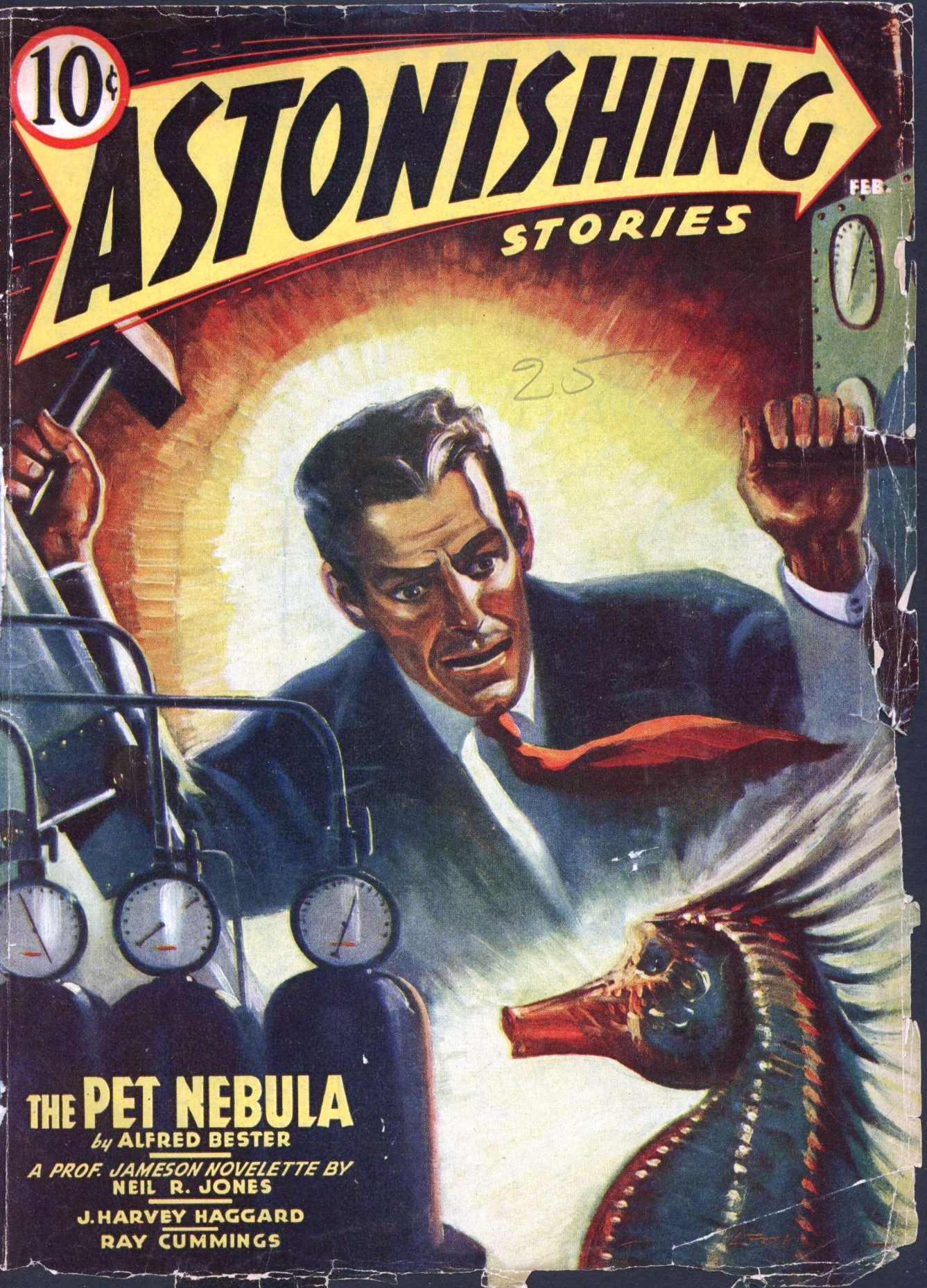
10¢

ASTONISHING STORIES

FEB.



THE PET NEBULA
by ALFRED BESTER

A PROF. JAMESON NOVELETTE BY
NEIL R. JONES

J. HARVEY HAGGARD

RAY CUMMINGS

TREMENDOUS PRICE SLASH

Genuine OFFICE SIZE de luxe MODEL

UNDERWOOD No. 5

with Late Improved Features

$102.50 MODEL 1/3 MFRS. ORIG. PRICE

Now $31.85 CASH PRICE

or on Easy Terms of 60¢ a WEEK

Yours! THE GREATEST TYPEWRITER BARGAIN EVER OFFERED! Actually Less than 1/3 MFRS. ORIG. PRICE!

NO MONEY DOWN

NO OBLIGATION. SEND NO MONEY — Try Underwood No. 5 for 10 full days in your home —without risk. See for yourself the neat, perfect work it does. Decide without salesman's pressure—without hurry.

10 DAY TRIAL

SEE BEFORE YOU BUY — Test, Inspect, Compare. This Underwood No. 5 is shipped to you on its merit alone. It must sell itself—must convince you of its tremendous value.

2 YEAR GUARANTEE

Our 2 yr. guarantee is your assurance of satisfaction. *You must be satisfied* that this is the biggest value ever offered in a typewriter.

Easiest Terms Only 60c a Week!

Only 60c a week soon pays for your typewriter at this low price. Use machine as you pay for it. Only $2.50 a month—less than the cost of renting an inferior machine. **Order Now!**

International Typewriter Exch., Chicago, Ill.

Buy direct from us and save over $70.00 on genuine office model Underwood No. 5. Rebuilt and refinished like brand new. Full 2 year guarantee. *Thousands paid $102.50 for this model,* but it's yours for only $31.85 cash or on Easy Terms of 60c a week. Pay No Money Down — See before you buy on 10 Day Trial. **Free typing course** included with offer.

UNDERWOOD — The World's Most Popular Typewriter!

Underwood—the typewriter recognized as the finest, strongest built! Think of this value! World Famous office size Underwood No. 5 completely rebuilt with late improved features—Yours for less than 1/3 the mfrs. orig. price. **This Underwood No. 5 has all standard equipment** — 84 character, 4 row keyboard, 2 color ribbon, back spacer, automatic reverse, tabulator, shift lock, etc. A perfect all purpose typewriter — stands hard, long service—No risk—You See Before You Buy — Fully guaranteed and backed by 30 years of fair dealing.

WIDE 14" CARRIAGES

Wide carriage machines for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc., only $3.00 extra with order. Takes paper 14" wide, has 12" writing line. **A Real Buy!**

EXTRA VALUE!

ROLL-A-WAY SECRETARIAL TYPEWRITER STAND

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $2.00 extra added to your account. *Quality built. Note all its convenient features.*

International Typewriter Exchange Dept. 139
231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.

Send Underwood No. 5 (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days trial. If I keep it, I will pay $2.50 per month until easy term price ($36.35) is paid. If I am not satisfied, I can return it express collect. ☐ 10" carriage ☐ 14" carriage ($3.00 extra) ☐

For Quick Shipment Give Occupation and Reference

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Check for typewriter stand ($2.00 extra). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

FREE!

Complete home study course of Van Zandt Touch Typing system. Carefully illustrated. Written for home use.

HURRY-Limited Quantity on this Sale!

I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio, Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $5 to $10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio and Television Offer You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 1BS9,
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 1BS9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

10¢ ASTONISHING STORIES

VOL. 2 FEBRUARY, 1941 NO. 3

NOVELETTES

THE PROFESSOR SPLITS by J. Harvey Haggard 6
Just a school-boy's unfinished experiment—until the Professor completed it!

COSMIC DERELICT by Neil R. Jones 82
The death of the patient isn't the only danger involved in brain-transposition!

SERIAL

QUICKSANDS OF YOUTHWARDNESS by Malcolm Jameson 42
Conclusion
Athanata—planet where age is immortal, and youth cannot live!

SHORT STORIES

HE WASN'T THERE! by Hugh Raymond 22
If a man offers you 10 years of time-travel for 10 cents—turn him down!

THE PET NEBULA by Alfred Bester 33
A playful nebula is nice around the house—if your life and property are insured!

THE KING'S EYE by James MacCreigh 63
Life is violent on Venus—and a death must be paid for by a death.

MAGNUS' DISINTEGRATOR by Ray Cummings 73
John Magnus' life was worth little—but his death would be of great value!

