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THE FIRST TO AWaken by Granville Hicks with Richard Bennett. Modern Age Books, New York. $2.50

Creating Utopias is an old and revered past-time and some of the greatest sources of inspiration have come from such writings. Granville Hicks, noted literary critic, has here tried his hand at the Utopian novel and does a good job. In the midst of these difficult and violent days when many can look at the future only with pessimism, Hicks boldly projects a vision of America one hundred years from now cleansed of its miseries and economic travails, rebuilt upon a new scientific and humanitarian scope.

"The First to Awaken" refers to George Swain, a New Englander, who is the first of several to undergo suspended animation and to sleep through the coming century. He awakens to take his place in a world of peace and scientific progress.

Granville Hicks takes care not to try to portray a perfect society but rather one that has solved certain problems but yet has far to go. "The First to Awaken" is heartily recommended.

—Donald A. Wollheim.


Richard Jefferies was an English writer of the last century. He achieved sufficient literary recognition to make it worthwhile for Dutton’s reprint library to republish this 1885 fantasy as a new addition to their other volumes.

"After London" is a story of the calamity that overcame that city when deadly vapors laid it waste and ruined civilization in England. The island is reduced to savagery and the secrets of science forgotten. Jefferies writes a pow-

erful description working out the innumerable tiny details that make for plausibility.

Along with "After London" the volume contains a non-fantasy novel of his, "Amaryllis at the Fair."

—Donald A. Wollheim.


The Facsimile Text Society is an organization specializing in publishing facsimile editions of rare volumes of past centuries. "A Voyage to Cacklogallinia" is their latest production. It belongs to the "Gulliver’s Travels" cycle and was first published in 1727.

The author, a supposed "Captain Samuel Brunt," details his adventures ending with his arrival at a strange land inhabited by huge intelligent and civilized chickens.

—Donald A. Wollheim.


Everyone remembers the scare that Orson Wells threw into America when he broadcast on Halloween 1938 a realistic play of H. G. Wells’ novel "The War of the Worlds." Princeton University’s Professor Cantril happened to be studying public responses to the radio and this was just up his alley. As a result he and his assistants spent many months carefully combing the country for the full story of the varied reactions of the populace to the belief that beings from Mars were invading the Earth.

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CHAPTER ONE
America's Blackest Day

THE bombardment had barely ended, reducing Pleasantville to a desolation of death and ruins, when Jim Cragg came plowing frantically up rubble-filled Main Street.

"Sheila!" he shouted. "Sheila! Sheila Donn!"

Dazedly Jim Cragg stared about him, trying numbly to realize that this thing had happened to two midwestern American towns.

"Hey Cragg!" shouted someone down the street.

Cragg turned. A young, khaki-clad orderly was picking his way through wreckage. He came up to Cragg panting and stared about in awe.

"Gosh!" he said, and his eyes grew big with horror. "We're more'n a hundred miles back, and this happens!"

"I know," rejoined Cragg bitterly. "This is the blackest day America has known since those damned Gans started their invasion six months ago. We lost New England and all the eastern seaboard before we finally got 'em stopped in the middle of Kentucky and Tennessee, and now this—Look out!"

JIM CRAGG caught the sound of the dread windy drone to the east and jerked up his head. He glimpsed the sleek,
By Edwin K. Sloat

Jim Cragg sought the secret of the deadly air-bombs of the invading Gans—and found, in an enemy cantina, the girl whom he knew had been killed a week before.

brown robot plane already starting its plunge earthward toward them. He hurled the slight orderly to the ground and groveled beside him.

The propeller drone rose to a shriek as the plunging, manless craft struck the wreckage of an apartment house two blocks away. The whole earth and sky seemed ripped apart by the bellowing explosion. Dust, mortar, bits of concrete and steel from the already wrecked building screamed past the heads of the breathless flattened men in the street. Neither was hurt.

After several minutes with their ears still ringing, Cragg and the orderly cautiously raised their heads and peered down the street.

A great cloud of dust was settling down, and of the already wrecked apartment house there remained nothing.

"Think it's any use to look for bomb fragments?" asked the orderly timidly.

"Hell no! All you'd get would be a
handful of wire, scorched and broken to bits. That's all anybody ever found."

The orderly said, "What'd you come in here for?"

"They told me at the hospital that some nurses grabbed an ambulance and came in here as soon as the bombardment started," answered Cragg. "Sheila Donn must have been with them. She was in that unit. Oh, they wouldn't have come, if they'd any idea these bombs were going to concentrate on one spot," he went on fiercely. "But how could they know—how could anyone know? The bombs never did that before. We'd see just one bomb, then another droning along through the sky going somewhere or other to explode. Looked like the Gans couldn't control them and just turned them loose to find a destination of their own. But now! I'll bet not less than two thousand demolition bombs struck here in two hours, every one inside the city limits. And that many more in Suburbia three miles from here. Yet not a bomb between—not even at the Pleasantville Country Club grounds where our base is. I tell you America can't stand up to this thing. The Gans will be splitting our country and our wealth between them inside six months!"

"Wonder what made that last bomb so late?" remarked the orderly. Discussion of the Gans, as the combination of overseas nations which had banded together to conquer the United States was called, had been dinned into his ears so long that it no longer made an impression.

"Probably it was just a slower ship and fell behind the rest of the swarm," answered Cragg somberly.

"That reminds me," cried the orderly. "The Old Man wants you and he wants you pronto." He hesitated, then added quietly, "I wouldn't think about her too much, Cragg. Anyway, you can come back and look some more after the Old Man sees you—if you want to. Or wait till they find her."

The Old Man, as the air base commander was affectionately known to his men, was pacing back and forth in the lounging room before the natural stone fireplace, his hands locked behind his back and his eyes scowling down at the worn rug. He jerked up his head and glared at Cragg.

"Where have you been?" he roared.

"In Pleasantville—or what was Pleasantville."

"What for?"

"Looking for a Miss Sheila Donn, sir. She was one of those nurses who grabbed an ambulance and went in to try to help the civilians when the bombs—"

"Looking for a girl!" roared the Old Man. "A girl—and the life of all of America may be depending on you! Dammit, I should have you courtmartialed!"

"Yes, sir," admitted Cragg humbly.

The Old Man's manner changed abruptly. "We found a Gan spy among the mechanics at Hangar Number 1. He go too interested in the effects of the flying bombs and tried to get away on a motorcycle. The others nailed him. He died over at the hospital a little while ago."

"Yes, sir," said Cragg, thinking unconsciously of Sheila Donn again.

"He's the spitting image of you, Cragg. Same eyes, same hair, same tone of voice, same everything. I don't believe we could tell the two of you apart if you stood side by side. Certainly no one could separately. He had credentials in the heel of his boot. He's a Balkavian attached to that Base Z-X the Gans set up in the hills west of Chattanooga two months ago, the place we're certain the flying bombs are launched from. This is the first real chance we've had to crack the mystery."

"Yes, sir," said Cragg automatically. Sheila Donn's eyes were a mysterious blue, and her hair a mass of wavy gold. And when she smiled her red lips parted a little—
"You speak the Balkavian lingo," the Old Man’s voice broke into his thoughts again. "You’ll be fortified with this dead spy’s credentials, and you’re a radio expert as well as a combat pilot. It’s a tough job." The Old Man’s gruff voice softened a bit. "All we can do is to ferry you over at 65,000 feet as we always do and let you bail out. If this Miss Donn shows up, I’ll tell her you’ve been ordered out on a mission, if you wish."

"I’d appreciate it very much, sir," said Cragg, but in his heart he knew she’d never come back. No one would ever come back from that blasted horror that had been Pleasantville. But he added, "Would you give her a letter?"

The Old Man nodded. Cragg fishes through his pockets and got out the last letter he’d received from his folks in Kansas City in which they said they were both working day and night on their little truck farm to help as much as they could do to feed the refugees pouring endlessly into Kansas City, from the east.

Cragg didn’t write much on the back of the first sheet. He just said he was sorry that he couldn’t keep the dinner date at the Pottstown road tavern, and that he hoped they’d have another date soon. He handed the note to the Old Man without sealing it. The Old Man wouldn’t read it anyway. In such matters he was the soul of honor. It wouldn’t make any difference if he did, thought Cragg somberly. She’d never see it anyway, and Cragg himself would probably never return from this mission into Gan territory.

Few did.

CHAPTER TWO

Base Z-X

Cragg’s pilot crossed the Front line trenches, which extended southwest from Northern Ohio through Cincinnati, Louisville, and Hopkinsville nearly to Memphis. He flew so high that not even the faint flickering flashes of the constant artillery duel between the Americans and the Gans across No-Man’s Land could be seen.

Presently the pilot motioned to Cragg to put on his oxygen mask. The pilot could have spoken if he’d wanted to, because he’d cut off his rockets and was coasting down an invisible fifty-mile-long hill so as not to betray his position to any watching Gans below, now that he was over their territory in eastern Tennessee. But the pilot didn’t seem to care. Cragg was another luckless Intelligence agent being ferried over to disappear in Gan territory and never be heard of again. The pilot, too, donned his mask, for at 40,000 feet the air would rush out of the sealed cabin when the trap was dropped.

Cragg made the leap. He waited a good long count of ten, then felt the black silk of his ‘chute jerk against his downward plunge and looked around for a last glimpse of his pilot.

There was only a tiny vertical streak of blue fire far to the west against the stars. It told Cragg that the pilot was standing on his tail to shoot up into the stratosphere safe above range of the Gan archies should they be put on him. Cragg shrugged, and strained his eyes vainly for some glimpse of the earth rising swiftly to meet him.

He made out the mass of a grove in the faint starlight in time to spill air and miss it, landing asprawl in an open meadow beyond. He waited a moment listening, but not a sound came to his ears. That didn’t mean there were no Gans around, though. In fact, there had to be, or Cragg’s plans would have to be changed. He intended to be captured, explain who he was, and be taken, Fate willing, directly to Base Z-X.

However, he prudently gathered up the mass of synthetic silk ‘chute as silently as possible, harness and all, and poured his
little vial of solvent upon it. Within two minutes the 'chute had evaporated into an odorless gas that dissipated itself on the light breeze.

Then he heard the thud of running feet off to his left. He stiffened involuntarily. Who'd imagine that the patrol would get here so quickly? Fleetingly he remembered his U. S. khaki uniform, the same the dead Gan spy had worn, and felt a momentary twinge of fear. Then he set himself grimly to wait.

The running feet drew swiftly nearer. A guttural voice spoke in Balkavian.

"I tell you I saw something against the stars. It was like a great black bird swooping down to earth."

"Plainly someone dropping by 'chute. We're spreading out and advancing. Shoot first and question afterward as usual."

"Indeed so," growled the first Gan.

Cold sweat began to trickle down Cragg’s neck. He understood now why the Americans lost so very many agents like this, why the news from behind the Gan lines was so terribly scanty. He slipped the gun soundlessly from his holster, moved forward lightly as a cat.

A bush materialized in front of him. Desperately he tried to stop, but a twig scratched the rough surface of his coat.

"Aiiee?" Instantly the questioning whisper arose the darkness directly before Cragg.

"By the beard," answered Cragg softly, crouching in a frantic effort to silhouette the unseen Gan against the horizon.

"By the beard?" whispered the Gan, and the words seemed questioning and suspicious.

"By the beard," parroted Cragg grimly, toeing forward.

"It is wrong!" cried the Gan in a loud voice.

"What is wrong, Imd?" called another Gan, and an excited murmur rose from all the unseen soldiers.

Cragg didn’t answer. Cragg’s slashing gun barrel caught him alongside the temple beneath the edge of the coal scuttle helmet.

He leaped the fallen man and fled on tiptoe across the meadow, skirting the grove.

"Imd, Imd? What has happened?"

The voice of the questioning Gan grew loud with alarm. Then a furious outcry arose, as the patrol found the sprawling man.

Cragg gritted his teeth and forced his flying legs to carry him even faster across the night-cloaked meadow. A line of trees warned him and he managed to slide to a halt before plowing into a barbed-wire fence. On the other side of the fence the ground was open again, and he resumed his flight.

The cursing and shouting behind him dwindled and after a time died away altogether. But still Cragg ran, climbing fences, and pounding through fields. After a long time he told himself that he had surely lost them now, and he’d have to stop or drop in his tracks.

Not only that, he had to plan his next move.

Across the field there loomed the hulk of a fire-gutted farm house. Probably there were bones of an American family scattered in the ashes, he thought, as he slipped cautiously past it, and came to a concrete road beyond.

Now Cragg had an inklimg where he was, for he and the Old Man had traced this road on photographic maps. The Gans kept it in good repair, in spite of American bombing, to keep supplies moving up through Nashville to their front lines. Cragg knew now that he could not be many miles from the heavily-guarded Base Z-X, for the ramp of the Cumberland Plateau humped itself against the eastern stars. He began to plod eastward along the road.
The name of the dead spy was Igor Remlov and he came from a village named Romzi in Balkavia, according to his papers. The Old Man and Cragg had been unable to locate the village on a captured Balkavian map so they decided that it was of little importance. There was practically nothing else to be learned about the dead man.

The Intelligence had made transparent reproductions of Remlov's fingers and stuck them on Cragg's so that Cragg would be protected in case that angle of the case was looked into by the Gans—and provided, of course, the Gans didn't already know about finger-print duplication.

Presently there was a rumble far up the road, and a couple of bright eyes appeared in the darkness. The rumble grew into the laboring drone of big Diesel motors, and the eyes became the carefully-hooded headlights of a giant tractor with a train of five trailers rolling westward with supplies.

Cragg plodded solidly along with hands upraised. It was do or die this time. He could hope only that the trailer guards weren't so quick on the trigger as the patrols he'd just escaped.

The rumbling train rolled to a stop with squealing brakes. Accompanying motorcycle guards sputtered up and ringed Cragg's motionless figure with their hooded lights. Not a word was spoken.

Cragg forced a grin and kept his hands aloft. "Igor Remlov attached to Base Z-X," he announced. "You'll find my credentials in my breast pocket."

A huge sergeant strode forward and removed the long envelope. He examined the papers at length, then indicated Cragg's U. S. uniform.

"What do you do in that?" he growled.

Cragg kept his frozen grin. "We agents must fit ourselves even into the hated garb of the Americans if need be."

The sergeant stepped back and spoke in an undertone to one of his men. The Gan slipped away into the darkness back toward the rumbling tractor, leaving Cragg standing just where he was with arms upraised and at least three Gan pistols trained on his chest.

Cragg knew why they were stalling. The sergeant had instructed the radio man in the tractor cab to get in touch with Base Z-X and report the matter.

Presently the man came back from the tractor, and spoke to the sergeant who motioned the men to lower their pistols. But first he relieved Cragg of his weapon.

"Headquarters is expecting you, sir," he said respectfully. "But I must take the gun. It is the rule, you know. You are lucky we didn't shoot first."

"Indeed I know that!" Cragg assured him fervently.

The motorcycles all had sidecars with mounted machine guns on them. The Gans removed the gun from one machine and told Cragg to enter it. Another followed with the soldier in the side-car training the muzzle of his weapon on Cragg's back.

But Cragg relaxed anyway. He was safe over the first hurdle, he thought, as the machines roared into motion back up the road. He was still safe and sound and was being taken to Base Z-X. But just the same he kept thinking of the words of an American who had managed to get away from the Gans and safely back to his own lines.

"When the Gans capture a Yank they think is a spy, they put him in some kind of high-frequency cell. In a little while he goes nuts an' tells everything he ever knew or thought of. Still they leave him in there. Pretty soon he's nothin' but a babblin' idiot. Then they turn him out to wander around like a baby. Then they shoot him for bein' in the way. That's war for you."

The road curved and seemed to mount
looming foothills. A gravel road swung off from it. The motorcycles followed this branch for a couple of miles, coming at last to what must have been an old-fashioned plantation, or a big country estate, back in the good old days when America was free and the Gans were still just a bad dream in the making.

CHAPTER THREE

Cragg Guesses

The commandant’s office was in the big drawing room. Cragg saw first the battered grand piano covered with maps, and then the paintings that had been ripped from the walls or covered with other maps, of Tennessee, Kentucky and northern Alabama stuck with lines of red pin flags to show the trenches of the Gans. After that he saw the baldhead, hook-nosed Gan officer seated at his desk with his pale blue eyes boring into Cragg’s face as Cragg advanced across the room toward him.

“You are late, Remlov,” said the commandant coldly. “You had orders to return not later than last night. What explanation have you to offer?”

Cragg mustered his wits. He’d known there was nothing he could do to prepare for this meeting, no plan to lay against it. Everything depended on his keenness of mind, his best judgment and that doubtful thing called intuition.

“I couldn’t make the connections I planned, sir,” he answered promptly. “I got hold of a motorcycle, but they shot it from under me before I was well started. I hid in a thicket, and later crept into their airbase and forced a pilot to fly me over. I shot him and bailed out. But I fear the shooting was badly done. He probably reached American territory before he crashed.”

“Indeed?” Those cold eyes locked with Cragg’s.

Cragg’s heart began to slide down again, and a chill little wind seemed to be blowing inside him. But he bucked recklessly on with his story.

“The chute began to dissolve before I reached the ground, sir. It was a question of getting down as best I could with my life. It’s something new the enemy has evolved, I believe.” Cragg figured that they knew about dissolving parachutes anyway, or would soon find out. “But I managed a safe landing and ultimately reached the road where the trailer train picked me up.”

The commandant picked up a yellow slip of paper from the desk. “I have here a report from the patrols to the north of the road reporting an unknown person descending by chute tonight. This unknown slugged a private named Imd unconscious and escaped. This unknown could not by any chance be yourself?”

Panic threatened Cragg. Should he deny it? He fought down the panic and made his decision recklessly. After all, the nearer the truth he stuck, as a rule, the safer the ground.

“I regret that I was that unknown, sir,” he confessed, forcing a wry grin. “There was no other way. The patrol, of course, would have shot me without giving me the chance to prove my identity.”

Now the commandant leaned forward and stared hard at Cragg. “And what have you to report, Remlov?”

“It had come! This was the crux of the whole thing, and Cragg knew it. He’d worried about it from the moment the Old Man told him off for this job back at the Pleasantville airbase. The Old Man and the whole staff had worried about it, too, and tried to figure out just why a Gan spy would be nosing around a couple of little, unimportant midwestern cities like Pleasantville and Suburbia more than a hundred miles behind the Front.

Cragg knew that he was lost, he was already as good as dead, for when he
opened his mouth they’d discover that he didn’t know what he was supposed to know. He’d die just as surely as the real Igor Remlov had died when he tried to get away from Pleasantville after watching the success of the bombardment of flying bombs.

Like a blinding revelation Cragg guessed the answer they were waiting for, or thought he did.

“The destruction of Pleasantville and Suburbia were utterly complete, sir!” he said in a loud voice, for he was desperate and reckless again. “First Suburbia dissolved to dust, then Pleasantville, three miles beyond. Not a bomb fell between or anywhere save inside the limits of the two towns. There is only one regret. A small reconnaissance rocket plane base just outside Pleasantville escaped.”

THE Gan commandant gave a triumphant bellow and leaped to his feet, overturning his chair.

“It works!” he shouted at the lanky, loose-mouthed Gan officer beside him, and slapped him joyously again and again on the back. “Did you hear him, Onder? Your calculations work! At last we can control the destination of our bombs!”

Everyone in the room was laughing and shouting except Cragg who stood numb and appalled. It was all too horribly plain now. The Gans had been unable to control the destination of their bombs until Onder worked out the calculations to govern them. Of course anyone could govern the flight of a radio controlled plane within sight, but once it passed over the horizon the control became a matter of guesswork—until now. Remlov, the spy, had been sent to Pleasantville to observe the results of the first calculation-controlled mass bombing.

Cragg became aware that the commandant was jovially telling him to get some sleep and report as usual tomorrow at The Works in the afternoon. Cragg turned dazedly to the door. As he did so he discovered that Onder, the tall, loose-
mouthed Gan officer, was grinning beside him.

"Your neck, Igor," said the Gan.

Cragg was aware then that his finger was hooked inside the collar of his tight-fitting coat and was trying to pull it so as to get more air.

"The excitement," mumbled Cragg. "It made me forget." At once he loosened the collar and jerked it open.

They stepped down off the portico under the night sky where the faint stars were criss-crossed with the blue fire of patrolling rocket planes, and the sound of them made a muted, jarring thunder in Cragg's ears.

Onder laughed, a jeering sound it seemed to Cragg.

"Do you know, Igor, that tonight is the first night in my life I ever saw you unbutton your collar in public?"

A warning thrill of fear touched Cragg, but he rallied fiercely.

"If you'd seen what I've been through the last few days, you'd unbutton your collar, too," he growled.

Onder laughed again. "Perhaps so. Well, let us go to bed now. You can dream of Tamra."

It was on the tip of Cragg's tongue to ask the Gan to lead the way, but he checked himself. Maybe this was a trap Onder was setting for him; maybe Onder was waiting to see if Cragg could find the barracks himself. Cragg began to wonder, too, who Tamra might be, and just how well this stalking menace beside him knew the corpse whose shoes Cragg filled.

They wandered down the drive past darkened buildings. The tiny maggot of worry inside Cragg grew. He began to feel certain that this Onder was trying to trap him. He seemed too content to leave the direction up to Cragg. Somehow, Cragg knew, he had to find the barracks.

Then he caught a faint glow of light from a little building just ahead. Second glance revealed that it was a cantina.

"I think I'll drop in for a cup of coffee," Cragg strove to keep the relief from his voice. "I don't feel sleepy somehow."

The Gan grunted, and they turned into the little building.

For a moment Cragg's eyes blinked in the light. There was a girl behind the counter, undoubtedly some American girl captured by the Gans and put to work in this fashion. It was common enough, Cragg knew. Then his eyes focused. The girl was Sheila Donn and she was surveying him coldly and impersonally!

Cragg tried to tell himself that this wasn't Sheila Donn, but he knew it was no use, because she was Sheila Donn. If nothing else proved it to him, that air of mysterious glamour about her did so now. A thousand un-answered questions flooded through his mind. How had she survived the destruction of Pleasantville? How had she reached this point behind the Gan lines—probably the most heavily-guarded spot in all the Gan territory just now? There was no answer to this second question, if she was American.

Then the appalling truth thrust itself upon Cragg. He felt a little sick, terribly lost and helpless, for now he knew that Sheila Donn was one of those most hated of all women in America, a Gan spy.

Her withering glance took in the honest U. S. khaki of Cragg's uniform, while he stood there dumbly trying to realize this monstrous thing. Then she spoke coldly to Onder.

"That uniform gives one a bad taste. Surely we have no dogs of Americans here?"

Bitter hatred surged through Cragg. With sudden fury he wondered how he could ever have loved Sheila Donn. Now he felt that he couldn't bear the sight of her or that lanky, silly-mouthed Gan another instant. They were alone in the cantina, just the three of them. Two quick
shots and Cragg would be free—for a moment. It was madness, yet... His finger tips brushed the empty holster at his belt. He remembered he'd forgotten to ask for the return of his pistol.

Onder's low laugh sounded, and out of the corner of his eye Cragg saw the lanky Gan pat Sheila Donn's shoulder awkwardly, while she smiled up at him.

"Heed not the uniform, Labelle," chuckled the Gan. "The man inside it despises it as much as you do."

"I have not seen him before." There was a little pont on Sheila's lips.

"He is attached to this base," Onder assured her. "He has merely been away on a mission. Come, you must meet him. He is Igor Remlov. Igor, I want you to meet Labelle Thai."

So she's not Sheila Donn here at home, then, thought Cragg ironically, as he got off the stool and bent low over her cool hand in true Balkavian fashion.

"It is a pleasure," she murmured, slowly withdrawing her fingers.

"I would have coffee," said Cragg surly, then instantly knew that he mustn't be surly. "A thousand pardons! I am tired to exhaustion."

"It is all my fault," she said graciously, and stepped round behind the little counter to serve him.

As Cragg sipped the steaming drink, he caught a fleeting glimpse of her eyes upon him, a coldly, impersonal glance. It set Cragg to wondering what she would do about him. The pretense she maintained of never having seen him before hinted that she might have some purpose of her own in mind, some use to which she would put him. Cragg had heard of that sort of thing before.

Presently Onder finished his coffee and got down from his stool. Cragg followed.

"Good night, my little Labelle," said the Gan, clinging overly long to the girl's hand.

Her eyes were only for him. "Hurry back to see me, On." Then as though as an afterthought she called to Cragg who was clumping out of the door. "And you must drop in again, Sirro Remlov."

Cragg grunted, without turning his head, and waited outside on the darkened drive until Onder joined him a few minutes later. They moved along together, with the Gan humming happily to himself and letting Cragg lead the way. The realization jarred Cragg back to his serious problem of finding the barracks. This time it prodded Cragg to action along a new line, for something had to be done at once.

"What a lovely girl she is!" he exclaimed fervently. "You have all the luck, On."

Cragg could almost feel the Gan stiffen beside him.

"What would Tamra say if she heard you utter those words?" growled Onder.

"Ten thousand miles of land and sea separate me from Tamra," answered Cragg lightly. "When we have crushed these stubborn Americans, I shall hurry back to her. Until then, ah, these American girls!"

The Gan tramped along in silence. Cragg began to exult, for his little ruse was working. The lanky Gan was unconsciously taking the lead to the barracks.

THEN Onder was turning off the drive toward a long darkened building, and Cragg knew that his problem was solved. But as Onder opened the door, and the dim light from inside the building illuminated his grim face, all Cragg's forebodings rushed back upon him. Onder paused and spoke coldly.

"It is indeed strange, Igor. I speak not because Tamra is my own sister and because you are her husband. It is the astounding change in yourself, Igor, that staggers me. Should an inanimate howitzer suddenly begin to enunciate our good Balkavian tongue I would not be more surprised than to hear you voice such sen-
timents about women as you have just uttered—you, my religious, sin-aborning brother-in-law."

With that he turned and stalked the length of the low building between the double row of snoring men, and paused at two empty cots at the end. Cragg followed with pounding heart. Now he'd really gotten himself on the spot. Onder was openly suspicious.

Above one of the cots was a colored photograph of a doll-faced Balkavian girl who looked down at him. This was obviously Tamra, so Cragg sat down on the cot and began to unlace his boots. Onder undressed in cold silence at the next cot. As Cragg prepared to roll in, Onder said abruptly,

"Aren't you going to remove your undershirt and don pajamas?"

Cragg hesitated. He was aware that the dead Balkavian was the kind who must invariably pajama himself before retiring. It would seem advisable to follow the example . . . . Yet there was something tense about the figure of Onder standing there, in the narrow look of his eyes. They seemed to sound a warning bell somewhere inside Cragg. Deliberately he pulled the blankets up over himself and yawned widely.

"Too tired," he said sleepily and closed his eyes. Incredibly, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER FOUR
Spawning of the Swarm

Cragg was up at nine o'clock although he was not to report at the Works until afternoon. He noted other officers from the barracks going back along the drive to what seemed to be the entrance of a camouflaged cave on the slope of the nearby hill, and knew from their conversation that this cave was The Works.

But of Onder there was no sign. He had left the barracks early. Fleetingly Cragg wondered if the Gan could be investigating him already, or be planning to. Then Cragg's thoughts turned back to the girl in the cantina. It seemed advisable to call at the cantina and have a talk with her.

Resplendent in a new Gan uniform, Cragg left the barracks. But when he arrived at the cantina Sheila Donn was not there. In her place was a listless, hopeless American girl called Maizie who only shook her head when Cragg asked how soon Sheila would return. Cragg ate at the cantina, rather than risk the Balkavian dishes at the officers' mess, and set out for The Works, walking slowly and trying to figure out how to attack the problem of locating his desk, or whatever awaited him inside the mysterious place.

The size of the base surprised him. Barracks were not only located all about the grounds, but all up the timbered slopes of the ridge, carefully camouflaged from the air. He saw, too, as he drew nearer, that The Works was not a cave, but a vast low building roofed with grass and shrubs so that from the air it must resemble ordinary terrain.

Cragg had prepared himself for nearly anything when he passed through the guarded entrance into The Works. But even so he was startled by the vastness of the low-roofed, electrically-lighted, artificial cavern in which he found himself. His eyes fell first on a block-long line of turning lathes with men before them, endless numbers of little trucks rolling here and there and piled high with rolls of wire and masses of brown shiny material. A manufacturing plant? No, he decided. This was merely assembly. Or both.

He turned and glanced across the cavern and his heartbeat quickened, for there, moving slowly along the assembly line were the vicious flying bombs that in a short while would spell the doom of free America.

Each bomb was a brown, glistening high-wing monoplane with a fat, cigar-
shaped fuselage, engineered to the last inch. The brown material of which they were constructed, even wheels and propellers, was evidently some kind of plastic.

The production line started far back in the hill itself where the roof was higher. Quite likely it had once been a natural cave that was enlarged. There hulked huge moulds with asbestos-wrapped conduits leading to them from tanks of hot, liquid plastic. At regular intervals hydraulic pumps acted, forcing the plastic into the moulds, and a little later doors of the moulds opened and electric cranes dragged out smoking brown parts.

It was obvious from the frenzied efforts of the men that everything was being pushed at top speed. Planes were fairly popping off the production line, and the drone of testing propellers was loud and continuous. As soon as each plane was given its brief final test it was trundled by a couple of men at a run through a big side door away to some unknown destination. Probably a store house, thought Cragg.

HE WALKED deliberately toward a nearby group of mechanics working over the motor of a plane which wouldn’t turn over. As he came up, the gray-haired sergeant in charge straightened and saluted.

“It’s the controls again,” he explained. “Just like the one you looked at last week.”

“Lift it out and take it to my desk,” ordered Cragg brusquely. “We’ve got to get to the bottom of this thing.”

The sergeant barked the order at his sweating mechanics. One leaped for the blow torch to cut loose the plastic fastenings of the motor box. The blow torch was out. With a curse, the man whipped out his pocket knife and sheared through the supports in a moment.

An electric crane mounted on rubber-tired wheels lifted the heavy little box out of the nose of the plane, and with two men pushing it, moved across the floor. Cragg followed, wondering if he really had a desk.

The crane was pushed into a little nook in the natural rock back wall of the cave. Here, instead of a desk, Cragg saw a well-equipped work bench. Cragg was on familiar ground now. Here and there his practised eyes spotted an unfamiliar instrument, but most of them were old friends. Brusquely ordering the mechanics back to their work, Cragg removed his coat and rolled up his sleeves.

Only in the pattern of his brain could he hope to carry back to the Americans information about this device. There’d be no way of making any other record.

He swiftly cut away the plastic side of the box with a blow torch as he’d seen the mechanics do. First he saw the powerful electric motor that powered the propeller, but such a motor as he’d never seen before. Plastic took the place of metal in everything but the wiring and core. Cragg began to understand why nothing but bits of wire had ever been found after the bombs exploded.

Next he discovered the tiny radio controls. These, too, were constructed of plastic and wire.

All these things he gave but a passing glance and hurried to learn what lay inside a strange plastic sphere from which cables of twisted wire connected with the terminals of the electric motor. On the top of this ball was a huge vacuum tube, and the sphere itself was placed in the center of a veritable spider web of fine wires that stretched out to sides of the box like a sort of screen.

