanished, as I said, with the dust. But so has everything else, as far as I can see." Vaughn looked out again upon the ruined city. "What year is this?" he said again to the girl.

Still she didn't answer; merely stared at him.

"Supposed to be a thousand years hence," Vaughn went on. "At least that's when Tahor said I'd awake. I came from the year 2087, you know."

Still the girl said nothing, and Vaughn looked at her in puzzlement. But he went on valiantly:

"Who's in authority around here now? I've got to see someone, you know! And what the devil's happened to the city? It seems all crumbling ruins!"

When the girl still didn't answer, Vaughn thought he understood.

"Oh, I'll bet the language has died. I didn't think it would so soon! I guess you don't speak English. English? Understand?"

**T**HEN the girl spoke, and Ralph Vaughn felt like a simpleton.

"My dear sir," she said, "what you mean by 'English' I don't know, but I assure you I speak your language very well. Quite a bit better than you do! You have the queerest accent!"

Vaughn felt his face turning red, and he tried to speak but couldn't. Finally he blustered:

"Well I'll be damned! Say, what's the idea? Why didn't you answer me when I spoke to you, if you were going to answer at all?"

"I was simply too enthralled to an-



swer," Chyana said. "Your accent, I mean. It's funny, but it's fascinating!"

He stared at her, and she stared right back; then suddenly they both laughed, simultaneously. And with that laughter both felt that they'd known each other for years.

"Who are you, anyway?" Vaughn asked.

"Chyana."

"Chyana what? Is that all?"

The girl nodded.

"Just Chyana," Vaughn said musingly, lingering over the name. "Well, Chyana, I'm pleased to meet you. I'm Ralph Vaughn." He extended his hand.

She took the hand puzzledly. "Ral Vahn," she repeated quickly, almost running the words together.

"And you think my language is funny!" Ralph exclaimed. "What kind of talk is that? It's Ralph Vaughn, not Ral Vahn!"

Chyana nodded. "Ral Vahn," she repeated very seriously.

"Oh, all right, have it your way. Well, Chyana, now that we're friends—we are, aren't we?—would you mind enlightening me on a few points? Is this really 3000 A.D. or therabouts?"

Chyana was puzzled. "I—don't really know," she said. "It's *supposed* to be the twenty-sixth century—I think."

"You mean you don't even *know*?"

"Oh, I don't belong here," Chyana said quickly. "I think I'd better tell you my story first, then you can tell me yours. It's probably much more interesting."

When Chyana told of the Council's decision, she said hesitantly: "Of course they were right. I—I was so different than anyone, both in thought and appearance. That world was so cold, unfeeling. They—they called me atavistic. They insisted I obey their dictates and shear my hair, because it's yellow and unsightly. No one else had hair, but I sort of—loved mine. . . ."

Ral Vahn was aghast. "Yellow, un-

sightly!" he exclaimed. "It's nothing of the sort. It's golden, and it's—well, lovely. In fact," he said feelingly, "it's so bright and alive it seems two shades of gold instead of one—"

Chyana blushed and to hide her confusion went on quickly with her story. When she had finished Vahn nodded and said:

"Then you are very probably right, and this is the twenty-sixth century. I was supposed to stay in that glass tomb until 3000-and-something, but you released me prematurely, for which I thank you most heartily! And now for my story.

"Tahor the Third, as you heard me shout awhile ago, was a tyrant. And to say that he and I didn't get along well together is a masterpiece of understatement. He came into power directly after the Ninth Great War. All of Europe and Asia was by then a shambles, and the Americas were all that remained of civilization. But it might just as well not have been. The Americas went the way of the other hemisphere—not by bombers and poison gas, but under the relentless, tyrannical thumb of Tahor Third. He was a madman and an egomaniac, of that I was always sure. Gradually I came to know that he had one growing obsession. This was the determination to be remembered as the most powerful ruler in all history.

"Through my initiative a group of thinkers rose in revolt. But just as we were about to strike for the freedom of the people, we were betrayed by a spy among us. The others were all executed, but I was saved until the last. Tahor wanted to attend to my punishment in person.

"Instead of execution, he decreed I should be placed under a newly discovered method of suspended-animation. After a thousand years the gas in my glass tomb would be automatically released and I would awake into a world where the name Tahor was resounding in history, if not still in power. It was better than I had



hoped for. At least it was life. It seems, though that Tahor's name is already forgotten.

"Everything I knew seems to be forgotten. I wonder if anyone else is alive to remember?"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### "Mech"

**R**AL VAHN ended on this note of puzzled interrogation, but Chyana shook her head.

"You know as much about it now as I do," she said. "It seems to me your city has crumbled with the ages."

"In such a short time? Nonsense! It's crumbled, all right, but it took something more than *time* to bring things to this state. Anyone else about?"

"I haven't seen anyone or anything. Except," she added in sudden remembrance, "my tile-layer who seems to have adopted me, and that awful beast of yours!"

"Beast of mine? What the devil do you mean?"

"He led me here! He came in here. Didn't you see him?"

"You couldn't mean Pete! My dog? I could have sworn I heard Pete bark, and something jumped at me, but it certainly wasn't him!"

But at the word "Pete" they heard the bark again, and the robot-dog came out of the gloom into the sunlight. Pointed metal ears were alert, and his metal tail wagged joyfully as he looked up at his master. He barked again, a sharp puzzled bark.

Vahn looked down at the fantastic thing in amazement. "That's Pete's bark!" he exclaimed. "I'd know it anywhere! Hello, Pete, is it really you? You recognize me, do you, after five hundred years? But I don't recognize you, Pete!"

Again the thing barked, joyously this

time at the friendliness in his master's voice.

"This is Tahor's work!" Vahn said venomously. His face was dark as he bent down and touched the robot's head. From the increased motion of Pete's tail it seemed that he liked this, though it was doubtful if he felt the touch; probably only the gesture was familiar.

"He was a beautiful animal," Vahn told Chyana, "and the best friend I had. When Tahor told me my fate, I hated the thought of leaving Pete behind, and I begged Tahor to send him along with me. He said he would, but he smiled peculiarly when he promised it; now I know the meaning of that. He's done this deliberately. He's encased the dog's brain in this metal body—for his brain is surely here, if nothing else of him. Tahor always had a diabolic sense of humor."

Vahn bent again and touched the robot-dog. "I can't say I like you this way. Well, Chyana changed my name, so I guess I'll have to change yours. Somehow 'Pete' doesn't fit you now. Guess I'll call you 'Mech'—short for Mechano. Understand?"

Mech dropped the rusty rivet he was chewing upon, and barked.

**C**HYANA had watched this tableau in wonderment, but there was something like understanding in her eyes. Now she said:

"Is the other one yours too?"

"The other one? What other one?"

"Watch," Chyana said. She walked out to where the tilelayer was waiting, a short distance away. She walked unconcernedly past it, but it turned and followed, quickly laying a tile on the fifth step.

"See?" Chyana said amusedly, coming back.

"No," Vahn exclaimed in amazement, and with the utmost finality, "the thing is certainly not mine! But it seems to like you!"



## A MIRACLE IN TIME

Chyana explained how she'd dislodged it in the ruin and then couldn't get rid of it. Vahn examined it but there was no clue except the serial number and the HEX—R.

"I don't remember having seen anything like this," he said, "so the thing probably dates after my time."

"But why does it follow me around? You don't think it has a—a brain, like your Mech?"

"I doubt that very much. If it does, it's a very crude one." Vahn walked around it, walked beyond it, trying to get it to follow him as it had Chyana, but the absurd thing wouldn't budge. Chyana laughed delightedly.

They examined the inside of the building. The walls seemed in fairly good condition, and most of the roof was still there, so Vahn said:

"Suppose we make this our—say our headquarters. Seems safe and fairly comfortable here. I've been wondering about what you said—no one else around. We've got to explore! And what about food? Are you hungry?" Vahn's practical mind had leaped into action.

"I think I will be before long," Chyana said. "I've been too excited to think about it."