SPECIAL FEATURES

FANTASY REVIEWS 4

VIEWPOINTS 40

EDITORAMBLINGS 81

Published bi-monthly by Fictioneers, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter January 11, 1940, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879.
Bi-monthly price per copy 10c; 6 issues, $.60. Printed in the U.S.A.

THOUSANDS NOW PLAY WHO NEVER THOUGHT THEY COULD

Read this typical letter from one of our students

YES, just like thousands of others, who thought music was hard, this man got the surprise of his life when he tried this easy way to learn music at home. And no wonder! Instead of months of tedious study and practice, he found himself actually playing real tunes in the very first few weeks!

But read this unsolicited letter for yourself:

"I didn't even dream that I could actually learn to play without a teacher, because I had always heard that it couldn't be done. I couldn't afford a teacher so I didn't think it would do me any harm to take your course.

"When I received the lessons I took the instantaneous note finder and struck the notes right off. You can imagine my surprise when after three or four weeks I found that I could actually play real tunes.

"Now, when I play for people they will hardly believe that I learned to play so well with just a correspondence course in so short a time. I am getting to the point where even the hardest music holds no terrors for me."

(Signed) * H. C. S., *Calif.*

FREE PROOF it's fun to learn the U. S. School Way . . . and it costs less than 7c A DAY

Wouldn't Take $1000 for Course
The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.
*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Plays on Radio
I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.
* W. H. S., Alabama.

Easy to Understand
The manner in which the various lessons are explained is very helpful as well as interesting. It makes one feel that the explanation is being given in person.
* W. W., Florida.

* *Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures posed by Professional models.*

Here's the best news of all! By this easy, modern method, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument, right at home, in your spare time, for less than SEVEN CENTS A DAY! And that covers *everything*, including valuable sheet music. No extras of any kind. What's more, it doesn't take years to learn this way. You learn to play in much LESS time than you probably ever dreamed possible.

It's easy as A-B-C. It's FUN! You learn to play by *playing*. If interested, send at once for the Free Print and Picture Sample that shows HOW and the handsome illustrated booklet that gives complete information. Just mail the coupon. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) **U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, 3672 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.**

FREE PRINT & PICTURE SAMPLE

U. S. School of Music, 3672 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument indicated below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and your illustrated Print and Picture Sample.

(Do you have instrument.....)

Piano	Mandolin	Trombone	Piano Accordion
Violin	Saxophone	Banjo	Plain Accordion
Guitar	Clarinet	Ukulele	Hawaiian Guitar
Cello	Trumpet	Cornet	Other Instrument

Name .....

Street .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if under 16 years of age.

FANTASY REVIEWS

Fantasy Books

THE DEVIL AND THE DOCTOR by David H. Keller. Simon & Schuster, New York. $2.50.

Dr. David H. Keller is widely known as the author of over a hundred published science fiction and fantasy yarns. He couldn't write a really bad story if he tried.

This one centers around the experiences of a middle-aged small town Pennsylvania doctor with the familiar Kellerian name of Jacob Hubler. Dr. Hubler is a fairly contented widower with one unique quality—he is completely open-minded and without prejudice. And it was because of that that a youngish lanky chap named Robin Goodfellow chose to drop in one day for tea.

Robin is known to the general public as the Devil. But because Dr. Hubler has an open mind, he was willing to hear Robin's side of the story. It develops that the Devil is not a bad sort at all, he's really the brother of God who is on the outs with his brother. His evil reputation is all due to a terrific propaganda campaign waged by his brother. Some day when mankind evolves to full comprehension, the two brothers will be reconciled.

Goodfellow proceeds to help his new found friend Hubler by granting his dreams and desires. However, this arouses the superstition of the townsfolk and trouble ensues. Dr. Keller has written a fine story here and we heartily recommend it to all.

—Donald A. Wollheim

INVASION by Hendrik Willem Van Loon. Harcourt, Brace. New York. $2.00.

Hendrik Willem Van Loon made a hit decades ago with his "Outline of Mankind" and similar works in which he explains history, geography and other matters in words of one syllable for the edification of children and those adults who think like them. Of late he has been writing articles on world affairs in a slightly enraged tone.

"Invasion" is part of his anger. Written for his usual audience, it tells all about the great Nazi invasion of the U. S. in 1960, when parachutists landed in Vermont and Mr. Van Loon, family and associates fought a stiff fight as they retreated with grim determination.

There have been and still are lots of good stirring tales of invasions and threats to America. This isn't one of them.

—Donald A. Wollheim

Fantasy Film

FANTASIA—a Walt Disney Production

First—let us dispense with superlatives and comparisons. There is nothing with which to compare "Fantasia"; it is entirely different from anything Walt Disney, or anyone else, has done. And too many superlatives have been heaped on things not a tenth as good as this motion picture. It is unique—literally. Perhaps it should not even be called a motion picture. It is an experience.

The only familiar figure in "Fantasia" is Mickey Mouse, who appears in Dukas' "The Sorcerer's Apprentice". The others are entirely new—cupids, dinosaurs, pixies, Satan—all interpret, without a word of dialogue, Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D Minor, Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite, Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring", Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours", Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain" and Schubert's "Ave Maria". There are no sound effects that are not heard in the music.

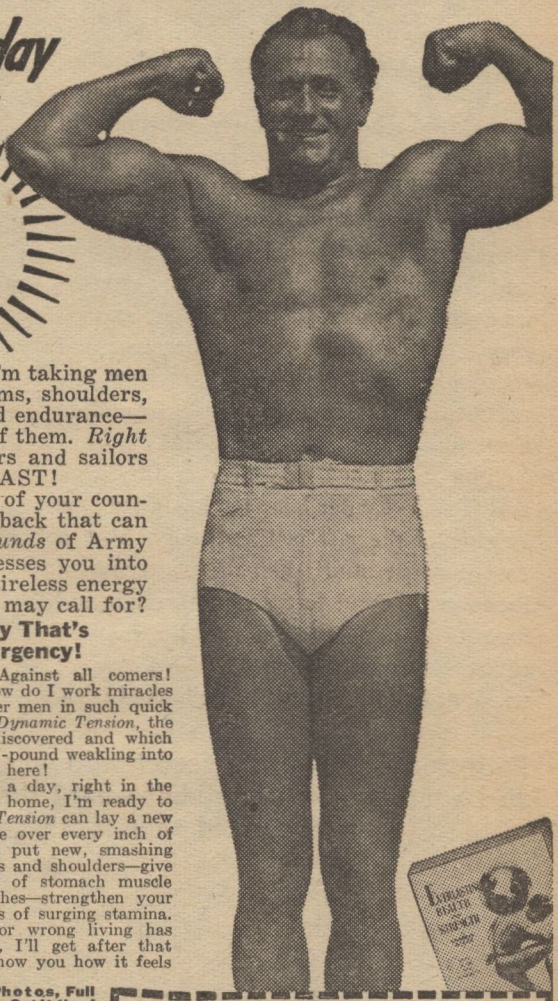
Because "Fantasia" requires two projectors—one each for the picture and the music—it will run as a road-show at only 67 of the nation's cities, at specially equipped theaters.

—Dick Wilson

I'm Drafting Men

-WHO WANT NEW BODIES!

and in just 15 minutes a day I'll prove I can make you A NEW MAN



I'M "TRADING-IN" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind", and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. *Right now* I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

How do YOU measure up for the defense of your country? Have YOU the strong shoulders and back that can haul for miles Uncle Sam's standard *61 pounds* of Army man's equipment? Or if home defense presses you into service, have you the he-man strength and tireless energy that double-shifts of working and watching may call for?

Now As Never Before You Need a Body That's Ready for ANY Job in National Emergency!

"GOD BLESS AMERICA"—yes, we all pray that. But it's the BODIES of America's MANPOWER that must make that blessing safe. Where do YOU fit in? Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? *Or do you want the help I can give you*—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-lb. weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in such quick time? The answer is *Dynamic Tension*, the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *Dynamic Tension* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you *inside*, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

These Are Atlas MEN!

5 Inches of New Muscle!

"My arms increased 1½", chest 2½", forearm ⅞".—C. S., W. Va.

What a Difference!

"Have put 3½" on chest (normal) and 2½" expanded."—F. S., N. Y.

FREE BOOK 61 Photos, Full Facts. Get it Now!