Carefully Cragg cut away the side of the plastic ball. Within it was only a common electric transformer. It was of an unusual type, to be sure, but a transformer just the same. It was wired to the connections of the big vacuum tube.

Now thoroughly puzzled, Cragg went
over the wiring carefully. It didn’t make any sense. He pressed the contact button, and moved the rheostat throttle which was attached to the radio control. Nothing happened.

Troubled and discouraged, Cragg straightened. As he did so his shoulder struck the crane, and the thing moved on its ball-bearing wheels, turning a quarter of the way around. Instantly the big vacuum tube glowed, and the motor roared savagely to life. Hastily cutting off the power, Cragg sat down to think.

One thing seemed certain. The power came from outside the motor. Or did it? And why did the motor operate when hanging in one direction and not in another—

Suddenly like a lot of jigsaw puzzle pieces falling miraculously into place Cragg guessed the amazing truth. He recalled something he’d read years ago about the paper that Ogi, the famous Asiatic scientist, had read at an international convention. Ogi had claimed to have proven mathematically the possibility of projecting electric power by radio—not, as the world once fondly hoped, by a general broadcast which would waste the power by dissipating it in ever widening circles.

Instead, Ogi insisted that you could broadcast a tight beam of electrical power which would follow the curvature of the earth due to gravitational distortion, and your motor would pick up its power from this beam, power generated by a web of wires set up in the path of the beam. Now, with Ogi’s nation a member of the Gan combine, the thing had been put to use.

CHAPTER FIVE

Cragg Is Accused

Cragg tramped back to barracks that dusk. He hadn’t been aware that he’d spent the whole afternoon dissecting and studying the motor. Now he saw that the faultless Gan uniform he’d donned in the morning was rumpled and dirty. It would be in keeping with the character of the dead Igor Remlov to change into a new one, it seemed, so change he must.

When he entered the building he thought that it was empty, then he saw the tall gangling figure of Onder rise from the cot on which the Gan had been sitting at the far end of the barracks. Onder’s hair was disheveled and his bulging eyes a little wild. The sight of him put Cragg instantly on the defensive and his thoughts leaped to the long Gan pistol he’d belted about his lean middle when he dressed, earlier in the day.

“Igor!” Onder’s voice was hoarse with excitement. “Igor, what did you do with those plans?”

Cragg’s amazement must have been reflected in his face as he answered, “What plans?”

Onder shoved a bony hand fiercely through his tousled hair.

“Oh, I know you didn’t steal them!” the Gan rushed on, his voice shrill. “But it’s the spy cell, Igor. I see it every minute. They’ll put me in it. I’ll go crazy, screaming crazy just like those Americans that are put in there. Igor, I tell you I can’t stand it!”

Cragg’s chest grew tight, and his eyes wary. They were alone in the barracks but the Gan’s hysterical voice would bring someone to investigate if this kept up.

“Hush!” ordered Cragg sharply. “Do you want the sentry nosing in here?”

Onder began to pace senselessly back and forth between the lines of cots, tousling his hair wildly. Cragg tried to guess what the dead Igor Remlov would do in this situation, and began to strip off his rumpled uniform after first tossing the belted pistol on the cot beside him—within easy reach.

“Now tell me about it, On,” he said kindly. “Maybe I can help you. Remem-
ber that I got back only last night."

"It's those plans—you know, my calculations that govern the destination of the flying bombs after they're launched," groaned Onder. "They're missing!"

"No!" cried Cragg, in pretended dismay.

"Oh, I know I should have left them in the headquarters safe in the house! But I wanted to perfect them. Some of the bombs may lag far behind the rest of the swarm now. It was useless to ask the Commandant for them once I had turned them over to him. He'd only become suspicious. So I took a chance and got them from the safe and have been working on them here and at The Works. I kept them in my trunk under the cot. Now they're gone!"

He began to pace again, chewing at his fingernails.

"Perhaps it would be better to go to the Commandant and make a clean breast of it," suggested Cragg. That was the last thing Cragg would have permitted, because in the resulting investigation he would be bound to be discovered. He would even have shot this hysterical Gan to prevent it. But it seemed to Cragg that Remlov would have suggested it.

"Never that!" cried Onder shrilly. "They'd put me in the spy cell sure!"

Cragg nodded, eased out his breath, and began to don his clean uniform.

"I've been through every trunk here," Onder hurried on, dropping his voice. "Even yours, Igor, but never a sign of the plans did I find. There's but one thing left to do. I'm going to the house and search there. Help me, Igor!"

A thrill of expectant triumph surged through Cragg, but he merely nodded. "You can count on me. On. After all there is Tamra, and blood is thicker than water. But first I must have something to eat. I'm nearly starved. You've got to make yourself presentable. So while you're doing that, I'll just slip over to the cantina and down a cup of coffee. I'll be back in five minutes."

Onder halted and scowled at the floor. "Good," he said, and his voice was calm. He sat down on the cot and grimly began to smooth his ruffled hair.

Cragg didn't note the change in him. He was too excited himself. Amazingly Fate was offering him a chance to get his hands on the whole secret of the deadly swarm. He really wanted nothing to eat, but he felt as though he simply had to settle his whirling thoughts.

Outside, the first cold stars were gleaming in the black sky, and the criss-crossing of the blue lines of fire marked the ceaseless patrol of the rocket planes. Growing excitement seemed to grip the whole of Base Z-X. Running men dashed past Cragg this way and that as he strolled down the drive.
He entered the cantina, thinking of the long pistol on his hip and what would happen if he and Onder succeeded in finding the plans. Cragg meant to have them. He was certain of that. He'd try to get them without hurting Onder, but if need be, he'd use the pistol. Such was the way of war.

He glanced up to see Sheila Donn behind the counter smiling at him. Instantly Cragg's chest tightened, and a tiny warning note throbbed in the back of his brain. He mounted a stool.

"Coffee," he ordered.

Her smile remained. "Come back to my room, Sirro Remlov," she said quietly. "It is but a few steps along this passage at the back of the cantina."

Cragg started to voice a curt refusal. He didn't have the time to go even if he wished. Onder was waiting. He checked himself. He didn't dare refuse! She'd notify the nearest sentry. He nodded and got off the stool.

She halted at the end of the short passage and unlocked a door. Cragg crowded into the little room after her to find the window shade tightly drawn and a single electric light burning. He saw, too, that no one could be hiding here. He soundlessly removed the heavy pistol from its holster.

She knelt before the bed and reached under it. Cragg tried to stifle the mad hammering of his heart, tried to draw in an agonizing breath. That kneeling girl wasn't Sheila Donn he'd loved back in Pleasantville. She was a foreigner, a loathsome spy! He must get the gun up and strike her before she turned her head and screamed. Strike hard—but not too hard! This pistol weighed a ton. Oh he must be careful lest he shatter the skull beneath that mass of golden hair—

She turned her head and smiled wistfully at him. Cragg reeled in spite of himself. She seemed not to notice the half-raised weapon in his shaking hand. From beneath the bed she drew a paper-wrapped package, got to her feet and tore off the covering.

The package contained a seat-pack parachute. She held it out to him.

"This will let you down to a safe landing, Jim," she said unsteadily.

Cragg's pistol clattered to the floor. His arms went around her blindly.

"Sheila—oh my God, to think that I nearly . . ."

She clung to him trembling. "It's all right, Jim. I don't blame you for what you couldn't help thinking. It had to be that way, though; I had no chance to explain."

"I thought you died at Pleasantville," whispered Cragg.

"I never went there, Jim. When the bombardment took place, I was being flown to Chattanooga. I was to meet Number 127-Q here and help him try to get the secret of the bombs. It was fixed by grapevine to put me in the cantina here. But 127-Q was shot by the Gans three days before I got here. Then I saw you, and knew that you'd been sent to take his place. I knew you thought I was a Gan, but I didn't dare let you know differently. I had to play up to Onder. He had something that America has to have."

She slipped from his embrace and drew a small gold-plated compact from the bosom of her waitress' uniform, and handed it to him. "It's inside the powder puff, Jim, written on silk. I copied it last night and destroyed the papers."

"Copied what?" he asked bewildered.

"Onder's calculations that govern the flight of the bombs. The swarm is useless without them. I got them from his trunk yesterday."

There was a sudden sound of feet in the cantina proper, and a muffled man's voice came through the door. Cragg ducked and caught up the pistol from the
floor. Sheila’s eyes were wide and her face white.

Then the voice of Maizie, the other girl, who Cragg surmised had slipped out to watch the counter while he and Sheila came back here, was speaking urgently beyond the keyhole.

“That was Captain Onder! He asked first for you, Labelle, then for Remlov. I told him neither of you had been here. I think he’s gone for the guard!”

“Carry the ‘chute, Jim,” said Sheila, and shoved him out of the room, while Maizie ran back to the front of the cantina again. “Here’s the outside door.”

“But what good is the ‘chute?” he muttered as she hurried him through the night across the grounds, past the giant black trees and darkened barracks.

“We’ll roll a bomb out of one of the planes, and put you in its place,” she explained. “I’ll trip the outside starting trigger. When you’re over the American lines you can bail out—”

“No! I’ll not leave you here, Sheila. Wait. I’ve got a better plan. We’ll both get in the plane. The mechanics will trip the trigger when they launch the rest.”

“No, no, Jim!” Sheila’s voice was determined. “We can’t risk it. There’s too much at stake. Don’t you see? This information has got to go back to the Americans. Better lose one life than millions!”

Jim said nothing more. There was no time for arguing, but just the same, he told himself savagely, Sheila Donn would be inside that flying bomb when it left the ground. Somehow he’d get away from Base Z-X and back through the lines to the American side.

The trees came to an abrupt end against a crumbling stone wall. Cragg helped Sheila over it, and they found themselves in a vast open field under the night sky. From the far side and all along the eastern edge came the sound of men’s excited voices. Then Cragg made out line after line of motionless flying bombs all pointed northwestward, lines stretching away across the field.

There was little time left, it was obvious, before the launching would begin. Cragg and Sheila hurried to the bomb, standing at the end of the first line.

Cragg dropped to his knees beside the fuselage and attacked the welded base of the side door with his pocket knife. The tough plastic resisted, but the knife sheared slowly along the lower edge of the door until at last it swung free on its inset hinges.

Between them they rolled the torpedo-shaped 400-pound demolition bomb out of the plane and let it thud heavily to the ground. As it did so both shrank instinctively away. But the bomb did not explode. Cragg was already certain that the bomb was detonated by remote radio control. He straightened—and froze.

A tall form loomed against the stars with an outstretched hand. No need to guess that the hand held a pistol.

“You’re not Igor!” Onder’s voice shook so with passion that the words were almost un-intelligible. “I knew it all along. I should have torn the undershirt from you last night and learned for sure you had no birthmark. But now the commandant shall do it with his own hands! Where are those plans? Up on your feet before I send a bullet crashing through your dirty American skull!”

Cragg caught the tiny sound of the strangulated sob in Sheila’s throat. Then a wild shout and the windy roar of propellers on the far side of the field drowned it out. Dimly he saw her hurl her slender body against the tall Gan. Cragg saw, too, the flash of the Gan’s pistol in his face and felt the hot touch of the bullet along his cheek.

Cragg flung himself upon Onder. One hand caught the long barrel of the Gan’s pistol and bent it backward until Cragg felt the snapping of bones in Onder’s fist and the gun came away uselessly from
it to fall under their trampling feet. Onder's hoarse scream died under Cragg's gripping fingers, and Sheila's pistol outlined itself fleetingly against the stars, and the dull thud of it striking the Gan's head could be sensed rather than heard in the swelling ominous roar of starting propellers as the mechanics came racing across the field, tripping triggers as they came.

Sheila faced Cragg, panting above the sprawling form of Onder unconscious on the ground.

"Quick, Jim! Get inside!"
"Nothing doing!" he growled. "You're going. I'll get through somehow—"
"Look out, Jim! Behind you!"

Cragg twisted his head. The barrel of her pistol caught him across the temple and everything blacked out for Jim Cragg.

CHAPTER SIX

Devil's Display

Cragg opened his eyes blearily. He tried to move. The result was nearly his last earthly act, for the parachute, which was his bridge to the earth below, slipped from its wedged position under his hip, pushed open the loosely hanging door in the fuselage of the plane, and vanished out into the night. The wind caught the door and wrenched it loose from its hinges, and it too vanished into empty air. Cragg started to slide after it before he realized what was happening.

Terror drove his hand clawing frantically about the smooth interior of the fuselage for a hold. There was none. But his knee found a tiny peg on the floor that was used to brace the bomb intended to ride in here, and he managed to stop himself.

He thought of Sheila. She'd dumped him into this flying tomb and tripped the trigger, bravely sacrificing herself that he and America might live. The realization dragged a groan from him and scurged him to action.

With the pocketknife, now dulled from hacking at the tough plastic, he attacked the smooth partition between him and the power unit in the nose of the plane. It was desperate work. More than once he started to slide as the racing, droning plane struck air bumps, and he held his breath and waited.

At last the partition was cut through and sliced out, leaving a ragged edge to which he could cling with his left hand while he reached through the opening into the compartment, glowing bluely from the big vacuum tube on top of the convertor sphere. Within a few seconds he'd detached the robot pilot from its connections with the little receiving unit through which directions were flowing from the broadcasting station back at Base Z-X.

Instantly the little ship began to pitch and toss out of control. Cragg's grip with his left hand on the ragged edge of the partition tightened grimly while with his right hand he seized the robot pilot.

Two thousand hours of combat flying experience came to his aid then. The little ship steadied, then whipped round in a tight circle, dropped a hundred feet, and headed back through the night toward the unseen Base Z-X.

Fresh despair assailed Cragg now. How could he find the Base in the darkness? What could he find the Base in the darkness? He envisioned himself flying all over the Cumberland Plateau in his hopeless search for it. Then he remembered the hurtling lines of bombs streaming past overhead, for he'd dropped beneath them. They were like overlarge black geese against the stars. He had only to follow them back to their source. Then what?

He'd be too late, Cragg told himself hopelessly, and even if he wasn't how would he ever locate Sheila Domi? There was no answer to that, but he kept his plane hurtling eastward toward the
spawning ground of the deadly swarm.

Then he saw that the lines of flying planes were lowering ahead, which meant that they were rising from the launching field. Recklessly he plunged downward, fishtailing the craft so that he could catch a glimpse ahead by looking out of the opening at his right as he lay full length on the floor of the plane.

At the first glance his heart sank. The field below and ahead was alive with rushing cars and motorcycles, and the flying bombs were no longer being launched. It could only mean that Onder had spread the alarm and a furious search was being made for Sheila Donn. Cragg told himself doggedly that they surely couldn’t have found her, or they wouldn’t be searching. He wouldn’t even let himself think that perhaps she was already in the hands of her captors and the search down there was for himself. But where could she have gone?

Where would he go if he was trying to get away, Cragg asked himself grimly. He’d try to cross the field and get out of the base and away from it altogether. It would be the only logical thing to do.

He had dropped so low that he was now but a hurtling, black bat a hundred feet above the grassy turf of the launching field. Then near the edge of the field he caught a glimpse of a running figure, and his heart leaped. It was Sheila! It had to be Sheila!

RECKLESSLY he nosed down to a hard landing, rolled out of the plane, sprang up and ran forward. His lips opened to cry Sheila’s name, but only closed again on a cry of despair.

Cleaving lights of a car on the far side of the field whipped across the now motionless figure, outlining it briefly, a figure too tall and lanky to be Sheila Donn. Then above the bedlam of racing motors

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Get in the swim with well-groomed men—

Use Thin Gillettes—priced four for ten.

They zip through whiskers like a breeze,

Give greater comfort—speed and ease!

Top quality at rock-bottom price

The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade
and shouting men Cragg caught Onder's faint, triumphant shout.

"Come, you fools! I have shot her. She lies at my feet!"

Cragg's wild charge hurled him across the intervening ground like a raging animal. His shoulder caught the lanky Gans midships and doubled him up. The pistol flew from his hand, and he went sprawling like a limp scarecrow two yards away.

Cragg caught up the girl's limp body and fled back to the waiting bomb plane.

A short, bumpy run and the ship lifted into the air. Cragg twisted his head to look down out of the opening at his side, meanwhile uttering a wordless prayer that no trees were waiting to claw him down out of the sky.

He saw car headlights pick up the gesturing figure of Onder on the field, and halt with their glare upon him. Jerky, bright flames of machine gun fire came from the car. Onder's lanky body twisted oddly and pitched forward. A line of trees moving past beneath the plane cut off the view.

It took Cragg but an instant to set a northwesterly course by quartering Polaris in the opening beside him, so that they went hurtling after the mechanical swarm of destruction now droning far ahead toward Kansas City. Then he turned to the limp figure beside him.

"Sheila?" He tried to keep the agony of anxiety out of his voice. "Sheila, can you hear me?"

She stirred and moaned.

"Are you hurt badly, Sheila?"

"Jim! Jim Cragg!" Her words were a sob of joy, and she clung to him.

"Where are we?"

"Never mind that now. How badly are you hurt?"

A moment of silence followed, then she answered quietly, "I'm not hurt at all except that my head aches. I remember now. I tried to hide, but I knew they'd flush me out in no time, because Onder had revived and was yelling for help. It was better to try to cross the field through the hedge and pass the sentries, if I could. I started. Onder caught sight of me and began to shoot. I stubbed my toe and hit my head on something. That's all I remember."

"Thank God!" said Jim Cragg.

HER answer was a shiver. Next moment the motor went dead. Cragg pumped the throttle a few times and sighed.

"It's here," he announced. "Now for the glide—what's that?"

Lightning seemed to be flashing ahead of them. He twisted the little plane slightly so as to bring the horizon ahead into view. The entire western sky was ablaze with thousands of flickering pinpoints of light, a tremendous Devil's display of fireworks that winked out a few seconds later.

"The flying bombs exploded in the air," said Cragg in awe. Either the bombs explode when the power is cut off, or the Gans didn't want to risk having some of them land in American territory without blowing up. Or maybe it was a wild, final effort on their part to destroy us, believing we're in the middle of the swarm.

"But you, Sheila—you've saved America! That's No-Man's Land just below us. We'll land well behind the Front now, safe among our own people. Sheila, they'll put your name in the papers, talk about you on the radio, and maybe the GHQ will even let you appear on television for the people of America to see. You'll be famous—what's the matter?"

She was sobbing hysterically against his shoulder. And now for the first time Jim Cragg saw her not as a mysterious, glamorous spy with the hint of exotic, foreign cities clinging to her, but just as an everyday, ordinary, lovable girl.

THE END
Dodging meteorites between the planets isn’t the only situation in space-travel that calls for quick thinking. Even the routine ground work can have its tense moments!

By Arthur G. Stangland

He was a little fella with the usual large black eyes, delicate nostrils and pale pink skin of the Martian. He was dressed in typical low-class Martian immigrant style—baggy red corduroys, faded blue shirt, and a ragged leather jacket long since minus its zipper. We see lots of his kind hanging on around the spaceport area. But Flando, as he called himself, was unusually eloquent in his plea to work his way back to Mars on the Iron Duke.

So I took him in to see Pat Morrison, even though I knew it was all ice from the start. As spaceport master Pat never told Commander Rogers how to run his ship. And one iron rule Rogers kept was not to sign on Martians at the last moment just to haul them home. He’d have been swamped if he did.
I kept my eyes averted from Pat as I said: "This's Flando. He wants to work his way home." Then with an inner sigh of relief I stepped aside to let Pat do the dirty work.

Now Pat is thin and ruddy faced, with a long jaw and nervous tapering hands. He's sharp-nosed, sharp-eyed and needle-tongued. But all that's just armor over a soft soul, defense against such a situation as this.

First of all he gave me a javelin glance for making him launch into such an acid bath. Then he turned on the poor devil. Flando's luminous eyes were glowing with a beseeching look that would have melted the heart of a stone statue.

"Listen, gimp," he began, using the unkind nickname for Martians, "I know your story a thousand times over. You came to Earth thinking you'd get rich quick. Then you'd return to Mars to live like a king, rate of exchange being what it is. But it wasn't all gold and silver, was it? Now you're here with your tail between your legs wanting to beat your way home on a luxury liner. Well, they're still shoveling manure in the cattle hulks to Mars. That's where you belong. Now — get 'thell outa here, I'm busy!"

If you've never been stranded a hundred million miles from home, then you can't imagine how that poor devil of a Martian felt. I didn't have to imagine it. I saw it all in his eyes. It made me remember a little pup I saw one stormy night huddled down beside the road. I stared through the big plate glass window down on the field, and rubbed my jaw.

Then after a long uncomfortable moment Flando's soft, unhurried voice came in answer.

"Thank you, really much, for lesson in Earth diplomacy."

Then he disappeared through the door. I swung around to see Pat lifting his black head for a surprised glance at the closing door. I braced myself for the inevitable. It wasn't long in coming.

"Damn it, Bill, that's your job to handle these gimps," Pat growled. "It isn't enough that I have to worry over a million other things, but now I get this threatening note thrown in to boot!"

I took the note from him just as he had torn it off the Autoscribe reel. It said: "Ramar will be assassinated at the spaceport tonight."

Ramar, as the government had informed us, was an important Martian envoy traveling incognito back to Mars. As soon as he arrived we were to hurry him safely aboard. But so far—no Ramar.

Isn't it funny how Fate gangs up on a guy some times? Here we were in the act of sprouting gray hairs over prospects of a murder in our front yard, when the photoviser went "bsst!" Automatically I flinched, then felt silly.

Pat reached a long finger over and switched on the plate.

"Yeah?" he snapped.

I saw the square, hard face of Jennigs, the F.B.I. chief, bloom into shape.

"Morrison, this guy Ramar—has he showed up yet?"

"No—why?"

Pat, I could see, was carefully out of view of the plate, crumpling the note in his hand.

"Well, he should have!" the chief boomed back. "I sent a squad of plainclothesmen with him to the port and they reported he insisted on seeing you alone. Now, by God, Morrison, you better dig him up before the Iron Duke leaves—or the Iron Duke won't be leaving until Ramar is on it. That guy's as valuable as radium right now. Call me when you find him."

With that parting shot the plate went dead, and we stood staring at it for a moment. But not for long. The door into the computing room opened, letting in a
burst of humming, clicking sound from the differential analyzers and integral calculators. It was Blake, the chief mathematician. He had shoved his green eyeshade up on his bald head and was coming toward us, frowning behind his thick glasses. Blake is a piece of machinery pure and simple, with danged little human emotion in him. In fact, I always declared that if you listened carefully you could hear a humming and clicking in his head.

"Pat," he began, in his dry flinty voice, "Rogers has got to 'up ship' an hour earlier. Asteroid 3448 just showed up and knocked the daylight out of our trajectory. We're grinding out the new dope now."

Pat's face fell on the floor—or it almost did. Then he came up fighting mad. His sharp eyes went wide and his long jaw stuck out.

"Yeah, just like that—Rogers has to 'up ship' an hour earlier!" he growled. "That means we have to post notices on the electrosigns all over town, notify all the hotels and herd the passengers aboard as soon as they arrive. Nice mess!"

I can't say that I blamed Pat. Old Blake has been with the company twenty years and I know blamed well he enjoys being the little cog that controls the big wheels. As high priest of the religion of Mathematics it's his eternal joy to consult the hieroglyphics of differential equations, hyperbolic functions and the calculus of chaos, then read the riot act to us.

"Don't blame me," Blake shrugged as he headed back into his cubicle. "Blame Asteroid 3448."

PAT lit a cigarette and pulled hard on it, laying down a blue smoke barrage. Through the haze his eyes pierced me. I knew what he was feeling. Pat has a woman's sharp sense for detail and he attends meticulously to things. That's why the company higher-ups trust him absolutely to co-ordinate all the minute details of getting a ship off ground and into space. But for each time that he does it, Pat Morrison sprays out the energy of ten men. And loves it, despite his constant defamation of the company.

"Some time I'm really going to tell this company what I think of it for making my office a sweat shop. I'll go on a grand drunk, then call all those stuffed pants into conference and give 'em two earfuls." He nodded to the door. "Well, you better get out there and tell the glad news to Rogers. He'll love it."

"Okay." At the door I turned for a moment. I'd thought of a little conundrum and just had to spring it on him. "What're you going to do if and when we don't locate this Ramar guy?"

Jennings, the F.B.I. chief, had said the Iron Duke wouldn't leave without him. But transportation companies don't make money cancelling trips. It was entirely up to Pat as the spaceport master. If he did let it up-ship without the Martian envoy, the government could make it tough, but so could the company if he didn't.

"Maybe I'll hop the Iron Duke to Mars myself," was the glum retort.

I doubled timed down the steps into the great waiting room of the spaceport. All was grand confusion, because the notice of earlier departure was already on the boards. People were fluttering over their possessions, protesting to the customs about leaving unessentials behind, first timers were staring through the view windows at the bulging sides of the Iron Duke, a little dubiously excited and pale faced. Outside were the usual farewellers down to see friends and relatives off. In the crowd I could see one or two of those rare old birds—bi-centenarians—who sprouted their first roots back in the 1930's and 1940's. Never get them to set foot inside a space ship. No siree! This new-fangled idea of traversing space—. Now, if you cracked up in a surface car
or a plane, at least you had the earth
to land on, but out in space, man, what
did you have under you?

**THE Iron Duke** is a sleek, proud thing
gostr of gleaming, mirror-like hull that
turns most of the penetrating rays of open
space. She was resting in her cradle, a
slumbering giant. As I walked under the
broad bulge of her I could hear the hum
of electric motors and the small talk of
crewmen through open ports. I found
myself wishing I were boarding her
tonight too. Up a ramp and into the
freight hatches men were rushing last
minute cargo.

"Hello, Bill," Simmons, the purser
greeted me at the gangway.

"Better dust off the gang plank, fella.
Old Blake just lopped an hour off de-
parture."

Simmons made a wry face. I was just
leaving him to enter the ship, when I
spied the ample form of Commander
Rogers stepping on the gangplank. His
usually genial face wore a frown and he
came toward us with heavy steps. Be-
hind him I saw the first engineer. Some-
thing didn't look right. I waited at the
bottom.

Rogers' worried frown did not disap-
pear as he recognized me. It deepened, if
anything.

"Now don't tell me I've got to crowd
another hundred tons of freight aboard," he
growled at me. "I've got plenty of
trouble already. We've sprung a leak in
freight room No. 2 and the ozone's going
out fast."

Now, ozone between the outer and
inner hulls of a space ship is something
it can't afford to lose unless the passen-
gers want to be fried by ultra-violet rays.
I spilled my gloomy news.

"Hell an' firewater!" was all Rogers
said for the moment. The fingers of his
big hands clenched and unclenched into
his palms while he stood thinking. Then
he said: "Well, tell Pat we're doing the
best we can. We'll be another two hours
yet, at least."

I looked at my watch. "That leaves
you a half hour grace before you upship
at 10 p.m."

As I returned to the administration
building, looming like a massive pile of
terraced stone blocks, a thought struck
me. Here I was, coming back just as
loaded down with bad news as when I
left. With Pat worrying about an assassi-
nation and a delayed ship, I had to heap
more trouble on him.

When I opened the door into the office,
my eyes swung to a woman like steel to
a magnet. She was a petite Martian,
leaning back against Pat's desk. Her slim
young body lost none of its curving allure
through the rich red skirt and short
jacket. She glanced up at me and I
catched the flash of a vivid, vivacious
spirit sparkling behind her dark luminous
eyes. Her soft moist mouth continued
moving in speech, but already she had
roused all the sleeping lions in me. Pat
I could see wasn't saying much. He was
just listening. It seemed she was in dire
need of passage but there were passport
difficulties.

Then for the first time I became aware
of Pat's red-headed wife, Betty, sitting
on the davenport. She was sitting as
straight as the sword of Damocles, and
snapping her purse with ominous mono-
tony. Her red hair flamed under the
saucy little hat perched upon a mass of
curls. When she glanced at me, the curls
jiggled like coiled springs.

". . . bot, Moster Morrison," the petite
Martian was saying with a cute little pout,
"I cannot be left to thes Uorth. So much
I want to go on the Aron Duk."

I MOVED over to the windows—not to
look out, but to get a better look at
Pat's face. He was looking up at her with
rapt attention and when she stopped
speaking, he stirred as if coming out of a dream.

"Well, the fact that you've been here for a year without renewing your passport, is a point not in your favor," he said. Then more briskly: "But I think I can iron all that out for you. You just board the ship and I'll arrange everything with the purser."

The little lady went off like a skyrocket. She sprang away from the desk in one bound, scammed around to Pat and planted a quick kiss on his cheek. Then she skittered across the floor and disappeared through the door.

Well... an Antarctic snowstorm settled down so fast on us that I shivered. There was Pat, half leaning back in his swivel chair, still getting over his surprise. And poised on the edge of the davenport like a hawk ready for battle was Betty.

Suddenly, Betty popped up, her tiny feet beat three quick steps on the polished floor to his desk. She glared down at her luckless husband with all the fury of a sun 120 degrees in the shade and no shade. Her blazing blue eyes were focussed down as sharp as knitting needles.

"Well, 'Moster' Morrison," she bit off, and her faintly freckled nose wrinkled up, "so you're going to move Earth and Sun to get our little helpless Martian on the Iron Duke?"

Pat's ruddy face deepened to a tomato red. "Now, Bet, you don't understand..."

"No, I'll say I don't. That Martian wench had you wrapped around her like a fox fur. You just hated that kiss, I suppose!"

"Bet, you don't realize the jams that people can get into when they are travelling," Pat said, trying to be matter-of-fact. He made a negligent gesture with his hands. "And it's up to me to help them if I can."

"I'd like to pull her eyes out, the she-devil," said Betty. "And as for you, Mr. Morrison, I'm going right down and get that sable coat you said I couldn't have. Good-by!"

With that terrible pronouncement she flounced out of the office. I couldn't help noticing how quiet and peaceful it was for the first time since I'd come in. At last Pat got his breath.

"There you go—woman and dictators, they're made of the same web, always keep you guessing. I'll never know whether she was really mad or just put on a show to have an excuse for buying that damned sable coat." He sat back for a moment, cupping his long jaw in his right hand.

"Bill, when this night is over, let's go open a keg o' nails," he said.

"Suits me," I told him. "I'm already getting a headache. Rogers says he's got a leak in the hull in No. 2 freight hold. Be a couple of hours before he patches it."

Before Pat could burst into profanity, the photoviser signalled noisily. He snapped it on.

"Yeah?"

It was Hauser, chairman of the board for the company. His fat face was as smooth as an egg and in a corner of his big mouth a half smoked cigar was tucked away.

"What's this about the government trying to hold up the Iron Duke?" His throaty voice came through the speaker with a deep resonance. The voice of unremitting authority.

"That's the dope all right," Pat said. "We're supposed to wait until Ramar, the Martian envoy, is aboard."

"Hm." We waited while he rolled the cigar across to the other corner. Then he said: "Yours is the word that delays the ship or sends her on her way, Morrison. Sometimes it takes guts to make a right decision. Don't let Jennings scare you with his shouting."
THE visor went dead. What Hauser meant wasn’t lost on us at all. Making a right decision meant making it in the company’s favor or else—

“Why, that cockeyed old walrus!” Pat growled, shoving his fists deep in his pockets and striding over to the windows. “He’s safe on the sidelines and tells me I gotta put my neck out.”