Vahn nodded. "Probably no food stuffs left, not even canned goods. Looks like we'll have to get out of here and back to nature. We can find growing things there, enough for the present. Most of all I want to find out what caused all this premature ruin. It's got me worried."

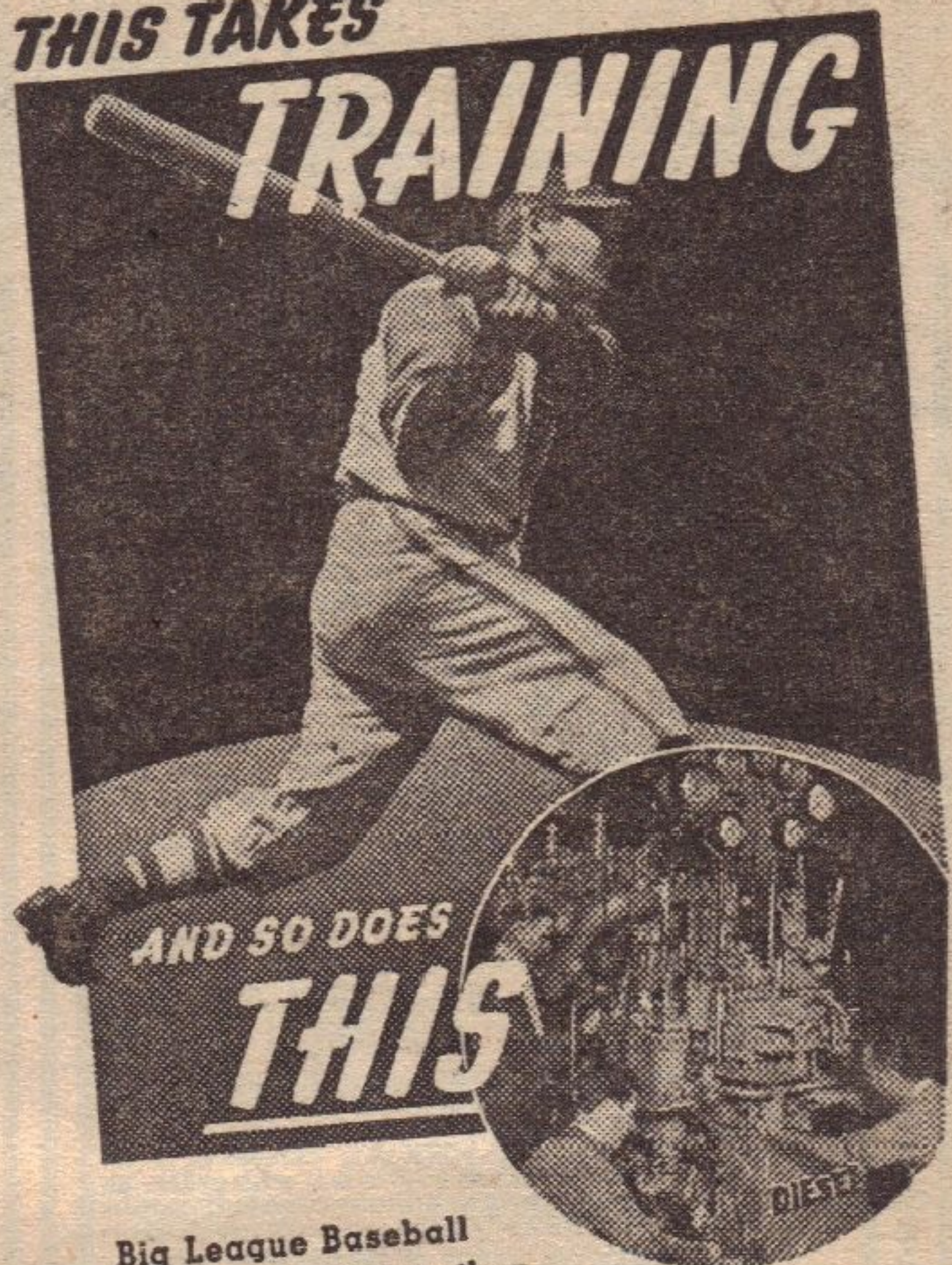
## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Blue Torment

AS THEY talked they had scarcely noticed the sun, now almost below the western horizon. Only a few red streaks were left across the sky, then even they

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6.00-17	3.40	1.40	Size	Tires Tubes	Size
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40	6.00-20	\$3.75	\$1.65
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45	6.50-20	4.45	1.95
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55	7.00-20	5.95	2.95
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55	9.75-20	9.00	10.95
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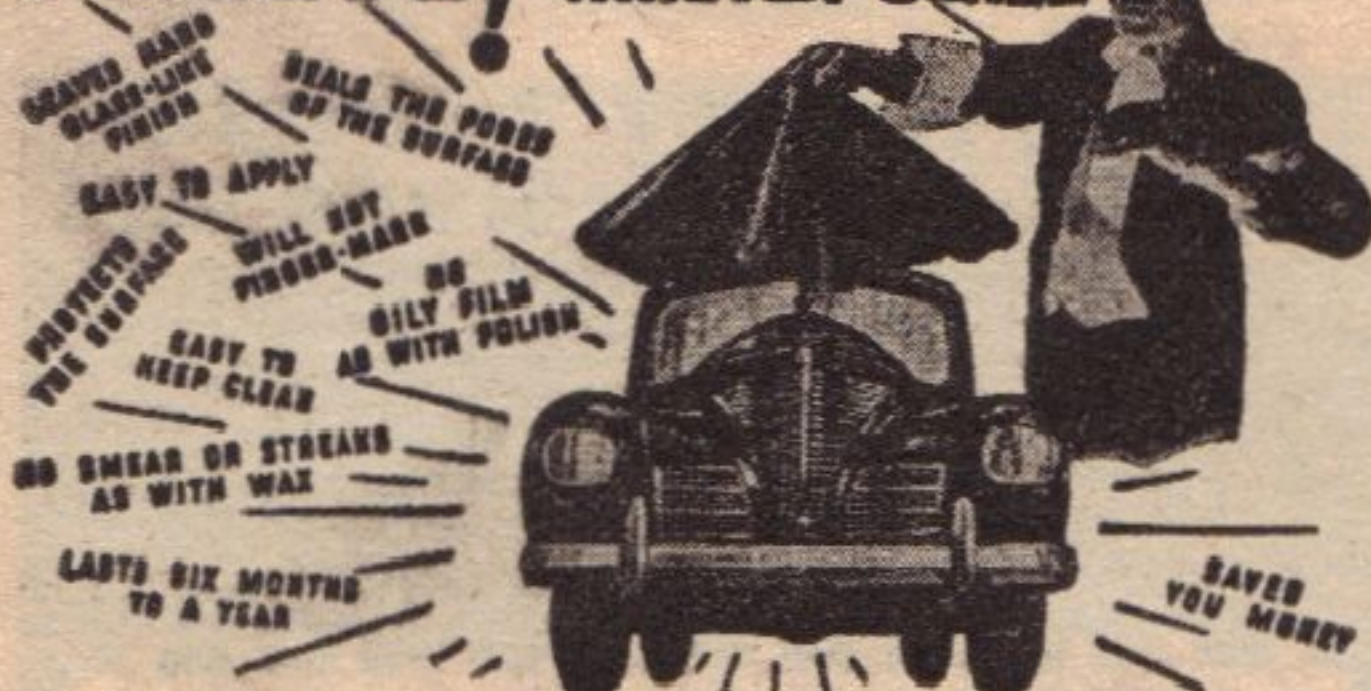
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## ASTONISHING STORIES

were gone and it was suddenly dusk. Then, close upon the vanishing of the last streak of light in the west, there dawned a startling phenomenon.

At first it was barely discernible, a faint bluish tinge that sprang up seemingly a few miles away toward the edge of the city. It grew and the hue deepened, spreading all along the horizon. It came nearer and nearer to them as they stood watching in amazed silence. They became aware of a slight intoxication which increased as the electrical pulsations became stronger. It was quite dark now and the air was crisp and crackly. The blueness flashed in intermittent jerky waves, like continuous lightning. Their intoxication increased until they staggered under it. But it was more than that, for mingled with it now was a malignancy almost frightening; a searing, mental torture from within!