I don't ask you to take my say-so for it. I'm ready to PROVE it with actual photos of men I have re-built. What *Dynamic Tension* did for them let me prove it can do for you. In just 15 MINUTES A DAY. See how. See RESULTS. See my book! It's yours FREE, but you must act AT ONCE. Times are moving too fast to put it off a single day. Mail this coupon NOW to me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-B, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-B,
115 East 23rd St., New York, N.Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength"*—and full details of your TRIAL OFFER.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City..... State.....

THE PROFESSOR SPLITS

By J. Harvey Haggard

CHAPTER ONE

Trial and Error

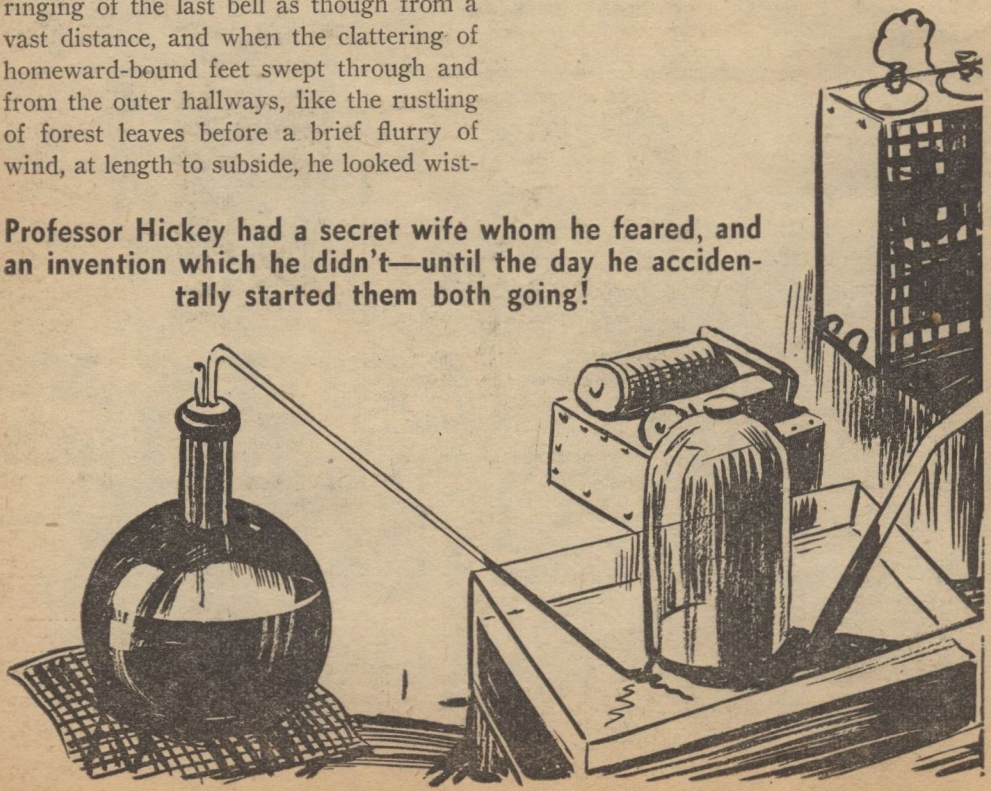
"OUR experiment is a failure." This mournful soliloquy echoed hollowly throughout the empty classroom, even as a pudgy hand toyed idly with a taut length of piano wire—referred to in the textbook as a "sonometer"—stretched between supports and suspended over a row of tiny electromagnets. It was a foolish student experiment that had to do with vibrations and harmonics, as foolish as that other experiment spinning around and around in the mind of the thinker.

John L. Hickey, professor of Physics I and II in Centerdale High, heard the ringing of the last bell as though from a vast distance, and when the clattering of homeward-bound feet swept through and from the outer hallways, like the rustling of forest leaves before a brief flurry of wind, at length to subside, he looked wistfully at the experiment abandoned on the nearmost student desk, which was occupied by one of the more brilliant and interested lads. He wished that the abandonment of his own experiment were as easy as that.

He was a rather short and abbreviated man (what there was of him) was Professor Hickey, with a wellworn grey suit that had seen many pressings, a pudgy head like a bleached summer apple, whose thinning hair was fast becoming but a mere halo, and whose eyes were enlarged by enormous horn-rimmed glasses.

"What's that? What did you say, John?" queried a woman's voice, and he jumped as though shot. His pensive mood did little to enhance his stout and fortyish appearance.

Professor Hickey had a secret wife whom he feared, and an invention which he didn't—until the day he accidentally started them both going!



"It won't work out," he said mournfully, strumming the wire till it whined. "Vibrations and er—overtones. Er—"

"John, you didn't mean that. You meant —us!"

He had scarcely heard the quick opening and shutting of the door, the click of a night lock. A prim woman had come into the room, laid several notebooks on the front table, and was moving toward him like an automaton.

"Miss Moon, er—I mean—Mrs. Hic—Hickey," he stammered and looked guiltily around. Of course they were alone, but it sounded so odd for him to call her that. A month now, and they'd been man and wife. Their marriage had been secret, a confidential trial marriage which each felt it best to conceal while still in the tryout stage. . . .

"John," said the secret Mrs. Hickey to her spouse. "I want you to kiss me."

HICKEY shuddered, but did not seek to evade the indomitable command in her voice. It was bad medicine, but he had to take it. Lydia Moon had lines as restricted as though she were encased in a straightjacket. Her freckled face was entirely devoid of cosmetics, and her cornhued hair was drawn tightly in a mannish bob. She was as practical and unassuming as corned beef and cabbage, but every member of the faculty conceded that she was a good teacher of Biology I.

Closing his eyes, Hickey pursed his lips and kissed her experimentally. After the swift peck at her rigid lips, his dejection descended like a mantle.

"That," said Mrs. Hickey critically, and not trying to conceal the contempt in her voice, "wasn't like Clark Gable did it in 'Glorious Honeymoon'."

"Wasn't it?" demanded Professor Hickey in a disinterested tone, pretending an absorption in the whining shimmer of wire. Secretly he reflected that she was no Gloria Swanson either, that dazzling feminine creature who fairly exuded an innocent need for the protection of manly arms. But Hickey dreaded such conversations, and their unavoidable complications, and made no mention of it. He had done his miserable best to avoid the company of his trial bride the past few weeks. "It's a silly little idea, the kid had. And yet there's something to it. The wire is vibrating at low C. His idea was to magnetize the central coil, cause an overtone, with each end vibrating round the center, doubling the frequency. That would be an octave higher."

"Interesting, no doubt," said the plain Mrs. Hickey pointedly, "to you—"

Ignoring the mounting portent of her words that sounded almost like a threat, fearing the coming crisis which he had felt for endless days was surely coming, Professor Hickey wrinkled his brow, peered at the shimmer of metal string, and reached over toward a switch. Once thrown, an electric light bulb glowed in the circuit, and he pressed another switch, at which the keening of the wire mounted shrilly.

"See," said Professor Hickey with the air of an Edison. "An octave higher, my dear. Vibrations are peculiar things, aren't they? Now I can open circuits at thirds along the way, or fourths, or so on, and each time the magnetic interference will cause higher overtones, each an individual vibration of higher frequency."

"John Hickey!" shrilled Lydia Moon Hickey, placing her arms akimbo and letting her voice mount to combat the rising crescendo of vibrations. "We can't go on like this! You don't mean all those things you told me, about the moonlight, about the way it made silver in my hair."

Inwardly, Hickey's soul was shuddering to think of some of those things he had uttered. At the moment Mrs. Hickey had all of the appeal of a fire horse. He didn't dare to face the glare in her eyes, so he began shouting absurdities, crazy

things without meaning, without sense.

"Vibrations!" he squawked defensively. *"All matter is a form of vibration!* All things are vibrations, and vibrations are all susceptible to this halving, this multipl—"

"Jo-John! Jo-John!" squeaked the voice, abruptly becoming unbelievably keen. "Jo-John. H-Help m-me! Oooooh!"

THERE was terror in that, enough to cause even the dejected Professor Hickey to whirl. His eyes bulged, for the words were coming in a chorus. He took off his thick glasses, and as the world was blurred from his vision, wiped them and saw—not ONE Mrs. Hickey, but TWO of them, each half size, but both of them flinging arms up in desperate appeal.

Crazy things without meaning, without—

"Good gravy!" expostulated the astounded Professor Hickey, his eyes monstrous behind their lenses. "Her body—matter. Matter—vibrations. And those halving overtones. Those—"

He grabbed for the wire and realized now that its vibration was past hearing, was indeed too high for human ear to record. Suddenly the blur of wire vanished, to be replaced by a cherry red line, and his hand came away.