To change the subject I asked: “Found any trace of Ramar yet?”

Pat swung around. “There’s something else to worry about. Maybe he’s been waylaid already somewhere. Maybe the assassins have done their dirty work. I’ve checked with the passport examiners below, but he hasn’t showed up yet. And I’ve got our detectives circulating in the crowd looking for him.”

“Well, Jennings can’t expect us to do the impossible,” I observed.

Just then old Blake stepped in from the computing room. His pink bald head gleamed for an instant as it caught the light. In his bony hands he held some sheets of paper.

“Here’s the flight dope and trajectory coordinates,” he began in his dry voice. He always sounded as if there wasn’t enough moisture in his whole body to wet his whistle. “Tell that new navigator, Dudley, to load on a three safety factor when he reaches . . . .”

At that moment I noticed the outer door opening slowly. And there stood Flando, the immigrant Martian. Ye gods, we had that to go all over again! He came in quietly, his large dark eyes fastened on us. His black beret he carried respectfully in his right hand.

“Here’s that guy, Flando, again, Pat,” I interrupted.

Pat’s head bobbed up, his ruddy face still relaxed in listening to old Blake. But as soon as he recognized the little Martian, old Nick put lines of anger in his face.

Yet, Flando beat him to the punch.

“Please, Moster Urthman,” he said rapidly, pulling forth an envelope and holding it out, “quick I must be on Mars. My little girl Lolan sick—I help her. You give me work on Aron Duk, huh?”

Pat’s face showed all the fury of a frigid nor’wester about to break. But at mention of Flando’s sick little “Lolan” it calmed down a trifle. He always was a sucker for little sick girls, and took the chance every time that it was a gag—“because maybe some times it isn’t,” as he told me once.

He leaned over his desk, scribbled on a pad. He tore the sheet off, handing it to the Martian.

“Here,” he said curtly. “I can’t get you on the Iron Duke, but this note will help you get a job on the Windsor freighters. They have one leaving tomorrow morning. Now get out, gimp.”

He glanced up at the wall clock. Nine o’clock p.m. The Iron Duke was scheduled to leave in one hour. Through the windows I could see the passengers streaming out to the ship now. The notice had been sent to the hotels and everyone was rushing to the spatoport.

“... and that means an ecliptic angle of 34° 23’ 45″,” old Blake’s flinty voice was saying. “We were able to take advantage of the conjunctive moon in this new trajectory—”

Yeah, Dudley will understand all that,” Pat said a little irritably. He took the trajectory sheets out of the mathematician’s hands. “I’ve got to get out there and see Rogers. Come on, Bill.”

DOWNSTAIRS in a clatter and out on the field through the milling crowds. We breasted our way to the gates and through the guards. Simmons was busy at the gangway punching tickets and inspecting visas. He let us through the drifting throngs on the main deck, we stepped into an elevator and shot up to the bridge.
Our footfalls were deadened by the cork decking as we stepped along to the chart room. Dudley, precise and as neat as the figures on his work sheets, looked up as we entered. Against the distant uproar from below decks, his voice sounded sharp and clear.

"Evening," It wasn't a particularly chummy greeting, I thought.

Pat laid the trajectory sheets on the chart bench. "Where's Rogers?"

"Down in freight hold 2 trying to save our ozone," Dudley tossed his pencil away and leaned against the bench. There was a faint trace of truculence in his gray-blue eyes. "I heard outside that this trip might be cancelled because of some gimp that hasn't showed up yet."

Instantly Pat was full of belligerence. "It hasn't been canceled and if it is you'll hear about it," he said curtly. He headed for the door. "Come on, Bill."

Down below there was plenty of racket. Freight and supplies rumbling in through the hatches were being sorted and fastened securely for the takeoff. In No. 2 we found Captain Rogers, and the square-faced chief engineer watching two workmen handling a steel-penetrant X-ray. On the outside two others would be operating the X-ray itself while these two inside would be observing through the fluoroscope.

Rogers turned to us as we wound our way through bulky bundles of cargo. By the look on his face I could see they were still hard at it.

"There's another leak here somewhere," he growled to us, gesturing at the workmen. "We found one bad spot and blistered her with a molybdenum patch. Still we can't hold the ozone."

Pat shoved his hands in his pockets. "But do you realize that in one short hour you've got to up-ship?" he demanded.

"Hell an' firewater!" the Captain exploded. "Don't you think I know all that? We're doing all we can, man."

Everybody was on edge. Even I was, but I managed to keep my head a little. I stepped into the breach and offered this marvelous bit of advice: "Let's go, Pat." I suggested. "There's still that assassination on the program."

We went. And Pat smoked three cigarettes just walking from the Iron Duke to the office. The time was getting down close. Maybe Ramar would choose to arrive at the gangplank at the last moment, having hidden somewhere around the spaceport all the time. But how he could escape the vigilance of our company detectives was more than I could figure out. They had pictures of his mustachioed mug and could hardly miss him.

We stepped into the office just in time to hear the photoviser go "Bsst!" Pat snapped it on.

"Yep?"
It was Jennings again. “Well, Morrison—what about it? Found Ramar yet?”

“We’ve got a net out all over the place.” Pat said. “If he’s around here, we’ll find him soon.”

“We’ll be waiting for the word when you do.” I could see Jennings eyes drop to look at a watch. “You’ve got just about fifty-two minutes.”

Thirty minutes of it rushed by for us as we dug into a pile of necessary paper work. There were manifests to be checked over, passenger lists to be compared and okayed. Clerks burst in with last minute details, and detectives called in to report that they had nothing to report. Ramar had disappeared utterly.

And then—in stepped Mr. G. Wither- 

spoon Hauser, chairman of the board, cigar and all. An impeccable gentleman of the old school, gray at the temples and exuding an air of authority.

“I just dropped in to see if this Martian envoy, Ramar, had been located yet,” he opened up blandly.

“We’re doing all anybody could do,” Pat said with a tinge of harshness in his voice. His eyes sought the clock on the wall. A bare twenty minutes before the Iron Duke was to leave,

Captain Rogers stepped in. From the happy smile on his round face I knew that the leak in No. 2 hold had been located.

“Well, Pat, we’re all set at last—oh, hello, Mr. Hauser,” Rogers said all in one breath. He shook hands with his meal ticket and then turned on Pat. “Are the clearance papers all made out?”

“All fixed.” Pat indicated them lying on his desk. In the lull the photoviser came to life. Pat switched on the plate.

“Yeah?”

I recognized Jennings’ face as the first faint outlines formed. There was a predatory look about them this time, as if he were primed for the kill.

“All right, Morrison,” he began, “this is it. Have you found Ramar?”

“Not yet.”

“That’s too bad. Means a delay until you do.”

Pat’s long jaw came out. I could see his eyes narrowing a little. “Now, look, Jennings. Delay will mean the trip has to be cancelled entirely for a day or two, conditions being what they are outside.”

“I can’t help that!” the F.B.I. chief barked. “I’ve got orders to get Ramar on the Iron Duke. If you let her go on schedule without him, you’re going to be hauled up for contempt.”

At that Hauser stepped over to the 

plate and said: “And I say that our company can’t stand the loss of a delay.”

“This isn’t your decision to make, Hauser,” Jennings said angrily. “It’s Morrison’s—what are you going to do, Morrison?”

For a moment you could hear the air molecules knocking together, it was so quiet in the office. Every eye was on Pat.

I knew what was going on in his mind. His face was drawn around his mouth and his eyes had an intense stare. He was in a spot, because deliberate contempt of government—if he were convicted—meant a stiff sentence. But if he caused a heavy loss to the company right now, it would mean his job also. What was he going to do? There was Jennings’ face fuming on the photoviser plate—waiting. And standing around him were Rogers and Hauser hanging on his next words.

Well, I never expect to see a human being make a decision on the strength of what happened next. The door opened a little timidly—and by golly, there was Flando! Beret in his right hand, and the note that Pat had given him held out in his left. The nerve of the little guy, and just his luck to break in at a tense moment like this. He came quietly over to Pat’s desk. This time, I thought, he certainly would go out on his ear.
“Moster Urthman,” he began, and I could see tears in his large eyes ready to cascade down his cheek, “this note— it not good. Windsor freighters held up by strike. My little Lolan—she sick— she need me. Please I go on Aron Duk.”

To my astonishment Pat looked at him steadily, with no suspicion of anger in his race. His blue eyes never flickered and I knew that he was thinking hard. Then he began to smile. His right hand came up and patted the little Martian on the shoulder.

He turned to the instrument and said:

“Well, Jennings, I guess Mr. Ramar will have to catch a later ship. There are other Martians going home that can’t be held up.” He snapped it off before the chief could say anything.

“An excellent decision,” Mr. Hauser said, nodding his head, in a satisfied way.

Pat never answered or even looked at him. He turned to Captain Rogers.

“Captain, take this gimp back to Mars—my expense. It’s the only way I have of getting rid of him. He certainly has been persistent.”

Of course Flando was all profuse thanks and bowed his way out of the office. And Mr. G. Witherspoon Hauser, now that his company’s loss was averted, made his exit. Pat and I were alone.

“What did that little Martian have to do with your decision,” I asked finally.

Pat gave a grunt. “Well, I didn’t want to lose my job, but I didn’t want Hauser to think that he made me decide what to do either.” Pat hesitated a little sheepishly. “Besides, I felt kind of sorry for the poor little devil.”

The siren stopped wailing and a deadly silence settled outside like the calm before a storm. Then gently, the Iron Duke rose into the air like an old lighter-than-air craft. Only she was riding her graviscreens. We watched her rows of lighted ports until they blended into three thin lines against the velvet darkness. Then suddenly the sky was lighted by a blinding flash as the rockets shot the Iron Duke out of sight.

Another sailing was over.

But we weren’t done yet. The photoviser stirred us out of our state of near collapse. Pat reached a tired hand over and snapped it on.

“Yep?”

The pretty face of interspatial central appeared and said: “One moment, please—call from the Iron Duke now ten thousand miles in space.”

There was a click. Then the face of Captain Rogers appeared. It was filled with a certain look of surprise and incredulity. He moistened his lips and said: “Pat, I don’t suppose you’ll believe this, but Ramar, the Martian envoy you’ve been searching for, wants to talk to you.”

And then to our amazement the familiar face of Flando—but minus the customary mustache—came on the screen.

Pat’s mouth dropped open. “So—you’re Ramar?”

“I am Ramar, yes,” the Martian answered in flawless English. “I wanted to save you the embarrassment of arrest for contempt of your Earth government. That is why I am calling.”

“But why did you put on an act the way you did?”

“I got a tip there would be an attempt to assassinate me at the spaceport, so I shaved off my mustache and put on the disguise of a Martian immigrant after the secret service men left me.”

The photoviser went dead and Pat sat back drawing his long tapering fingers across his mouth. He looked at me with more energy than I’d seen for hours.

“Bill, let’s padlock the joint and go up town to the Merry Mill. Instead of opening a keg o’ nails let’s make it a barrel!”

THE END
THE ELEMENT OF LOGIC

To the Experimental Philosophers, Inductive Acroamatism was rank heresy. And any means whatever was legitimate, if it could convince an Acroamatist of his error.

By R. R. Winterbotham

Dr. Newberry H. Cindo, whose name will go down in history coupled with those of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, formulated that Reason was about to come into its own again.

Dr. Cindo was not, as his writings may indicate, opposed to experiment, but he believed there was too much experimenting and not enough thinking.

The so-called Experimental Philosophers, who claimed reason was an impossible goal for humanity, that the world was incurably mad and it was best to
let it remain so, were led by Dr. Frank Gally, who condemned Dr. Cindo as an impractical man. Dr. Gally acknowledged that Dr. Cindo had some intelligent ideas, including the one about the world being crazy, but Dr. Cindo believed that mind eventually would triumph.

Dr. Gally, according to Dr. Cindo, was a dabbler in inanities.

In the year 3032, the scales were gim-micked in favor of Dr. Gally, for this worthy had a charming personality. He was large of body, muscular and solid, and when he laughed he rippled all over. He was not fat, but commanding. He tipped the scales at two hundred and forty pounds.

In contrast was Dr. Cindo, mystical, dreamy-eyed and aesthetic—a man of average weight and build, who might have passed unnoticed in a crowd, for he lacked any attribute that was outstanding—except in the unimportant matter of brain power.

Dr. Cindo, however, was a rebel against the unwieldy system of philosophy promulgated by Dr. Gally. That is why he formulated the school of Inductive Philosophy, which he later termed Inductive Archaism, too deep for the common herd and therefore unpopular—but I'm getting ahead of my story.

Perhaps, when I mention the common herd I should include myself, for there was a great deal of the surprising in the fact that I, Cecil DeFugue, a timid amanuensis who wore shiny clothes on his back, glasses on his nose, and dandruff on his collar, should be become identified with such an admitted mental giant as Dr. Cindo.

But in the aggregate I was only a spectator and my part in the controversy and its bizarre climax was only minute.

I entered the employment of Dr. Cindo on December 19, 3038. My duties were the taking of dictation and the transcribing of notes for Dr. Cindo's books and lectures. It was natural that in this capacity I should learn much about Dr. Cindo’s school of thought.

"It is, in fact, a revival of the scholasticism of the Dark Ages," Dr. Cindo admitted after charges had been hurled at him by Dr. Gally. "However, instead of discussing trivialities, we talk about important realities: we build worlds of reason and fortresses of logic in which to hide from the Experimental Philosophers. There has been too much useless research; too much experimentation. Dr. Gally is dabbling while knowledge rots."

To this Dr. Gally replied that progress had dated from the time when experiment took the place of speculation.

"When science ceased wondering about things and began to find out, the world emerged from the Dark Ages—into which Dr. Cindo would plunge us once more!" barked Dr. Gally.

Dr. Cindo did not really believe that all experimentation should be abandoned: his war was with useless experiment, such as collecting voluminous data on the average diameter of raindrops and the wave patterns of non-existent types of energy. But to carry his point with the public, he adopted a plan of attack familiar to all reformers. He denounced everything, good or bad, that was proposed by his opponents. Dr. Cindo decried the theory of experiment.

"Only logic is sound," he asserted. "We must inquire as did Plato and Socrates; we should discuss realities as did Hylas and Philonous in the dialogues of George Berkeley—like Hylas we should be a long time distrusting our senses and believe we are seeing things by a dim light through false glasses. If our senses lie, then experiment will tell us nothing, because we can know the external world only through our senses. Better it is to reason from Descartes' first step: cogito ergo sum, 'I think, therefore I am.'"
For seven years Dr. Cindo and Dr. Gally fought, each chiding the other that what he taught was of no practical value. Dr. Cindo berated the experimental scientists for contentions of accuracy of measurement, when by their own experiments they showed that material relationships were constantly changing and any measurement, was at most, good only for the instant it was taken. Then, one year after I had entered Dr. Cindo’s service, a cordially worded note came through the mail to Dr. Cindo from his arch-enemy, Frank Gally.

“My dear Dr. Cindo,” ran the note, “one of my co-workers in the Cincinnati University has discovered a remarkable compound which should end this war we are waging on each other. Suppose for the nonce that we call a truce, investigate this find, and let Nature herself decide which of us is in the wrong?”

Dr. Cindo read the note aloud and, after he finished, he replaced it in the envelope. For several minutes he sat in his chair, thinking deeply, tapping his thumbnail with the envelope and pursing his lips. I knew that he was considering the strange letter from all angles. He did not wish to rush blindly into something that might be a trap and lend everlasting discredit to his School of Inductive Acromatics.

Then, at length, he turned to me.

“Pack the grips, Cecil,” he said quietly. “We are going to Cincinnati to teach that rogue, Dr. Gally, the error of his ways.”

Secretly I feared the outcome, for I knew that true progressive science could be neither all blind experimentation, nor wholly wordy logic. If the test devised by Dr. Gally was sound, it would lead to the discrediting of my employer.

We went by stratosphere plane and we were met at the airport in Cincinnati’s upper levels by Dr. Gally. From the port we were whisked by pneumatic conveyor down to the ninety-eighth level, where Dr. Gally had his home among the subterranean gardens underlying the Ohio River. Below the surface of the Earth the warming glow of the ultra-violet illuminators, the charming rusticity of the underground grottoes, and the cordial welcome extended by Dr. Gally were completely disarming.

The University, an educational subsidiary of the Experimental Philosophers, ran between the fiftieth and one hundredth levels of subterranean Cincinnati. It was a mammoth establishment with entire levels covering more than a square mile devoted to particular types of experiment.

As soon as we had refreshed ourselves from our trip, we were taken upward to the sixtieth level where we were led through long corridors and several locked doors to an isolated group of laboratories marked “Private.”

There was one central room into which Dr. Gally led us. Although the room was large, there was a minimum of equipment in it. In one corner was a huge magnetic freezer, capable of lowering temperatures of substances to within a few millionths of a degree of absolute zero. The freezer door was closed and locked with a spectrum combination, which worked only by light of a definite spectrum.

“You must be afraid of burglars,” remarked Dr. Cindo, eyeing the lock.

“My chemical, which I call atomic sublime, is so different that it alarms me,” said Dr. Gally as he opened the freezer. “It is a dangerous chemical and it is more for my own protection that I keep it locked, than for fear that it will be stolen.”

Dr. Gally donned insulated clothing and gloves and entered the freezer. He emerged, a minute later, covered with frost and carrying a small, yellowish cube,
which glistened like a gem in the light of the illuminators.

As he emerged, Dr. Gally switched off the ultra-violet lamps that lighted the room and turned on some old-fashioned tungsten-filament globes.

"The sublimate deteriorates rapidly under ultra-violet radiation," explained Dr. Gally.

Working swiftly, before the heat of the room melted the cube, he took two rabbits from a cage and placed them under glass bells on a laboratory table. Beside the animals he placed a block of wood, about a foot square.

With a knife he sliced the yellowish cube into four portions, two of which he placed in small bowls, filled with milk, and the third he stood on top of the wooden block. The remaining piece of the cube he set inside the small refrigerated unit outside the large freezer.

"This substance acts on every piece of matter known to science," Dr. Gally said. "Only when it is frozen will it remain inactive, and therefore I keep it at nearly absolute zero to prevent a world-wide disaster."

"What is it?" Dr. Cindo asked.

"I have welded atoms together to form a new element. I do not know its atomic weight, for it is far too active for such experimentation, but I know it is beyond the weight of any other element and I have called it element No. 95, since Nos. 93 and 94 have been created artificially," Dr. Gally explained. "More than likely the weight is above 750. But that is merely guesswork—inductive reasoning."

"Poof!" Dr. Cindo scoffed. "Such exemplifies the crudities of Experimental Philosophy. It cannot see beyond the boundaries of its experiments. It knows of 94 actual and artificial elements and it feels that it must call a new one No. 95, when probably its number is much higher!"

Dr. Gally opened his mouth to retort, then, seeming to restrain himself, he passed off Dr. Cindo's remarks with a laugh. Then, gingerly raising the glass bells, he shoved a bowl of milk to the two rabbits, who set about drinking the liquid.

Atop the wooden block the frozen chemical was melting and the wood was absorbing the yellowish liquid. As the wood absorbed the atomic sublimate it began to shrink. It decreased in size slowly, but at the end of an hour it was small enough to place under a microscope.

At the same time the rabbits began shrinking—more slowly than the wood since the body processes apparently resisted the reaction, although the rabbits showed no discomfort.

Dr. Cindo watched without comment, but I could see that he was amazed by the chemical. Several times he glanced into the microscope at the block of wood and at length he turned to Dr. Gally with the words:

"It has vanished!" Which he quickly amended: "Apparently."

"Quite correct," smiled Dr. Gally. "It has vanished so far as we can see, but we can still feel its weight. If I should place this microscope on the scales I would find that it weighed its own weight, plus that of the block of wood."

"And what of the rabbits?" asked Dr. Cindo. "Doesn't that stuff harm them?"

"So far as our experiments have shown, it does not harm them," said Dr. Gally. "The rabbits were given only a small dose, not comparable to that placed on the block of wood, so these creatures will not disappear entirely and we may watch them under a microscope."

"Just what is the action?" asked Dr. Cindo presently.

"The atoms are collapsed without a change in structure," explained Dr. Gally. Somehow I caught a malicious leer, just a trace, in his eye as he spoke. "It is an action that has occurred in the galactic
system before, however. The proof exists in the dwarf stars of the universe."

Pausing for a moment, he glanced from Dr. Cindo to me, then he strode to a cabinet and brought out a bottle of brandy, labeled “Napoleon” although it had been manufactured in 3014 A.D.

“I believe,” he continued as he poured the bottle into three glasses, “that dwarf stars have been created by the presence of atomic sublimate in their structure. Or, at least, some of them have been made that way. A quantity of the sublimate, and not a great quantity at that, might reduce the Earth to the size of a small asteroid. That is why I guard the chemical so carefully.”

“Doesn’t the reduction in size—the shrinking of the electron orbits—necessitate a loss of energy?” asked Dr. Cindo.

“There is energy lost,” replied Dr. Gally with a nervous laugh as he walked into the next room. He called back: “But instead of energy being given off as heat or light, it emanates in the form of radio waves, detected only by receiving sets.”

Dr. Gally returned to the room presently without offering an explanation for
his departure. He glanced at the rabbit cage where the creatures were hopping about like fleas, scarcely visible to the eye. It happened that I turned my eyes to Dr. Cindo for an instant and saw my employer covertly exchanging his brandy glass for the one Dr. Gally had carried out of the room. Dr. Cindo raised his finger to his lips and shook his head, then he pointed to my glass and shook his head again, indicating that I should not drink the liquor.

"I'm anxious to learn, Dr. Gally," said Dr. Cindo, "how you expect this substance to settle our philosophical differences."

Gally slid into a chair and sipped his brandy. Dr. Cindo raised his own glass to his lips and drank while I secretly held my glass over the laboratory sink and poured the contents down the drain.

"I am anxious to try the sublimate on a human being," began Dr. Gally. "There is much to learn of the small things of this world. My creed calls for experimentation in all fields, yet I cannot find one of my co-workers willing to sacrifice his own future for the cause. It would mean entering a life alone—beyond contact with all other human beings, save by means of radio transmission, for there is no antidote to the sublimate. With you, I hoped to find a willing subject—you might even take your secretary, Mr. DeFugue, with you if he is willing.

"In the microscopic world you will be alone—you can think and expound logic and you might even find a different logic there than you have on this Earth. If you find that Truth and Reality change with size, then Experimental Philosophy has been right; but, if you should find that Reason is unchanged, Truth is unchanged and reality is unchanged with size, then I will admit that I have been in error. No matter what happens, the record of your experience will be a gift to the world!"

Dr. Cindo nodded.

"It is a great honor to be selected for such a noble work," he declared. "But why, Dr. Gally, don't you do it yourself?"

"Alas!" sighed Gally. "I have not finished my work of experimentation as yet. Were it not for that, I would not hesitate."

Dr. Cindo shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," he declined. "You brought me here under a false representation. What you really
wish to do, Dr. Gally, is to rid the world of me. By using the chemical on me, you can carry on your experiments with the sublimate and at the same time rid the world of a dangerous rival. It would not be murder, since the chemical would not stop me from living. I would be unharmed, except reduced in size. No, Dr. Gally. Your plan is too thin."

A slow, evil smile crept over Dr. Gally’s face.

“You think so, eh, Dr. Cindo?” he asked. “It isn’t as thin as you think! Already I had decided that you and your secretary should sacrifice your size for Experimental Philosophy before I invited you here. That brandy you drank contained an unused portion of the sublimate I brought from the freezer this afternoon. While you were intent on the shrinkage of the rabbits and wooden block, I slipped it into the brandy bottle!”

PERSPIRATION broke out on my brow as I realized how nearly I had come to the loss of most of my five foot ten. Then, I suddenly realized that Dr. Cindo, through inexorable logic, had foreseen the trick and saved the day. Dr. Cindo was laughing and pointing to the glass in Dr. Gally’s hand. It had shrunken to two-thirds its former size.

“I changed glasses on you, Frank,” Dr. Cindo laughed. “You didn’t think I would guess why you left the room after you poured the brandy. But Inductive Philosophy teaches that there is a reason for everything and how to find that reason. I deduced you took your glass out of the room to deteriorate the sublimate under ultra-violet illuminators in the next room. My logic saved my size, Dr. Gally, and now it is up to your Experimental Philosophy to save yours.”

Dr. Gally’s eyes bulged as he looked at his shrunken glass. It was the last time anything on him ever bulged. He started to shrink.

“You fiend!” he roared.

“And what would you have done to me?” Dr. Cindo asked. “Along your line of reasoning, both of us are equally fiendish.”

But Gally had never reasoned. It was contrary to his beliefs to reason and besides he was beyond reasoning at that moment. He charged toward Dr. Cindo and I think Dr. Gally would have killed him, had Cindo shown fear. But once more, Reason and Logic saved Dr. Cindo’s life. Dr. Cindo held his ground.

“You forget, Frank,” said Dr. Cindo, “that if you should shrink to the size of a microbe, Cecil and I would be the only ones to know about it. Nothing must harm us and you cannot hurt us without jeopardizing yourself. It is we who must give the alarm so that an attempt may be made to save you—if experimental philosophy can save you!”

“Experiment will save me!” cried Dr. Gally. “Get in touch with my workers! Tell them to get to work at once on something to counteract the sublimate!”

Within a few minutes, Gally was the size of a 10-year old boy. He had shrunk completely out of his clothing.

“Hurry!” he pleaded in a piping voice.

“Call my workers!”

Dr. Cindo turned away with a laugh.

“I’ll make you do it!” roared Gally savagely.

Dr. Cindo turned calmly to meet the charge. Despite Gally’s weight, which still was 240 pounds despite his loss in size, Dr. Cindo had the advantage of size. Cindo’s arms were longer and he could land blows at will without permitting Gally to come close to him. At length he floored Gally and with my help we bound the pygmy with strips of his own clothing.

“Hadn’t we better call some of his assistants?” I asked after we had secured the little man.

“I suppose so,” nodded Dr. Cindo, “al-
though it would give me great pleasure
to watch him shrink into nothing!"

We turned away and started toward
the door. We had determined now to let
Experimental Philosophy have its inning.
As we walked toward the pneumatic lift,
we heard a staccato tattoo of little foot
steps behind us. We turned in time to see a two-inch man with eyes shining
muder charging toward us. He had shrunk out of his bonds.

The attack was too sudden to be averted
and now Dr. Cindo's size was a disad
vantage. A 240-pound projectile sailed
through the air, felling Dr. Cindo like an
ox. I stared, too startled to move, and
saw Dr. Gally, now less than an inch tall,
drag Dr. Cindo back toward the labora
ory.

From the floor came a barely audible
squel: "See now if Inductive Acroamat
ism can save you, Dr. Cindo!"

I MANAGED to collect my wits and
dove toward Dr. Cindo who seemed
to be moving without cause. I searched
the floor for the tiny man, just as Dr.
Cindo opened his eyes.

"He's the size of a grain of sand and
he's climbing up on my body!" said Dr.
Cindo. "I can feel him!"

I tore away the clothing from Dr.
Cindo's chest, but I was too late. From
his chest oozed a small drop of blood. Dr.
Gally's 240 pounds had caused him to
sink through the skin and he was in Dr.
Cindo's body.

I watched Dr. Cindo die, slowly and
horribly. At first there were twitchings
of pain as Dr. Gally swung from Dr.
Cindo's nerve ends. Then there were ex
quisite tortures as Dr. Gally collapsed
blood vessels. Dr. Gally carefully lacer
ated Dr. Cindo's lungs, pounded his liver
into a pulp. Every internal action of the
human microbe was calculated to bring

the most pain and a slow, horrible, inevi
table death.

Vainly I called for aid and laboratory
workers did come to my assistance after
Dr. Cindo had died from a thousand
nerve-rending tortures. We tried to lift
Dr. Cindo's body, which, with the in
cluded 240 pounds of Dr. Gally, would
not budge until we got a stretcher.

The authorities graciously permitted
me to perform an autopsy and by aid of
an X-ray I located Dr. Gally hiding in the
left ventricle of Dr. Cindo's still heart.
There was no problem of extricating the
240-pound mite, for Dr. Gally was
anxious to leave; he seemed to be suffer
ing tortures as extreme as those he had
inflicted on Dr. Cindo.

I could not hear his voice and by the
time we had used the remaining stock of
the atomic sublimate to shrink a short
wave radio to Dr. Gally's size, the midget
had died.

With Dr. Gally's death the Experimen
tal Philosophers passed out of existen
cence for lack of a leader; and, without
the Experimental Philosophers, the In
ductive Acroamatists went out of existen
c from pure ennui.

There was a great deal of mystery sur
rounding Dr. Gally's death, but as a final
triumph for Inductive reasoning, I have
written these words to show that the
Acroamatists alone could solve the puzzle.

Dr. Gally was too small to be given an
autopsy, but reason can probe any death.
The Experimental Philosopher came to
his death from starvation. His 240-pound
body still needed the same amount of
food he had consumed before his reduc
tion in size and his infinitesimal digestive
tract was too small to hold it. We had
fed Gally food reduced by the sublimate
to the proper size, but the impregnated
food acted to reduce Gally's size still fur
ther, so that he never could eat enough to
sustain life.

THE END
THE CAT-MEN OF AEMT

A New Professor Jameson Story

By Neil R. Jones

INTRODUCTION

PROFESSOR JAMESON'S death was a quiet and expected one, and the professor had no fear of its coming. But, though he philosophically yielded life's mysterious equation to the inevitable, he drew the line at the dissolution of his Earthly remains. He sought for immunity from the eternal law of dust to dust.

His coffin was the funeral rocket he had built and which his nephew, faithful to Professor Jameson's death-bed instructions, shot into space with radium propulsion. As the professor had planned, his rocket became a satellite of the Earth, a cosmic coffin in the graveyard of space.

Forty million years fled by as the rocket satellite revolved about an aging world, moving ever nearer the sun, while all life upon it gradually passed into eternity.

This was how wanderers in a space ship from a distant star found the Earth. And they also found the funeral rocket still upon its endless orbit. They found the professor's body intact, preserved by the cold and the vacuum of space.

The wandering Zoromes had found semi-immortality through the transposition of their brains into machines. They did not die, though they could be killed by the destruction of the metal cone which housed their organic brains. And, in the shadow of the dying world, they transplanted Professor Jameson's brain to one of their own metal bodies.

The machine men were space wanderers, seeking the unusual and adventurous from system to system. Professor Jameson became one of them, and embarked with them upon their eternal Argosy. He became known as 21MM392, and participated in all of their adventures, as did the other planetarians to whom the Zoromes gave the boon of near-deathlessness.

CHAPTER ONE

Abduction

"WE HAVE seen no intelligent life on this world yet," the professor remarked, "but still there seems to be a
manifestation of mind force, thoughts close
to us which are partly veiled.”

“It grows stronger up here,” said 6W-438.

29G-75 bent over the edge of the pro-
jecting rampart and looked into the valley
far below. The space ship was many miles
down the valley and lost to sight. 119M-5
was first to reach the plateau to which
they were climbing and loosed a mental
exclamation.