In Ral Vahn's ears was a vast singing, and the earth seemed to sway beneath his feet. Through the darkness everywhere the livid blue hell pulsed incessantly. He clutched at his head. His brain was a writhing thing of fire. He reached out blindly for Chyana beside him, but no one was there. He thought he opened his mouth and screamed something, but he heard no words. An anguished white face flashed momentarily before him, and then the figure was fleeing blindly away with golden hair streaming. He staggered after it, stumbled and fell, arose and ran wildly and fell again. Innumerable tiny hot fingers were trying to tear his brain apart fiber by fiber.

Afterwards he did not know how long he had run or where. He had lost all sense of direction. He dimly remembered crashing many times through tangled creepers and ruins, to lie exhausted, then to stagger blindly on, anywhere, anywhere to escape the pulsing, all-pervading torture in his brain from which there was no escape.



He only knew that when he awoke the sun was shining painfully into his eyes and something was tugging insistently at his sleeve. He turned his head and saw Mech, who cried woefully. He stood up and saw that the sun was in the east. It was morning. His clothes were torn, he was scratched and bruised and his head ached fiercely. Chyana was gone, nowhere to be seen.

CHYANA awoke somewhere, battered and bruised. It seemed like a horrible nightmare, the headlong flight to escape the blue horror that had attacked their brains so suddenly. One moment she and Ral had been laughing together, and the next moment the horror had come. It was gone now, and the sun was bright in the east.

She stood up, and saw HEX—R a short distance away, who took a step toward her and laid a tile. Only a few hundred yards away she could see what seemed to be the edge of the city, and it seemed to end abruptly, strangely.

She walked toward it and found herself standing at the edge of a precipice a few hundred feet high. She shuddered to think how close she had come to it in her insane flight. Below, stretching to the horizon in all directions, was a vast black plain. It was convoluted and ugly, seemingly nothing but black dust. She could see little swirls of it as a slight breeze blew.

She looked timidly down the perpendicular cliff at her feet, and saw that it was covered with a smooth, crystalline substance. But it was criss-crossed with millions of tiny cracks, and in a few places patches of it had fallen off, leaving the bare earth exposed beneath. She reached over the cliff-edge at her feet and touched a small patch of what seemed the barren earth. It crumbled beneath her fingers into a fine, black dust! Apprehensively she looked far out upon the black desert again, then at this cliff with its glassy protective

substance. But that substance was beginning to crumble!

Chyana was unaccountably disturbed. For some reason, a reason she could not quite grasp, all this phenomena seemed foreboding and frightening to her. And it seemed somehow familiar! Where, and when, had she seen or dreamed of this scene? Had she indeed dreamed it, or had she—

Chyana gasped. With a sudden flash of realization she remembered. She had not dreamed of this scene at all. She had read about it! In a book! It was a book which the Council had called a preposterous fable, and which she herself had called a historical romance. There had been much more in that book, but now she could not quite remember. She was confused and apprehensive and a little frightened. With a pang of foreboding she remembered Ral Vahn. She must return quickly to that ruined building which they had called their headquarters.

About an hour later she found it, and saw Ral Vahn and Mech coming from far away in the opposite direction. She called, and he hurried toward her. Impulsively she went onto his arms and he held her closely for a moment. No word was spoken or needed. He released her and his face was stern.

"Thank God you're safe!" he said. "We've got to act quickly, for there may be another of those things tonight, and every night following—and we can't stand many more of them. I know what it is. I should have guessed before! We've got to find the source of it and destroy it before it destroys us!"

Chyana's panic-fear had ended with the strange new experience she had found in Ral Vahn's arms. Quickly she told him of her discovery. They went back to that line of cliffs overlooking the black desert waste.

Vahn surveyed the scene grimly, and looked along the line of crystalline-covered



cliffs extending several miles in each direction.

"Yes, it all fits in," he said bitterly. "More of Tahor's work. But it wasn't deliberate this time—simply a creation that got out of control and has been running rampant ever since. Just before Tahor sent me here, there were rumors about a vast army rising out of the shambles of the other hemisphere. This army was supposed to be preparing for a mass attack upon the Americas.

"Tahor's councilors were panic-stricken, for they knew he had no army of any size. But Tahor merely smiled, and a little later made it known that he had a new weapon of war that would destroy any possible invasion. There was wild speculation as to what this weapon might be. It was rumored that it received its potent power from stored solar energy, but this was no more than rumor.

"Now I know it must have been true, for we've had a manifestation of it! This thing we felt must be Tahor's weapon! It gathers its solar energy by day and releases it at night in those brain-destroying waves!"

GONE now were all thoughts of food. Uppermost in both their minds was a horror of that brain-destroying blue force, and a doubt that they could withstand another such assault. And they knew it must come again at dusk.

But they searched that line of cliffs in vain. They knew the ray had sprung up from somewhere at this edge of the city, for they'd seen it the night before. But wherever the source, it must have been well hidden.

HEX—R plodded steadily behind Chyana, laying its tiles regularly, and Mech wandered at random. They searched the edge of the cliff in both directions until it petered down into little rocky ravines leading onto that black desert waste. They worked back toward the city, searching

through the endless streets of ruins. Several times they brought tottering walls crumbling down dangerously about them. They stumbled with exhaustion, but they plodded on, scarcely daring to rest for more than a few minutes at a time. Meanwhile the sun was climbing relentlessly toward the zenith; after that it would make its steady descent to the west, and Ral knew too well what would come again once the sun was gone. . . . Their despair grew at the fruitlessness of their search.

Chyana stumbled along uncomplainingly, searching the ruins when Ral searched, resting when he rested—but somehow she did not reach his point of despair. She was perturbed, but more than that she was—puzzled. This all seemed so *familiar* to her, but in a vague, distant, disassociated way. She felt all this had something to do with that book she had read. That book had been romance; this was romance too, but somehow—distorted. She needed but one little clue, one little remembrance, to connect this present with that far-away book in a very vital way. But in vain she racked her brain for that clue, and the book she had read remained only an historical romance, dimly remembered.

At last, hesitantly, she mentioned it to Ral. But in his despair he only half listened, and pronounced the book a fable in the same manner the Council of Scientists had. Chyana's brows knit into a puzzled frown. . . .

THE sun was now well past the zenith, and Ral Vahn sank down exhausted. Chyana sat beside him, and Ral turned despairingly to her. He placed his hands on Chyana's shoulders and looked deep into her eyes. His voice was tense as he spoke:

"Chyana . . . do you *really* know what this means? It's not merely your life, or mine. Everything—the entire future—hangs upon a thread at this moment; and you and I are that thread! The last re-



maining— But I wonder if you do quite realize. . . .”

“Yes, Ral Vahn,” she said, and her tone was so vibrant it startled him. “Yes, I realized, even before you. We’re the last ones. And I know it will not be easy.”

“Not be easy,” he repeated bitterly. “It may not even matter.” He looked to the west. “Very shortly now we’ll know.”

“Do you really think it will come again?”

“It must and it will. I know what it is now, and it will do its work to the very end. Even after we’re gone it will do its work. I think that force must encompass the entire globe!”

They continued their search for that destroying force, but it was a hopeless search now. Already they were far from that line of cliffs. Ral knew the weapon must be located in such a way as to receive the sun’s rays, but somehow in their search they had passed it by.

The sun’s rim was touching the horizon when Ral Vahn turned to Chyana and said:

“This may be the end—I mean the very end. I don’t see how our brain tissue can survive another such assault. But before it comes, I want to tell you—I want you to know—”

Chyana thought she knew what Ral Vahn was trying to say, and she wanted to hear him say it; but it was too late. Mech had been watching the sun in the west, and now he howled once, woefully. He must have known what was coming, for he had felt it the night before. Now it was upon them more abruptly than they had expected . . . the sudden dark, and the pulsing blue force leaping to them swiftly. . . .