"Ouch!" managed Professor Hickey, controlling a desire to mutter more vitriolic things, and dancing around with a burned hand between his knees. "Something's wrong. It's vibrating at the frequency of heat waves, and no wire molecules should stand that! It's—"

There were four Mrs. Hickeys now, all dancing around him like an end chorus and pointing up at the table. It was all very kaleidoscopic and hysterical to the amazed little professor of science. The four faces became eight midget ones, all blanched with unbelievable terror. At last it soaked into his mind that he would have to get to that switch, and that in a hurry, before she went into more microbic fissions, but as he jumped forward some other blundering person staggered toward him, and he went down in a tumbling swearing heap from which he finally extricated himself.

Forgetting his pain, he sprang upright, then gasped, for the entire room seemed to be melting away from him in spurts and bounds. His own body was flickering vaguely as though in a spasmodic shadow dance, with faceted figures splitting away and tumbling back, and the gigantic square column directly in front of him could be nothing else than the—table leg!

He too was subdividing, and rapidly too. Over his head the ceiling was like a lofty darkish blue-hazed vault, and to all sides he saw thousands of the ill-mated Hickeys spawning and multiplying with hideous rapidity.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tiny Two

AT LENGTH his terror-bound eyes centered to the straight line of fire that was like a streak over his head, a sword slash across the sky, which had run the gamut of rainbow colors from red to hazy violet. Abruptly there sounded a sharp twang, and the violet shattered outward in cosmic spraying drops like a Fourth-of-July rocket bursting, and down on all sides came fiery meteors, which struck the floor and resolved into cooled, blackening globules.

Professor Hickey gasped. Before his very feet yawned a chasm, bottomless and unbelievable, and as he staggered over the very edge, he saw the straight-laced Mrs. Hickey faltering over the brim. Just as her knees buckled and she plunged for the depths, the abbreviated Professor Hickey acted impulsively, seized her waist, and dragged her back.

He deposited her in a heap on the queer corrugated terrain, feeling strangely and unspeakably gallant. Unbelievable though their adventure was—he had saved Mrs. Hickey's life, and it was in his right to feel justifiable pleasure in the feat. When he had seized his wife from the yawning maw, something had ripped, and as he stared down into the bewildered features of Mrs. Hickey he saw that her clothing was torn.

And, very oddly, she did not seem as straight-laced as before.

"John," cried Mrs. Hickey unbelievingly. "You—you saved my life." Then she seized for the gaps in her raiment, and the new Professor Hickey, who had been staring approvingly, wrenched his gaze away and grew crimson as he polished his glasses anew and cleared his throat.

"Never mind, Mrs.—Miss Moon," said Hickey restrainedly. "I'll call you Miss Moon, I suppose. Where we are I can only conjecture. I suppose that the mighty chasm over there is just a crack between floor boards, and that the matter vibrations of our bodies have been subdivided into numerous overtones by the oscillating etherical current of the series of electromagnetic impulses. But I'll get you out of this some way and we may call our rather unsuccessful, er—experiment to an end."

"Ooooh!" wailed the more feminine Miss Moon, giving up in her battle with shredded nylon and now appealingly helpless. "How will we ever get out of here?"

"Not by crying and yelping!" retorted Professor Hickey masterfully, and inspired by a confidence her terror was instilling. "See all those other bodies lying about? They are our overtones. And it will last as long as that current is surging through the electromagnets on that table."

GAINING their feet, they peered across the corrugations formed by deep worn grains in the wood, and across an expanse of oblong plateaus, divided at regular intervals by deep parallel crevices between the individual floor-boards, each now so monstrous in comparison to their new-found bodies. Piled here and there, helter-skelter and everywhere, were counterparts of their bodies, but each of them was now moveless. Everywhere they looked, the weird clumps of figures were in evidence, and of a number too vast to estimate.

"Those are part of our larger composite bodies," explained Professor Hickey, looking longingly at several of his nearer counterparts in the blue haze. "Luckily our ego, the spark of intelligence, or whatever it is, was indivisible, and thus only one of each of our tiny overtones knows sentient life."

After several worried moments, they found that each of the slumped bodies was alive and warm, with a slow pulse. Professor Hickey wiped perspiration from his brow and pointed to the black column of the table leg that soared so high in the blue haze that it was invisible at the upper heights.

"Our only chance," he said ruefully, "is that I can climb that and get to the switch. Apparently the alternating currents in the magnets are creating an etheric pulsation that will continue to alter the vibration of our bodies until it ceases to exist."

"But how are you going to jump the chasms?" demanded Miss Moon in dismay, for it was several floor-boards distance to the mastodonic table leg.

"Traverse the length of the board we're on, of course," explained Professor Hickey patiently. "Come along, if you're going with me, or if you want to, stay here. You might sit down and rest."

"Oh no," protested Miss Moon feelingly, springing to his side as he started off at a brisk walk. "You'll not leave me here. I'll be scared to death."

After long minutes of tiresome walk-

ing, they halted before the edge of a short cross precipice.

"Blast it!" muttered the scientist, doing a reluctant right-about-face. "I might have known the boards wouldn't be full length. We'll have to chance it the other way."

CHAPTER THREE

Arduous Journey

THE blue haze about them became thicker, and after retracing their steps and proceeding in an opposite direction, they discovered to their joy that there was a space in which the yawning chasms dwindled to cracks and ceased to be, where swelling joints and a thick padding of what to them was log-sized dust particles formed natural foot bridges over which they sprang easily.

Now certain that they were upon one of the boards that supported a table leg, they hurried forward into a gloom that was almost impenetrable. Professor Hickey was remembering that night would soon be falling upon the gigantic outside world. The janitor made a habit of sweeping the rooms in the early morning, and when that happened his unknowing clodhopper feet would be certain to crush many of their counterparts. If that came to pass he was certain that the overtones would never be coerced to rejoin and create a unified whole. It gave him exactly twelve hours in which to effect a release by stopping those damnable electric pulsations that had raised such havoc with their beings.

"Well, here we are," he announced, coming to the black column that stretched far above them into the increasing darkness. His hands sought for rough creases made by wood-grains, and in a moment he knew that he would be able to pull himself hand-over-hand, like a human fly, clinging to the innumerable splinters and gashes available to his diminutive hands. "You'll have to wait for me here."

"That's what you think!" remonstrated Miss Moon in a decided tone.

"You mean you're going to follow me?" demanded Professor Hickey in surprise.

"I'll be right on your coat tails," promised Miss Moon, looking around into the blue haze with a look of fear.

"That," said Professor Hickey stiffly, "will be quite up to you."

Saying this, and not daring to hesitate lest the terror of that which he contemplated seize him, he reached up, found niches, and began climbing slowly. Below him he glimpsed the intent features of Miss Moon, her arms moving with machinelike precision, her quivering face not daring to look below.

For the moment her plainness was transformed, and he rather regretted that he was so thoroughly beyond comparison with her favorite movie idol.

Then, as grasping, aching hands reached ever upward, seeking some sort of precarious hold, it occurred to Professor Hickey that his own attempt to save them might be looked upon by Miss Moon as an unselfish effort to restore her to a long and happy life in the monstrous outside world, and he felt better. It was just such an accomplishment as Clark Gable might have set out to do, and the mental comparison cheered him.

HIS hands were soon bleeding, and his feet began to burn from cramped positions in the ripped leather of his shoes. Always above and below was the blue abyss. For an interminable period he climbed upward. Once a splinter came away in his hand and he hung to it as his body swayed, but the fragment did not give. Luckily the table was very plain in construction, and the leg went straight upward, not being shelved over by a jutting top.

At last, tired but triumphant, he balanced on the smooth head of an upholstering tack and thrust himself out on a smooth plateau of oiled cloth that served to cover the table. Turning, he gave a hand to Miss Moon, and soon they were standing together, staring at a monstrous elongated sun that glared down at them over the great dark expanse. It took some little time to readjust his reasoning and decide that the solar orb was really the electric bulb hooked in series with the sonometer. After their eyes were used to the glare they could make out the plain uncovered socket below, as well as the towering electric switch nearby.

Rushing forward, he felt as the tiny men of Lilliput must have felt when they viewed Gulliver lying stretched on their shores. A terrible suspicion assailed him when he noted that his body was not even as wide as the thickness of the switch handle, but he thrust the thought from his mind as he raced past the long cylindrical structures which were the wound magnets, reached upward, braced his body, and pushed with all of his strength.