“What is it?” asked the professor,
scrambling up beside him and staring at
a metal spheroid which glinted back the
rays of the sun.

“Spaceship or aircraft of some kind.”

All four were now on the plateau, sur-
priised to find this striking example of
civilization on what they had come to con-
sider an uncivilized world.

“Dare we go any closer?” 29G-75 sug-
gested.

“If any intelligent creatures inside had
sinister aims against us, they would prob-
ably have executed them already while we
stood watching.”

Professor Jameson suited this thought
with a slow, deliberate approach. As the
machine men came nearer, they saw that
two metal doors were swung open, as if
whoever had left the ship had not re-
turned. A sense of emptiness and lone-
liness pervaded the exterior of the craft.
The four Zoromes stood and peered in
through the doorways. Strange mechan-
isms and strange objects met their inquisi-
tive sight, but they saw nothing living.

“I shall go inside,” the professor de-
cided. “Stay out here until we are sure
everything is all right.”

Professor Jameson stepped inside, his
eyes moving restlessly from one mechan-
ical feature to another, but he paused for
no detailed examinations. He was first
going to find out if any living creatures
were on board. He made his way from
chamber to chamber. He saw all manner of bizarre objects, suggesting an advanced intelligence, but he saw no life on board ship. He told his metal companions as much, and they came aboard and joined him.

"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 towards us will be."

"Outside evidence shows that the ship has not been here very long," said 29G-75. "I examined it quite well, and there are signs on the rock of its recent descent."

"We shall have to look outside occasionally for their return and be ready to appraise them of our friendly interest."

"What is this?" 6W-438 asked. "An airship or a ship of space?"

"Space, I am almost certain by now," the professor replied. "Everything seems to be arranged to close up tightly. That is the one unfailing sign."

With great interest, they examined the mechanical details of the ship. Some of it they readily understood while other parts were of a nature entirely unknown to them in their travels, and they tried to reason out as much of it as they could. It was a space ship, but one of inferior efficiency to that of the Zoromes. A sudden crash of metal against 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 over there," he said. "We must have started it rolling."

"I feel uneasy here," 119M-5 radiated.

"That's strange," Professor Jameson mentally observed. "I couldn't have sworn that I had seen this door slightly ajar when we came in. Now, it is closed."

IMMEDIATELY, 6W-438 strode to the metal door by which they had entered. It was securely fastened. With curled tentacle, he wrung the handle, but without success.

"We're locked in!"

"These doors seem to close automatically."

"The others did not close!"

"Wait—listen!"

Again they sensed vague, mental radiations which now seemed bolder and possessed of intangible satisfaction and elation. The machine men became suddenly aware of a motion to the ship, and they rushed and crowded to the ports. The world beneath them was falling away. Soon, they saw the planet's curvature, and then night and daylight merged in space. The sun shone brightly against the star-sprinkled blackness. Momentarily stunned, they watched the world they had left become a round ball which gradually grew smaller.

"We've been trapped!" the professor exclaimed. "We were lured here!"

"Where were the things which are now running the ship?"

"This may be operated by remote control—by another ship not far away. There are the weak traces of intelligent minds we have sensed, and—"

"And which are now strong and clear, you creatures of reasoning metal," came an unveiled, mental radiation. "As for being remote, we have been here all the time, guarding our thoughts well after you entered the ship. It was one of us who carelessly knocked off the cylinder and alarmed you. We are invisible."

"And are we prisoners?" Professor Jameson asked.

"You may consider yourselves as such."

"Where are we going?"

"To another world of a nearby system. We are leaving this sun and its planets. There is a bright, yellow star shining ahead. That is where we are going, to an inner world of its system."

"What do you want with us?"

"We want to learn more about you.
We want to take you back to our home world and exhibit you."

"But must we go as prisoners?" the professor deplored. "We shall be only too glad to visit your world and consort with a species of intelligence capable of having mastered space navigation."

"We shall remain the masters," came the cold reply.

By MENTAL conversation with their captors through the walls separating them, the machine men learned more about the home world of the Aemts, as they later learned these creatures were called by a subjuggled race of vocal articulation. The Aemts, like the machine men, conversed entirely on the wings of thought. Their home world was mostly water. It was smaller than earth's moon, the professor learned, but was dense.

They had the power of invisibility. Periods of time were marked off among the invisible Aemts by the usual habits of flesh and blood such as eating and sleeping, and these facts were apprehended by the machine men. The Aemts kept them close prisoners.

The growing star became a sun, and a blue, gibbous orb swelled steadily upon the interested sight of the four Zoromes. As the world of the Aemts filled the sky, they saw it as a vast ball of water until the island continent rolled slowly out of night's shadow into early day. A part of the island was mountainous, the rest of it was green and level. A small, gray splotch in the lowlands grew into a city as they dropped groundward, a city of tall, cylindrical buildings, linked together by aerial cables at various levels on which sped weird vehicular traffic. Aircraft plied the air lanes above the city.

The ship dropped upon a building whose parapets loomed so high that the ship was enclosed by a tall circular wall. The door

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Taste this Delicious, Different GIN with the Tangy Flavor of Juicy Oranges!

A WELCOME change, this gin that's different and delicious—my Orange Flavored Gin. You'll enjoy the luscious taste of sun-kissed oranges . . . the richness and vigor of its full 70 proof. Drink it as you would Dry.Gin. A handy drinking cup tops each pint bottle.

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ALSO MINT FLAVORED GIN AND SLOE GIN—70 PROOF
short, thick fur covered his body. His attitude was somewhat subdued. He gazed curiously at the machine men from unusually large, bright eyes. A pair of antennae curled from the foretop of his head. A narrow, lipless mouth completed his physiognomy. The machine men later learned that breathing took place through porous membranes situated behind and at the base of the antennae. The antennae picked up both sound and thought.

“You are making a mistake if you think him one of us,” an invisible Aemt radiated. “He is one of the Moeps, the lesser species who live in the mountains and have the honor of serving us in return for our giving them various needs for living. We are not so dull-witted and unlovely as they.”

CHAPTER TWO

In the Arena

As for this contrast, the machine men had immediate opportunity for consideration. The Moepr opened a door and stood aside to let a dwarfish creature walk into the antechamber. The Aemt was little more than half as large as the feline man who had admitted him and was made to look much smaller by contrast with the four stalwart robots who accompanied him. His limbs corresponded to those of the Moepr as did the rest of his physical features, but here all comparison halted. The Aemt was a soft, flabby weakening without any of the blue-black, glossy fur of the cat-like Moepr. Besides the usual pair of antennae, a smaller set curled and waved excitedly in contemplation of the machine men who stood beside the robots whom he had brought them to the antechamber. His lidless eyes popped in an excess of interest.

“What are these?” he asked of the invisible Aemts. “A new and smaller set of robots with improved features?”
"They are more than unreasoning robots," came the reply. "Each of them has an independent, organic brain. They are space wanderers whom we lured into our ship on the fifth world of the northern system."

"How wonderful! How lucky we are! You have brought me something which will bring me much riches! You shall all be rewarded. I'll take away those appointments I bestowed recently and give them to you."

Avarice and treachery were clearly expressed in thought and manner of the egotistical creature. The machine men immediately developed a dislike of the Aemts and felt that their security over an extended period of time was not assured by any means. Their invisible captors quickly told all that they knew about the machine men, while their interrogator stood and listened in breathless, excited wonder.

"How wonderful! Put them in the exhibition arena, so that all may come and see, at a price!"

The robots once more urged the machine men along, and this time two Aemts and a Moep were also in attendance. The professor later learned that the Aemt whose property they had come to be considered was known among the Moeps, who had an articulate language, as Iop. They were escorted by way of numerous corridors to a deep, open court surrounded by terraced balconies hung steeply one above the other. Here, they were left, and the grated door which had allowed them entrance was locked behind them. Other locked gratings in the surrounding walls mocked any opportunity for escape, yet Professor Jameson knew that if a profitable chance offered itself he carried a heat ray installed in his fore tenacle. He would bide his time until melting a lock promised a definite advantage.

From that moment on, day after day, the machine men were the focal point of surging crowds of Aemts upon the balconies as they came and went by the thousands. The machine men had an excellent opportunity for studying the Aemts, too. They found them an intellectual and lazy species fast falling into physical and moral decay. All the work was done by automatic machinery, robots or by the Moeps, seemingly intelligent but rigidly oppressed by the Aemts. The Aemts were suspicious and envious of one another. Greed and envy were supplemented with treachery and hate, all stimulated further by lack of physical well-being.

In their thoughts regarding the Moeps, Professor Jameson found and pondered over a strange attitude. The Aemts envied this species which they had virtually converted into a slave nation and would have done away with all their liberties, especially those of the greater number who lived in the mountains but for some nameless necessity which the feline men sup-
plied them. The Aemts envied the Moeps their splendid physiques and greater strength. The feline men were an oppressed lot who might have forged rapidly to greater heights but for the fact that for thousands of years the Aemts had held them down in almost complete subjection. The Moeps were capable of speech as well as telepathic means of communication, resorting to speech mostly among themselves.

NOT UNTIL several rebellious Moeps were cast into the arena with the machine men did the professor learn why the Aemts found the Moeps so necessary. At first, the feline men stood as much in fear of the machine men as if they had been savage beasts, standing back fearfully against the grating by which they had entered. The machine men made friendly advances, however, and the desperate Moeps took heart and trusted the four Zoromes once they had gotten over their initial fear and surprise. Rumor throughout the city had painted the machine men a horrible lot, mostly because Iop wished to stimulate a more popular interest. Asked what they were doing in the arena, one of the feline men ventured to explain.

"We are to be punished. The Moeps who have committed even the smallest of infractions are to come and see the punishment and go back and tell all the rest of our people what happened to us because we tried to leave this accursed city and run back to the mountains where we were born and raised and were not quite so completely enslaved as we are now."

"What will they do with you?"

“One or more of us is to die as an example against desertion or revolt. We do not know how many or which of us will die. They never tell us. That is part of the punishment. And the manner of death and punishment is varied. They have many ways and make a sport of conceiving new ways. We truly believe that they find excuses for these spectacles rather than using them for the sake of discipline. Those balconies will be crowded. Besides the Moeps who are forced to come, the Aemts will fill all remaining spaces to overflowing and pay a great price to watch."

"What is this secret I have yet been unable to fathom regarding the importance of your race to the Aemts?" Professor Jameson asked. "I have vaguely picked out the fact that you do some service or furnish something which is necessary to their existence."

"A very few of our race know the secret of a formula whose basic ingredient is a mineral the Aemts do not know how to obtain. We use it in our foods and call it ‘ijr’. Within the past several hundred years, the Aemts have come to develop a blood ailment which in a short time weakens and kills them. They promptly used blood transfusions from the Moeps which proved quite satisfactory until the Aemts took to breeding our people in captivity. The new generation of Moeps did not give the desired results, while those taken from the mountains did. Conditions were studied, diets and habits analyzed, and it was finally discovered that this ijr used by the Moeps in seasoning their food was the difference between successful and unsuccessful transfusions. The Aemts tried taking this ijr direct and experienced even better results than by the secondary effects of transfusions. Since then, the Aemts have kept an ascendancy over this fatal disease by regular use of ijr. Their condition has not improved. Without the ijr, they would soon die."

"But cannot they go to the mountains and confiscate its source of supply?"

"Only a few know where the mineral it found and how to process it. It has also been so even before the Aemts came to need it. A few prospered on its monopoly. Now, it is the very bulwark of our safety."
"Why is it that you do not stop the supply of ijr to the Aemts and demand the liberty of all Moeps in the city? Why is it that you do not have equal rights out of this?"

"Because the Aemts would come in their airships to the mountains and destroy all our villages and every one of us."

"They would not dare. It would be suicide," the professor argued.

"There are a few of the Aemts who believe that the secret of the ijr exists inside the mountain where rumor has it a certain organization of the Moeps live, but the greater share of the Aemts dare make no rash moves unless our people force them to it by stopping the ijr supply. It is a deadlock with the Aemts holding the advantage in power and supremacy. Ages ago, the Moeps lived in the fertile lowlands, but now the Aemts do not allow us there. We have to depend on them for many things."

"Have they not tried to learn the secret of the ijr?"

"Yes, but it is too well guarded for even them to find out by means of their invisibility, or invisible robots, for they have a way of making their robots invisible, too. They cannot wring the secret from the Moeps, because so very few of them know it. It is said that these live within the mountain."

A frightened Moep was drawn away from between the arc points by a command of the Aemt, while another of the brainless minions seized a second Moep and strode to a position behind the first.

The robot at the controls made a few deft movements, and a ball of intense white heat sprang into brilliance between the arcs. The Moep held by the first robot was slowly thrust feet first into the destroying heat. Feline men looked on in horror, their wails drowned by the rapid succession of agonized screams from the lungs of the dying Moep who struggled helplessly and was rapidly burnt up, lower limbs being entirely consumed before his struggles ceased and he sagged inert and lifeless. Aemts in the balcony looked on in stimulated excitement and fierce enjoyment, waiting for the next victim. The Moep's head was last to disappear, and then the robot withdrew red-hot fingers from the burning glare. The machine men were stunned momentarily by the fiendish act.

As the second feline man was slowly raised to the withering heat, Professor Jameson came to life and activity, his mind focussed on one thought, an attempt to prevent a repetition of the cruel act he had seen. He sprang not to hold back the robot but to snap its source of initiative, the Aemt who stood near the machine directing operations. Tentacles lashed about the slender throat of the startled Aemt, and he was dashed to the ground senseless. The robot lifting the struggling, screaming Moep halted uncertainly in his movements, continuing to their original design in short jerks. The feline man shrieked louder as one of his feet touched the flame. He twisted his legs away from the consuming death to which he was being slowly thrust nearer. A mass of rushing metal suddenly hit the robot's legs, and it fell, dropping the feline man who scampered swiftly to where his companions stood rooted in surprise at the
actions of these smaller robots with coned heads.

Orders were rapidly given the robots from the balconies. One of them seized 29G-75 and thrust his legs into the withering heat. The robot at the controls increased the intensity of the heat, and 29G-75’s metal feet melted and dripped away. His legs gradually followed. Other robots stepped forward to keep back Professor Jameson and the remaining Zoromes. The machine man’s legs were gone, and now the emotionless robot moved the metal body into the heat. In vain, the machine men battered frenziedly at these brainless machines so much larger than themselves. They were held back, seized and lifted up helplessly. The professor thought of his heat ray in a fore tenacle, but this was a moment for swifter action.

During the days when Professor Jameson had learned much from the minds of the Aemts who came to see the machine men on exhibition, a passing thought had found consideration, and now in his desperation he put it to the test. 29G-75’s cubed body was half consumed when the professor focussed his mental faculties intensely upon the robot holding the helpless machine man. He concentrated upon one forceful thought—that the robot should instantly remove the remnant of the machine man with its all important head from the ball of heat. The robot remained oblivious to the professor’s frantic promptings and only thrust the man’s diminishing body deeper into the flame, ever nearer the vulnerable head.

Then something happened. The robot’s metal arms stiffened out straight, passing the rest of the machine man’s body and head through the flame. In this split second, Professor Jameson’s hope and mental efforts collapsed in despair. But 29G-75 was not held in the flame. This was but a motion of the robot in throwing him to the ground. The professor had won. Aemts were running inside the arena from all directions, amply protected by robots.

Cheering Moeps were quickly cleared from the balconies. This sort of a spectacle had not been intended. It was too much a reversal of form. The Aemts filed out after the hustled feline men, and soon the balconies were empty except for the machine men who were left alone to ponder the situation and consider what would come of it.

29G-75’s head was removed from the remains of its useless body.

“What will they do with us now?” asked the head. “We have killed one of them and destroyed their exhibition.”

It was Iop who eventually came and answered this question. He came with a guard of eight robots and an ultimatum issued to him by the city superiors.

“You must be destroyed. You have been adjudged a great danger both to the morale of the Moeps and to us physically. You are my property. I would save you, could I but prove that you are useful.”

“We can work tirelessly,” 6W-438 offered.

“No, not that. We have plenty of robots each capable of doing more than any one of you.”

“You have a plan to offer,” Professor Jameson challenged, probing into the mental reserve of Iop. “What is it?”

“Brain transposition.”

“But we have no extra metal head or other parts.”

“We do not want you to convert us into machine men. We want you to transfer an Aemt brain to the head of a Moep in order that he may go and spy out, if possible, the source of the ijr supply.”

CHAPTER THREE

Elk’s Brain Transposition

The magnitude of the proposition to the detriment of the Moeps appalled the professor.
“And suppose we refuse? Suppose we found it impossible?”

“Then you must die—and when I say that, I mean the destruction of your heads.”

Thoughts flew thick and fast among the machine men, on a mental frequency not open to the Aemt. They revolted at the idea. Their backs were to the wall. The glimmer of a suggestion carefully guarded by the professor found them all immediately agreeable.

“We shall do it if you can offer us the proper equipment.”

“You shall have everything that you need, be assured!” replied Iop enthusiastically. “If you succeed, it will make me a great man!”

“It will require longer than the brain transpositions we told you about,” 6W-438 warned. “For one thing, the operation is not a standardized one like our own, and there must be time for healing, too. We are not removing a brain to one of the metal heads, remember. Have you found a willing subject for this experiment?”

“Yes. I shall announce your agreement to this idea and have you set up in a laboratory at once.”

Everything which Iop promised came to pass, and the machine men found themselves surrounded by all manner of scientific instruments needed for the brain transposition. What the Aemts did not have, the machine men had them fashion. The head of 29G-75 was set up in a position where the many eyes could watch all that was being done and offer mental collaboration. The subject was a fanatical Aemt who would have given his life, if needed, to the cause of his species. That this fanaticism was abnormal proved itself by the fact that the Aemts were generally a selfish lot and not given to any kind of personal sacrifice. The Moep to be used in the transposition was a healthy physical specimen.

“It is better if only parts of the Moep brain are replaced instead of the entire brain,” Professor Jameson advised the scientists. “It would be very difficult, very lengthy and very uncertain if we tried to accommodate an Aemt brain in a Moep skull for which it was not built, even though the Moep skull is sufficiently large. After all, you see our own requirements.”

Both subjects were held in a state of suspended animation bordering close on death while most of the long, painstaking job was being accomplished. The machine men were never left without several of the Aemts in attendance. Every move in the transposition of brain parts was carefully watched. Many robots were always in attendance. The four Zoromes were allowed to direct the robots in the laboratory and found out many things in the way of handling the remarkable mechanisms. 29G-75 became especially adept in
this, probably because without a metal body and limbs he found less to occupy him than the rest.

THE DAY finally arrived when their work was all finished, and he who was to be called Ekk was brought to consciousness. The laboratory was crowded with important Aemts.

He came to wakefulness, his mind crowded with a mixture of thoughts in which few were of Moep origin. The Aemt influence held the ascendancy, there being no memory of the Moep to survive the transposition. Only the Moep instincts and physical requirements remained. For several days, Ekk convalesced and grew strong. The last the machine men saw of him, he was being taken to an airship bound for the mountains where he was to be let out secretly to commence his spying activities and try to discover the secret of the iir.

“We've saved ourselves,” 6W-438 observed to his fellow machine men once they were alone, “but our work is done and 744U-21 has not yet come in the spaceship.”

“If your plan to reach the Moeps and warn them about Ekk is practicable, 21MM392,” said 119M-5 turning to the professor, “we should waste no time.”

“Is your heat ray strong enough to melt the bolts in the lock?” the head of 29G-75 inquired. “The metal of the door is a resistant alloy built to withstand heat.”

“It will take steady application,” Professor Jameson replied. “We must be sure that no one is watching. Among other things, I have learned from the minds of the Aemts where a supply of the invisible plating is located in the basement of this building. I ask only to reach it safely while the rest of you stay here and keep grouped so that if anyone looks in they will think that we are all here. And the longer Ekk stays among the Moeps, the less dangerous he will be.”

“But we do not know for certain,” said 119M-5. “It is only a theory, and we conducted the brain operation on that principle.”

“Unless the Aemts or their robots enter and look too closely, we can manage the illusion of all being here,” 6W-438 promised, “by holding 29G-75’s head just right.”

Professor Jameson immediately put the heat ray of his fore tentacle into effect on the lock, slowly burning a hole into the metal door where by previous notice he had marked a spot, knowing the bolt to rest beyond it. The work was slow, but the bolt of the lock was finally reached and severed. All four machine men listened and strained their telepathic faculties before Professor Jameson considered his chances good for reaching his objective and started off down the corridor. His three companions waited, listening mentally for any alarm or consternation which would be occasioned by 21MM392’s discovery. None came, yet they knew that if he were caught in the basement, knowledge of it would not reach them except by direct, controlled mental radiation.

A great deal of time passed. The night grew old and weak daylight commenced filtering through the tiny apertures high up near the ceiling. The professor would have been back by this time, they argued, had he succeeded. Their uneasiness grew. If he were caught, why was it that the Aemts had not come to the chamber where they were imprisoned to see if the remaining three were still confined or at large?

THIS thought became a magnified fear as the footsteps of many Aemts and robots were heard approaching down the corridor. But they passed on, and their thoughts were found to be directed to a mission entirely foreign to the machine men. It was not until the group was be-
yond hearing that the door opened softly and closed. It seemed that someone outside had opened and then closed the door without entering. A mental ejaculation struck into their wonder and dissipated their uneasiness.

"Success!"

"21MM392!"

"Here I stand—invisible!"

"You were so long gone that we feared you were caught."

"I was nearly caught three different times, twice on the way down and once after a pair of robots entered the store-room and forced me to hide after I was half-plated with the spray gun. I feared the robots were going to work there all night, and they did. With the dawn, an Aemt came and gave them orders. They left, and I quickly finished making myself invisible. Now, I shall do the same to all of you, and we shall be gone."

"But the plating gun?" queried 119M-5. "Where is it?"

"That, too, I have made invisible with another gun. Look." A soft sighing arose in the vicinity of 6W-438, and they saw a corner of his cubed body disappearing progressively as if emptiness were gradually eating the machine man. "The gun
is loaded with metallic crystals which I've not yet had time to examine closely, and a union with chemicals and heat makes the application.”

Before the eyes of 119M-5 and 29G-75, 6W-438 disappeared gradually from sight, piece by piece, the professor ordering him to close his eye shutters for a plating. Afterwards, they again blinked open, a semi-circle of floating optics.

“We must be careful and leave but one eye open to guide us while the Aemts or their robots are about,” Professor Jameson warned them. “We may find it even necessary to occasionally close that one before we reach the mountains.”

They were too engrossed in the plating of 119M-5 to hear the footfalls outside the corridor, and four robots burst into the chamber. The machine men had subconsciously been listening with their brains for the greater menace of the Aemts. The robots rarely entered alone. The professor had almost finished with 119M-5. Only two metal tentacles remained in sight. The robots stared stupidly about them, one of them bowling over 6W-438 without seeing him in the way. Another seized the metal head of 29G-75 in his metal fingers and resisted the efforts of Professor Jameson and 119M-5 to recover it. More robots came in answer to the alarm of disorder emitted by the four who had entered. Aemts cautiously followed to discover what new uproar the machine men were causing. They saw that with the exception of the one head, the machine men were nowhere in sight, and they quickly spread an alarm that the three machine men had escaped. The two visible tentacles of 119M-5 had not yet been noticed, and while the professor hastily plated one of them, 6W-438 quickly removed the other and let it fall to the floor where the Aemts later found it.

The machine men closely bottled up their thoughts. Confusion reigned among the robots due to the strange, unfathomable events preceding the entry of the Aemts who were likewise somewhat confused and uncertain. Conflicting orders were given the robots. The robot who had seized the head of 29G-75 appeared to hold to some original course which his director had probably forgotten now in the train of unexpected happenings and made off with the machine man’s coned head. For a minute or two, the three invisible machine men had difficulty in dodging the robots until they saw an opening to the door through which they stole into the corridor and out of the building.

They experienced but little difficulty in getting out of the city in spite of the broadcast warnings and the watch for them. Their secret had not yet been discovered, or sharper means of finding them would have been employed. They were believed to be hiding somewhere. Airships cruised low over the city looking for them, while they walked bold and unseen out of it. Without a vehicle of any kind, they found their progress through wild growths and rocky country a slow one. They were far beyond the city and well into the mountains before they commenced to notice shady semblances of their mechanical bodies. 6W-438 commented on it.

“The plating has been scratched and cut off in places.”

“It is flaking off, too,” the professor added. “I was but a novice at putting it on, and it was a hurry job besides.”

It was not until four days and nights after their escape that the machine men reached the first village of the feline men. By this time, their coat of invisibility had nearly worn off. Instead of fear at sight of them, the Moebs evidenced joyful surprise. The story of their defense of the Moebs in the arena and the killing of the Aemt had long ago reached all the villages and communities of the feline men. The machine men found themselves regarded
with almost the same awe and respect accorded to deities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Those Within

TWO days were required in which to track down Ekk among the feline men. From the description given out by the machine men, there had been no great difficulty in finding him. Once the secret of his character was betrayed, the scars on his cranium were quite sufficient to identify him. Ekk was brought to the village of Emeg where the machine men waited, wondering on 29G-75's fate, and if they might contrive some means of rescuing him from the Aemts.

Ekk was found to be a greatly changed individual, and the machine men were not entirely surprised to find him so, although his reversion was more rapid than they had dared hope or had expected. The dominant Aemt brain had not held its ascendancy. Although the reasoning faculties, typically Aemt, were unchanged in function, the viewpoint was a new one, entirely altered from the old.

"It is all so different," mused Ekk. "My new body has exerted a strong influence over my brain. I exult in a joy of living I never knew before. All the past is so drab and impossible. I would rather die than betray this happiness. I have taken a mate among your people, and I intended to bury my identity and let my friends of another life think me dead. Guard your secret of the ijr well, for once it is in the hands of the Aemts you are a doomed race. They do not need you. The robots are sufficient for them."

"He is entirely sincere," the professor assured Emeg. "He can be quite helpful to you, knowing as much about your enemies as he does."

"That is well," said Emeg. "But," he added cautiously, "he will be kept under surveillance for some time, and there is much information he must give. Meanwhile, you three living machines from another world can be of great assistance to us, and we may be able to find a way of helping you rescue this companion of yours from the Aemts. You have been invited by those within to enter the mountain."

The machine men and Emeg, who was to accompany them, journeyed to a wild, rocky country not far from the village and entered the vast, underground sanctuary of the feline men by one of the numerous secret entrances. They traversed more than a quarter mile of rough, winding tunnel before they reached a massive, metal door whose portals opened to admit them. Beyond, they found an amazing transformation, an entirely different atmosphere from anything they had ever seen or scarcely guessed in connection with the Moeps. Here were the best brains and the unrestrained science of the feline men, the basis of their hopes for a free future.

"We are nearly two different peoples," Emeg confessed. "Those within never leave here once they have entered. Those outside are encouraged to show no signs of progress so that the sleeping giant within shall not be betrayed. The Aemts know but vaguely of our tunnels and caverns, but they placed no great significance on them other than the fact that they know it is from here the ijr comes."

The machine men were surprised to find the subterranean network equipped with tram cars and elevators run by electrical principles. There were laboratories and vast workshops.

"Why do you not deprive the Aemts of the ijr?" Professor Jameson suggested. "They would all eventually die. According to their ethics, it is either your race or else theirs to survive."

"We know that this is our most likely way of success, but there is a terrible price
in life to be paid if we follow this action too soon. We are not in a position yet to make this bid. Great food stores and ample accommodations for our people outside must be made here inside, and even then the destruction of life will be horrible, for the Aemts will come blasting at the mountain with their superior weapons and power just as long as they remain alive. Think what it would mean now. There is little more inside here than would support those of us within during the necessary siege and bombardment which would follow."

LIFTS took the machine men and several of the leaders of the Moeps many miles into the planet's depth. It grew very hot and uncomfortable for the Moeps.

"There are internal fires here," Yrel told them. "It is down here, many miles below sea level that we find the mineral which we use and mix in making the ijr. This is the only place where it can be found, and the quantity is unlimited."

The machine men examined the mining operations and the mineral itself. They were unable to classify the dark gray powder. It was something new to their experiences. From his earthly life, the professor was reminded of salt, borax and other deposits possessing peculiar qualities and values.

"We are now below sea level," said Yrel. "We have long passages which lead in under the ocean beds for quite a distance. They required several lifetimes of tunnelling."

The machine men spent many days with the Moeps exploring the deepest levels where the mineral so important to the Aemts was dug from stratified layers. They were also shown into distant caverns which lay many miles beyond the mountain and were to be used in case of a successful raid on the mountain by the Aemts. It was in the lower levels with the machine men that Yrel and Emeg received startling news from the surface over the wire communication system.

"Aemts are coming in large numbers in their airships! A fleet of them cruises above the mountain even now!"

Breathlessly and in wonder, the Moeps waited for further information, the machine men divining the import of the alarming message from their thoughts. More reports of the strange movements reached them. Demands were being communicated by the dread conquerors and relayed from the levels above to Yrel and Emeg below.

"Access must be given to the ijr supply, and the machine men who escaped and are reported to be inside the mountain are to be given up. If these demands are not complied with, the Aemts are going to destroy the villages in retaliation and then blast their way into the mountain and seize whatever they want. They know that the machine men have betrayed Ekk and brought their elaborate plans to nothing."

"Tell them we shall give ourselves up," Professor Jameson offered, "if they will be satisfied and leave the Moeps in peace."

"The council is deliberating above us," Yrel informed the three Zoromes. "Giving yourselves up would be only a useless gesture. The Aemts have determined that our monopoly of the ijr supply is dangerous to their future, and they will stop at nothing now, I fear."

"Information may have leaked out of the mountain to make them suspicious of what goes on here," Emeg suggested.

"Whatever they do," said Yrel, "they will never gain control of the ijr supply, even if we must sacrifice the greater share of our meek and submitted nation in order to kill off their race! They are forcing the issue!"

Yrel's mind held an ominous alternative.

"The waters of the ocean!" Professor Jameson exclaimed. "You would first let
them into the internal fires, causing an eruption!"

"I would!" vowed Yrel. "And be the first to die that a part of my civilization might outlive the Aemts and be free!"

"It will blow the mountain apart!"

"I hope so. No ijr will ever be secured again."

"If only the Aemts realized this, they would hesitate," 6W-438 ventured. "They are being told now."

THEY waited for further reports which were not slow in coming once the message between the Aemts and the council of feline men ceased.

"Bombardment of the mountain top has started. Tunnels 71, 79 and 54 have been opened but are not accessible because of collapsed walls. An army of robots is coming up the mountain. Several scattered contingents are digging into the tunnels. The village of Bho has been destroyed. It is in flames. Those surviving are running for their lives. Large groups are being killed from on high. Only scattered individuals are escaping."

A hopeless look emanated from the eyes of Emeg and Yrel and the attendant feline men, but their resolution was not shaken. Patiently, they waited. Dull boomings shook the ground over their heads. Reports reached them again.

"More villages are being destroyed. Reports from outside no longer reach us. Contact has been broken with the outside. Robots have broken into the upper tunnels. There is fighting. These points are being sealed off."