Chyana screamed something that Ral did not hear, for his brain was afire. He thought he yelled, “Chyana, we must stay together!” But already it was too late, for he saw her fleeing away blindly. He felt something else catapulting past him

and knew it was Mech, who must also be enduring the torture.

That was the last logical thought Ral had. He ran wildly in what he thought was the direction of the blue force, with some vague notion of reaching its source; but now even that notion was gone, plucked out by the millions of tiny fires that were searing his brain. His flight now was only to escape that livid blue hell, but there was no escape. It was worse this time than it had been before. He stumbled and fell heavily and retained barely enough sanity to know it was useless to rise and flee again. He lay there quite still as the tiny fingers of fire tore at his brain, for he knew this was the end and he knew it would be quick. . . .

## CHAPTER SIX

### Sacrifice

AGAIN Ral Vahn was conscious of an insistent tugging at his sleeve, but this time he didn’t care and didn’t even open his eyes. His head ached almost unbearably, and he only wanted to get back to blessed oblivion so it would stop.

But the tugging continued, and a sharp bark close to his ear caused his head to split down the middle—or so he thought. He groaned and climbed wearily to his feet, wincing at the excruciating pain in every muscle. He looked down at the metal Mech, and was suddenly envious because Mech had no muscles that could ache. But Mech whined piteously, and Ral knew the dog’s brain must feel the same as his own at that moment. He reached down to touch him, and Mech’s metal tail wagged half-heartedly.

Systematic thought was flowing back to Ral’s brain slowly, but he wished it would hurry. Vaguely he knew there was an important thing—no, *two* things—that he must determine. . . .

Then one of them flashed upon him.



Chyana! With a sudden tightness in his throat he looked around, and Chyana was nowhere to be seen. Ral groaned at the thought of anything happening to her, which would leave him all alone on this world; but even more than that he suddenly realized what she had come to mean to him. He must find Chyana!

Then he knew what the other thing was. The sun! Where was the sun? He looked up, saw it nearly overhead, and realized it was almost noon or a little past noon; at any rate it didn't leave him many hours until another attack of that blue torture, and he knew a third attack *would* be the final one. . . .

But it was the thought of Chyana that spurred him into activity. He hurried back to that place they had designated as their headquarters. Chyana was not there, and Ral's heart fell. He shouted her name many times, and the sound went echoing into the vast silence of this barren world. There was no answer. Ral knew she must have heard, if she were—alive. At this thought, he thought suddenly of the cliffs. He hurried there and traversed the entire length of them, peering anxiously below. Chyana's body was nowhere to be seen. Vahn was at once relieved and dismayed.

As he walked away in his weariness he stumbled over something. Looking down, he saw it was a red, hexagonal piece of tile! He had entirely forgotten HEX—R. Now he shouted in joy. He saw how he could find Chyana, by trailing her through HEX—R's faithful markings! But these might be yesterday's old markings. If so, it would take him hours to trail her and it would be too late.

But it was his only solution. He followed the tile-trail easily, through the streets and ruins. At one point another line of tiles crossed the one he was following. Ral hesitated, then decided to continue the way he was going. A short time later, however, the trail led into a pile of debris. Ral recognized the scene as one

of the places where a wall had collapsed behind them yesterday during their search. He groaned, for he knew he was on one of HEX—R's old trails. Quickly he traced his way back to where the other path of tiles had intersected.

He followed this new lead, and his heart leaped as he saw how erratic and wandering the tiles were. It might mean that he was now following the path Chyana had taken in her insane flight the night before. Always the tiles were five long strides apart, and the line doubled and redoubled on itself aimlessly. Ral stayed doggedly with it, sometimes losing sight of the next red marker in piles of debris, but always finding it again after a little search.

After more than an hour of this, the trail led back toward the cliffs, then turned abruptly to the left. Ral followed through a scattered heap of masonry, then up to the entrance of one of the ruined buildings. The tiles continued through this entrance. Ral followed into the half-gloom beyond, and took a few cautious steps before he noticed that the floor ended almost abruptly at his feet, falling away into a dark chasm.

And HEX—R's trail led right up to the lip of this brink.

**F**EARFULLY Ral peered below, knowing that if HEX—R had gone here Chyana must have gone before. Gradually his gaze penetrated the darkness and he saw that the drop was about fifteen feet. He slid backward over the brink, held by his hands for a moment and dropped, alighting with a force that jarred his teeth.

Above him Mech peered over the edge and cried. Ral called to him to come, but Mech wouldn't make the jump into the dark.

"All right, Mech, I'm sorry," Ral said to him. "I may never see you again. Wish you'd come, but I can't wait."

Mech cried again but Ral moved away



in the darkness, feeling his way along what seemed to be a rough, narrow tunnel. For perhaps fifty yards he moved, then the tunnel was suddenly blocked with stone that seemed to have come down upon it from above.

There was sudden fear in Ral's heart at the thought that Chyana might be lying just beyond him, crushed. For an hour he worked feverishly in the dark, clearing his way through. Just as he got through he came upon HEX—R, twisted and battered. His heart was light again, for this meant Chyana must have barely got through before the collapse caught HEX—R behind her. Ral felt a moment of sadness for the faithful tile-layer, and a pang of regret that he would probably never know the secret of its bizarre attachment to Chyana.

He felt a current of fresh air ahead of him now, and pushed hurriedly forward. He saw a pale gleam of light that increased as he advanced. A few hundred yards further the tunnel opened abruptly into a wide grotto. On the opposite side of the grotto was another wide opening through which he could see the red setting sun. He could also see the vast black plain stretching out far below. He knew he was somewhere beneath the cliff.

But these details were of little importance just then, for he also saw, standing there waiting for him—Chyana.

CHYANA released herself from Ral's frantic embrace. "Yes, I'm all right," she said in answer to his anxious inquiries, "except I got an awful bump on the head when I fell into the tunnel back there!" She rubbed it ruefully. "That was sometime last night. I've been here all day heaving rocks down the side of the cliff!"

Ral Vahn looked startled, and Chyana laughed bitterly. "I'll show you what I mean," she said. "I've found what we

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## ASTONISHING STORIES

were looking for!" She led Ral over to the opening overlooking the black plain. "Down there," and she pointed down the side of the cliff.

Ral peered over the edge. About fifty feet below, but far over to the left, he saw what was undoubtedly the destructive weapon. It rested solidly on a wide, smooth promontory about halfway down the side of the cliff. That section of the cliff overhung it slightly, which had prevented them from spotting it from above. As to the weapon itself, all Ral could see was a huge convex lens that must have been twenty feet across. Behind it he could see hundreds of metal filaments that converged into thick cables. These led back into the cliff out of sight. The whole thing rested on a free-swinging pivot. At the present moment the huge lens was directly facing the reddening sun, which was very low in the west.

"It turns with the sun," Chyana said. "The lens is directly facing the sun all the time. When I first saw it this morning it was far over this way, and I could see it slowly turning as the sun moved across the sky."

"Yes, I can see how it works," Ral replied. "But we've got to smash it! We haven't much time!"

Chyana laughed a bit hysterically. "Oh, yes, we've got to smash it! What do you suppose I've been doing here all day?" She pointed to a little pile of broken stone and masonry. "That pile was nearly as high as my head. I hauled it all here from down the tunnel where the cave-in occurred. Then I spent hours heaving it all down to hit that lens. My arms are nearly dead! When it was facing in this direction I could hit it part of the time, but the stones simply glanced off. Now it's almost impossible!"

"Poor Chyana," Ral said. "But I'll try it. This is an awkward angle, but we've got to keep at it. It's our only chance!"



RAL TRIED, leaning as far out over the cliff as he dared. He clutched at the wall with his left hand; with his right he heaved the stones in a huge arc, much as a shot-putter might. But out of every dozen attempts he could only score four or five hits, and these only glanced off of the lens harmlessly and hurtled to the plain far below. Meanwhile Chyana, despite her weariness, hurried back and forth down the tunnel bringing more ammunition.

"Bring the largest and heaviest pieces you can find!" Ral called.

But he soon saw it was to no avail. They ceased their efforts out of sheer collapse and despair.