It would not give. The gigantic forks in which the copper lever was seated held it in an unshaking grasp. He bent over, applied his back to the knob. His muscles became rigid. Huge veins stood out in his face. Then something moved.

Simultaneously a scream from behind aroused him. He turned to see that Miss Moon was gaping with protuberant eyes at something in the distance, and that she seemed to be occupied in trying to stuff both hands into her gaping mouth.

At the same time a great reddish tentacle was thrust from beyond an outcropping of insulation about the bases of the electromagnets, to be followed by a great rust-hued head. Then monstrous insect-like legs propelled the apparition forward.

It was all very unbelievable. The mandibles of the giant ant whipped the air in eagerness. Great horn-covered eyes centered their attention upon the two tiny people. Professor Hickey had seen too many ants under the microscope to mistake the newcomer.

Paralyzed by fear, he waited while the armor-plated monster edged forward inquiringly. Then as the wide-spread reddish legs sent it skittering toward them, Hickey released all holds and went skidding across the black oiled-cloth in a desperate dash for freedom.

Yet in that wild moment, something of chivalry remained, for he cut directly in front of Miss Moon, across the path of the charging insect, in an effort to attract attention and draw its pursuit.

He was far too slow, compared to the insect, which whirled off in a new direction without losing speed. It came racing down upon him with the momentum of an express train, dragging his kicking, plunging body from his feet and lifting it into mid-air between great mandibles.

HICKEY had never known such excruciating agony. The clawlike mandibles were crushing his ribs. The sharp points severed his coat to either side below his shoulder joints and cut through the flesh, coming to rest against the bones of his diaphragm. A hot poison flamed from the squeezed, broken points of pressure, pulsating through his blood stream to cover his body, until every inch of his being burned and throbbed. For an indeterminable length of time Professor Hickey fainted.

A rocking motion told him that his captor was on its way. His body was numb and detached now, a dead weight, and his mind was an aching thing that cried out against thinking. He only knew that the light rays were dwindling. Strangely enough the illumination from the giant bulb appeared to come from below. Then he saw the reason.

The ant was carrying him directly up the side of a wall, a partition between his

classroom and the biology hall in which Miss Moon had given lectures to reluctant students only a few hours before. It was all a trifle unreal. Ahead of them a conduit pipe loomed. As his captor climbed over a protuberance, Professor Hickey caught a glimpse of another insect following them, bearing the limp, unmoving body of what could be nothing else but Miss Moon.

Reaching the tubular sheathing that penetrated the wall, his captor calmly crawled into a crevice, made its way through an inky darkness in the wall, and emerged again into a deep purple gloom which Hickey knew was the biology room.

Now the way turned to left, along the broad ledge formed by a wainscoting. The right angle of the room's corner sent them off in a new direction, led along the broad top of a specimen case set against the wall, and then, strangely enough, the gloom began to lighten. Without warning a brilliance of light flooded down upon them.

Captor and captive were proceeding across the edge of an infinite chasm, brooded over by a giant scarlet orb that was sinking low. Though his perspective was immensely distorted by his tiny size, Professor Hickey presently recognized the crimson disc as a setting sun, the abyss being that space directly below a second story window, intervening over the campus grounds. Although he had supposed that several hours might have lapsed since their departure into this Lilliputian existence, he saw now that it was not so, and that the sun was sending its final rays through the spruce trees at the further end of the football field.

There was a radiant warmth to the dying rays, a pleasant flooding of vital emanations that acted to arouse the stupefied atoms of his being. Terrifying though the spectacle was, he knew that the ant was merely carrying him across a window ledge. He felt like laughing and crying at the same time. An incredible thought had struck him.

But of course! These ants were from the little ant village which Miss Moon had insisted on keeping in a small flower box on the open ledge. On a tiny miniature island, surrounded by a moat of water, she had kept the insects imprisoned, or at least thought she was keeping them prisoners. Now it was obvious that there was a way to get across the moat. Professor Hickey squirmed as he laughed, and for a precious instant the giant manibles loosened their pressure.

Despite himself, a silly chuckle escaped his lips at sight of the ant village, now seeming immensely magnified and distorted, with its central cone of an island rising in stark silhouette against the sunset. As he squirmed and laughed his horn-rimmed spectacles slipped, dangling precariously from his nose, and the world blurred.

Quite by chance, the lenses of his glasses had concentrated tiny spots of light on the right jaw of the ant, and he could feel it trembling.

Raising his numbed hands with an effort, he held the glasses with their pinpoints of light steady on the chitinous covering of the mandible.

Almost immediately Professor Hickey was released. He went tumbling head over heels and sat up in a crumpled heap. The world was blurred, and it seemed like aeons while he crawled about, found his spectables, and managed to don them with tingling, awkward hands. He was just in time to see his erstwhile captor backing away uncertainly, while the ant bearing Miss Moon had now appeared along their backtrail. Professor Hickey was seized by a hysterical fear that sent him dashing for it, screaming with such headlong frenzy that it grew excited, dropped the dangling body from its mandibles, and also retreated to some distance away. There the insects held a council of war, rubbing their antennae together and apparently trying to decide what to do about this odd turn of events.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Deadly Pool

MISS MOON was dazed but unharmed, though her clothing had reverted to a weird sort of garment that might have done justice to a cave woman. He was able to judge however in a swift glance that Miss Moon, devoid of constricting apparel, was by no means an unshapely woman. She swayed in his arms, sobbing and watching the ants from fearful apprehensive eyes to see what they would do next.

"Professor Hickey," she sobbed ungratefully and in no uncertain tone. "This is all your fault. And you know it."

It was like a spray of icy water for a person in Professor Hickey's moment of glowing. Forgetful of the threat constituted by the lurking insects, who might be converted into deadly machines of annihilation at any instant by a sudden offensive, the short physicist withdrew his hand from under the bare, scratched arm of his legal wife. At the instant he was on the verge of becoming a confirmed misogynist.

"They are your ants," he retorted vengefully, looking very offended. "If you'd keep them on their ant island where they belong this would never have happened, and we would have been back at the switch, figuring some way to open it and save our lives."

"My ants! I believe they are," returned Miss Moon in dismay, her thoughts diverted as she looked with new interest upon their monstrous insect opponents. "My, but they're strong and fat! And they'd be pretty if they weren't so big. I kept their moat filled with water. There is only one explanation. They must have tunneled through the sand below. But what are we going to do if they start after us again?"

"I don't know," replied Professor Hickey truthfully, watching the hovering insects. "They're puzzled now, but if we start to run, they'll probably be right after us. Isn't it true that ants don't work much after dark?"

"Of course it's true," returned Miss Moon hopefully.

"Then what we've got to do is to play hop-scotch with these red devils until dark, which won't be long," concluded Professor Hickey. "And there's one place better

than any other to do it. I'm thinking about the moat. Let's try moving slowly toward it, hoping not to precipitate an attack on their part."

Grasping his intent, she moved to his side and they began edging, not away from the great ants, but at an oblique angle toward the window-box and the ant village. Apparently their direction, more than their movements, mystified the insects, who crept slowly along after them, not increasing or decreasing their distance. But as the two tiny humans crawled over the window-box, the ants apparently regained part of their courage and began to overtake them.

Professor Hickey began to urge Miss Moon along a trifle faster, and the odd pursuit began to accelerate into a run. A low dirt ledge formed a short expanse under their feet. Above them the blue cone of the ant village reared mistily, a mighty cliff wall in which great grottos and yawning caverns told of a teeming inner life. In that mighty precipice were housed thousands of the great insects, who now might constitute a new and greater menace if they were discovered.

The dirt ledge disappeared abruptly beneath their feet. A gleam of water showed, mirrorlike and moveless. At the same time the huge red monsters from behind seemed to divine their intent, for there was a flash of crimson legs and both giant ants came charging at them.

Too late, however. Two bodies had arched out somewhat ungracefully, plummeted downward, and Professor Hickey found himself fighting depths of water with one hand over his nose. At length he gave that up, began to flounder with both arms, and managed to come to the surface, hoping against hope that they were out of reach of the mandibles.

HE WAS out of reach, well enough, floating some distance off shore. A pair of ant heads were peering defeatedly over the high upper ledge, but Miss Moon, who had entered the water simultaneously, had not come up.

He began paddling around, forgetful of everything else, crying her name aloud, although he realized that it was almost impossible for her to hear. Then something cold lashed up from the water, settled around his neck, and began choking him and pulling him down.