"Emeg, my friend, you must go above and do all that you can," Yrel told him in stern affection. "Your place is up there. Order everyone out of the lower levels as fast as they can go. Get everyone to the further caverns in the lowlands where they will be safe from what is going to happen. Those on the outside must meet what comes and fare for themselves. We cannot save them. We are not prepared."

In helpless resignation, Emeg looked his last upon Yrel and then fled to do his duty, warned to haste by the sinister vibrations which rumbled above them. With the machine men, Yrel boarded an underground tram which hurried along one of the tunnels leading beneath the ocean. Professor Jameson and his metal companions reviewed the situation with Yrel and realized that there was no other way out but the one on which they had embarked. At the tunnel’s end, the tram stopped, and Yrel conducted them into a side chamber where there were many switches against the wall.

"You have told me that you can live in water as well as anywhere else," Yrel turned to them.

The machine men assented.

"Each of these switches sets off an explosive at the end of a tunnel, letting the ocean pour inside. This tunnel will be the last one. Stay in here until the inflow has stopped, which will be soon, for this is but the branch of a larger tunnel where the flow will pass stronger. When the current slows, you will be in no danger of being swept back into the caverns. The explosives will leave an irregular slope to the ocean bottom, for this tunnel has been a gradual incline. You will not be far from land, and you can walk out by following the slope to shallower water."

Yrel, grim of face and purpose, consulted a timepiece as the machine men stood by ready to witness the closing act in the secret struggle of the Moeps to throw off the tyranny of their oppressors. His hands hovered at the switches and then descended upon one after another in rapid order until he reached the last where he hesitated as shivering rumbles shook the rock floor gently beneath their feet. He turned to the machine men, his hand upon the last switch, his large, expressive eyes shining with a strange light.

"I hope that you will survive my death
to see the last of the Aemts die off—and that you will help, if you can, what may be left of my people to rebuild and start upon a free life which will raise them to a great and intelligent civilization."

"We shall do everything we can for them which is in our power to do, Yrel," Professor Jameson pledged him.

Still looking at them, Yrel jerked down the last switch, and a thundering roar shook the chamber, bringing down chunks of rock from the ceiling. A different roaring succeeded the first, the roar of unleashed water under heavy pressure. A spray leaped through the doorway, and inrushing water spattered the metal legs of the machine men. Yrel rushed to the door and waded against the rising inrush of water. He turned, a fanatic gleam on his face.

"Stay here until the water is quiet!" he warned them. "Goodbye!"

"Yrel, wait!" the professor exclaimed as the feline man leaped into the rising water which raced madly down the tunnel.

Professor Jameson reached the doorway too late and saw Yrel go bobbing and tumbling down the corridor where he disappeared around a bend. The lights in the tunnel suddenly died. Darkness and rising water surrounded the three Zoromes in the rocky chamber where they waited. They lessened the gloom with their body lights. Dull booming noises, stronger than those produced by the bombarding Aemts, reached them, and the ground shook as from a passing earthquake.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death of a Nation

FROM time to time, they tested the force of the current outside, finding it too strong for them to venture forth. The professor feared that the earthquakes being caused by the junction of water and fire inside the mountain would shake the chamber to pieces and trap them beneath tons of rock. But true to the prophecy of Yrel, the greater force of water rushing down the main tunnel proved an eventual check against the flow of water from their tunnel, and they were able to breast the inflow. Holding together with locked tentacles, in single file to present as little resistance as possible against the current, they climbed the rough path over shattered rock to the ocean bed. Amid the marine life of the sea, they walked from perpetual darkness of greater depths to the shallow murk of filtered daylight. The explosions from the wedding of water to the internal fires increased in intensity, so that the ocean bottom quivered, heaved and shook. With difficulty, the machine men kept their feet. They were able to guess of the cataclysmic upheavals going on in the bowels of the mountain. They neared shore and debated their further moves.

"Wait until night and we may be able to steal an airship from the Aemts," the professor counselled. "It will be well for us to keep out of sight here in the daytime. We shall see what we can do either for ourselves or for any feline men who still survive, but we must be careful."

When darkness fell, the three Zoromes waded ashore. The moment their heads broke the surface of the water, they saw in the distance a lurid glare which inflamed half the sky. Muttering, coughing rumbles were no longer muffled by the water. The mountain had become an active volcano, its cap blown to bits and scattered over the countryside. As the machine men advanced towards the mountain under cover of night, they saw lesser conflagrations either started from sparks out of the volcano or else by ships of the Aemts riding on high. Fires burned both near and far, most of them blazing villages. Drifting lights overhead suggested marauding airships.

The machine men skirted the ruins of
a smoking village, chattering, frightened feline men, reduced to the status of terrified, disorganized animals, crashing madly through the thickets in which they had been hiding, thinking the machine men were robots hunting them out. From time to time, the three Zoromes stumbled over dead bodies. All about them lay fear, destruction and death.

They traveled all night, making a wide detour of the mountain. With the graying of dawn, they found refuge among the ruined houses of a small village. Daylight revealed a greater desolation which the hellish glare of night had but partially shown. Airships of the Aemts were visible in the sky, and with daylight they once more commenced a destructive fire on all habitations and groups of Moeps in sight. Sounds reaching the machine men suggested scared Moeps hiding among the ruins even as they were hiding.

A mile or so away, they saw as many as fifty robots hurrying off in the distance on a search for stray feline men. The Aemts were grimly pushing a campaign to destroy the entire Moep nation. The professor wondered if some means had been found to synthesize or substitute the ijr, yet he could not give this possibility much credence, for the Aemts had seemed too dependent and hopeful of Ekk finding out the secret. The professor wondered how long it would be before the Aemts started to weaken and die, if the reports he had learned on this strange world were at all true.

MOVING only under cover of night, the machine men spent five more days in hiding before they reached the territory under which the caverns were supposedly located.

The chance the three Zoromes were awaiting finally came. They stole an airship. Several robots had embarked from it and were searching the ruins in which the machine men had been hiding. Inside the airship, the found but a single Aemt who appeared sick and close to death. Weak and desperate, he attempted to recall the robots, but Professor Jameson put the ship quickly into the air.

"I am dying!" the Aemt told them. "Most of us are dying! So many of us argued against this mad scheme of the others, but our arguments were overruled! Many of our ships are now run entirely by the robots!"

"What happened to the head of 29G-75?" Professor Jameson asked the Aemt.
"He whom we could not take with us when we left."

"Did not all of you escape?" the Aemt counterqueried in mild curiosity. "I know of no other."

"That is strange," the professor contemplated:
"Possibly 29G-75's head is hidden somewhere back in the city," 6W-438 suggested.
"If that is so, then he is safe for the time being."

"Dare we go back yet?"

"The longer we wait, the safer it is for us. More of the Aemts will die."

The Aemt in the ship lost consciousness. While they cruised over the territory of the hidden caverns, he died and was tossed without ceremony to the ground below.

With the coming of dawn, the machine men looked upon an alarming sight. The Aemts had somehow discovered the existence of the caverns and their locality. Hundreds of robots were swarming about excavations. Many airships were swarming nearby and more flew above. By flying close and picking up thoughts, the machine men learned that the last solid remnant of the Moeps was fighting desperately and erecting all manner of barriers.

"If we can only hamper and delay their advance until the ranks of the Aemts are further weakened."

"Some of them are bound to live a long
time," was 6W-438's logic pessimism. "There are probably a few who have hoarded personal supplies of the fjr. They are like that, as we learned while we were among them."

"We can slow up their digging and draw part of their forces in pursuit of us," Professor Jameson suggested, returning to the current situation below them.

"But when they chase us?"

"We'll land in the ocean and sink to the bottom. They'll have a hard time finding us there."

The plan was immediately put into execution. A salvo of fire wrecked many of the airships on the ground and a further attack disorganized the robots and put many of them out of working order. The machine men wheeled their ship away before those around them recovered from their sudden surprise. Every ship off the ground sped angrily after them. The machine men headed for the sea.

THE coast was just visible on the horizon when their power gave out and the ship dropped groundward.

"What has happened?"

"Either something is wrong with the ship's mechanism or else we have been stopped by remote control."

Their ship floated down amid a swarm of pursuing ships. They had no sooner touched the ground than robots boarded the airship and seized them. Brought out into the open, they found that the crews of nearly all the ships were robots. There were but a few Aemts, and they were a desperately unhealthy lot. These gazed upon the machine men with intense hatred.

"You things are the cause of all this woe! It was your coming which started all this!"

"We were captured and brought here," the professor reminded them.

"We know what to do with you. You'll not live to see our race die—nor live to see every last Moep die before we go."

The Aemts veiled their intentions, and the machine men could grasp but the single fact that they were to be conducted at once to a speedy end. Robots held them securely, and they were put on board one of the larger airships, a flagship. Three Aemts and eight robots manned the ship. One of the former was too feeble to stand. The ship headed straight for the mountain and did not veer when it met floating palls of smoke. A sudden suspicion on the professor's part met mocking vindication from the Aemts.

"You are going to drop us down the volcano."

"You are right," was the reply. "Then we shall find the other machine man and do the same by him, even though he is but a helpless head."

Again, the allusion to 29G-75 set up a train of speculation in the professor's mind, but he forced out these thoughts. There was too much else to think about. The ship neared the belching crater.

The robots held the machine men securely. Professor Jameson bent his mental faculties to the test of directing the robots who held him and felt their hold loosen. The two Aemts gave a sudden start, their thoughts leaping at the robots with terrifying tenacity. Three of the machine men were no match for two Aemts in a mental duel for control of the robots. Those holding 6W-438 and 119M-5 rushed them to an opening where they were to be cast overboard into the volcano. The adaptability of the robots to Aemt control was too perfect, yet the concerted efforts of the machine men made an impression in the slow moves and hesitations of the robots. Although held securely, Professor Jameson found most of his tentacles free. One of the Aemts made his big mistake when he stepped within range of the professor's unsuspected heat ray. A scorching blast of heat in his face sent him in uncontrolled, writhing agony against his companion. The robots hold-
ing the professor relaxed their hold so that he twisted free, but another leaped in front of him to block his path. 119M-5 was lifted out of the ship and hung there suspended by the robot who held him as Professor Jameson’s mental faculties were exerted to their utmost upon the robot. The robot froze, seemingly without any further volition of his own. Only one Aemt was now capable of mental direction. 6W-438 freed himself by mental persuasion and seized the Aemt who called robots to rescue him from this new danger. It was 119M-5, held above the volcano, and the professor, who jointly urged the robot to bring the helpless machine man slowly inside once more.

Professor Jameson ordered the robot who held him to release his hold. The robot, still under the spell of the Aemt whose mental faculties were disorganized by pain and his efforts to win free of 6W-438 with the help of the robots, slowly responded. Once more the professor found himself free, and his heat ray blazed death at the Aemts.

The robots stood idly by as the three Zoromes took over control of the ship and headed back in the direction of the beleaguered caverns. The accompanying ships which had stayed away from the volcano’s mouth followed the flagship, unaware that the machine men controlled it. Three bodies had been seen to fall into the crater. That they were machine men had been taken for granted.

"Here comes trouble from the city," said 6W-438, pointing to a speeding object larger than an airship.

"One of the space ships. Why are they bringing that? Their space ships do not maneuver in atmosphere so easily as the airships."

"21MM392! It is not one of theirs!" 119M-5 exclaimed. "It is ours! 744U-21 has found us!"

The discovery was electrifying. As the space ship of the Zoromes sped into the neighborhood of the volcano, thoughts leaped from the flagship of the Aemts to the space ships piloted by 20R-654. The situation was speedily flashed into the minds of those on the space ship.

"29G-75 is back in the city hidden somewhere," the professor told them.

"29G-75 is right here on the space ship!" came the staggering reply of 744U-21. "It was he who came back in a robot-controlled space ship of the Aemts and brought us here!"

It was 29G-75 himself who explained the surprising sequence. "When our cell was entered by the robots and Aemts, my head was seized by one of the robots. In the confusion, I found that I had a clear, mental control over him. I had him carry me aboard a space ship. From that moment on, the robot was my legs, body and tentacles. The robot piloted the ship across space."

If the Aemts in the surrounding ships had any misgivings regarding the strange space ship, their doubts were well founded. In a graceful series of maneuvers, 20R-654 loosed power blasts from the space ship which made it difficult to perceive bits of wreckage from the aircraft. Flagship and space ship rode on together to the scene of the excavations where the robots were forcing their way into the caverns held by Emeg and the feline men.

Less than an hour later, Emeg and his band of besieged Moeps came up out of the ground. Machine men and their space ship gladdened the expectant sight of the feline men.

"We have done all, and more, than what we promised Yrel before he died," Professor Jameson told the feline men. "We stand ready to help you take up the civilization left by the Aemts which you should develop more happily. You have come into your right at last."

THE END
WOMAN OUT OF TIME

Not especially a pretty girl—why should men stare after her? Was it the aura of power she possessed—the strange, regal will that could compel a mob or force a man to take his own life?
CRAIG couldn’t understand it at all. The girl’s eyes were deepset and as cold as ice. But otherwise there was nothing distinctive about her. Her complexion was sallow; her features just run of the mill. She was wearing a simple print dress which stereotyped her figure, giving it an angular and countrified look.

On her back was a little square sign which read: “Ardsley’s is an absolutely different cigarette.” She wasn’t clever or a jitterbug, and she didn’t move with grace. She just walked up and down a long platform, handing out cigarettes to the men in the crowd.

Yet all about her men watched her, their eyes shining, their jaw muscles tense. Craig knew what was going on inside their minds because he felt that way about her himself. He wanted to bow down and worship her. He wanted to kneel and kiss her little pacing feet.

It was Craig’s first visit to the World’s Fair, and he felt like a boy again. Craig wasn’t a young man exactly. His hair was thinning a little on top and he had a fortyish look. In addition, he strongly disapproved of men who spoke to young ladies without an introduction. He wasn’t prudish or straight-laced, but his code of behavior was that of a gentleman.

He waited until she stopped pacing be-
fore he spoke to her. She was stooping at the edge of the platform, distributing amplexes of the absolutely different cigarette, when he caught her eye.

“It’s a nice evening, isn’t it?” he said.

Her reaction was one of cold disdain. She displayed no resentment, but her chill stare was so devastating to his dignity that he trembled and turned pale.

A woman beside him giggled. No wonder. He was losing his mind. He had forgotten that there were men in the crowd half his age, trimly set-up young fellows with thirty-two waistlines.

He was stunned when she said: “Yeah, it’s nice out. But I don’t get to see much of the fair.”

For an instant he blinked up at her incredulously, a slow flush spreading over his face. But like most timid men he had a bold side to his nature. When good fortune charged at him he usually managed to take it by the horns.

He did so now, without sidestepping. She would be free an hour before the exhibits closed? Swell. You could cram a lot of sightseeing into an hour, if you rode in the trackless trolley and concentrated on the high spots.

“I’ll meet you at nine-thirty in front of the perisphere,” she promised. “Don’t be late.”

He spent the next two hours wandering around in a daze. There was something about her—

When you looked at her the air cooled. Something seemed to swirl away and you were standing with her in the cool of the evening, listening to music that never was on sea or land. There was a shimmering too. All about you a pale green shimmering of something translucent that flowed.

Time seemed to stand still when you looked into her eyes. Sure, they were cold, but it was the sort of coldness that dropped a man to his knees in awe. The stars looked cold. So did stalactites in crystal caverns underground. Her cold eyes rivaled nature’s cold splendors—stars glimmering in the depths of the sky, the wonder caves of Kentucky bathed in a pale refugence.

Lord, what a fool he was! She was just a plain girl with something about her that appealed to men. He had met girls like that before. As soon as you talked to them and realized how tawdry and vulgar they were your ardor cooled.

He glanced at his watch repeatedly as he roamed about. In an hour, a half hour, fifteen minutes now he would be seeing her again. He began to tremble as he approached the glimmering theme center of the fair.

SHE had been a little inexact about her free time, apparently. He arrived in front of the perisphere ten minutes ahead of schedule and found her waiting for him, her heels beating an impatient tattoo against stone.

“I didn’t figure you’d be late,” she said, reproachfully.

The injustice of the remark chilled him. There was contempt in her tone; a tinge of venom. Somehow he felt that she despised him.

“What—what do you want to see first?” he stammered.

“The perisphere,” she said. “I ain’t been inside it yet.”

Five minutes later she was clinging to his arm in darkness. Standing on a revolving platform, staring down at the World of Tomorrow he was tormentingly aware of her presence beside him. He scarcely saw the miniature city far below—a glowing cyclorama of forested parklands and sixty story buildings housing thousands of unborn men and women.

The City of Tomorrow loomed like the aerial traceries of some cosmic architect’s dream, wedding the solid earth to the far-flung constellations. It was all so breath-taking in its loveliness that it seemed a pity you had to relinquish it at last. The mov-
ing platform swirled you around the interior of the perisphere and in ten minutes you were descending to the fair ground again, blinking in chagrin.

But despite the impermanence of Utopia the ten minutes seemed to drag unprofitably for the girl at Craig's side. All she did was screw up her face and murmur: "Nuts to that!"

Craig turned and glanced at her swiftly. Her fingers were clenched and she was staring down sullenly, her lips writhing in derision.

Craig shivered a little. He was aware of that strange coolness, as though the veils of sense had dissolved about him and he was standing alone with her listening to music that never was on sea or land.

A thin piping—and there were vague outlines as of tombs. He had the strange feeling of thoughts beating in upon him which were somehow alien, queer. Thoughts flowing from her brain to his in the darkness.

Suddenly she was speaking again. "You'd think they'd know better by this time. Trying to figure out what's going to happen a hundred years from now. They ain't any different from us. I was drowsing when the Greek brought the model in. He said: 'It will be like this, but you won't be alive to see it.'"

"Boy, did I wake up and stare. It was better than anything we had. But it was just a pipe dream. It never came true."

Coolness. A soft breeze blowing, sails on green water in the sun. Her cheekbones in silhouette looked like the ivory contours of a skull. They were nearing the exit now. They had been swirled around Utopia and were approaching reality now.

They stepped from the moving platform together. "They never learn," she muttered, blinking a little as they stumbled out into the moonlight, and joined a descending throng.

The coolness came again and with it a sense of alienage and calm. Walking beside her he seemed to be treading on air. He moved through the fair in a kind of trance, aware of white exhibition buildings gleaming in the moonlight and beyond them the shadowy outlines of tombs.

Now they were in the Historical Pavilion gazing on—

WHAT they were gazing on was not quite clear. It was huge and recumbent and whiter than the moon. He saw it through a veil obscurely. His head seemed to whirl as he stared at it.

He was aware of pressure on his arm. "The wolf," his companion murmured. "The great mother wolf of Rome."

He turned toward her dully, his vision swimming. Her face seemed to recede as he stared at it, to grow nebulous and imperious and calm.

He could not force his eyes from her face.

"The Romans worshipped it," she said. "It sucked Romulus, you know."

Of a sudden the mistiness dissolved. He saw the great recumbent animal clearly. It stood a little to the left of the main entrance, a huge white plaster wolf.

It was simply a cast, but overpoweringly impressive. To the left of it were towering statues of the Roman Caesars—the divine Augustus, his arm upraised in imperial salutation, Severus the warrior, Marcus Aurelius—all the wearers of the imperial purple who had once been worshipped as gods.

Here was all the pomp and pageantry of an imperial city which had once been mistress of the world. In white and majestic splendor Rome lived again in the rotunda of the Historical Pavilion. The glory that was Rome—he could almost hear the tramp of the legions, crying, "Aut Caesar, aut nihil," as they marched across the world, their flag-birds high-raised against the sun.
He was becoming aware of the people about him. The building was thronged with men and women who appeared to be as enthralled as he was by the majesty of the exhibits. They were clustering thickly at the feet of the Caesars, gazing up in awe at Severus’ towering bulk, the cold, stoical features of Marcus Aurelius, the mighty biceps of Commodus the Gladiator.

But the girl by Craig’s side was gazing at none of these. Her eyes were riveted on Augustus and she was swaying as though in the grip of emotions too overpowering to be borne.

Suddenly she exclaimed: “He robbed me of my life. I hate all Romans. They are a cruel, merciless race.”

Soft music was playing in the depths of the rotunda. A modern American orchestra was rendering Chopin’s *Notre temps*, screened by flags and the floating mists of fountains.

Suddenly the girl was clambering on the pedestal of the wolf. Her arms embraced a limb of the great beast as she heaved her body upward.

Craig was too startled to move a muscle. He stood as though palsied, his brain beginning to whirl again. Something green and translucent was unmistakably flowing between the ascending girl and the outthrust forepaws of the statue. All about him the air congealed.

The enormous white wolf dwarfed the girl. She was standing directly in front of it now, as Romulus may have stood in years remote and forgotten, before the Tiber reflected the proud city which bore his name.

Small, but imperious she stood there, high above the crowd, her cold eyes flashing scorn. Craig stopped breathing suddenly. She was not alone! Beside her, ghostly and indistinct, there loomed three colossal shapes with the bodies of men and the heads of animals. Vast and still, as though carven of silence, they towered to the dome of the rotunda, dwarfing even the Caesars.

“God!” breathed Craig. “It can’t be. I must be going mad.”

From the crowd a vast murmur arose. Men and women covered their faces with their hands, fell to their knees.

“Command and we obey,” someone shrieked.

The girl smiled in malign derision. Her cold eyes seemed afire suddenly. She raised her arms.

“Destroy their gods!” she cried. “Destroy this Roman mockery. Burn, vandalize.”

There were screams of fury from the crowd. Men and women leapt up, shrieking, searching about for implements of destruction. The orchestra stopped playing suddenly, its members dispersing in all directions. The guards stationed at intervals about the rotunda were helpless in the face of the madness that ensued.

The crowd seized upon everything firm and weaponlike within reach of their hands—metal chairs, brass segments of railings, jagged glass, discarded orchestra batons. Flames appeared as a dozen infuriated men invaded a roped-off industrial exhibit and poured petroleum on fueled flags. Improvised torches flared bobbed about all over the hall.

TERRIBLE was the crumbling of the Caesars. The head of Augustus fell with a crash, decapitated by a flying wedge of glass. The plaster body of Severus, splintered at the knees, descended thunderously, smashing into fragments as it struck the floor. A cloud of white dust arose and swirled across the rotunda, spiraling from a narrow base like an oriental sand-twister.

For an instant the girl remained standing imperiously erect above the fury-maddened throng, her lips twisting in derision. Then she gathered up her skirts and leapt from the pedestal.
Her descent was erratic, weird. She seemed to float downward as though supported by invisible wings. As she approached the floor the vast, spectral shapes behind her wavered and receded, merging with the swirling white dust of fallen Caesars.

With her skirts swirling up about her knees she descended beside Craig and gripped his arm.

"Come on," she hissed. "We're getting out of here."

Craig wanted out. But he couldn't move. He was numb with terror.

Fiercely she tugged at him. "Fool! They'll tear us limb from limb. If they find out why we did this they'll burn out our eyes."

Something deep within him shrieked protest. But by just staring at him she could command him, body and soul. Looking into her eyes he forgot that he was innocent of crime.

Reeling with an awareness of guilt he fled with her from the pavilion, his inertia dissolved by her insistence that they escape swiftly from the retribution of the gods. Roman gods—terrible in their wrath.

They ran through the moonlight together, not daring to look behind. Roman gods. His thoughts were her thoughts now, pulsing to the vast dread which filled her mind.

They were gasping for breath when they sank down on a bench far from the scene of their crime. Opposite them loomed the enormous pale pink facade of the Pavilion of Medicine, its frieze-adorned bulk blocking out the stars.

The benches about them were deserted, the educational area having shut down for the evening. They were still breathing harshly when the air about them began to waver and the long, cylindrical bulk of the mysterious vessel swam mistily into view.

It looked from where they were sitting like an enormous cigar floating above a lake of fire. White and luminous in the moonlight it obscured the outlines of the perisphere and the exhibition buildings beyond.

The woman at Craig's side began to tremble. She arose slowly from the bench and advanced toward the startling apparition, her body rigid in the moonlight. Across the mall they proceeded somnolently, Craig enveloped in awe, the woman beside him moving on automatic feet.

THE vessel increased in bulk as they drew near to it. Now it was as large as the perisphere; now a cyclopean cylinder shutting out the sky. Its entire length was dotted with luminous portholes from which a pale, greenish radiance poured.

Near its tapering stern was a glimmering square of radiance surmounting a many-runged ladder of metallic sheen. Descending the ladder, a trifle awkwardly, was a bearded man enveloped in darkly flowing robes.

He was carrying in his arms a huge, gleaming instrument which looked like a navigator's sextant. Craig's companion advanced to the base of the ladder and stared up at the descending figure, shading her eyes with her hand.

"Hurry, Rameses," she cried. "I want to talk to you."

The man on the ladder shivered. "I thought you were lost, Light of the World," he responded chokingly. "God, what a night!"

Craig gasped. The man had descended now and was prostrating himself at the girl's feet. She was shivering, her face deathly pale.

"If I had a terrible experience, Rameses," she said. "I destroyed the gods of Rome. They were only statues, but there is power in lifeless stone."

"Light of the World," the man groaned. "We should never have traveled so far through time. We have weakened our-
selves by dissolving too many centuries in the vortex transformers—a danger I warned you against. The energy seepage has drained us of strength. We are pale, ethereal ghosts, Light of the World."

"I know, Rameses. This body that I have borrowed is difficult to control. But before I return into the past I want to live again on earth. You forgot that when we left Egypt I was dying. The asp had already embedded its fangs in my flesh."

The man was rising now. Craig perceived with awe that there were curious figures woven into the fabric of the long robe which enveloped him—animal-headed forms with the bodies of men, moons and horns and the signs of the zodiac. He was wearing sandals with blood-hued straps, and his long, snow-white hair was blowing mistily in the night wind.

"We have traveled far and audaciously, Light of the World," he said. "We have stood on Venus and Mars and beneath the immense rings of Saturn. We know more about time than they do. To travel through time is no mean accomplishment. We Egyptians should be too proud and disdainful of earth to return to it. It is, after all, a little, trivial planet."

"It is my planet, Rameses. To me it is home. I am still a great Queen on earth."

She paused an instant, then resumed: "When you came to me with your wonder-invention and promised me immortality I believed you, Rameses. If we kept traveling, you said, I wouldn't die. We would travel far out into the vast ocean of space and time, and I'd cheat death.

"How could I doubt you, Rameses? You were so wise, so far ahead of your age. The marvels you showed me were unbelievable. You told me that all life throughout the universe obeyed immutable laws. What must we imagine reality to be? Something beyond the comprehension of the age over which I ruled; beyond the comprehension of this little fool beside me on his twentieth century earth.

"You said the gods didn't exist. You said the vast beings whom we worshipped as gods were simply inhabitants of other dimensions of space. The gods of Egypt and the gods of Rome—inhabitants of other worlds encroaching on our world and occasionally breaking through.

"You said it amused them to watch our antics. They used us, sucked energies from us. In Egypt where I was Queen we called these vast beings Osiris, Isis, Thoth—"
remain here on earth," interrupted the girl.

The bearded man sighed. "You are still a woman, Light of the World. You are attenuated, wasted by time travel, but you are still yourself. The body you are occupying is a mere protective shell, with all its organs, nerves and sinews usurped by you.

"The original occupant is subconsciously asleep and you are using the waking brain to move the body and talk with. But your emotions are not those of this borrowed body. They are the terrible, insatiable emotions of Egypt's queen, who could never experience enough of life."

The girl's eyes glowed. Imperiously she drew herself up. "The old drama, Rameses—I must act it out again. When the Martian held me in his arms I dreamed that I was alone with Marcus again, and when the Venusian kissed me—"

The bearded man nodded grimly. "I understand," he said. "You are eager to languish in the embrace of this—this funny little man. I can see it in your eyes. I wish that I could wean you from your folly. I regret that I invented the astrospheric transformer which permitted you to flow into the body of an earth woman.

"We belong on other planets now, you and I. We are far too attenuated for earth. The Martians were cold and-unemotional and they did not know that you were Egypt's queen. But this funny little man—"

"Enough, Rameses. I have made up my mind."

The bearded man shifted his sextant-like instrument and bowed. "Very well, Light of the World. I am still an Egyptian and must obey my queen. I will vibrate the ship until it becomes invisible again and await your return."

He turned then and mounted swiftly. Up the high ladder he climbed, his beard
still blowing in the night wind. Up toward the glimmering square, his heavy navigator's instrument gleaming with little, weaving coruscations of light.

Now he was a tiny figure high on the ladder; now a glimmering midge dwindling to a speck. One by one the glowing portholes blinked out until only the outlines of the great vessel remained.

For a moment longer Craig remained aware of an obscuration between himself and the perisphere, a vast nebulousity shutting out the stars. Then all at once it seemed not there at all. There was a wild rush of stars and the perisphere came floating back, an immense white moon floating in a sea of light.

The girl was tugging at his sleeve. "Come, Marcus," she said. "The moon was made for love."

She took his hand and drew him toward a Mallside bench, her body trembling uncontrollably. They sat down. For an instant she clung to him and then she was in his arms. Her lithe, soft body molded itself to his, her rounded bosom assailing his square, straight shoulders.

Delirious with joy he crushed her to him, and rained fiery kisses on her mouth. "Marcus," she murmured, "Marcus, darling. I dreamt that you were dead."

He was suddenly aware that she was not speaking to him at all. Her eyes were closed and her face had a faraway, enraptured look.

"Kiss me again, Marcus. I torture myself for love of you. I close my eyes and for a moment this slave's lips are your lips and I am in ecstasy and torment."

Suddently her eyes opened. She stared up at him steadily, her lips curling in scorn.

"Slave, I have called you Marcus. The world must not know of my shame."

Swiftly she slipped from his embrace and stood regarding him in the moonlight, a cruel little smile on her face.

"Kill yourself, slave."

Before Craig awoke to a realization of peril he was standing in cold water to his knees. His body had moved stiffly and with a terrible swiftness across a marble court and into a glimmering, fountain-encircled lagoon.

Her mind had issued a relentless command and instinctively he had obeyed. Horror stabbed at him when he realized that the surface beneath his feet was a sloping one. A compulsion he couldn't resist was drawing him toward the middle of the lagoon.

He knew well enough that the water was over his head there. But he moved forward notwithstanding, his head spinning horribly.

She had commanded him to die. He was aware again of coolness and a strange whirring. Invisible wings seemed to be beating, beating high above his head. Filling the air with a vast whirring, mournful as a dirge at twilight arising from a city of tombs.

The water was swirling about his waist now. In dull despair he turned and gazed back across the lagoon. If only she would turn and whisper a reprieve. A single, pitying glance in his direction, a gesture of compassion and he would wade back and prostrate himself at her divine little feet.

Surely, seeing him humbled, she would not think it shameful to have surrendered her lips in a moment of weakness. By his very abasement he would restore her pride.

A plain girl in a print dress, her head bathed in a silvery refulgence, was receding toward an avenue of trees. She was moving away without a glance backward, carrying his life in her hands.

He did not want to drown himself. Death was horrible. A poor man, a slave, had no assurance of immortality. There would be no wooden image in his tomb, no food left there for his spirit to—
He clamped wet palms to his skull. Something was whirring about inside his head. He saw shapes in grayness, towering, majestic, hoary with age.