"Then this *is* the end," Ral groaned. "To be so near, and yet so far! To be within the very sight of it—"

"We can go back above," Chyana cried, "and get something to lower one of us down there—some vines—"

But Ral pointed to the sun, now almost touching the horizon. "Too late. We've only a few minutes at most." Again he surveyed the face of the cliff that dropped sheer below them. This time he saw something he had overlooked before. About twenty feet below their opening, a narrow ledge jutted out from the cliff. It was hardly two feet wide, and became gradually narrower as it extended to the left. The point where the ledge disappeared entirely was directly over that lens, about thirty feet above it.

A sudden hope flooded over Ral. But then he saw that what he was thinking would be a desperate, even a foolhardy attempt. If he held by his hands and dropped to that ledge, there was a fifty-fifty chance that he would lose his balance and plunge the remaining hundred and fifty feet below. If he did gain the ledge safely, Chyana might toss him some of the heavy stones, and from his closer position he might smash the lens.

But even as these frantic thoughts raced

through his brain he knew it was impossible. He could never get close enough. And by the time they could have a makeshift rope ready, it would be too late. The sun was very near to setting now. . . .

"Listen!" Chyana said. They heard a sudden clattering sound from far down the tunnel, then Mech came running out of the tunnel into the grotto. But he was hobbling rather than running, for one of his rear metal legs was hopelessly bent. Evidently this had happened when Mech, overcoming his fear, had leaped down into the dark tunnel. He did not seem to mind it, however, or even notice it. He barked joyfully when he saw Chyana and Ral. He came over to Ral, who spoke to him tonelessly.

Mech stood at the cliff edge and looked out at the reddening sun. He lifted his head and howled mournfully.

"You see, he remembers!" Vahn said. "Yes, Mech old boy, it's going to happen again. But just once more, I'll guarantee you that." In a last desperate attempt Vahn heaved a few more stones.

Mech remembered indeed! He looked at the sun, then at Ral, and cried again pitifully. He ran aimlessly back into the tunnel a short distance, then came back to where Ral was standing. It was as though he were trying to escape from what he knew was coming, but realized it was no use. He looked down at the ledge below. His front legs stiffened, then he drew back instinctively. He looked up at his master and cried again, plaintively. Again he approached very close to the brink and looked down. He made several little hesitating movements.

Ral suddenly cried, "Don't, Mech—don't!" He made a frantic grab at Mech.

But it was too late. Mech had disappeared over the edge.

THEY SAW him strike the narrow ledge below. For a breathless moment, his bent and useless leg slipped



over the edge. He clung there perilously for a moment, then clawed frantically and regained his footing. Breathlessly Ral and Chyana watched. Chyana whispered in an awed, but excited voice: "I remember, Ral! Now I remember!" But Ral scarcely heard.

Very carefully Mech moved along that ledge toward the lens below. Then the ledge narrowed and he could move no further. As Mech hesitated, they heard a click and saw the huge lens swing back to center. At the same time there came a smooth, humming sound as of huge dynamos in operation. They saw the filaments begin to glow beneath the lens. The glow brightened. They knew that in a few seconds those blue waves of torture would burst forth again. . . .

Mech must have known it too. They heard him cry deep in his throat. He tried to turn back and look up at them, but the ledge where he stood was too narrow. He barked once, sharply—then leaped far and accurate. The metal body formed an arc reflecting the dying rays of the sun. It hit the lens truly in the center, and crashed through. There was a single, tremendous flash of blue, a sputter of fused and molten metal, then—silence.

CHYANA WAS crying softly, but Ral Vahn was not. He hadn't liked Mech in his new metal body; but in Ral's soul now, at the thought of Mech's sacrifice, there was only a vast singing quiet too deep for tears.

Chyana was clinging to him, and through her tears she was saying again—but reverently:

"I remember it now—I remember it all. That's the way it happened. It was all true, then, not a myth!"

Ral Vahn was suddenly very tired, but as he sank down upon the floor he managed to ask, "What do you remember, Chyana? What's that about a myth?"

"The book I was telling you about! The book I read, which the Council of Scientists pronounced as preposterous. I thought all of this reminded me of it, but in a vague, distorted way. Not until that final act of Mech's was I sure. That brought it all back!"

Chyana was very excited now, but Ral was so tired he could only ask wearily, "What about Mech?"

"He was in the book! It was exactly like that! All the rest of the book was interpreted, and misinterpreted, and exaggerated through the thousands of years, until it became a legend which was finally disbelieved. There was no mention of a history or a civilization before the legend; the legend was supposed to be the beginning! It told of two persons who somehow came from thousands of years apart, and met each other in a twilight place, and through this miracle the race was born. . . ."

Gone was Ral Vahn's weariness as the realization burst on him. "Thousands of years apart! A twilight place! But Chyana, that's us! This is the twilight of my race. . . ."

"And the dawn of mine, Ral Vahn. Yes, it's a miracle in time. The Council of Scientists had to send me back here, or they could never have existed! By sending me back they unknowingly caused the beginning of the new race. And I remember something else about that legendary book, Ral Vahn!"

"What is that?" asked Ral, his mind just beginning to grasp the tremendous thought of all that lay ahead.

"I remember the title of that book. It was *The New Beginning*. And I remember the author! Although the story changed through translations, and gradually became legend, the name of the author remained, and the name was—"

"Yes?"

"Ral Vahn!"



# Editoramblings

YOUR letters show that a lot of you readers want a two-way reader's column; one wherein not only the readers but the editor as well is granted privilege of the floor.

That's a good idea, but. . .

Wouldn't that be sort of defeating the purpose of the department, which is, after all, not to present the editor's "viewpoints" but *yours*? It seems that way to your editor; however, remember our motto: "What the reader wants, that he shall have!" And so, if you want answers to the letters in the "viewpoints" column, let's hear about it.

You can get a slightly different kind of two-way correspondence with kindred souls of science fiction, incidentally, by joining up with *The Science Fictioneers*, the swell new fan club sponsored by our sister magazine, *Super Science Stories*. Right now this club has nearly two hundred members, more coming in every day, and all of them active and keenly interested fans of scientific fiction. You'll like the club itself, and you'll enjoy attending meetings of its branches if there happens to be one in your neighborhood (if not, form one!); but most of all you'll like the feeling of fraternity that you will get from it. Meeting fellow-fans, talking the subject up, hearing their opinions on the matter—it's a grand sensation!

And you surely will enjoy the magazine that backs *The Science Fictioneers*. That magazine, *Super Science Stories*, is developing quite a reputation for itself—and its rep will really be enhanced by the stellar line-up for its July issue. Glance at a couple of the names in its line-up: "Day of the Comet" by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., "Trouble-Shooter" by Harl Vincent, "The Thought-Woman" by the perennial Ray Cummings, and six other great science fiction tales.

Whenever plugs are being passed out in science fiction, one is definitely in order for *The Chicago Science Fiction Convention*, to be held next September in the Illinois metropolis. Space forbids saying much about this gala conclave here and now, but here's a hot news flash that was just received. Dire plans are now being made to have everybody attending come in *costume*, representing their favorite science fiction character! Imagine seeing some of your better-liked authors dressed as their own creations—or, still more entertaining, coming very modestly as themselves!