Professor Hickey went down blubbering, kicking and fighting. He wanted desperately to get a single gasp of fresh air. One final wrench and he was free, although his arms were yet entwined about something smooth and oddly warm. With his lungs bursting, his temples throbbing, he opened his eyes and tried to penetrate the murky depths, just as something wavy brushed past his face and a cold visage with closed eyes drifted by.

It was Miss Moon. He had been struggling with her as she fought in drowning frenzy.

Remembering vaguely what to do with a drowning person, he seized one limp wrist, gave a tremendous kick as his feet touched bottom. Their bodies broke surface, and he saw that Miss Moon was unconscious. Professor Hickey forgot part of his troubles, and struck out wildly for the opposite shore, a circular expanse of huge painted boulders, and soon he had dragged Miss Moon into a niche below precipitous cliff walls. Darkness was falling swiftly, and as he laid her limp body on the brief skirt of sand, he was not certain whether life remained.

Her eyes opened in the dark, and she gasped. For a moment her bare arms went around him convulsively. Then she sat up and shoved him away. The water behind them had quieted, and the opposite walls were mirrored perfectly in the gleaming surface, as were the giant inverted heads of their puzzled pursuers.

As they shivered together, wet and cold, darkness came. Professor Hickey

remembered enviously how it would appear on the outer campus grounds. Long shadows from the gymnasium would have been creeping across the lawn for hours, crawling up the sides of the administration buildings, and then suddenly, abruptly, the shadows had engulfed the window-box. That meant quick blackness in the ant village. And it meant that their allotted span of life on this terrifying world of littleness had been lengthened, though perhaps only for a short while. With the darkness came an icy chilliness that went right through their wet clothes to their very bones.

"We'll wait for an hour," decided Professor Hickey, trying to pierce the sooty darkness. "Then we'll take a chance that the ants have given up and crawled back into their holes. We've got to take that chance because we've got to get back to the sonometer before morning and stop its damnable broadcasting of sub-Hertzian waves. We'll swim and try to retrace our steps."

"In the dark?" demanded Lydia Moon with a voice that quavered at the mere thought of creeping along the wainscoting ledge in the stygian black.

"In the dark," returned Professor Hickey decisively. He knew that there was no other way out.

CHAPTER FIVE

As the World Slept

PROFESSOR HICKEY had a wild notion that they were swimming around in circles through the unseen waters. Then his toes struck a submerged rock and he wanted to scream from the pain. A moment later they were wading waist-deep in water and feeling their way along the perpendicular walls for a crevice.

After venturing toward the right for some distance, a gorge opened in the sea wall and they climbed black tortuous walls so slowly that hours seemed to pass before their ascent was over. Once again on the black edge of the window-box, they clung together, feeling that a giant insect might leap out of the dark upon them at any moment.

The trip back along the window ledge was something Professor Hickey never wanted to remember. Finally he bumped into the sill, found the ledge leading along the wainscoting, and went along hugging the wall. As they ventured across the comparatively wider surface of the specimen case, he noticed that Miss Moon was trembling with the same icy cold that was numbing his own body, and that she was tiring. Once she stumbled, and he thought she had fallen over the ledge.

Then he heard her sobbing.

"C-can't we rest?" she begged. "Just for a little while?"

"No," retorted Professor Hickey fearfully. "Keep walking. It's getting colder all the time and we've got to keep circulation going. If we don't there's a danger of freezing to death."

He helped Miss Moon to her feet and for some time afterward she made no protest, although her strength was waning and her footsteps began to lag. Professor Hickey got hold of one of her arms and helped her along. There was not much left of his clothing, and what there was of it was hanging in shreds. The mere thought of descending the further side of the precipitous wall, even when penetrated, sent tremors up and down his spine, and he forced it from his mind as they staggered onward.

How many hours were passing, he didn't know. He began to fear that they had passed the conduit in the darkness and were lost.

For some unaccountable reason the ledge was narrowing to a mere strip, and Professor Hickey could not remember having come that way. The footing got so

risky that he told Miss Moon to wait for a while as he went forward to investigate. He had not gone far when he ran headlong into the conduit, bruising his forehead. Yet he was so glad he hardly felt the bruise as he hurried back.

"Miss Moon!" he called joyously. "I've found it. Miss Moon! Where are you?"

He found her slumped along the ledge, unconscious. She had rested only for a moment, but had fallen into a deep troubled sleep. He slapped her cold cheeks, rubbed her arms, and elicited only a faint, drowsy response.

WHAT Professor Hickey said in the darkness did not reach the unresponsive ears of Miss Moon. He was more than glad that it didn't. Bending over, he gathered her limp body in his arms and lurched forward with infinite slowness. He carried her into the crevice, then along the rounded top of the pipe. When he felt a warmer breath of air he knew that they were again in his own classroom, though high up along the wall above the

laboratory. It was much warmer now, and he laid his sleeping burden down.

By peering over the edge he could make out the electric light bulb, still glowing in the gloom below. Beyond it was the sonometer, with its formidable array of electromagnets, which even now were sending out strange ultra-radio waves in spherical pulsations. By looking closely he could see the numerous tiny slumped bodies on the floor. Now they gave the appearance of lifelessness, yet he knew that they were living overtones of their own bodies.

And he saw something else, did Professor Hickey. As if the night's adventure were not enough, he saw something enormous and threatening, a prehistoric thing of unbelievable ugliness, creeping around the bare terminals of the incandescent bulb. The monstrosity was peering over the edge of the table, glaring with gigantic, greedy orbs at the scattered bodies lying on the floor of the classroom.

Even as he watched it walked along the edge of the table on its many legs, then paced back again. It did this several times. Professor Hickey stood on the upper ledge, a strange, half-naked apparition in rage, his scratched knees knocking together. The monster that looked so huge was a cockroach, and it was apparently contemplating a means by which it could get down to the moveless shapes on the floor. Once there, it might devour several of them, and by so doing, destroy the vibrational harmony by which the tinier pulsations might once more unite into a whole. And if it kept staggering on the edge of the table, it would presently lose its footing and fall to the floor, which would of course answer the purpose as a means of transit.

Professor Hickey had never thought nor acted so quickly in his entire life. Perhaps it had become apparent that it was useless to attempt to analyze the situation. He would have to accept it for what it was and do something about it. And that is exactly what happened. He managed to awaken Miss Moon by shaking her savagely, pointed to the monstrous creature on the table below, and indicated something which had only shortly before caught his attention for the first time. It was the extension cord from a light socket, dangling down the wall toward the table where it was feeding electricity into the light bulb.

Springing outward, Professor Hickey wrapped arms and legs about the extension cord, turned his eyes deliberately from the sickening depths, and loosened his hold. He began to slide downward rapidly.

Once started it was impossible to stop his wild descent. It was all he could do to hang on, and as the cord looped out toward the horizontal, bending his path in a swooping curve, another force was added to that of his weight, trying to wrench his arms loose.

Then it was over, and he was sent skittering along the oiled-cloth table top, his legs pumping like pistons to keep him from falling. When he managed a gasping stop he was attracted by the renewed swaying of the dangling cord, and a strange sight met his eyes.

For Miss Moon had refused to be left alone, and had followed his pathway; she was coming down the cord, tattered skirt flying, her eyes widened with fear and set upon Professor Hickey with an odd sort of supreme determination.

CHAPTER SIX

The Monster Roach

SHE was catapulted out and down, directly at him, and they both went down in a sprawl. Directly over them loomed a black ugly thing that was like some diabolical creation lured from a nightmare. The only thing moving was its black seg-

mented antennae, yet there was that in its attitude which revealed that it was crouched, watching them.

The entity that sat watching them was like a prehistoric monster from some long-dead era of the past. It *was* a prehistoric monster! Professor Hickey was enough of a scientist to realize that the history of cockroaches, and evidences of their remains, go back as far as the days of cave men and even back to the age of the giant lizards. These hated insects are remarkably adaptive, and have persisted in much the same form as century after century goes by. Now its bloated, black body was moving up and down, trembling with anticipation. In another instant it was flinging itself upon them.

Professor Hickey rolled over and in a single motion gained his feet, dragging Miss Moon with him. The slashing ebon-hued jaws came down at them, whisked closely by. Those inky scimitars had barely missed them as they raced around the end of the row of electromagnets, seeking refuge. It was Hickey's thought to escape by throwing themselves into a crevice so small that the ponderous body of the roach could not follow. But they raced along the series of giant cylindrical coils, and found no such crevice.