A baboon’s head on the body of a man. Beside it walked a crocodile-headed figure, its arms crooked stiffly at the elbows, its legs swirling in a translucent emerald mist.

Someone was smearing red-yellow ochre on white and gleaming bones. His bones. They did that to restore the circulation of the blood. It was the best they could do for slaves. Mummification was an expensive process; you had to be a king or priest to rate a tomb and expensive rites.

He was up to his chest now. In a moment it would be all over. The water would close over him, his lungs would fill and death would come to him on swift wings.

Isis! Merciful Isis! He was inwardly screaming. His temples seemed on fire. They would boil the flesh from his bones, and paint his ribs red to restore the circulation of the blood when he rested on the bosom of Osiris. But his ka would wither. There would be no tomb-image to keep it alive.

Only his ka was intimate, personal, alive. The cold spirit which dwelt with Osiris did not remember earthly joys, all the great beauty of the world. And even that would perish if they did not recover his body, if the Nile was unkind.

Merciful Isis! He did not want to die. The water was pouring into his mouth now. Was drowning painful? If you couldn’t swim, if you just thrashed about—he was going under. The water was closing over him.

SUDDENLY something seemed to stab at his chest. A sudden pain, sharp, agonizing, shot through him, as though a sting-ray had arisen from the dark depths of the lagoon and shocked his flesh.

The next instant he was flailing the water with his arms. He arose to the surface, sputtering and gasping, and struck out for shore. With swift, overhand strokes he swam to safety, arising in shallow water to stare up at the stars, marveling at his deliverance as the water dripped from him.

A pale, careworn little man close to forty, his hair thinning on top, he stood shivering in the shallow lagoon, bewildered by all that had happened to him. The hideous compulsion had left him. His chest still smarted, but he was otherwise unharmed.

Suddenly, acting on impulse, he tore open his shirt and gazed down at his scrawny chest.

Two tiny red spots glimmered on the pale skin above his breastbone. Scarcely larger than pin-pricks and aureoled by a faint nimbus of inflammation they faded swiftly as he stared at them.

He buttoned his shirt again. Prickly heat, of course. Sudden chilling could bring it on. It was a triviality of no importance.

He started wading shoreward. He didn’t want to end up in a strait-jacket. You could fight off madness if you were just—sensible.

In the depths of his mind a kernel of suspicion smouldered, menacing his sanity. Great, life-hungry spirits out of the past had roamed the world before. The ancient world had discovered the secret of time-travel, and built great ships, journeying from the past through space and time.

She had spoken slangily, wagging a shopgirl’s tongue, using a borrowed brain to think with. But something of her vast, mysterious life had flowed into him as well. Fleeing from the Historical Pavilion he had felt closer than breathing to Egypt’s great queen—linked by bonds of thought to her imperious spirit, tormented by a grief as fathomless as the tomb-shadowed Nile.

He had felt her emotions, sensations and
thoughts in his own nerves and mind. Obscurely he had been aware of the sacred river’s flowing, and the beat of ibis wings, while all about him had hovered old Egypt’s gods, Osiris, Isis, Thoth—

He shook himself suddenly. He was splitting open the kernel with a vengeance; taking fearful risks. If he wasn’t careful he would end up in Bellevue.

He was cold and shaken, but otherwise there was nothing wrong with him. All he needed was a stiff drink to clear the mists away. A double whiskey-soda, a brisk rubdown and a change of mental clothing would do wonders for him, he knew.

NEW YORK NEWS-GRAPHIC,
August 15—The girl was below medium height and plainly dressed. The guard, Fred Lang, declares that she was trembling when she spoke to him at the entrance of the zoological exhibit.

“She wanted to know if we had any poisonous snakes,” he said, in an interview this morning. “I told her she would have to wait her turn in line. She gave me a cold stare and mumbled something about adders. Had we any adders?

“I told her, sure. ‘If it’s just them you want to see, lady, you won’t have to wait. The King Cobra is our star attraction. If you want to get a peek at him you’ll have to wait your turn in line.’

“She said she wasn’t interested in the cobra. It struck me as funny, because the adders are just little gray snakes which like to bury themselves in the sand. They’re poisonous, sure, but they can’t hold a candle to the King Cobra, which has everyone nuts about him.

“All I did was take her over to the adder cages, and warn her to keep outside the rail. I noticed she was carrying something done up in a newspaper under her arm, but how was I to know it was a big stone she had picked up in the Japanese Gardens exhibit? How was I to know? I was standing by the door again when I heard the crash.”

THE girl smashed the plate glass window of the horned adder’s cage by striking it with the stone, which weighed several pounds. Lang declares he leapt toward her with a warning cry, but was unable to reach the cage in time to save her. She had torn open her dress and was pressing the snake’s flat, triangular head against her bosom when he caught her and pinned her arms back.

The girl was saved by the prompt application of an intermittent ligature and the administration of strychnine and other stimulants. Antivenene was also employed.

The North African horned adder “Cerastes cornutus” is believed by modern scholars to be identical with the asp of antiquity by means of which Cleopatra is said to have taken her life.

The girl’s identity was known a few hours after the tragedy, but the police refused to divulge it until this morning. They are checking the reports of several eye-witnesses who are positive that the same girl appeared in the Historical Pavilion earlier in the evening, and incited the riot which occurred there.

Her connection with the fire and riot has not been definitely established, however, there being some confusion as to the appearance of the girl whose hysterical actions caused a property damage of thousands of dollars. One witness asserts that she seemed at least ten feet tall and that she wore something on her head which looked like a luminous tiara.

The girl’s name is Jane Taylor and she has been employed for several weeks by the Ardsley cigarette concession in the Industrial Arts Pavilion. She claims to have no recollection of entering the zoological exhibit.

THE END
WEDDING OF THE MOONS

No true Martian of the House of Dinato would ever dream of letting the festival of the Mating of the Moons pass, leaving him with a debt unpaid, of money—or of blood.

By Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

Dr. Augustus Holt, in his admirable treatise on Martian traditions, writes at some length of the Wedding of the Moons. A graceful and typically Martian piece of folklore, he asserts, its origin lost in the dimmest of antiquity. Even the most ancient records of the Han Dynasty, the renowned Canal-builders, speak of celebrating mighty Phobos’ marriage to his consort Deimos; while the flowery manuscripts of the so-called Dakites describe in detail how the path of the two deities regularly cross, how they embrace, blend into one, and then, the eclipse over, go their respective ways across the sky. Surely a joyous occasion in the olden days, when the warrior Phobos and the frail mother-goddess Deimos met after long months of separation the more joyous since it was believed that from this union of the immortals mankind had sprung. Today, however, as Dr. Holt writes with some regret, the introduction of earthborn logic and science have transformed the Wedding of the Moons into a mere excuse for banal merriment, mundane pleasure.

Yet in spite of Dr. Holt’s regrets over the passing of the age-old traditions, terrestrial tourists, present at Mercis during the festival, assure us that many of the customs still linger. Debts are punctiliously paid, scores are settled, while crowds still gather in the spacious squares, on rooftops, along canal embankments, to offer homage to the gods of their forefathers. A trifle breath-taking are the
brilliant decorations that adorn the city, the colored lanterns on the canal boats, the gay, many-hued costumes that swirl through the broad streets. More wonderful than anything else, perhaps, is the sight of the emotionless, reserved little reddies, their debts paid, exhibiting joy, friendliness...even gaiety.

Nor is this carnival spirit confined to the Mercis of the stately white buildings, the broad, flower-lined canals, the gleaming glass streets. Even in the Olech, that squalid maze of slums about the freightport, the festival is celebrated...more flamboyant, more sensual, perhaps, yet still a holiday.

SO IT was this Wedding night. Like some ancient harridan seeking to hide her wrinkled ugliness behind a mask of powder and rouge, the Olech made a brave show of streamers, of banners, of festoons, in a confetti-like blaze of color. Hardly a house that did not have its cluster of fayeh blossoms over the door, and doors to make a mosaic of gold and ebony upon the crystalloid pavements, while high above the spaceport a searchlight groped for an incoming freighter, its beam a blue chalk-mark on the black slate of the sky.

Yet while all the Olech celebrated, there was no rejoicing at the house of Naavic, the spice merchant. In his little office with its fragrant aroma of Saturnian hepta, Neptunian solis, and Terrestrial cloves, the old man sat hunched over his desk, resembling a baroque and rather melancholy gargoyle.

Of the pre-terrestrial school, Naavic, as was indicated by his flowing ceremonial dust-robe, the pendant about his neck showing the two overlapping discs, symbolic of the Wedding of the Moons. His longish, hairless skull, his round, bulging ice-green eyes, proclaimed him to be a member of the highest caste, the Dina-to, traditional ruling class of Mars. Fierce in pride, meticulous in honor, the Dinato...which was the cause of Naavic's dejection.

Let the Wrong be avenged, let the Debtor repay,
Let the Law of the Lowly this hour hold sway.
Fools, be ye wise! Sad, be ye gay!
Weak, be ye strong—strike while you may!
Let justice be done in the Red Planet's way—
At the Mating of the Moons!

Ancient Martian chant.

the roofs laughed with flags. Garish, cheap, tawdry, this tinsel had seemed in the cruel light of the afternoon; but now that the day had died in a wrath of scarlet flame, the Olech took on a hectic, unhealthy beauty. Shadows swirled in purple pools about the dingy houses of "Amen" Alley and on Ki Street lanterns ran from post to post in a frenzy of color and movement. Here and there furtive shreds of light jetted from beneath closed A trifle stiffly the old reddy rose to his feet, peered from the window. Space Market Square was a savage, barbarous clash of color, while from the open doorway of Xoal's tavern opposite, throbbing multi-phone music surged. Men of every planet crowded the Space Market this night, tall languid Venusian traders, huge, mighty-thewed Jovian stokers and blasters, solemn, soft-footed reddies...and bronzed, lean-faced terrestrial spacemen
who shouldered through the laughing throngs with a trace of a swagger to their swinging stride.

Naavic sighed, unhappily. A night of joy, of triumph, when all men paid their debts, as the ancient law of the moon-gods demanded, and faced the world with pride and assurance. Most men, that is. Naavic turned, stared at the heap of crinkly, gold-embossed Martian banknotes upon his desk.

Ten thousand thaels! All that he had been able to collect, with two Jovian cargoes a month overdue. Naavic shook his gleaming, rust-colored head. Disgrace enough for a member of the Dinato to live in this squalid Olech, even though his import business demanded it... but to owe debts at the Wedding of the Moons! Unthinkable, for a man of honor! Even though these debts were unjust, unlawful, tradition demanded that they be paid. Twenty thousand thaels to pay and he had but ten! Besides, there were scores, quite apart from any question of money, which should be settled before this night of atonement had passed. If only he were not old, feeble...! Like a prayer the ancient Martian chant rose to Naavic’s lips.

“Let the Wrong be avenged, let the Debtor repay,

“Let the Law of the Lowly...”

A sharp knocking at the door interrupted him. Naavic swept the bundle of notes into a drawer of his desk, shuffled forward and drew the bolt. A tall terrestrial stood on the threshold, dark, debonair, cruelly handsome; his spun-glass suit, fashionably cut, contrasted strangely with Naavic’s loose robes.

“Gail, matol, the old man murmured. “It is an honor.” He started to close the door, then opened it again as another figure appeared.

Naavic’s second visitor was the exact opposite of Tony Gail. Small, wizened, ratty, he had the muddy skin and quasi-terrestrial features of a half-breed. His clothes were unkempt, matted; his ironic smile revealed irregular teeth stained blue by habitual use of Jovian lee.

“Redinsky,” Naavic murmured. “You are prompt, men of earth. You know each other?”

“More or less,” Gail, the lean gambler, nodded a trifle scornfully at the rat-like stranger. “I’m always prompt when money’s concerned. You’re ready to pay?”

“Right,” Rockets Redinsky nodded. “The Wedding of the Moons is the time for settling. I’ve waited long enough for mine as it is.”

“You—you will not reconsider?” The old Martian’s protruding green eyes were imploring. “My Jovian shipments are overdue...”

“That’s your funeral.” Gail’s face hardened. “You owe me ten thousand thaels gambling debt. Unless I collect, I tell all Mars that you’ve welched.”

“Even though the gambling was with weighted wheels, with drugged fighting-spores?” Naavic murmured.

“You can’t prove they were fixed.” Gail laughed harshly. “And if I let it out that you didn’t settle before the Moon Festival tonight, you’re sunk. No credit, no business from the other reddees, disgraced. Honor of a Dinato and all that bunk. You’ll pay, or I don’t know Mars.”

Old Naavic bowed his head, clutching the edge of his desk with gnarled fingers. Gail was right, bitterly right. There was no way of proving that the fighting spores had been doped; and to be known as a defaulter on a day when repayment was a sacred duty...

“That goes for me too.” Rockets Redinsky grinned. “I want my ten thousand on the line. That’s cheap enough for letters admitting you’ve smuggled dream-dust to Mars in your spice shipments.”

“But it is not true!” Fierce hatred
roughened Naavic’s soft voice. “No shipments of mine have contained drugs! The letter was only a warning to my terrestrial agent, explaining how such things were done and warning him to take care against them. . . .”

“I know.” The little half-breed lolled back in his chair, chuckling. “But a word changed here and there, a page of the letter ‘lost’. . . . You’ll pay tonight, Naavic, or I’ll slip that letter to the terrestrial police tomorrow. They say there’s been a lot of dream-dust smuggled in lately.”

“Gods of Mars!” Naavic choked. “And it is for this the red planet has sold her freedom! There was only honor, only the Law of the Moons, in the old days! And even those first terrestrial voyagers were men of courage, of honesty! But now, beings like you, unwanted on earth, seeking to take advantage of our trust! What wrong have I done you, men of earth? Why do you seek to obtain what is mine by right of sweat and sacrifice? Is there no honor on Terra. . . .?”

“Skip the sermon,” Gail growled. “You’ve stalled long enough. I want that money . . . tonight!”

FOR a long moment Naavic stood motionless. Suddenly, his burst of rage giving way to hopelessness, he slumped down in his chair, an abject figure. The room was silent, tense. From the nearby space port came the staccato coughing of exhausts as some freighter warmed up its rockets preparatory to taking off. Sand, swept inland from the burning plains of Psidis, made faint pin-pricks of sound against the windows. In the street outside the sounds of laughter, of revelry were increasing.

“So be the will of the gods.” Naavic’s voice was bitter, broken. “Better to lose fortune than honor. I shall make the arrangements, pay you before the Mating of the Moons. It is now the first hour of the night. You, Gail, meet me on the embankment of the Han canal at the stroke of the third hour. Behind the Interplanetary warehouse, where none may witness my disgrace. You, Redinsky, be at the same spot one half hour later to receive your money. And now”. . . . Naavic arose, waved toward the door with that solemn dignity which is so utterly Martian a characteristic . . . “I wish you the joy of the Moon-Festival.”

“All right, then.” Gail climbed lazily to his feet. “See that you have the money. And none of your cute Martian tricks. Just remember that if anything should happen to me, Redinsky would testify who I’d met and why. Which, coming from an impartial witness, would nail you.”

“And as for me”. . . . Redinsky laughed, patting a bulge beneath his arm . . . “I’ve a little friend here that keeps me from being worried. All I ask is the cash.”

“Have no fear,” Naavic bowed with elaborate courtesy. “Death comes to such as you, Gail, from your own unscrupulous kind, and to you Redinsky, from the lethal rays of the death house. Until later, men of earth. May your night be long!”

Left alone in the little office once more, the old reddy drew open the desk drawer, surveyed the sheaf of gold-embossed bills. Ten thousand thael . . . he needed twenty. And where was it possible at this late hour to raise so great an amount?

Automatically Naavic turned to the window, gazed up at the deep blue-black sky. Like two great calm, unblinking eyes the twin moons stared down, bathing the Olech in white ghostly light. Naavic’s lips moved tremulously.

“Ancient gods of Mars!” he whispered. “Aid me!”

The house of Egor Tu was crowded that night. Gamblers, who cared nothing for traditional holidays, lined the long tables, avid eyes fixed on the great glasssex globes within which the green, swift-growing spores fought for supremacy.
Tony Gail, wedged between an antennaeed Venusian and an enormous, beetle-browed Jovian, was running in good luck. The stack of coins and bills before him was large, and represented the currency of every planet.

Gail took his gaze from the globe long enough to glance at the flashing time-light on the wall. A quarter before the third hour, when he was to meet Naavie. And an excellent time to quit, since he was well ahead of the game. Grinning, Gail stuffed the heterogeneous collection of cash into his wallet, and, with a nod to the impassive, wooden-faced Egor, strode from the gambling den.

The streets about Egor Tu's place were dark, silent; all the Otech it seemed had sought the gay, brilliantly-lighted Space Market, the music and laughter of Ki Street, of Harkan Road. With easy strides Gail made his way along Dak Street, past grimy, dust-covered shops, past dim-lighted latticed windows from which soft laughter, even softer voices, floated, past the decayed splendor of Atoh Square, ghostly in the palid rays of the moons.

As he approached the Han canal, passers-by grew more and more rare, for the little pathway along the embankment had an evil name. An occasional gliding, soft-footed reddy, a bewildered, drink-muddled countryman from the valley of the Acheron, lost in the maze of streets, a dark, fierce desert nomad from the Psidian plain, white-robed, silent, bent on some mysterious errand of vengeance or pleasure. These and no more, though from the distant Space Market Gail could hear sounds of revelry, of laughter.

The footpath along the canal bank was cloaked in darkness; the twin moons, low in the western sky, sent the shadows of the warehouses sprawling in black grotesqueries across the turbid, oily waters. Rows of moored, deserted barges rose and fell in the wake of an occasional spray-flinging, speeding canal cab.

Gail picked his way among the stacks of boxes and bales, heading toward the dim bulk of the Interplanetary warehouse. Vague uneasiness filled him, and his eyes swung warily from side to side, striving to pierce the gloom.

All at once Gail heard it, the soft pad-pad of shuffling footsteps coming through the darkness toward him. He froze at once into silent rigidity. Was this some space-rat, some scum of the cosmos, seeking rich prey? Motionless in the shadow of a packing case, Gail waited.

Then suddenly from the space rockets roared and a broad-beamed freighter leaped spaceward. Its exhaust, great streaks of crimson lightning, transformed the embankment momentarily into a lurid red inferno. In that instant Gail could see old Naavie's wrinkled, rust-colored countenance, his round, bronze-green eyes blinking querulously. Swiftly the freighter's exhausts faded to feeble flickering points of light and a cracked, tremulous voice issued from the shadows.

"Gail? Gail, matoul?"

"Right." The gambler's voice was brittle. "You've got the cash?"

"Aye." Old Naavie sighed. "You will not settle for less?"

"Ten thousand's the figure." Gail drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

"Here's your note."

There followed a rustle of the old man's robes, a crackle of stiff new bills. Gail could see their gold gleaming gleam dully in the wan starlight.

"Ten thousand." Old Naavie's voice was like the whisper of wind-swept sand. "And an hour yet before the Wedding of the Moons. Thus is the honor of my house preserved."

"Umm." Gail counted the notes in the darkness; the design embossed upon them told his deft fingers their denomination. "Nine... ten! Right! You've got your
NOTE? Thanks, old timer. Maybe this'll teach you not to gamble with terrestrials." Chuckling sardonically, Gail crushed the bills into his pocket.

"It is for me to thank you," Naavic murmured, "for this opportunity of paying you that which is your due." Smiling a trifle crookedly, the old man slid a hand beneath his robes...

ROCKETS REDINSKY, strolling briskly along the canal bank, hummed a tune to himself in a piping, uncertain treble. The night, he decided, held promise. Quite apart from Naavic's ten thousand there would be other, if not quite so profitable, matters to be attended to. Drunken spacehands to be "rolled," pockets bulging with specie of every planet to be emptied by his nimble fingers, wealthy, gullible countrymen to be steered into blackmail traps set by the doll-faced denizens of "Amen" Alley. A night made for space-rats and all those who lived without toil. Rockets quickened his steps, eager to transact the business with old Naavic, return to the roistering, brawling throngs at Xoal's tavern.

The canal embankment was still dark, shrouded in black gloom, but Rockets, known to all the netherworld of the Olech, felt no fear of attack. Once, indeed, the eerie blue fluorescence of a heat gun, winking momentarily on the placid waters far ahead, sent his hand to the holster beneath his arm; but the darkness that followed revealed no further signs of a struggle. Rockets grinned. There would be corpses aplenty on the canal's scummy surface by dawn... and wealth aplenty among the space-rats at Xoal's. Squaring his puny shoulders, Redinsky strode along the glass-paved path.

Approaching the Interplanetary warehouses, Rockets glanced skyward. The great glowing moons were close now, cold, luminous eyes peering through the purple veil of night. An hour, at most, before they blended momentarily into one. Nodding complacently, Rockets plunged ahead.

He was perhaps a dozen paces from the warehouse when he heard the grit of sand beneath silent feet.

"Who's there?" he barked, snatching his gun from its holster.

"Me. Naavic." The old man, a bent grotesque gnome, shuffled from the shadows. "It is you, Redinsky?"

"Right." Rockets' eyes were slivers of obsidian. "Walk forward slowly. No tricks. You've got the money?"

"Yes." Naavic's gnarled fingers were fondling the moon-pendant about his neck. "Yes... I can clear my debts, now. Yet if you would spare me this payment, surely would the gods look upon you with favor...."

"Never mind the gods," Rockets laughed. "We terrestrials... he did not like to consider himself a half-breed... "are our own gods. If you're smart enough, you don't have any trouble in this or any other world. Hand over the cash!"

Shaking his head sadly, Naavic drew a heavy molat-skin wallet from his pocket, handed it to Redinsky.

"All right. Stay where you are while I count it." Rockets stepped into a patch of moonlight, leafed through the bills in the fold. "Good enough. And now..."

"The letter?" Naavic clutched eagerly at the half-breed's arm. "You have my letter?"

"Sure." Rockets shook off the old man's hand. "Here!" He handed Naavic a crumpled bit of paper.

"Ah!" The importer straightened up, sighing. "You and Gail both paid and the moons not yet met. Now can I, too, join the celebration. Go in peace, earthman!"

"Not much peace at Xoal's," Rockets chuckled, "but that's where I'm heading.
FOR a long moment old Naavic stared after Redinsky’s figure as it blended into the gloom. A deep bitterness gripped him. Memory of the past loomed in his mind. The peaceful, placid existence before the coming of the terrestrials, the ceremony, the ritual, the endless rise and fall of voices in lengthy discourse over goblets of scented tong. Then the arrival of the earthmen, the change to hustle, to striving, to surging, relentless lust for domination. And on the heels of the explorers and traders had come the Earth’s outlaws, seeking haven far from the powers of their own planet. Cruel, unscrupulous, without honor...

Naavic nodded thoughtfully as Redinsky’s footsteps died away. All at once he turned, peered behind a big packing case, then, kneeling on the edge of the embankment, reached down and dabbed his hands in the tepid water. From his pocket he drew a heat gun, two crumpled pieces of paper. One lambent blue burst from the gun reduced the bits of paper to ashes, after which Naavic tossed the weapon into the canal. Then from beneath his voluminous robes the old man produced a small, compact micro-wave communications set, spoke softly into its trans-
skin. "Gail's wallet, all right! Well, well, Rockets! We've been waiting a long time to nail you!"

GLASSY-EYED, Redinsky stared at the wallet.
"No!" he screamed. "I didn't do it! Naavic, the spice merchant, gave me that bill fold! Just half an hour ago, behind the Interplanetary warehouse! Naavic killed him, I tell you!"

"So... the lieutenant chuckled... "so you admit you were behind the I. P. warehouse half an hour ago. That makes it nice! Because, Rockets, that's where Gail's body was found after we got that micro-wave tip! You'll have a tough time getting out of this, especially"... he leaned forward, seized Redinsky's arm... "especially with this blood on your sleeve!"

Rockets' teeth clicked like shaken dice; his face was grey. The spot on his arm where Naavic's hand had rested...

"No!" he bubbled. "Naavic did it! He owed Gail money..."

"Huh!" the terrestrial snorted. "Why not say the Thantor of Venus killed him? D'you expect me to believe that a rich man, a Dinato like Naavic would be trafficking with rats like you and Gail? No good, Rockets. You can't get out of it this time. Wallet and heat gun on your person, blood on your sleeve, and your own admission that you were behind the I. P. warehouse half an hour ago. Well, you've been dodging the lethal-ray for a long time, now." He gripped the 'little half-breed's arm tightly. "Come on, Rockets! Let's go!"

OLD Naavic sat on the terraced roof of his house, nodding benignly. The square below him was crowded with milling throngs seeking places from which to watch the Wedding of the Moons. Naavic glanced upward. Only a hair-line of dark sky separated the glowing discs. In an-
other minute or so the ancient festival would reach its climax.

A screaming, protesting voice from across the street rose above the deep murmur of the crowd. Naavie turned his placid bottomless green eyes toward the entrance of Xoal's tavern. Rockets Redinsky, in the grip of the two members of the Martian Patrol, stumbled through the doorway. Naavie watched them drag him aboard a police boat that waited, exhausts flaring, at the shore of a narrow arm of the Han canal.

A complacent smile flickered across the old man's wrinkled face. His note, that ill-advised letter—both were destroyed. No debts to slur his honor, and his score with the two terrestrials settled. Redinsky's story would be laughed at, in view of the evidence against him.

Naavie fingered the heap of money before him. Sols, mercs, dollars, money of every planet, taken from Gail's wallet before the substitution of the crisp thousand-thael notes. Enough, almost, to make up for the ten thousand he had given Redinsky.

Truly the gods had smiled.

Suddenly from the square below an excited cry went up. "Yetano! Yetano!" The moons had met! Swelling, triumphant, ecstatic, the tumult rolled like deep-throated thunder through the Olech, quite drowning out the cough of the police boat's exhausts as it bore Rockets Redinsky off into the night.

Naavie raised his eyes to the sky. The two silver-white discs, hanging low in the heavens, had met with a blaze of shimmering radiance, were beginning to merge into one.

"Yetano!" the old man whispered.

"Let justice be done in the Red Planet's way—at the mating of the moons!"

THE END

IN THE AUGUST ISSUE
Flashgun Casey, GEORGE HARMON COXE'S great news-cameraman character, returns in this issue, and whether you've met him before or not you'll get a kick out of Casey and the Blond Wren. And whether you've a hock-shop habitue or one of those fortunate folk who can manage to get by without calling on "Uncle" you'll be interested and thrilled by Ten Carats of Lead, the new complete novelette by STEWART STERLING which deals with the colorful and intricate operations of the Pawshop Detail of New York's police department. And whether you've ever worn a C.C.C. uniform or are just one of those people who wonder what goes on behind the scenes in Uncle Sam's Civilian Conservation Corps Camps you'll get a kick out of Murder—For No Reason, ROGER TORREY'S amusing new story in the same issue. And you'll also enjoy the yarns by WYATT BLASINGAME, G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS, EATON K. GOLDSHWAITE and many more in the AUGUST—

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CHAPTER ONE

For Love of a Lady

KALAN COJAR, President of Cojar Rocket Builders, Inc., opened an ornate box to extract a black cigar. He bit off an end and sucked at it meditatively, trying to analyze just what motive had prompted the girl in the chair beyond his desk to come on this errand.

He had heard of Verna Singleton wherever space-pilots congregated, and she was much prettier than he had expected.
By D. D. Sharp

CORE

It's a little trick of jiu-jitsu—if your opponent is stronger than you are, you turn his strength upon himself to win.

Indeed, she had charming personality, and she couldn't be over eighteen. Too eager, he decided, not as much interested in the scientific angle as she pretends. Rather looks as though she were trying to hurt someone. "Sorry,"
he said coldly, "We are builders, not adventurers, Miss Singleton. Personally I abhor the void. I've never seen any successful business man enjoy it, even between nearby civilized planets. Its emptiness gives me moods. Island worlds developing and dropping away, as though even they were trivial sequences in a vaster scheme. Bad, extremely bad, for executive ability."

She smiled, "I hardly expected you to come along, Mr. Cojar. I want backing, and a ship built especially for the unusual conditions it must face."

He waved his cigar tolerantly, "Impossible, Miss. Impossible! That star has gravitation no ship can escape. A pinch of it dropped on an ordinary floor would crash right through, it's that heavy. Try something more hopeful. A journey less extensive. You'd be middle-aged before you got back. Whatever you gain, one lost romance isn't worth it."

The tilt of her chin defied his ridicule, and warned him not to underestimate her.

SHE was still very much in his thoughts that afternoon when Syno Naffar, ace pilot of a subsidiary interplanetary line, pushed jauntily through a side door of the private office. With an air of a conqueror he waved an envelope, then slapped it on Kalan's desk.

Kalan stared with a frown.
"Read it," Syno beamed.
Kalan sifted out a folded note, read it, then glared.
"I was born for it," Syno went on enthusiastically, "and of course Orthlay wants you to build our ship."

Kalan ripped the letter in two, doubled it and tore it again. Two space pilots from opposite poles of the profession bursting upon him with the same fantastic idea was too much for a single day.

"It must be aluminum alloy and faster than light by three times at least," Syno elaborated, ignoring Kalan's temper.

"Does it enter your clumsy head," Kalan blustered, "that the Companion star of Sirius has a surface temperature of ten or eleven thousand degrees of heat! And you talk of aluminum construction as though you expected to land on it."

Syno grinned, "Of course I'm not up on astro-physics like you college grads, but I got ideas. What I want to know is if the Companion is only one third the size of Sirius and gives only one ten thousandth of its light, how come it has the same surface heat? Besides, I don't believe it is incandescent gas at all. Burning gas can't weigh two thousand pounds to the square inch!"

"The two have identical spectra," Kalan reminded dryly. "White hot, both of them."

"Well it's worth the trip to find out, but let's talk ship."

Kalan eyed him coldly, "So you really would quit the line that fathered you for a fool scheme. To Uranus, Pluto even, you're the best we've got, but to a star eight and eight tenths light years out! I can't believe it."

"You ought to get bit by the bug," Sy said impulsively, "It'll bloom you out. Try using your imagination, sometime."

Kalan glared. He was in no mood for kidding. "Risk your life then. I'm surprised at Orthlay."

"See you when you are ready to talk ship. Running out on you now. Got a date."

IT WAS more than a year before Syno got his ship completed according to his plan. She was a thousand feet long, with hull rotation to give gravity, insulated with a newly invented breather process, and every metal part of aluminum for lightness. She was christened the Flash as a tribute to the excellence of Cojar Superflash combustion.

During that year Kalan had tried to improve his acquaintance with Verna
Singleton. She accepted his concert and theatre invitations with charming eagerness, but Kalan suspected there was more hope for eventual interest in her adventure than there might be in himself.

One night as he wrestled alone with blueprints and stress tables, there was a knock on the outer door. At his shouting invitation Verna came in.

With confused surprise Kalan offered her a chair.

“Thank you,” she said coldly and remained standing.

He noticed that her hands were clenched and her eyes, so softly violet before, were electric with suppressed fury.

“Wasn’t it mean enough to convert my idea?” she began bitterly. “You had to turn it to that—that six foot bundle of conceit!” Then quite suddenly she dabbed at her eyes.

Kalan stared, his fat cigar pendant from slack lips.