—THE EDITOR

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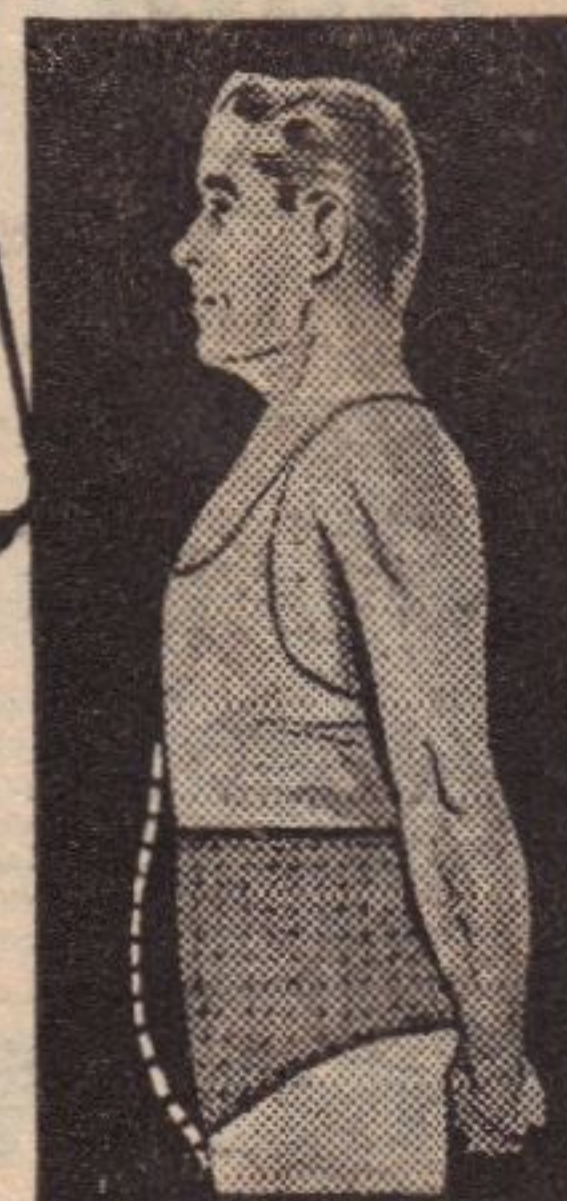
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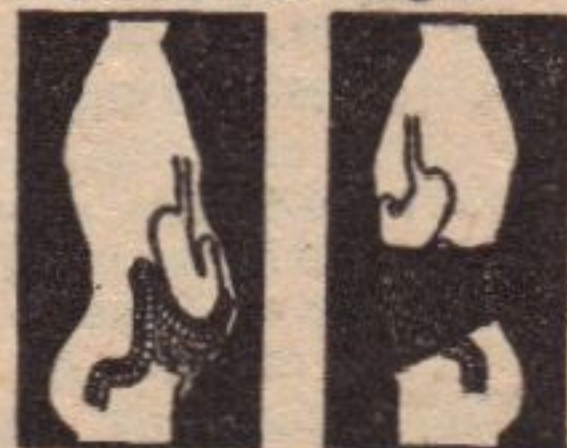
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## Tales to Come

**P**ROFESSOR JAMESON and his three companions of the metal race of the Zoromes stepped inside the strange, deserted space-ship. The professor's eyes moved restlessly over its strange fittings, but he paused for no detailed examination.

"Suppose the owners return and find us here?" 119M-5 suggested. "We have no idea what they are like, what weapons they carry, or what their attitude toward us will be."

With great interest, the four machine-men examined the mechanical details of the ship, until a sudden crash of metal brought them to alarmed attention.

"What was that?"

Professor Jameson pointed to a short, thick cylinder of metal on the floor. "It fell off that table," he said mentally. "I recall seeing it there; our movements must have started it rolling."

"For some unexplained reason, I feel uneasy here," 119M-5 radiated.

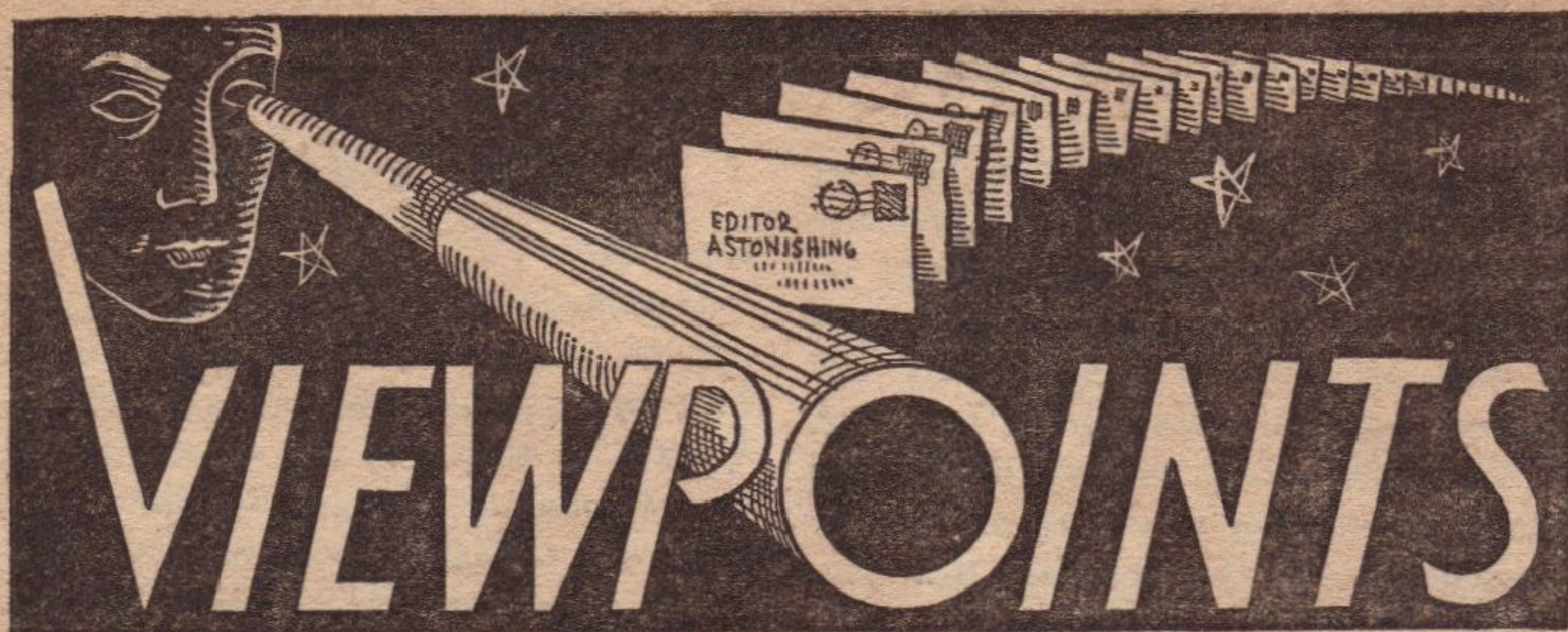
"Wait—listen!"

The Zoromes sensed vague mental radiations, becoming bolder and filled with intangible satisfaction and elation. The machine men suddenly became aware of a motion to the ship, and they rushed and crowded to the ports. The world beneath them was falling away! . . .

Do you remember the popular Professor Jameson stories of years ago—the tales of the man who had died, had his body cast into space for its tomb, and was resurrected to mechanical life in a metal body by the strange race of the Zoromes? *Astonishing Stories* is proud to present a new story in this series, "The Cat-Men of Aemt," in the August number.

In the same issue will be found "The Lodestone Core," by D. D. Sharp; "Wedding of the Moons," by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. (crowded out of this issue); and others. The August *Astonishing Stories* will appear June 25th.





## System Play

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

You said in your first editorial that, "Penny for penny, *Astonishing* is your best science fiction buy." That prompted me to write you about the system I have been using for the last two years, determining which magazines were worth buying. It's sort of complicated, but I think it's interesting.

Let's take two magazines, yours and what we'll call "Magazine X." *Astonishing* has 112 pages, costs 10c; "Magazine X" has 140 pages, costs 15c. (We're safe from libel suits there, Editor; there's no science fiction magazine answering that description.)

*Astonishing* has six stories. Three of them are good; one of them is fair; two of them are poor. A good story represents ten units of enjoyment; a fair story, five; a poor story, none. (I don't give anything a negative unit; if I find I can't possibly enjoy a story, and may dislike it intensely, I just stop reading it.) Therefore, *Astonishing* has given me a total of 35 Enjoyment-Units.

"Magazine X's" eight stories run: three good, two fair, three poor. Total, 40 E.U.'s

Now we multiply by the number of pages (since the bigger the magazine, the longer the enjoyment is sustained), and get 3920 EU-p's for *Astonishing*; 5600 EU-p's for "Magazine X."