In the shadows behind the magnets they managed to lose the monster for a moment, and stood flattened against a rounded wall, watching it blunder around in the gloom. It became obvious as it neared that it would be certain to discover them eventually. Professor Hickey looked about for a weapon and his eyes lighted as he saw a loose end of coil wire jutting from one of the magnets. It was a length as long as his own body. If he could break it off at the terminal, it might serve as a club.

Seizing the end of wire in his arms he tugged, and a thrill of hope went up in his heart. He could bend it, though it took every exertion.

"Miss Moon," he cried. "Can't you help? If we bend it back and forth we may be able to break it."

It was a thrilling moment. Side by side the half-naked little human beings tugged at the copper wire, pulling it one way as far as it would go, then pushing it around the other way. Each moment the black hulk of the seeking monster loomed more gigantic and discernible against the outer gloom.

As though to add to their troubles, the outer gloom was beginning to lessen a bit, with that warning glow which tells of a night almost gone and a morning that is near. The monster was almost upon them when the wire broke at the terminal and Professor Hickey felt a new strength flowing into his veins as he hefted the strange weapon.

He had been none too soon. Apparently guided by smell, the huge cockroach came in at him, its huge eyes glittering fiendishly like green living jewels.

Tensing his muscles, Professor Hickey swung his metal club back as far as it would go, put every ounce of weight into the swing, and let fly. Giant mandibles lowered and closed like forceps. His club struck the black horny snag of a mandible, and the shock of it sent him reeling. In an instant he saw that no great harm had come to the loathsome insect, even though his blow had landed solidly.

YET he had diverted the attack, and as it came in viciously again, he swung a second time, aiming at the nearmost leg. This time he had the savage pleasure of seeing the roach's leg crumble up at the point of impact and break away from the towering black body. But this served only to anger the giant attacker, and it lurched toward them again.

"Run for it," shouted Hickey in dismay, glancing back warningly at Miss Moon. "We've got one last chance. Run out toward the electric lamp bulb."

Miss Moon had been obeying Professor Hickey unquestioningly for the past few hectic moments, and he was not surprised in the least to see her obey instantly. Lugging his metal club, he raced at her heels, hoping to find use for it as a last resort.

Circling from the shadows of the electromagnets, they felt the warmth of the incandescent bulb, towering from above. It increased, as they ran, to an almost unbearable intensity. Past the great bulb he began to make out other objects in the highflung spaces of the physics room. A great oblong of light was glowing with the blue flush of dawn. Morning was upon the outer world.

The central loop of incandescence in the light globe was like a snaky sun to these tiny midgets, racing along the table top, sending out a stream of heat that beat down upon their exposed limbs. The bare white crockery of its base loomed pyramid-like, somewhat taller than the little professor where the huge glass bulb was screwed in. Lower down, he saw where the extension cord parted, forking into two naked copper wires. The copper terminals reflected reddish rays into their eyes, almost blinding them with brilliance and heat.

They leaped over the cord and at a word from the professor, halted. Here he would make the last stand.

And there was a chance, just a chance, that the heat would drive their pursuer away.

Even as they hoped, the great sprawling insect was slowing down, progressing crookedly due to its crippled leg, but the antennae branched out, shuddered to a tautness that revealed it had discovered them, and it came lumbering forward, crawling across the forked extension wire.

With one lightning move, Professor Hickey wheeled, thrust the woman backward in a flying heap. Turning to confront the diabolical ebon monster, he picked up his metal club, but did not swing it. Instead, he balanced one end on a bare terminal of the light cord and tilted the other so its fall would bring it into contact with the wire of the opposite charge.

Holding his body rigid, he waited until the jet-black head was almost upon him, eyes glittering like fire, mandibles slashing with crazed eagerness. Then he released his hold on the club and kicked back on his heels.

The enormous thing that crawled toward him was wading one moment across bare copper wires, and the next—

The giant incandescent bulb flickered. Sparks flew from the bare wires, danced along the metal club, which grew red-hot, then turned white and dripping. Over the club, the dark body of the insect shuddered to a halt. Wisps of smoke began to rise. The light grew dimmer, it squirmed spasmodically in its death throes.

AND out of the distant dawn came a strange sound, like the twanging of lyres, to be followed by deeper, more resonant sounds, booming up the octaves into a deep, rumbling bass tone. There followed a sound like the striking of a huge gong, and then only silence remained.

A ray of sunlight had transformed the gloom now, a warm golden ray, emerging from a shining oblong. Professor Hickey moved his head slightly, and saw that the stream of light was coming in from the east window of the physics room where the earliest rays of sunrise struck.

He gasped, not daring to believe what he saw, or hope that it was true. The golden glow was falling upon the recumbent body of a woman of normal size who lay on the floor. He blinked his eyes, removed his glasses and polished them, and then looked again. Yes, it was Miss Moon all right, although her clothing had gone through a strange metamorphosis, and she

rather resembled some naiad stepping from dawning sunbeams in some forest glade. Of course he was thinking in mythological terms, but the comparison did seem to be apt.

Or perhaps it was his frame of mind. Professor Hickey liked to try to analyze his feelings and emotions as much as one might make a scientific test of some curious new substance or compound. But he was a genial little man and did not worry a great deal about abstract objects or emotions. He was content to seek what he could, then accept things for what they were on the surface.

After prowling around through the basement corridors, he managed to find two pairs of soiled but usable janitor's overalls, in which he and Miss Moon were presently attired.

"From one angle," she said, looking at the abbreviated Professor Hickey with admiration and a trace of moisture in her eyes, "the experiment was a success."

He nodded gravely. "One that must never be repeated," he told her. "I'll see to that. And also the other, Miss—er—Moon. It's rather hard to explain, but I've grown to dislike the sound of that word. You see, regardless of our pretenses or of how we may feel, it is an incorrect name."

"You mean—I should be Mrs. Hickey?"

Professor Hickey nodded. When he tried the electric lights he found that a fuse had blown, but the sun was streaming through the window and in the fresh solar glow Mrs. Hickey had beautiful hair. There were many pretty little gleams, rather like silver ripples. He had told her about it once before, and for some time had not felt impelled to recall the fact. Yet at the first opportunity Professor Hickey intended to remind her of it and start in just where that left off.

THE END

HE WASN'T THERE!

The little man offered ten years of time-travel for ten cents, but Winant only took two. Two, he found, were plenty!

KELLY wasn't often in New York. When he did get to the city, it was usually on business, and he seldom had more than a few hours a day, for a week at the most, which were unconditionally his own. Those hours he usually spent in the company of an old pal, Winant. The manner of spending was varied, yet bounded by one definite specification: it must offer opportunity for full use of the candid camera.

"The only way to see New York," Winant had advised him as soon as he had picked him up at the station, "is through a thin film of alcohol. It's the greatest city in the world, but out-of-towners generally just can't take it undiluted." Thereupon, though it was only noon when they met, they proceeded to absorb liquor. Like sponges.

The two of them hoofed it up from Penn Station to Times Square, Kelly ticketing his baggage to be sent to his hotel. The Square was almost empty at this hour of a Summer Sunday, but there are almost always some things open and of interest for the out-of-towner, providing, of course, there is someone to point them out, and that the host fits the entertainment to the type of person he entertains.

Kelly and Winant had gone to school together ten years before. Their joint attendance at a farm-college had lasted only one year, Winant quitting at that time through lack of interest. He went on to New York to take the post of minor executive with a publishing company while Kelly finished out the course, then took an offered job as an asphalt salesman whose route covered the small towns of six states in the middle West. Winant envied Kelly his job, though his own paid more in salary. But Winant wanted, more than anything else, the atmosphere of freedom in which his candid-camera mad friend lived.

Kelly was sleepy. "Let's take in a movie," he suggested. "Maybe I can snap some stills."

Winant stared at the surrounding marquees. "What do you want—first run picture or revival?"

Kelly snorted loudly. "First run! Every show on this street is a revival to me. I've seen all the ones I can stomach." It was quite true, as Winant was aware. Broadway got its "premiere" showings from a week to six months after they had been played in most of the small towns of the country. There didn't seem to be any sane reason for it, thought Winant, and it was a sore spot to his New Yorker ego.

"All right then. Let's forget about the movies," he said. "Tell you what—let's take a squint at the Futurama. It's just around the corner here. You haven't seen *that* in a road company out yonder!"