She dabbed her eyes a moment, but soon recovered her old composure. “I’m not so easily pushed aside, Mr. Cojar,” she said firmly, “Tell Mr. Naffar he asked for a race and will get it!”

Before Kalan could say a word she whisked out the door. He gathered the blueprints and put them away. His brain hummed as though she had left a storm of static behind her. He had been unjustly accused. It aroused hot indignation. Yet the soul of him had but one desire, to explain his innocence to her.

Early next morning he took his gyroplane out to her country place. She was gone. He scribbled a note on one of his cards and left it with the maid asking opportunity to explain.

Two days later the card came back. It fell upon his desk an omen and a challenge. Since the day he was born Kalan had been an autocrat. He had never endured frustration nor even delay. He bit the end from a new cigar and pressed a buzzer. By the Almighty he’d make her regret this more than himself. He’d show her he didn’t care what she thought.

That night under the green-shaded drop lights of the draughting room Syno peered at him, “What’s worrying you, Kal?”

For a few minutes he sparred defensively, and then, surprising even himself, he felt a sudden demand for understanding, for consolation and advice. “I suspect I was mooning,” he admitted, “all my life I’ve been too busy to be in love. Now I suspect it’s slipped up on me.”

“You act as though she had turned you down?”

Kalan laughed nervously, “She doesn’t even suspect. I know my limitations, Sy. I’m prosaic. She, romantic—very.”

“Forget her then.”

“I can’t.”

“Then try something more adventurous than being president of Cojar Inc. Turn a hand-spring for her. Understand

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"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, 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 postcard or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 391, 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. 391, Moscow, Idaho. *Advt. Copyright 1929 Frank B. Robinson.*
what I mean? Show her a new bag of tricks. Arouse her interest."
"How?"
"Coming along to Sirius might do."
"Sirius, it'd scare me to death. In space I'd impress no one."
"Tackling something a man's afraid of, sometimes knocks 'em cold."
Kalan's shoulders widened. Slowly he said: "Sirius. Perhaps. I'll do it!"
Naffar laughed. "Of course you will, Kal. Get your duffle aboard—you'll be our supercargo!"

CHAPTER TWO

Woman Overboard

DRIVING sleet barraged all visible objects. Beyond the rocket-yard fence the watching crowds moved like dark waters. Gyroplanes hummed somewhere beyond the curtain of mist, automobiles glided into parking lots.

High overhead in the brightly lighted pilot room, Syno Naffar slipped off the ear phones, dragged his, big feet slowly from under the instrument table, carefully put on his official cap, and started for the door. Verna Singleton met him, put out a gloved hand impetuously. Syno drew himself into a frigid official pose. Saluted stiffly.

She raised her chin, but almost immediately weakened, and caught him by an elbow, "Major Syno Naffar, I accept defeat. The Cycloid won't take off if you'll take me with you. I'll make a good navigator." His sternness stopped her. "If you don't—" she left her threat wide open.

He looked down at her steadily, took her small gloved hands in his, "Why go over all that again, Verna? We'd fight over the course charts and too against each other at the pilot wheels. I know better than to accept. You'd never be happy playing second fiddle to any man."

She took her hands from his with a little twist of anger. "If that's what you wish—good-bye!"

"We can't both be commanders," he defended, "At least not of the same ship."
"You've an ego that can't endure a woman being equal," she retorted.

He took a sharp pace backward, saluted as to a comrade of the void, a sweeping arc of the arm, hand brought stiffly down at a sharp angle to slap against the thigh.

She accepted the challenge, returned it smartly, tossed him a kiss from her fingertips, then stepped across the anteroom and entered a lift.

"You aren't taking her?" Kalan demanded when he came back.
"It wouldn't work. She'd mutiny before a week."
"Then I don't make the hand-spring."
"Well, that's a relief."
"Clear sailing," Kalan put out his hand.
"I really did intend to go."
"Step on it," the other growled. "You know there's timing to a ship. Get out or be left aboard."

FAINTLY through the insulation insisted the siren's wail. Kalan released the clasp.

"That girl, Miss Singleton. What have you against her? I wish you hadn't refused, Sy. It was for her I was taking the hand-spring. Silly, I suppose. Silly, and knowing it, and unable to stay off if she was aboard." He stopped short, tumbling at once to his mistake. Syno was gaping at him as though he had taken him in a fraud. He walked out stiffly.

Syno watched the doors close upon Kalan as he stood rooted in a daze of recollections. A buzzer hummed insistently, green lights down-field changed red, a humming vibration started in the combustion chambers, but Syno, stupefied beyond response, did not seem to hear anything at all. So it was Verna who wanted Kalan to build a ship.

His gaze shifted from the sleet driven
across a porthole to the green light now blooming on the control board. He heard the blasting response of the ship’s whistle. Signaling ‘all set.’ The ship waited his command to fire the mercurial tetrabbitumide into the combustion chambers.

He brushed a hand across his face, clearing away Verna and Kalan. They were denizens of an earthy past, he a protagonist of the great void that Earth so wondered about. He strode to the table, lifted a phone. “Open guns,” he called curtly.

Lanes of glistening rails slid under the ship. Then it bellowed skyward to clear the driving sleet and leap out into a tranquil stratosphere.

Ahead the sky became darker and darker blue, and the sunlight even whiter through the port holes. Star-points opened in the indigo, and the white sunlight halted sharply at black shadow, with night and day hemispheres of the rocket sharply divided.

By that time Syno had strapped himself into a tension chair for the crushing acceleration he must put into the ship after clearing Earth’s atmosphere.

Earth was fairly tumbling now into a nadir of deepening sky. It became a rosy canopy, a filmy far-off circle of opaline cloud, which rapidly deflated to form merely a big, white moon.

Velocity piled upon velocity until it approached that of light. Sound had long ceased for the ship out-traveled it. Now the ship raced on under robot control, the crew placed under suspended animation to conserve valuable supplies.

THE following months faster than light afforded nothing that might be termed companionship. At long last the ship slowed. Ears heard again, eyes could see, though for many weeks ears roared annoyingly and eyes retained a blurring pulsation.

They emerged a hairy and wolfish crew. They stared at each other amused, yet horrified. Syno was in better shape because he had always been stern with himself about eating and exercise. Kalan was a pitiful figure with silky brown beard smoothing the lean crags of his cheeks, but no beard could soften the Adam’s apple that pumped up and down his throat when he swallowed.

Sirius was so big and dazzling sunscreens were drawn against its light. Its companion (‘Opes,’ Kahn named it, because of its promise of scientific wealth) was almost as big on the starboard side of the ship.

Photographing, spectroheliographing, analyzing, the crew recuperated during the next few months, preparatory to closer approach.

Despite his scientific interest in all that was going on, Kalan was too evidently depressed by the utter absence of all life except that sealed within the ship. Syno watched him with misgivings. This was indeed the dominion of eternal quiescence. It refused to be aroused or disturbed, even by the conquest of daring ephemera. He too was overtaken at times by distressing melancholia. Above there was no tangible sky, below there was only endless depth, star bounded. No change marked one hour from another, day from night. The ship hung midway a giant hole that had not top, bottom, nor enclosing sides. He too discovered a ravishing desire for landscape and cloud flecked skies, and always he thought of Verna, wondering how she had taken her defeat, and whether after all, he had the right to refuse what she had demanded.

Then the preliminary calculations were at an end, and the Flash took up a cautious approach. Opes swelled larger and larger out of the cavern of infinity.

Old Skywash, a veteran whose wrinkles had tanned to winds of divers moons and planets, discovered a cloud. To Syno it appeared more like dense smoke. It
seemed to follow Sirius like a tide as Opes turned on its axis and the two binaries swung in stately sarabands around each other.

"Such unhuman desolation," Kalan muttered, "It never struck me before how small is the part of creation that will tolerate life." He confronted Syno sternly, "Why go further down into such a pot? What chance has any ship with such gravity?"

He meditatively plucked a pencil from his pocket.

Codeman, the mate, glued eyes to the binocular-telescope. Kalan set down an equation of numerals and symbols in small print-like figures on a notebook. Suddenly he ripped out the sheet and stared wide-eyed at Codeman, then at Syno.

"What's eating you?" demanded Sy with annoyance.

"Gravitation," Kalan answered very seriously, "I've done this twice. If Opes really has a mass of eighty-five percent that of the Solar sun, we ought to be using head-guns against it. How do you explain that?"

Syno spread his hands, "It just ain't so dense as you scientists figured back on earth."

"It has to be. Look." Kalan drew a diagram.

"Maybe it isn't mass," Syno stood his ground. "If there was some other kind of a pull, say magnetism, wouldn't the figures be just as good, hold up just the same?"

A buzzer interrupted. Then a voice from a loudspeaker; "Some object directly on our tail. It is coming fast."

A magnifying viewplate was swung rear. A thin flashing sliver, like metal was caught by the magnifiers and held up from the hollow distance that swallowed it. It was some minutes before it could be certainly identified as a ship. It was very far back, but her purple exhausts and port lights slowly turning, soon left no doubt.

It was the Cycloid.

KALAN spoke first. "She's a plucky little devil," he said eagerly.

"My God, not her!" Syno growled hoarsely.

"No one else," Kalan insisted, "I'd know the Cycloid in hell."

"Vemen," Skywash muttered disgustedly. "Vemen."

"She's crazy," Syno said after a pause. "Her ship's not built against such gravitation. Skywash, push that neon focus so that it takes her plates. I want to talk with her."

Kalan went to help adjust the neon machine.

Syno cut high-voltage current into a ray projector.

"This is the limit," said Codeman.

"Vell, vot you wait on? Talk vit her." Skywash bellowed.

Syno closed a switch. The neon ray fell into invisibility immediately beyond the projector. Only by passing a hand through it could its ruddy light be discerned.

"We're not making contact," Syno snapped, "Send flares, two blues and a red. That ought to signal her to position."

Kalan took the binocular-telescope. Syno waited in headphones.

"She's trying to show me," thought Syno, "Wants to beat every man at his own game. Well, at least she's got nerve."

"Hello. Hello the Cycloid," he repeatedly called.

Half an hour like that. Half an hour of tight nerves and silent wonder. The Cycloid came rushing larger and larger. Now her lights were bright, streaking around and around like fire ribbons on a stick. The whiteness of Opes grew brighter on her nose and Sirius blinded all outline of her tail. She seemed to hang
like Jacob's coffin, with no apparent movement save the spinning hull, and that swelling of proportion.

"She's falling," Kalan cried. "Look, she's wheeling over! She's out of control! My God, Sy, do something!"

"Hello Cycloid. Hello Cycloid," Syno called.

Suddenly as from one of the ship's own phones the broadcast caught her, "Flash? Flash?" Then a nervous laugh.

Syno covered the microphone with his cap. "She's worried. That laugh isn't natural."

A closer scrutiny through the binoculars told that neon contact was impossible, the ship was riding belly up, and even as Syno watched she emitted a headblast that should have braked but instead, pushed her over. For a moment she fell toward Opes unchecked, then a burst of tail-fire spun her nose around.

"Lord," moaned Kalan, "She's completely out of control!"

Syno plugged the engine room. "Stand by for speed, Jensen. Keep the oil coming." He nosed the Flash into an arc that pointed her along the path of the oncoming ship.

"She was crazy! Vare she tink she was heading, by Jingoes?" Skywash bawled unable to stand silent.

"Watch out!" Kalan warned, "The Solo-meter's swinging out but your nose is hard down. What can that mean, Sy?"

Syno's firm jaws slackened with amazement. "Darned queer," he said aloud.

Verna's voice from the loudspeaker came so unexpected every man wheeled to stare at it, the voice of a girl in bad trouble, trying to be quite brave and self reliant for those who depended on her.

"Instruments all haywire! Sy, see if you can't give me a braking check." Then more humanly and a bit unstrung, "Oh, I don't know what's wrong—Flash—but—"

The voice was gone.

By then there was no need for glasses to watch the ship. Violet tail fires mushroomed alternately from head and tail, whichever pointed downward toward the blazing binary.

Soon trouble also developed aboard the Flash. As she flanked the Cycloid to gather her pace, every instrument aboard jiggled and buzzed. Static howled in the phones until talking became impossible, Magnetic needles froze to their discs.

The Cycloid came crowding their pace like a meteor rushing down the heavens. Syno paced her like a runner boarding a freight train, all the while trying to spot her beam plate with the neon, repeating over and over one message he hoped to get across.

"Bail out! Bail out, all of you, for God's sake!"

"It's their one chance," Kalan muttered, "Men in space suits ought already to be popping from the chutes. What's the matter with their common sense?"

A stream of violet fire from the head exhaust, then a burst from those at the tail. "Bail out, you hard-head," Syno bawled into the microphone.

Then her voice again. "She's gone. I can't hold her." Then it was lost in cracking, popping interference that soon had the neon sputtering.

Kalan groaned, "It's got her. The blasted stuff is pulling her down!"

"Shut up!" Syno bellowed his nerves now out of control. He shot the acceleration lever forward.

Kalan slid across the room to flatten breathlessly against the rear wall. Syno notched down, and still down, until the conoid belly of Verna's ship rushed back at them, sliding past the viewplates until it was far back in the glaring halo of Sirius. Only then did Syno open the braking nose jets, allowing the Cycloid to ease nearer and nearer.
“What are you trying to do?” Codeman demanded with alarm.

“Stop her,” Sy said softly. “Just going to stop her ship.”

Codeman leaped upon him, struggled for the control lever. “It’s got you!” he cried excitedly, “Kalan, grab an arm. The void’s got him! See! It’s got him! He’s trying to smash the ship!”

With a jiu-jitsu twist Sy laid him across the floor. “Cut it, you fool,” he demanded harshly. “Or has it got you?” He reached for a control lever.

Codeman quieted, partly by the amazing suddenness of his fall and partly by Syno’s tone. “Lord,” he sighed as with great relief. “I sure thought you were space-mad.”

“Looks like she was. All hands stand by cable controls. We’ll attempt tying her!”

“All hands by cable controls!” Codeman shouted as he rose.

Verna, space-mad or no, certainly caught what he intended, for as the Flash paced the Cycloid, plate almost touching plate, she kept the ship out of a roll by powering her dive. It looked perfect as the smoothly riveted hull walled all starboard portholes, as cables, one after another, hooked the anchor eyes. But luck played out suddenly with a roll of the Cycloid. She rose up and up until she seemed like the tower of Babel overhead, then she tumbled, the full thousand yards of her like a mammoth smokestack overbalanced.

With a skillful blast Syno dodged the hull, but with ships partly cabled together, the down-rushing tail lifted the Cycloid’s nose. There wasn’t the measure of a full breath to avert a crash. All Sy could do was to open nose blasts which toppled her just as hard the other way, swinging up the tail of the Flash to snap the cables. Noses banged with a shudder that rumbled from prow to stern. The ships parted in a spin, the Cycloid circling like a prodigious boomerang through a dusky gloom, to bury her prow deep in the belly of the Flash.

Air detonated with explosive rumble. Sealing hatches banged. Through small perforations air whistled like a Dakota blizzard.

Sy spread his useless hands across the instrument table and stared dazedly through a viewplate at the wound in his ship. The nose of the Cycloid had driven through. Certainly the combustion engines were destroyed, though a closer survey failed to reveal any broken seam of the impaling Cycloid.

CHAPTER THREE

Plunging to Smoky Seas

So quickly came disaster it seemed unreal, even with the two ships so plainly interlocked. Syno tried a phone. It was dead. By the means of an emergency battery set he finally aroused Jenson. The hearty, booming voice of the Scandinavian raised hope, only to dash it. Jenson’s heartiness was bravery not optimism. Sy left the phone hanging in air like the rope of a Hindu mystic—without revolution of the ship there was no gravitation. Falling free in space, the tug of Opes was not apparent, and with it still too far away to approach noticeably at the present rate of fall, to all appearance they were safely suspended and at rest. This lulled no man aboard into false hopes. They knew they were falling.

Beyond the view-window a litter of scrap, sheet metal, compressed oxygen cylinders, broken pipes and packing, circled with the precision of little planets around a sun. A great tetribitumide engine rode up from below the hull as though swung by an invisible chain. Slowly it rose overhead in an arc that was true as a wheel, a mighty mass of steel hung on nothing, a rocket moon, bright with
the hot lights of both Opes and Sirius.

"Space-suits," Syno said, as calmly as though he had touched an airless world. A push sent him soaring toward the ceiling, another floated him toward the lockers.

Clinging to a hose-bracket for security, he pulled open a door and got out his own suit, stuck his legs down the rubberized trouser legs, and pulled the sealing zipper. When he had lugged on the spherical helmet, he plugged to the airhole and inflated.

"What use?" demanded Kalan.

"Die trying," Syno encouraged. "If airlocks are still working, we can get into the Cycloid. I believe she's tight." He flung a suit at Kalan, then one at Skywash.

"Ven I do say id myself," Skywash protested, "Dot womans vas too closd a-ready."

Codeman was next to complete inflation, then Skywash, and lastly Kalan, who was having trouble with the helmet lugs.

"All set?" Codeman warned, then opened the valves which drained the air.

Verna was waiting, very reserved, for all the tenseness of her fingers as they clutched his sleeve, and to Syno she was very breath takingly desirable. There was an unspoken hunger, an unacknowledged need of his strength in her gesture. Beyond that she seemed wholly unyielding and defiant.

A MOMENT they faced each other, both draining heavily their trained reserve, eyes trying to search the other's innermost thought.

"The crew coming?" she demanded.

He shook his head. "Sealed." He unscrewed the lugs which bound his helmet, slipped the metal piece from his head.

"I'll take command," he said quietly. "We're cracking up." She made a grimace. "I don't believe even a man can stop that!"

He nodded but looked down into her stubborn eyes with grave tenderness. "We have but a few hours together, Verna. The old battle can be put away."

A dark, lean man of long face and angular features pushed into attention. His eye-lids were peculiarly languid and heavy, and he looked at one with a disturbing, penetrating stare.

"This is Doctor Olmstead," Verna introduced him. "Doctor, meet an old friend, Captain Syno Naffar. We have often discussed his genius. And of course you know Mr. Kalan Cojar! Quite an occasion for formalities." Verna was over-acting. Syno felt sorry for her.

"Are we really out of control?" Olmstead ignored the introduction.

In turn Syno ignored the question as he pushed open the control-room door and slid into the pilot seat. "Might as well pull out of this ghostly weightlessness," he broke in as Olmstead followed to ask questions. "Buckle into your tension chairs, all of you, I'm going to spin free."

He closed the rotation circuit, but the Cycloid only shivered as the gravity lever notched down.

"Seats!" he barked at Olmstead, who had moved not an inch.

Olmstead's eyes were defiant, "Who asked you to give orders?" he objected sturdily. But as Sy began pouring explosives into the combustion chambers, he took a chair and quickly buckled in.

A tail charge drove them free of the Flash, entirely through her. But the tug from Opes toppled the Cycloid's tail over when a head-blast tried to break her fall.

Syno pushed the rotor lever again. This time the hull revolved and normal earth gravitation was soon attained inside the ship.

"This calls for a drink," Olmstead said thickly, "Or a shot of arsenic. It
won't be pleasant for us all to be cooked alive."

"Not arsenic, something quicker," Kalan demanded in a voice that strove for self control.

"What have you, little skipper?" Olmstead rose unsteadily to fumble at the emergency chest.

"Too bad your fighting mood couldn't last it out, Kal," Syno said bitterly. "You and Olmstead can do it quickest dropping out the escape chute with open helmets. But if I had half your education I'd try making use of some scientific principle instead of bawling for a drink. My school didn't teach a lot you men know, but it did teach me not to quit!"

Olmstead gurgled a stiff drink of whiskey into a glass, then handed the bottle to Kalan. "What will be the difference, brave one, a hundred years—I mean a hundred hours from now?"

But Kalan put the bottle down. He was staring at Verna. There was little doubt what was going on in his mind. Verna was dying, too, but one wouldn't believe it from the way she was acting. And she wasn't calling for either poison or a drink.

Olmstead was looking at Verna too, but with incrimination, "If you had listened to me," he said sharply, "This wouldn't have happened."

"Shut up," bellowed Sy, "If you want to be really smart, this is the time for ideas."

"In a few hours," Olmstead muttered, "There will be no ideas. We'll bake like pigs in a pit. We'll char like rags in a hotel fire. Then our very ashes will melt, and explode into neutronic gases." He closed his eyes a moment. Opened them wide as though they had suddenly seen some horrible monster his brain had never conceived. He tossed down another drink, then clutched the back of a chair and stood trembling, with his back to the screen that revealed the brownish disk of Opes.

SYNO, though, could not drag his eyes away from that slowly enlarging sphere. It was a horrible magnetic thing that crept upon them without halt nor possible evasion. Its great surface was clear dazzling white except for a belt directly below its binary Sirius. Here the molten seas seemed cloaked with vapor, which, unlike geysering Solar sunspots, hugged the fiery sea.

"What do you make of it?" he demanded of Kalan.

"What else?" Kalan's tone was dismal.

"But those are peaks! Peaks! See those jutting points. That can't be incandescent gas!"

"Let's not kid ourselves," said Verna, and put her hands, palms pressing tightly, upon his.

"OK, honey," he said, "Makes a right last chapter. Yes?" His chin lowered to caress the intimate softness of her hair.

She buried her face in a shoulder. "Oh Sy," she whispered, "You can't possibly know how I feel. And it's rather late for remorse."

Syno sat very quiet for fear she might remove those small cool hands. Olmstead turned and left the control room. Kalan sat staring at the rubber matting under his feet, his eyes wretchedly trying to ignore Verna in Syno's arms. Skywash paced the floor, muttering helpless expletives. Codeman, glum, hopeless, indifferent, sat as though entirely alone.

"You don't belong to it," Syno whispered. "It's jealous. But it will never have your heart. That belongs to me and the sun-warmed earth, and flowering spring, youth, and soft laughter. Those are the things you love, Verna."

Her only answer was the pressure of a palm.

As at a rival who was taking by force what could not be gained by fair-play, Syno glared at Opes. He hated it for the first time. For the first time hated the great emptiness of the void which im-
prisoned to the end of infinity those few small worlds that tolerated living things. For the first time also he understood Kalan's fear of it. Kalan, master of other men, had to lose, isolated from the lives he controlled.

The mood changed. He would fight the thing, every mile of the way down. Even hopelessly, he would fight.

"Buckle in!" he shouted into the microphone. "Strap yourself in again," he whispered to Verna, as softly as a promise.

He tried a nose blast to check acceleration, then a rudder blast to straighten her tail. That held her a moment, then the nose went up and tail-down, they slid toward Opes. He opened tail guns, and then the nose and rudder guns again. Back crept the tape of the velocimeter, from fifty thousand miles per hour to forty, from forty it crept more and more slowly, stuck at ten, then very obstinately to five, to four.

Verna relaxed, believing he had done an impossible thing, but there was strength in the binary, and a tumbling ship lost power like a drive-wheel on a slick rail.

The ship, already hot and stuffy, grew still hotter, even with conditioners full blast. The tape stuck and all the power of the ship was unable to take it further back. But Syno wouldn't give up. He was fighting not against death so much as that hopeless remorse in Verna's eyes. He couldn't let her down, he told himself. For her he could do miracles.

Every mile of the way down he fought, even when he began to lose tape again, even when the fiery glare was so blinding he could no longer look through the smoked viewplate. Hope drew thin, but he battled to the very last mile with every opposition.

Incredibly they plunged to the white seas, still alive. Deep and ever deeper they plunged until there seemed no possible bottom or stopping. Then, puzzled at still existing, Syno got hold of himself and opened a noseblast to halt the dive. The ship was uncomfortable, but livable. Whatever made up the sea, it was surely not fire.

The rocket wallowed up with the aid of tail guns. It broke upon water that was like white metal, blinding in the reflected light of Sirius. Not a wave, not a ripple broke the glaring smoothness of the end of the world. Where the ship cut it, the stuff fell heavily back together. Sprays that dashed the nose of the rushing Cycloid, darted quickly in showering silvery pellets.

"Quicksilver!" Syno exclaimed. "Well, what do you know about that?"

As he slackened speed the ship wallowed down into the stuff, as though pulled by a magnet.

Powered again she raised and ploughed swiftly until after an hour or so she grounded in ten feet of mercury upon a reef that was solid as a continent. Further progress threatened to drag the bottom from her.

Syno slid back into his chair, then buried his head into his folded arms. He was utterly exhausted and badly shaken. "OK, Captain," Verna began, and then choked up. "OK," she tried again, "Just sleep. Tomorrow, we'll get her off."

He shook his head despondently, every ounce of fight used up in him. "She'll never go up again. Never. This is our earth now, forever."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Kingdom of Midas

The first night on the metal world, the ship was as quiet as the planet. Not a light burned. If any man woke to nightmares, he kept quiet about it.

Early the next morning Syno and Kalan donned space suits to explore what
might lie in store. Verna, Skywash, and Olmstead chose to stay aboard, Codeman and the crew were still asleep.

Low tide left the ship on a magnetite bar which was spotted with many bright mirroring pools. Kalan dragged a geologist's hatchet from his belt and dropped it beside the air-lock. The magnetic tug upon it was too heavy to long endure.

They crossed a mercury lagoon, by sitting down and kicking across it, then followed the shore line. Black metallic sand lay in ripples behind low ridges of crystallized magnetite.

A short way down-shore they reached a surprising stream of mercury, tumbling ever so much more swiftly than water. It appeared to be a permanent drainage from the distant mountains, too wide to jump and too swift to risk crossing.

Kalan stared at it, but Syno could see his mind was somewhere far off. "Pretty tough on you, Kal," he said impulsively.

Kalan looked up, stared levelly through the windows of his helmet as though trying to read Syno's soul. "I didn't tumble until she went to you as the ship was going down. About women I suppose I'm pretty dense."

"It must have been hell on you," Syno growled and looked at the quicksilver sea. A smoky haze was rising, red and dense.

"That may mean oxygen." He was glad to change the subject. "It has the appearance of red mercurous oxide."

"Vell, here you vas," came a voice in the headphones that wasn't Kalan.

Syno wheeled to find Olmstead and Skywash.

"Then why is it so untarnished?" Kalan was speaking of the mercury, of course.

"Dry oxygen wouldn't affect it," Olm-
stead broke in, "until it was subjected to heat for some time. Sirius is doing that now. It's my prophecy the clouds will be more dense as the sun goes higher. Something similar led Priestly to discover oxygen. But for that smoke, we could breath it safely."

"Priestly used his noodle, professors," Syno snapped impatiently. "The oxygen is smoked with poison, and we can't breath it. Now what can we do about it? And by the way, gentlemen, there is the little problem of getting off this dead world. Can science handle that?"

Olmstead scowled. "It might," he said coldly, "with a lab, a factory, and much more than iron and mercury as raw materials. Without equipment, my friend, science is out of control. Only a ship made of non-magnetic metal could take off this sphere. Hard-headed spacepilots can bungle much easier than scientific skill can repair."

Syno accepted Olmstead's thrust good-naturedly. He hadn't been too nice himself. "What about the Flash?" he asked. "She's aluminum."

Kalan shook his head. "The lot of us couldn't budge an engine if we found one."

"Then we're stuck," Syno said with rising anger. "We're stuck all right," Olmstead echoed.

_GLOOMLY_ they watched the red clouds thickening over the sea and spreading inland, gathering into windrows of rusty, poisonous red, turning the paling sun to copper, and the excited brook to blood. A black shore-line became blacker and the crimson deepened to maroon, and then all color faded out under ever thickening mists. Heavier, lower, inland, the cloud moved. Drops began to spill. Silvery pellets showered into thousands of tiny beads as they struck the ragged magnetite.

"Going to rain," Olmstead observed cynically. "Better be hurrying back." He quickened pace. "And it will free oxygen," he barked contemptuously, "Priestly, on a large scale."

"That's salvation!" Syno accepted, a load falling from him.

"Don't be a fool," Olmstead barked, "A whiff of those fumes would be instant death. Try it when the smoke clears."

The silvery pellets came faster, darting from man and boulder to flee back to the sea. The four men ran for the ship. The downpour became blinding. It hid the nearby ship. Then quite suddenly it was done and even the red clouds were gone, though far up the mountain canyons there seemed a little of the rusty smoke still clinging to the walls.

Verna came to join them and they walked slowly down shore. Syno kicked aimlessly at chunks of drift, his mind busy with ship-stories and estimating how long beans and flour and oil would last with severe rationing. Oxygen was the most serious problem, though he could see no way of ever growing anything at all. He believed Olmstead was right about the oxygen and also the poisonous fumes, and he was just as sure there was a way to convert it to their lungs. That could be worked out. Oxygen too should support some plant growth, if it could be protected from the poisonous vapor, providing chemical nutrients could be manufactured. He decided to try the air, when the sky cleared. The decarbonators aboard the Flash were already demolished and the Cycloid was poorly equipped in this respect. It was a necessary risk.

Verna seemed to understand his mood, and to be content to walk silently beside him. Now and then she too kicked aimlessly at queer residue left by the tide.

_They_ were far down the beach when Syno stooped and attempted to lift a spongy lump of crust from the sand. He
could not raise it. Puzzled, he examined it.

“Found something?” Verna asked with slight curiosity.

He laughed, and laughing tickled him so, he laughed again, until she cried out, “Don’t! Please, Sy. You sound crazy! Is there anything wrong?”

“Wrong,” he shouted. “It’s all wrong—the wrong place—the wrong stuff—a great big worthless chunk of gold amalgum—gold and quicksilver—get it? Gold to walk on, to kick around, tons of it brought down by mercury washing the mountains! Isn’t that wrong! It ought to be good red beans, or ice, or precious seal blubber, but it’s got to be gold!”

Verna caught the infection. Neither of them sounded pleasant as they laughed together. “We—we—we’re Midas!” She broke into hysterical tittering. “Gold! Gold! Gold! My gold-mine for a cabbage!”

Her laugh sobered Syno, “Let’s be sensible,” he said dourly, “It isn’t good even to make fun of how completely we’re marooned.”

They turned at the lively stream that came darting so unexpectedly swift as though to leap all in a minute from mountain to ocean. They left tracks faintly in the iron sand and not at all on the ledge that was worn smooth by ages of quicksilver flood and rain. He took her gauntleted hand, and lifted her up a boulder that was washed smoothly across its middle like a stock saddle. There they sat and looked moodily upon the promised land of their eternal exile. It drew them together with a great love, with understanding, and desire to be of fortitude for one another.

“Verna,” he said when she became weary of the bleak endless peaks, and the ragged iron prairies, and the glassy, mirroring sea. “Forget about tomorrow.”

“It’s all right,” she answered, “since we’re together.”

“You really mean that? Or is there still a tiny bit of hungry longing for ticker tape and sirens screaming? It’s the height of irony, I suppose. We had to be here, before we discover how ambition’s been fooling us. We’ve done big stuff. What a whopping new world we’ve discovered! And what a thoroughly squeezed lemon it hands us!”

She frowned. “I didn’t know you felt that way, Sy. Doing great things to me was more than glory courting.”

“Sure,” he spread his hands, “And my glory-courting dies here. Ambition now rises to covet vastly more important treasures like water and soil, or free air.” He paddled a finger into a pool of quicksilver caught in the rock. On earth it would have bought a space-liner fully equipped. “I’m not much at such talk, Verna, but I thought you’d know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t quite get you, Sy.”