Looks bad for *Astonishing*, doesn't it? But never fear, Editor; I wouldn't be going to all this trouble just to slam you. Let's take the final step, and see what happens.

We now *divide* by the price of the magazine, to get the actual value per penny. *Astonishing* selling for a dime, gets an Absolute Value of 392; "Magazine X," at 15, comes to 373.

And that—though over-simplified almost to the point of extinction—is my system. I make you and your readers a present of it.—R. L. Agora, Bethesda, Maryland.

## What This Country Needs—

Dear Sirs:

Have just been reading *Astonishing Stories*. Boys, you've got something there—and so have we. Some wiseacre made a loud crack about a 5c cigar, but the need of a 10c science fiction magazine has been felt by plenty of us strugglers for years.

May I make only one suggestion, which I believe if opened to controversy will be suggested by the majority of readers: Don't print continued stories, not even 2-part ones. Make it a complete story magazine, and known as such.

I really believe that *Astonishing Stories* will revolutionize the field of sci-fiction magazines. Thousands of interested people feel that they cannot or should not



spare a quarter for a magazine, but wait until they can buy them second-hand for a nickel or a dime,—and thereby alternately starve and glut themselves. But a dime magazine will find ready and grateful readers while it's hot and new.

Thanks for some pleasant hours—and make *Astonishing* a weekly as soon as possible.—Paul G. Stevens, 812 Eye Street, Sacramento, California.

### "No Superlative"

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Your second issue was magnificent, there is no superlative to describe it. Congratulations from *Science Fictioneer* No. 69.

I am going to do something I've never done before, and that is to try to rate your stories 1., "Stepsons of Mars;" 2., "Master Control;" 3., "The Callistan Menace;" 4., "Salvage of Space" and "The Space-Beasts;" 5., "Murder from Mars."

I really see no sense in doing this unless it lets you know what kind of stories I like best. Which doesn't make any difference either way, because you will keep right on printing what you want to anyhow—so what?

What was wrong with "True—No Doubt?" It might give us dumber-than-you fellows a little knowledge. Put it back!

I agree with Brother Brazier from Milwaukee, when he says give us fan biographies—only make them autobiographies!

Who is this fellow Blish that would make our contemporary "4SJ" literate? Never!

Give us a reprint column, especially the story Leon Coles suggested. I think it may have been the first science fiction story I ever read.

May your next issues be as good as the first two.—Art R. Sehnert, 791 Maury, Apt. 1, Memphis, Tennessee.

### Critic's Report

Dear Editor:

In accordance with my policy and custom of rating science fiction magazines (the idea is to see what makes 'em tick!), I herewith send you my report for the second issue of *Astonishing Stories*. I perform a similar function for your companion magazine, *Super Science Stories*.

Here in order of merit, is how I rate the April number: 1., Master Control; 2., Stepsons of Mars; 3., The Callistan Menace; 4., Salvage of Space; 5., The Space-Beasts; and, 6., Murder from Mars.

Your cover kept up to the standard set by the first one. I thought the space-beast was really alien, and that is something, for I am hard to please about the appearance of inhabitants of other planets, space, other universes, etc.

And now I suppose you're wondering what all this gab is leading up to. Simply this: My criticism service for *Astonishing Stories*, April, 1940, concludes that the periodical is improving. Of course it is unnecessary for me to exclaim, "Keep it up!" for I know you will.—Henry Andrew Ackermann, 5200 Maple Avenue, "Pimlico," Baltimore, Maryland.

### Finds Discrepancies

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

No. 2 of *Astonishing Stories* is very good. There is no single story quite as good as "Half-Breed" in the first issue, but the average is as good as that of No. 1.

"Master Control" and "The Space-Beasts" tie for first. "Master Control" contains some of the qualities of the "Heavy Science" type of story, for which I asked in my first letter. Concerning that, more later.

"Stepsons of Mars" presents two interesting characters in a good, light adventure yarn. One story of this type in



## VIEWPOINTS

each issue is OK. "Murder from Mars" is another light, cleverly written story, comparable with Towers' story. OK, but only one of the type per issue, please.

Space salvage is an old theme in sf, but is handled in a new way in Kummer's story. My information on the kicking qualities of a rocket blast is a little sketchy. Still, I wonder if that kick would amount to much; and if it did, could the gravitational effects of Mars' two tiny moons overcome the effects of that kick at the distances involved? A good yarn, anyway.

"The Callistan Menace" doesn't compare with "Half-Breed," even disregarding a serious discrepancy in the story; and the discrepancy is too great to disregard. I refer to the statement that Peewee Wilson was the *second* visitor to Callisto (p. 71), and that he was also the *seventh* (p. 73). I thought at first it was just a typo, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Peewee's last voyage had been a long time ago, at the time when *steel* space-suits were just coming into use, and when old Steeden was a young man; then, two pages later, the trip turns out to have been quite recent; the last one before that of the *Ceres*. Such discrepancies shouldn't be allowed. It isn't like Asimov, either.

When I asked for heavy science, I didn't necessarily mean hyper-dimensional rays, etc. But I like a story in which the author extends some theory or scientific fact well beyond present knowledge, and weaves a story in which that logical extension of such knowledge plays a basic part. This may involve hyper-dimensions, time—travel, interstellar travel at speeds in excess of that of light, "planet-juggling," or any other such fantastic extension of logic. But the extension must be logical, and the resulting quasi-facts must be a part of the story, not just a background for a story which might just

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## ASTONISHING STORIES

as well have taken place in Santa Claus,  
Indiana, or Valentine, Nebraska. There  
are, of course, splendid science fiction  
stories which *do* have their settings in  
prosaic surroundings, and I like them  
very much. But I also like the other  
kind.

The science article reads just a little  
too much like a small boy's "What Ev-  
eryone Should Know" essay. Articles  
are OK, but should be on matter less  
readily available, and perhaps more tech-  
nical in presentation. Ley and de Camp  
are good at that sort of thing. Anyone  
who could do similar work would be a  
worthwhile find.

Cover—not as good as last month. The  
"Horried Girl" cover has been done so  
many times that it is just a trademark  
—for magazines far below the standards  
of *Astonishing Stories*.

Inside illustrations—Bok and Perri as  
good as any except Eron; Fox made an  
incredible mess of his drawing for "The  
Callistan Menace." It put Asimov's  
story behind the eight-ball to start with.

The "Preview" of Rocklynne's story  
looks as though I'm going to get to read  
a "heavy science" story right away. It  
may not be that, but I'm sure it will be  
good.

Another letter that is too long—but  
you asked a lot of questions on your edi-  
torial page. I'll be back.—D. B. Thomp-  
son, 3136 "Que" Street, Lincoln, Ne-  
braska.

### Likes Our Art

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

Having noted the debut of *Astonishing  
Stories*, let me congratulate you. I wish  
you all the luck in the world, and sin-  
cerely hope that you make a go of it.

As a passing commentary on the cur-  
rent issue, I might say that the acquisi-  
tion of the skilled Hannes Bok, together



with that of Leslie Perri, also showing much promise, and whose illustrations are particularly likeable to me because of their similarity to the work of the redoubtable Marchioni (a favorite of mine), will contribute to your magazine's interest and excellence. Asimov's current yarn was very potent with *real* human interest—quite a rare thing these days, as I think you'll agree. Again, my felicitations.—Eldred Vernon, 68 Shuter Street, Toronto, Ontario.

## Doesn't Like Our Art

Editors:

Your illustrations are of so inferior a quality that I'm surprised at your courage in printing them. Whether you pay so little that the drawings reflect the low price; or whether your cousins or brothers are doing the drawings I can't tell, but they are among the worst I've yet come across.

I wouldn't mind paying 15c per, if necessary, but please give us better illustrations.—Daniel Burd, (address missing), New York City.

## Fans Fresh?

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

I want to support the suggestions of Fortier, Ackerman, etc., that you draw from the ranks of the fan illustrators for future art-work in *Astonishing* and *Super Science*. The fans' work ought to give a bit of freshness to the magazine, something that present-day science fiction sadly needs.—Harry Dockweiler, 89-17 215th Street, Queens Village, L.I., N.Y.