“Don’t let me hurt your feelings again, but I was just thinking how different you and me are out here without any high and mighty ideas of ‘our careers’. I mean burning up our nerves trying to outstrip somebody. Letting it fuss us up until we wouldn’t take the finest thing even God could offer. You careering gloriously and me holding no woman ought to outdo a man she loves. I’m glad it’s overboard with our chance of ever getting away from here. Now we’re just man and woman.”

It took some moments before she relaxed to touch his arm behind her, to lean her helmet against his shoulder. “I was thinking, Sy, some day one will be here, alone. Let’s make the best of being together now.”

Her hand slipped into his. Verna the woman was ready to meet the crisis with the leadership of her man. Her fingers clung, her heart at last understood, as Verna the space-pilot could never have done.
Night took them there alone, and the strange stars reminded them they were far out in alien heavens. Syno, inspired by her surrender, was keyed to dare more terrible perils than the promising atmosphere that dimmed not a single star. With Verna soft against his heart he opened a valve, then breathed deeply.

"Glorious!" he cried, "Try it Verna. It stirs the blood. It's an unbreathed Eden."

She unugged her helmet. "Like Adam and Eve," she laughed. But Adam had a garden to offer his Eve, Syno had only a mine. Yet even Eden had starlight hardly as glorious, and Syno's heart was quickened by a woman's surrender. More barren worlds than Opes have yielded to less enchantment.

CHAPTER FIVE

Science Makes Opportunity

IN the days that followed Syno did not wholly give up hope of relaunching the Cycloid. Kalan discouraged him frankly when he approached the subject, and Olmstead's silent sneer was more disheartening than argument.

You scholars, thought Sy, have claimed much of the honor for earth's scientific advancement. Two of you, at least, are only the soil in which greater men plant their ideas. You can grow large harvests, but utterly fail without a creative seed. Kalan gathers together a perfect ship according to another's plan, Olmstead calculates the path of an eclipse, or the mass of a sphere by its tug upon a binary, and both are helpless when isolated from their rules.

On a lodestone planet where earth laws go haywire, they give up, ridicule the very idea of conquering that which they do not understand, forgetting this identical situation had always dared human progress on a little sphere where they were born.

When shipmasters and scientists agree upon fate, the crew also conforms. The immediate task was to formulate new social laws, and begin the pioneer life with stringent rationing of food, and to conserve water and air by hoarding and purification.

There was one day of rejoicing and celebration. The day the Flash came in from where she had plunged into the mercury far out at sea. Emergency batteries had brought her in easily for there was only gravitational pull upon her aluminum hull and castings.

"Not a chance to mend her," Jenson grumbled as he crawled drunkenly from the locks.

"Sy'll do it! I know he'll do it!" Verna boasted her faith in him.

"Not with half a ship," Jenson growled. "You don't be fair to expect it of him."

Syno shook his head warningly, "Don't get hepped up, Verna." But he smiled at the confidence in her eyes. It gave a new faith in himself. He had at least one loyal ally.

That night when the noise of life was quiet, Syno again tackled the problem. There were two crews now, more than two hundred men. The Flash was splendidly provisioned, the Cycloid not so well. He estimated with close rationing the colony could exist ten years. Then extinction.

What lay beyond the mountain range, they would probably never discover. Mercurious gasses confined them to the ship or space suits after the smoke began to form, so voyaging far inland in search of soil or water was impossible. From the heavens the whole of the planet had looked about the same, untouched by life in any form. Here there was an absolute monarchy of death, against which they could barricade themselves for only a little while. Not even bacteria nor the most primitive unicellular organism was anywhere apparent. Outside help was
fantastic. They were far from inhabited spheres. Opes might swing desolate, a million years before another expedition, even more foolhardy than they, set out to dare what they had not conquered. If they were to escape, it must be by their own ingenuity, and the best available scientific opinion ridiculed every hope of reversing the immutable law that shared the only space-worthy ship.

Beyond his window the alien configuration of Canis Major wheeled into the mercury sea, oppressing the gropings of his mind with its unfamiliar pattern. Great Sirius came over the iron peaks with frightful power. Syno rose and went out to the demands of a new day.

ONE of his main occupations became reading a treatise on magnetism that he found in the Cycloid's library. Once he looked up to discover Olmstead in the door observing him cynically. Olmstead's superior smile thrust a barb into Sy's kindling hope. The book hadn't been any too easy to digest, it was so thoroughly shot through with symbols he did not understand.

Syno replaced the book and went out of the library by another door. On a middle deck he found Verna. "It's sundown and the smoke's cleared. Let's go outside."

She seemed reluctant, or did he imagine it? He recognized the growing horror she must discover in mechanical, metallic absence of growing fruit or flower. Still she accepted cheerily. Syno ground a heel disgustedly into a stratum of gold, and Verna lifted her helmet. Her hair tumbled in a bright cascade that gleamed and rippled with halos of the argentine brightness of the heavy sea. Down shore they wandered, pure new oxygen quickening their heart-beat.

He sat upon a ledge moodily, hand in chin.

"Don't," she begged. "One would think we were going to starve tomorrow."

"It's got to be done by taking advantage of the very force that holds it down," he said aloud, as though he had not heard her.

"If Olmstead would only try to help," she exclaimed. "He must know some way of making iron resistant to magnetism—repellent to it, even."

Syno's head came up. He stared across iron prairies with loose mouth and widening eyes.

"What? What do you see?" she demanded, peering along the ragged horizon.

"Nothing down there. You reminded me of something," His voice rose queerly. "Something that happened back on earth when Kalan was experimenting with an aluminum ring!"

"What?" she demanded. His excitement contagious.

"Don't get your hopes up," he cautioned. "Come on—let's get back."

He hurried back with strides that kept her running until they reached the gap in the belly of the Flash. There he turned, put out both hands, palms facing her, "Shh," he whispered, "He's at work. You go to the Cycloid. Let me have a few hours with him. He'll probably discover nothing in it after all. See you at dinner."

Inside the partly demolished lab of the Flash Kalan sat owl eyed, upon a big spool of insulated wire, working with a blow torch and some coils. "Kal," Syno interrupted, "Put that down and listen. You're an authority on electro-magnetism. Now get a load of this and fix up something that will work out."

Kalan fixed him with a puzzled stare. "I hope it's a brighter idea than investigating the heavy elements of Opes."

"Well, we found out, didn't we? Now do as good with this." He sat down upon a keg and picked up a bit of aluminum from the litter of wreckage. "Suppose

(Continued on page 100)
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ASTONISHING STORIES

(Continued from page 98)

this is a ring. Wouldn't it pop right off this magnetic planet, like that one did from the induction coil when you cut in the juice?"

Kalan stared at him shocked and with wide open mouth.

"Remember," Syno prodded, "You laid a flat strip of steel over the coil. It stuck tight, but the ring popped away. Couldn't we use the principle to ease the tug on the Cycloid?"

"I believe you've got something," Kalan said quietly. "Not just an aluminum ring. The magnetism in the planet's core won't build up resistance the same as in an induction coil which uses high A.C. frequency. There's got to be more done than just put a big aluminum ring under her."

"What?"

"Let me think. We'll have to work it out, but I believe you have got something."

KALAN worked day after day. Syno spilled over with hopeful suggestions, more frowned upon than received with joy. Diagrams were backgrounds with such wealth of mathematical calculation, Syno came away each night with a new headache.

Before a month had passed Kalan began to be very optimistic. Before the new one began, he was again in despair. "What's worrying me," he admitted, "is that someone will have to be left here. I can't, Sy. I know it's cowardly, but I can't volunteer. I'd go mad. And I won't ask it of someone else."

"Why leave anybody?"

"There doesn't seem to be any way around it. The ring won't work without induction coils under it. That means we must power the coils from the Flash with high voltage. Someone must be in the other ship to build up the juice to time
with the Cycloid's guns. We have no
way, here, of opening, nor sealing the
Cycloid to run in juice cables. We must
leave someone outside. That's the only
hitch I can see now. Once we are up as
far as the coils will boost us, eddy cur-
rents in the ring will cushion us against
the magnetic tug so that the guns can
slide her off into space. But who remains
here alone? Figure that out?"

Syno's breath stopped at his throat.
Plainly Kalan was calling him to a hero's
part.

But what of Verna and his new found
happiness with her?

"I know I'm the one to stay," Kalan
went on. "She loves you, not me. It's
my chance to be something to her, a lofty,
magnificent dream for the years that
come, but I'm simply not hero stuff. I'd
start screaming the minute the ship
opened guns. Maybe die of terror before
I got the juice going. No!" he screeched
breathlessly as though already abandoned,
or that Syno was demanding the sacri-
fice of him.

"I can't. I can't!"

Syno stared at the ragged opening of
the Flash, trying to imagine himself utter-
ly alone, the Cycloid gone. Eight or ten
lonely years to be endured.

"We won't leave any one here," he
said, "We must find some other way."

"I wish to God we could."

"It wouldn't be human," Syno went
on. "One man here? Alone? I couldn't,
myself, not with all the toughening I've
had to the void. I wouldn't ask any man
to do it."

CHAPTER SIX

Alone

The completed ring looked something
like a turntable fused to the steel
hull. Everything ready, Syno stood with
Verna under the gaping wounds of the
Flash, waiting for the signal that would
set her dynamo humming. Behind the
helmet goggles his eyes were obstinate as
steel, his figure ridiculously bulbulous.

Kalan had been right. There was in-
deed no other way to step up power,
gauge it, shoot it to the coils. The two
powers must synchronize, and Syno, be-
cause he was built that way, stayed.

Olmstead signaled airlocks were to be
sealed. Kalan waved a last good-bye
from the control room, high overhead as
a tenth story window.

Sy touched Verna's sleeve. She did
not move. She was quite rigidly erect, re-
miniding him of that day long ago when
he had said good-bye to her in the Flash.
The same defiance, the same determined
posture of soldierly attention.

"Hurry," he said, "She's all set. Some
day you'll come back for me."

"Us," she insisted. "If you stay, I do.
That's final, Sy."

He nodded assent, shut down the mo-
tor, and together they entered the locks
of the Cycloid.

Olmstead met them truculently.
"What's wrong?"

"Someone else will have to touch her
off. Verna won't leave me. She can't
stay here."

"Who then?" Olmstead flared.
"That's what I'd like to know."
"I did it myself," old Skywash blus-
tered, and pulled down an air suit.

Syno shook his head. "No," he said.
"I couldn't allow it, old friend. We'll
have to try some other way."

"That's all been gone over a dozen
times," Olmstead growled.

"Then it's up to you, or Kalan. You
two can draw straws. I won't let Verna
stay here."

Olmstead eyed him scornfully, "You
sure it's to protect the lady?" he sneered.

Syno, without replying, entered the
control room. "If it demands their life,
they'll discover a way out," he assured
himself.
SHIP-BELLS struck softly. Midnight.

For hours Syno had been sitting be-
Configurations that had patterned the low
heavens above the saw-tooth peaks were
now high toward the zenith. Twice he
had tiptoed down the street gray corridor
to Verna’s room, to find a thread of light
still bright under her door. When the
last chimes died into silence, he tiptoed
a third time. The light was gone.

He stole past her door into Kalan’s
room, switched on a light. Kalan sat up
with a start.

“Get Olmstead and arouse a crew.”
Kalan’s drowsy bewilderment fell
away. “You mean . . . .”
“You didn’t think I intended anything
else?”

Kalan slid his feet to the floor and
pulled on slippers. Without waiting to
get out of pajamas he followed Syno into
the hall. They woke Olmstead, then Sky-
wash and Jensen. When there was a
stealthy stir all over the ship, Syno went
out the airlock that was nearest the con-
trol room, crawled down the catwalk,
reached hard metallic ground.

The iron world had never seemed so
repulsive, so inert, so ghostly. The quick-
silver sea was cold plate glass, under
which had drowned all warm and living
things.

He hurried across the darkness to the
wounded Flash, groped a familiar corri-
dor to the engine room, switched a light,
closed the starter, opened the feeders.
Motors purred with powerful rhythm,
and the generator hum gained a higher
note.

He hurried back into the starlight. A
bright square of light was now high up
in the hulk of the Cycloid, like a single
bright window in a dark warehouse. A
green eye bloomed in the black prow. His
signal. There was a man in the window,
Kalan or Olmstead, waiting with great
eagerness to escape.

Syno grasped the handle of a great
copper knife. He drew himself erect,
kissed the tips of his fingers and tossed
it across the darkness which swallowed
Verna from his eyes, then with his free
hand he gave her the old salute space men
reserve for those who dare the void. With
that he drew the blade into its nest.

A hundred induction coils howled at
the resisting ring.

His heart seemed dead within him as
the ship ploughed up and up, now he saw
her por放出 lights skimming above the lode-
stone sierras, then she was gone, with
only the fires of her exhausts flashing far
off like sheet lightning from a distant
mass of shadowy cloud. Then even these
were gone out.

Gone! Earthward, soon at faster than
light. Verna, back to the earth she loved,
to a new career, perhaps, freed of the tug
of the unrelenting Opes and the domi-
nence of himself.

He picked up a welding rod, quite with-
out reason, and walked slowly across the
dry magnetic sands to the remaining air-
tight compartments that were to be his
home. Entering an airlock, he left it open,
glad to allow the bracing oxygen of the
night to clear the stagnation of artificial
decarbonization.

He opened the inner door. This was
self pity. He would not indulge in it. He
puckered his mouth but could not whistle.
He laughed aloud, and it frightened him.
Quickly he ran into the room and shut the
doors against it. He switched on lights,
then halted dead in his tracks, a chill of
utterable horror trickling from his
spine to prickle his flesh.

The ship was gone, irretrievably, but
Verna hadn’t gone with it. She was there,
across the room, standing ridiculously at
attention, smiling as though she had done
something big.

“Didn’t you think I knew what you
were up to?” she said.

THE END
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Tales to Come

THE city looming before the Thuban was quite extensive, and entirely covered by a system of crystal domes, tinted in various shades and hues. The aggregation looked like a mass of iridescent soap-bubbles. From a cleared area to one side of it, silvery objects could be seen rising into the air, hundreds of them.

They were planes, planes of the primitive airborne type used so extensively on Earth during the pre-rocket days.

The leading plane swooped by the bow ports, and as it did a very old man leaned out over the side and made a gesture with his arm for the Thuban to follow him. The startled pilots of the space ship had only a glimpse of the steely blue eyes, the glinting baid head, and the whiskers flying flat in the hurricane of the propellor stream; but the ancient, to make sure he was understood, went into a vertical loop and swooped by again, repeating his signal.

"Holy Comets!" exclaimed Daxon. "Father Time himself has come out to meet us!" But when the Earthmen peered out the ports at the machines pounding along at their sides every pilot they could see was the same bewhiskered, venerable type as the patriarch who led them.

Quickly the space ship came to a landing, and the crew tumbled out, anxious to meet the inhabitants of this far planet.

The inhabitants, all old, moving with creaking slowness, came tottering and stumbling toward the ship. Presently a number of small cars sped across the field, rolling to a screaming stop just behind the assembled octogenerians. A lane was opened in their ranks, and a wheel chair containing a venerable patriarch was haltingly pushed through it to where Captain Yphon was standing. The seated old man coughed, painfully cleared his throat, and said in a high, cracked voice: "Wallaika Muthbirn!"

As the old man spoke, Daxon whispered to Captain Yphon, "He's speaking English! He said, 'Welcome, Earthborn!'"

There was another interruption, and four old men in white coats came up. They commenced to touch the crew of the Thuban, grasping their wrists, peering into their eyes, feeling the texture of their skins. When the examinations were complete, Daxon and Elgar, the youngest of the party, were disregarded while the crowd of ancients grouped around the older Earthmen. "Cumithius," said the patriarch to the older Thubanites.

"Come with you? Surely," said Captain Yphon. "But what about those two?"

The patriarch turned to look at them. "No, not those," he said, in his slurred speech. "Leave them here. They're too young!"

And from all around the tatterdemalion group of ancients came the echo, "Too young!"

The three-part novel of the adventures of the crew of the Thuban on the planet of senility, "Quickscsands of Youthwardness," begins in the October issue of Astonishing Stories. In the same issue are, "Personality Plus" by Ray Cummings, "Stepson of Space" by Raymond Z. Gallun, and four other science fiction stories. The October issue will appear August 25th.

104
Return Engagement

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Here I am again, but feeling quite sober this time. Say, you could have sent me reeling with the flip of a page when I saw that you printed my first letter. Thanks!

I have just finished reading the June Astonishing, and from what I can make out of it and the previous issue, it seems you intend keeping up good work. Perhaps a commentary is now in order. I have before me the three copies of Astonishing, and Vol. 1 of Super Science.

Somehow or other, “The Space-Beasts” was too bizarre for my stomaching it. I would say it belongs in some weird-tale rag. “Murder from Mars”—I read it three times. Judge for yourself! “Master Control” was a mighty good example of what I call science fiction—but no doubt I am prejudiced by my liking for stories dealing with the “rights” of human beings. If I could have had my way, “Salvage of Space” would not have been printed. Just run-of-the-mill hash. Please do not print “big names” for their effect. I don’t give a hoot who writes a story. It must be good. I was rather disappointed in “Callistan Menace.” Say, Isaac, don’t tell me you are “hacking”? “Stepsons of Mars” had the human angle, and not a bad tale. More in that vein. Sure, keep up with the science articles.

Next. “He Conquered Venus”—ain’t it true! Good. “Joshua’s—”, “The Devil’s —,” and “Improbability”—too mediocre for my liking. Rather pointless, placed in order of goodness. “A Miracle in Time” is a miracle. Consider the possibilities. Makes one wonder if he is his own grandchild—or sumpin! “Children of Zeus” could have been worked into a longer, better story, good as it was . . . Now, then, I have a bone to pick with you. I have been working for the last two eons on a tale. I was sure that all you editors would bid against each other when I submitted it for publication. Then along comes Ross Rocklynne with “Darkness” and spoils the originality of my yarn! He must be a clairvoyant, and have seen my manuscript. (I won’t essay a guess as to how he deciphered my longhand hieroglyphics.) Which just means that I will have to put a new twist in my story—but enough. “Darkness” certainly takes the prize as being the most refreshing story to appear anywhere in science fiction in at least a year!

I haven’t even had a good look at No. 2 Super Science, for my moocher-friends scooped it away as soon as I had planted 15¢ on the counter for it. But here are my viewpoints on the first. “World Reborn” probably best in issue. “Lotus Engine” just as good. It gives a new slant to interplanetaries. “Guyon 45X”—villain-girl-hero-suspense-drama—bah! “Phantom from Space” in class with “Master Control”. I must have been sick
when I read “Gravity Island”, for I didn’t care for it. Ditto “Trans-Plutonian Trap” & “Stitch in Time”...

I heartily approve of the two-way readers’ column in Vwpts. Keep all departments. Book-film-music reviews; science articles; have at least one good poem per issue; run a contest at least three or four times per year; I would prefer smooth edges, but if it’s a question of smooth edges versus more pages, give me the latter. Sure, come out monthly.

By the way, here’s a suggestion. Take it at face value. Have a super-colossal Super-Science-Astonishing of 244 pages. Make it a monthly. Reason: most of us who buy one, buy the other... Have at least one long story—per issue—somewhere about 40-50 pp. I like serials in no more than 2 parts—if the mag is a monthly.

Gosh, this garbled mess took up four pp. of longhand. But, just a word or fifty more,—I was in a bookstore the other day, and I heard “science fiction”—I pricked up my ears and glared around. There was another one! Naturally, I introduced myself. Bill Patton is also a sci-fi-fan. That makes about a dozen I know. I am going to get the gang together and see if I can start a branch of The Science Fictioneers here in Calgary.

Now, I’m just about finished—but take warning. It matters little if this never sees the columns of Viewpoints—but if you intend printing it, I will ray you from here to Canopus if you cut out a single word! You’ll hear from me again!—Fred Holobow, General Delivery, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

More “Jameson” Coming

Editor, Astonishing Stories:

The illustrations keep the June issue of Astonishing Stories from being definitely above par. The only two artists that are worth keeping are Hannes Bok and Fox.

Best story of the issue, in my opinion, was “Into the Darkness.” I see that you have a Professor Jameson story scheduled for the next issue. Here’s hoping it will be only the first of many more.

I’m another one of those guys in favor of a two-way readers’ column. Most of the readers are for it, I’m sure.

If it weren’t for the drawings (better do something about that), Astonishing Stories would be far superior to a certain 20c mag I know of.—Philip Bronson, 224 West 6th Street, Hastings, Minnesota.

We Can Try!

Dear Mr. Pohl:

I had a letter all prepared to send you yesterday, enveloped, stamped, and everything. It was to ask you to bring back some of my favorite old series of science fiction — principally Professor Jameson.

Then I noticed that you had one coming up—and I had to destroy my letter, luckily unmailed. Thanks.

Beside the Professor, though, I want to recommend Hawk Carise, Tumithak, Arcot-Wade-Morey, and Dr. Bird—all great chains of stories, all long regretted by science fiction fans. Can you do something about getting their creators to continue with them?—R. L. Agora, Bethesda, Maryland.

“Astonishingly Good”

Dear Editor:

Astonishing Stories continues to be astonishingly good. I hope I’ll be able to say the same for forthcoming issues of Super Science Stories.

Best stories are “Into the Darkness,” certainly an unusual tale; “Children of Zeus”; “Joshua’s Battering Ram;” and “Improbability.” Least satisfying, but not bad, is “The Devil’s Pocket.”
If "4SJ's" Ackermanese is phonetic, so is ideographic Chinese. If he is really interested in a simple, practical, phonetic spelling, applicable to English, he might look at the first few pages of a beginner's text of Gregg shorthand, disregarding special brief forms and abbreviations. But he probably won't.

I'm glad to see that a "Professor Jameson" story is forthcoming. I always enjoyed that series.

The possibility of serials in the near future in Astonishing Stories is good news, especially if it means that the magazine is going to come out monthly.

I should like to see the top three or four stories, as selected by the readers, listed in succeeding issues. Also, brief editorial comments on some of the letters.

The absence of numerous departments continues to be one of the magazine's best qualities. May your success continue!—D. B. Thompson, 3136 Q Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

"Untold Joy"

Dear Editor:

As an ardent sf. fan and reader, I have undertaken to write you concerning your new magazine, Astonishing Stories. Imagine my surprise and untold joy on seeing a new sf. mag with a beautiful "10¢" mark on the cover. Well, after reading Astonishing Stories, I was very pleasantly surprised and thrilled. For a new magazine with only a couple of issues published, you have done marvelously. To my disappointment, I missed your first issue, but as for the second publication:

The thing that impressed me most was your departments. Every one of them was perfect. "Editoramblings" and "Tales to Come" are very good features. Keep them in the same position in the magazine that they now occupy. "Fan Magazines" and "Book and Film Reviews" are swell and
original features. They don’t need any change at all. “Viewpoints” is one of the best-conducted letter-to-the-editor columns I have ever seen in any magazine. But you ought to have editorial comments to some of the letters. Other readers beside the letter writers themselves like to know the ed’s “Viewpoints” on letters.

Kalevsky’s scientific article, “Water, Water Everywhere,” was very good, and I think you ought to have such an article in every issue. But with each article you ought to have some kind of illustration. A drawing to accompany the title, and maybe some small drawings in the article itself.

As for the illustrations in the April issue: The cover was pretty good. Who did it? Whoever did should use a little less sketching and more detail in his figures. The machine that occupies the upper right portion of the cover really has more detail than anything else. But the girl is pretty. The interiors are fair, but there is plenty of room for improvement. Lasker and Bok are not bad at all. The interiors are not very accurate in regard to their stories. Let’s have a little more cooperation between the artists and the authors.

I won’t say much about the stories this month, because I’ve written too much already, and also because they all ranked about the same, which was rather good. None of them were outstanding, but that is something no magazine has ever achieved in its second issue. They are certainly far above the average for a second issue, but most of them were too short for their plots. Vincent’s “Master Control” was about the best. What happened to Kummer? “Salvage of Space,” while good, was not up to his usual yarn.

All in all, Astonishing Stories is without a doubt one of the best science fiction magazines on the market. More power to you! I know your progress will be super indeed, and I know you will acquire
many new fans throughout the world. You have one thoroughly confirmed fan in myself. Orchids to Astonishing!—Jon F. McLeod (QX-1744), 1225 Willow Court, Jacksonville, Florida.

Suggestion

Dear Editor:

Put me down as requesting a very important change which all your other requesters seem to have completely forgotten. I ask—nay, beg!—that you trim the edges on Astonishing! Very likely you can’t afford to do it for the ten-cent price, but I’m sure that a lot of us readers would be willing to pay an extra nickel for neatly-trimmed edges and possibly a few more pages. Especially those who collect science fiction, because untrimmed edges get all torn up in a very short time, while the smooth variety last on and on.—Mayer Waite, R.F.D. 1, Haarlem, Pennsylvania.

Threat or Promise?

Dear Mr. Pohl:

A sense of justice and a well-merited reputation of being a guy who always admits he’s wrong when he is wrong (which, I might point out, is not as often as it might be) prompts me to admit that friend D. B. Thompson was perfectly right about that discrepancy in my yarn, “The Callistan Menace.”

Nor was it a typographical error. I caught the mistake myself when I went through the yarn in the magazine and ran to my carbon copy of the mss. to see if I had been done dirt by the editorial board. To my horror, I found the same discrepancy there, thus placing the blame squarely on my own broad, sturdy shoulders (who laughed just then?).

It can, however, be corrected easily enough. Peewee Wilson led the second expedition. The seventh was led by a man whom we will call Fortescue Xeres Xilch. Now everything is clear.

As to how I came to do such a thing, I can’t say. I think—I say I think—that I’m taking just a wee drappy too much opium lately. Maybe not, though. Maybe it’s just the pickled herring.

In any case, it was up to the editor—and I do mean you, Mr. Pohl—to catch a tiny mistake like that. We writers are too much enwrapped in the broad strokes of genius to pay attention to minute details.

Anyway....

I’m gratified at the nice reception “Half-Breed” received. I’ve been thinking of a sequel, you know, and kind words from the gallery are just the things that are liable to make me lose my head and write one. Then the fans will be sorry.

Of course, sequels are rarely as good as the original (for argument’s sake, we’ll call the original good), and I’ve never tried writing a sequel before. If I can think up any more advance alibis, I’ll send them in, so that when I finally get around to concocting “Half-Breeds on Venus” I can duck the brick-bats more easily.—Isaac Asimov, 174 Windsor Place, Brooklyn, New York.

Wants Bok

Dear Editor:

Just a brief word to compliment you on the latest issue of Astonishing. I particularly liked Ross Rocklynne’s “Into the Darkness.” It surely was unusual and unexpected.

Hannes Bok’s illustrations were appropriately beautiful. When does he do a cover? You should allow him more room in your magazine, he is the only one I like of the conglomeration you now feature. Or am I prejudiced? Anyway, a cover done with the famous Bok blues and his mastery of proportion, centralization, and symbolism would profoundly improve your covers.
I’m getting into the habit of reading your mag now. At first I only bought it for my collection but now, you see, you have made me interested. Thank you!—Ray Bradbury, Los Angeles, California.

Suggests Authors

Cheerio, Chum,

I wish to second the motion of reader Harold G. Schaeffer in the June issue.

Among the other authors I want to see in future issues are:

A. R. Steber, Morris J. Steele, Harvey Emmerson, Dave Vern, Derwin Lesser, Ransom Reade, Don A. Stuart, Karl van Kampen, and perhaps Will Garth, if you can catch him in a certain individual mood!—Bob Tucker, P. O. Box 280, Bloomington, Illinois.

“Near-Classic”

Dear Mr. Pohl:

You should receive a medal. You are the only editor who hasn’t hacked my letters to pieces. Congratulations again.

At last, a story worth reading. “Into the Darkness” is one of the best science fiction stories I have ever had the pleasure of reading. For a long time I have been eagerly hoping some author would write such a story, and my wish has finally been granted. I label it a “near-classic.” It lacks just one tiny undefinable something—that is all that keeps it from being a “true-classic.” Even the girl-friend liked it, and she hates most sciencefiction.

Fearn’s story was enjoyable. Tyne’s bombastic personality appealed to me. “Children of Zeus” comes next.

“Improbability” will come next because of its new twist; the others as follows: “The Devil’s Pocket,” “Joshua’s Batter ing Ram,” and “A Miracle in Time.”

Yes, give us a two-way column. Short comments and answers by you would give “Viewpoints” a much more familiar and sincere ring.—Art R. Sehnert, Secretary-Director, The Tennessee Fictioneer, 791 Maury, Memphis, Tennessee.

Forum

Dear Editor:

I am glad to note that you have put the question of a two-way readers’ column squarely up to the readers themselves. Let us hope that the replies favoring same will be large enough to convince you. A glance at some of the others in the field will show you that the editor’s replies and general comment in no way detract from the readers’ letters or from the interest of the column itself.

I thought that Mayorga’s cover was attractive, which same can be said of his interior art work. He and Bok, of your artists, satisfy, but Klono preserve us from the others which mar your pages.

Best stories in this issue seem to be “Into the Darkness,” “He Conquered Venus,” and “Joshua’s Batter ing Ram.” If you go monthly in the near future I hope you’ll add serials to Astonishing.—Robert W. Lowndes, 2574 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

Against ’Em

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Unlike most of the others of your readers, I am against the proposal to have you answer the letters in Astonishing Stories. As you said in your editorial, the whole magazine reflects your particular “Viewpoints,” and any direct messages you may have for the reader can be gotten from your editorials. Besides, I stand for not cutting down the column by adding your comments, but increasing it, by eliminating the captions over each letter, printing them in smaller type if necessary, and devoting more pages to them.—Murray Sanford, 2301 Radleigh, Colon, C. Z.
FAN MAGAZINES

(A review of the current crop of amateur fantasy publications.)

SHANGRI-LA, 10c, bi-monthly, published by the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, P. O. Box 6475, Met Station, Los Angeles, California. Large and beautifully printed, it is up to the high standard of the Los Angeles group of fan magazines.

SNIDE "The Thud and Blunder Magazine", 10c, occasional, published by Damon Knight, 803 Columbia Street, Hood River, Oregon. Witty and entertaining; most enjoyable feature of the first issue was a list of "The Pro Magazines," designed to acquaint the reader with the existence of "a group of struggling little publications known as pro magazines."

VOICE OF THE IMAGINATION, 10c, bi-monthly, published by Forrest J. Ackerman, P. O. Box 6475, Met Station, Los Angeles, California. Letters and nothing else—except one reprinted short story—make up the Voice. If you're interested in what the fans are saying to each other—you'll be interested in this.

MERCURY, 5c, monthly, published by J. J. Fortier, 1836 39th Avenue, Oakland, California. Lively news-sheet, supplying information about the Northern West Coast fans. About the only section of the country without its own fan newspaper now is the Deep South.

FANTASY DIGEST, 10c, occasional, published by Ted Dikty, 3136 Smith Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The hugest of the fan magazines, it is making a comeback after a prolonged lapse in publishing.

THE COMET, 10c, occasional, published by Tom Wright, R. F. D. 1, Mar-
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112
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