## The Defense Rests

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Bfor I begin, a word of explanation to your readers, of whose reactions one writer's may b typical: it has been brot

to my attn that this gentleman thot my spelling in your first issue "an obviously deliberate attempt at articial illiteracy, in bad taste." On the contrary, the fonetix & breves I employ r part of a movement tord a simplifd spelling for all! Particularly shoud scientifiction fans (stfans) be expected to b intrested in a "sciencized" sort of spelling, of wich that apearing in this letter is but a mild example. A correspondent writes me: "... 'Ackermanese' is an expression of an evolving, growing language. As Esperanto may some day be the language of the entire world, Ackermanese may eventually become, in a modified form, the language of all America." Enuf.

I'd b quite careful about labeling a tale "classic" (Vaeth's "After the Plague"). With a dozen different stf mags on the market—say approxly 60 storys publisht evry 4 wks—I dout in 30 days' time I coud recall what the plot was all about.

Illustrations pretty punk: I repeat my request for Bok, Baltadonis, Marconette, etc. if U can't get Paul, Dold, Finlay, Wesso (or even if U can!)

The depts I deem *very* good. I hope to contribute to same from time to time. Praps I shoud say, I hope my contributions will b accepted!

Incidently, I shoud like to see editorial comments on & ansrs to (where required) readers' letters.

*Bon-shancon!* wich is the Esperantists' way to say, in the Tongue of Tomoro or Universalanguage . . . Good Luck!—"4SJ" Ackerman, 236½ N New Hampshire, Hollywood, California.

## A Colorful Idea

*Astonishing's* Editor:

Stricken with a bright idea, I am making haste to pass it on to you. I offer it for your free use, no royalties asked or expected.

A lot of your readers seem to want



covers that are really *un-Earthly*. And your artists apparently don't know just how to go about giving your readers what they want. Well, this is what they can do:

Paint a normal scene, using the normal colors. (By "normal" I mean a normal science fiction scene, rocket-ships, monsters, and things; not a landscape or a still-life.) Photograph it in the normal way, have the color-plates engraved just as usual.

Then, in the printing, *switch the colors*. You use the regular three-color process, I guess: use it here, too, *but with different colors*. Where there should be red, use blue; for blue, substitute green; for green, something nice and novel, possibly silver-gilt.

That is probably the *only* way to get a cover that's really *Astonishing*!—H. K. Harrigan, St. Albans, New York.

## A Booster

Editor, *Astonishing Stories*:

Please accept my congratulations on the two issues of your new magazine. It has within its pages most everything that the fifteen-cent scientifiction mags have.

I have but few complaints to register. Science fiction does not necessarily mean interplanetary yarns. I think you publish too many interplanetaries in one issue. The sketching is far from satisfying, and I think a staff of artists is badly needed. The cover painting was fair, but basing it on the previous issue it was below par. Binder is a good man, why not leave the cover and a reasonable portion of the inner artwork to him?

The issue, all in all, was an improvement over the first copy, which in itself was very good. Please keep men like Isaac Asimov, Harl Vincent, Polton Cross, Ivar Towers, Lee Gregor. Please add occasional stories by Nelson S. Bond, Robert Bloch, Thornton Ayre, Ed Earl

Repp, Ray Cummings, E. E. Smith, Stanton A. Coblenz, A. R. Steber, and Edgar R. Burroughs.

I, for one, suggest putting out *Astonishing Stories* once a month, beginning with the next issue. I think it is quite worthy of this, and I am sure many of the readers will feel the same way. So here's looking forward to an announcement in the next issue to the effect of its appearing monthly. So far I have induced three of my friends to buy your mag, and I am sure they would like it to appear more often because they raved about some of the stories.—Harold G. Schaeffer, 1320 Fulton Avenue, New York, New York.

## Two-Way Column?

Dear *Astonished* editor:

Am glad to see the cartoon gone; trust no further turkeys in its like will appear.

"Stepsons of Mars" is a readable yarn, despite such little incongruities as (1) marching the men all over Mars in search of the Greenies—matter of fact, they'd hop, with that gravity—when it could have been done much more simply by aircraft; (2) lack of such staple military equipment as super-machine guns; and (3) *buttons* on their clothing at this late stage of the game. Come, come, Towers, old man: even in 1940 the *best* armies use zippers. Outside of that "Stepsons" is first-rate. Let's see more from Ivar, the Towers.

"Murder from Mars," on the other hand—uh-uh! Nice characterization of the detective but there just wasn't any story. Too, too simple, in fact. Bring him back, say I, but give him a real mystery and make him work it out.

The rest of the issue was neither startlingly good nor was it bad. How about that two-way reader's column?—Robert W. Lowndes, Editor, *The Science Fiction Weekly*, 2574 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.



# Fan Magazines

(Presented as a review for the readers of Astonishing Stories of the current crop of amateur fantasy publications.)

**SCIENCE FICTION WEEKLY**, 5c, published by Robert W. Lowndes, 2574 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. Newest of the news magazines, and one of the best ever. Attractively mimeographed with four or six pages of entertaining information of science fiction's fan and professional goings-on.

**STARDUST**, 20c, bi-monthly, published by W. Lawrence Hamling, 2609 Argyle Street, Chicago, Ill. Biggest and best-looking fan magazine ever, contents an improvement over the first issue, but still not up to its appearance.

**1939 YEARBOOK OF SCIENCE, WEIRD, AND FANTASY FICTION**, 20c, published by Bob Tucker, P. O. Box 260, Bloomington, Ill. Complete and carefully tabulated listings of all science fiction stories published in 1939. Valuable to the collector.

**SUN-SPOTS**, 4c, monthly, published by The Solaroid Club, 9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey. Mimeographed; mostly club news, with an occasional science article.

**FANTASY-NEWS**, 5c, weekly, published by Will Sykora, 31-51 41st Street, Long Island City, N. Y. Technically poorly published, but has the largest circulation of any fan news publication.

**AD ASTRA**, 10c, bi-monthly, published by Mark Reinsberg, 3156 Cambridge

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**MID-WEST FAN NEWS**, 5c, bi-weekly, published by Richard I. Meyer, 3156 Cambridge Avenue, Chicago, Ill. The first issue appears as a supplement to AD ASTRA, but this sheet deserves a clientele of its own. A news magazine, it is principally devoted to the professional field.

**ULTRA**, 10c, bi-monthly, published by Eric F. Russell, 274 Edgecliff Road, Woolahra, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. The only Antipodean fan publication appearing regularly, it is entertaining but somewhat obscure to the American reader.

**PSFS NEWS**, 5c, bi-weekly, published by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, 2308 East Belgrade Street, Philadelphia, Penna. Despite the unusually high entertainment-value of this publication, the most amusing thing about it is its kaleidoscopic change of color from issue to issue. Much club news in it, but there is a lot of other interesting material.

**NEW FANDOM**, 10c, occasional, published by Sam Moskowitz, 603 South 11th Street, Newark, New Jersey. Large, attractive-looking, but filled with weighty and unimportant material. Is a club organ.

# Classified Advertising

(Continued)

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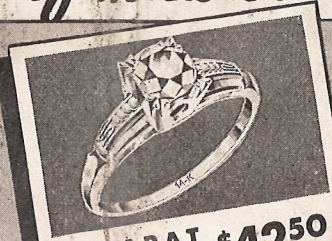


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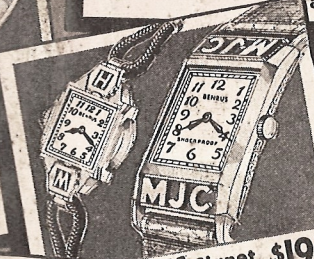
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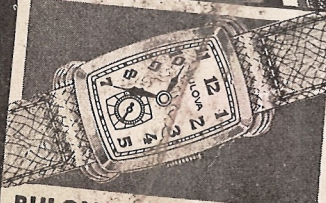
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