Kelly shook his head. "Fair enough. Lead on. I'm just in the mood for passive entertainment."

The Futurama, hit of the New York World's Fair of the year before, had been moved to Times Square when the Fair closed its doors for good. The piece was an excellent advertising for the firm sponsoring it, an automobile company. Simple in concept, it had meant a great deal of planning and ingenuity, the outlay of large sums of money, and the labor of many men. You paid your quarter and you walked in. Inside the entrance, an attendant placed you in an armchair, part of a long string of chairs which moved along in an endless chain. You sat down

By Hugh Raymond

and moved a short distance, then there was a faint click and a voice beside your ears began a commentary on the tiny model houses and villages and roadways that were spread out before you. First, you saw a scale model of the countryside of today, with its autos, horses, barns, farmhouses, and death-dealing highways, full of intersections, blind curves, and the like. Suddenly the string of chairs rounded a curve, and you saw, in beautiful exactitude, tomorrow's world.

"It's all about highways, isn't it?" commented Kelly suddenly as they were sitting down. "Seems like a sort of busman's holiday to me, but I guess it's too late to turn back."

They saw it; they enjoyed it, and they came out proudly wearing white enamel buttons bearing the legend: "I Have Seen the Future!" in their lapels.

Kelly jerked against Winant in astonishment as they left, grabbing his right arm in a death-grip.

"For Heaven's sake! What's that?" he ejaculated.

Winant stared, too, and whipped out his camera.

THE object of their attention paused and smiled. It was a fat little man, occupying loosely the confines of a black Prince Albert coat, with a derby hat on his head. From between the slit in the tails, the end of a loud red handkerchief protruded. The man smiled again, nodding to his photographer, and began to walk up and down before the Futurama, waving a big sign tacked on a broomstick before the eyes of bystanders. In huge, perfectly printed black letters, the sign read:

DON'T BE FOOLED
The Futurama is a Phoney!
Patronize the real Stuff!
Time Travel, Inc.
TEN YEARS FOR TEN CENTS!
Satisfaction or your money back.

The bystanders looked and walked on. Some looked back, occasionally, laughing or commenting to their companions, but none paid attention of a serious nature to the little man. Presently the street was almost empty.

"For Heaven's sake!" gasped Kelly again, trying to shake off the mental fog that was swirling about him. "Look at that guy!"

"Interesting," agreed Winant. "Do you suppose that Incorporated part of the sign is on the level?"

"It better be. The Futurama people probably won't care for this guy's picketing them, and they can have him jailed in a second if it isn't actually incorporated."

"I wouldn't want to see him go to jail," said Winant reflectively. "Maybe we can do something about getting him away from here."

Grasping Kelly's arm, he hustled over to the little man, casting about in his mind for a suitable way of opening a conversation. "Uh—er—" he began, "we—my friend and I here—just saw the Futurama. We thought it was pretty good. What's your service got that it doesn't have?"

"Mine is the real thing," was the fat little man's answer. "It's just what the sign says. I know how to travel in time."

"Ah!" exclaimed Winant, who liked his chance acquaintances to be odd and interesting. Kelly, though amused for a moment by this New York City type-character, decided that the little man must be mad, wondered how he could get Winant away.

"I'm glad that someone at least shows the courtesy of asking about my service," the fat little man went on. "I don't think any of the others believed me—perhaps you do not, either. And I tried so hard to fit my sign to their psychology. Sales pressure, you know; the proper approach and all that soft of thing. All gone to waste. I don't suppose that a single one of the six or seven hundred people that saw me in the time I've been here would be willing to put their stupid prejudices against whatever they haven't been told a thousand times is true to the test. And —that reminds me," he added eagerly. "Will you put me to the test—will you try me out? Remember: 'satisfaction or your money back', just like it says on the sign."

Winant wasn't sleepy any more, not even a little bit. "What do you say?" he asked Kelly. "Shall we see what's ahead for us?"

The fat little man tugged at Winant's sleeve. "You've got entirely the wrong slant!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I am not a fortune teller. I will show you the future—the whole future. The future of the city and country, as a whole. Not your own, particular, individual future."

"Fine," replied Winant heartily. "Well, shall we?"

"I can't," said Kelly. "I just can't. I've got to have lunch with the Sales Manager today. I told you about it, but I guess you forgot it, too, just as I did. Why don't you go ahead and see what it's all about; I'll meet you—tomorrow,

at around noon, in your office. We can have lunch together before I catch my train."

THE fat little man resumed his walking up and down for awhile as the two made their arrangements. Kelly left, and Winant stood undecided for a moment. Then he walked up to the odd man, a bit put out at having been left alone. "Well—when do we start?" he asked.

The fat man looked at him blankly, as though he had forgotten he'd had a prospective customer. "Oh—you," he said finally. "Well, could you wait a few minutes? It would hardly pay me to operate the equipment for just one person, you know. Just ten minutes, if you can wait that long. I'll leave now if you like, but, really, my machine uses up a lot of power, and it would hardly pay me to operate the equipment for . . ."

"Okay, okay," replied Winant. "Where shall I wait?"

"Yes, of course," mused the little man. "You have to wait somewhere, don't you? Well . . . Oh, I know what. Wait in my car. Here," and he fumbled through his pockets, "I'll give you the keys. You won't run off with it, will you? Of course not. It's parked right around the corner. You'll know it—it's a new Pontiac, red car. I like red, myself." He handed Winant the keys, then turned away and resumed his picketing.

Winant stared after him, shrugged, and sought out the car. It *was* a new car, and a very nice one. Also expensive—apparently the little man was not dependent on his "Time-Travel, Inc." for a living. Perhaps, after all, he was really just a practical joker. Winant shrugged again, unlocked the car door and got in. If the fellow was a joker he was going to a lot of trouble, and the denouement was bound to be pretty funny. Possibly even funny enough for the victim to appreciate.

Sinking back into the soft upholstery, Winant looked about him. Being single and of solitary frame of mind, he was strictly a coupé man himself, and the feeling of so much vacant space in the rear seat behind him gave him a sense of uneasiness. He twisted in his seat and peered at the back. On the floor, he discovered, was a canvas sack. He stretched and prodded it: it was almost empty, but contained some small metal objects that clinked against each other. Coins, possibly, or more probably metal parts for some gadget or other. It suddenly occurred to him that the little man might come along and find him acting inquisitively; hastily he straightened and turned to the front.

There was a radio in the car, he discovered, so, for lack of something better to do, he snapped it on. It warmed up very rapidly, he found, but he encountered difficulties when he tried to dial a station. His fingers slipped as though the plastic knobs were heavily larded with some sort of grease. But it wasn't the knob, after all. He held his hand up before him and saw that there was unpleasant-looking grey slime, with threads of red and yellow floating in it, on his fingers.

Where had he got that? He cast about in his mind, enumerating the things he had touched since he shook hands with Kelly when Kelly left him. Nothing but the keys, the door-handle, and the radio. And—oh yes, that sack in the rear. He twisted around again and examined it more closely.

It was the source of the slimy stuff, all right. It was saturated with it, like a thoroughly rotten apple seems to be saturated with decaying pulp, exuding it if you so much as brush it with a finger. Just what the stuff was, Winant could not guess. Some highly efficient lubricant, possibly, though it seemed to be of animal origin.

Fastidiously he took out a clean hand-

kerchief, scrubbed his hands thoroughly, then rolled down the car window and tossed the handkerchief out into the street.

Just then the little man came up to him, without any further customers. "They chased me," he declared aggrievedly. "The police said I was obstructing the sidewalk."

"That's too bad," said Winant.

"Well, I certainly won't get any more customers here," the little man observed. "We might as well get started."

ALTHOUGH so tiny that Winant thought his legs couldn't reach the starter, the little man drove the car very well indeed. As they sped out of the Times Square area into the Central Park residential zone, Winant relaxed.

"What's the principle of this machine of yours?"

The other replied without looking aside. "Power. Lots of it! Time is a medium like the air, or water, or the ground. Ships and airplanes need lots of power to plow their way through their mediums. Earth borers need the same. I can push people through time with an accumulation of simply inconceivable power. All this energy is under perfect control, of course. You needn't worry."

Winant knew a stall when one was thrust on him, and this was one very definitely. For that matter, power was the motivating principle of the automobile, the steam engine, or the electric light bulb. He didn't press the subject, though: the man had a right to his secret. Like all really great inventions it might be so elementary that the slightest hint would give away the whole thing.

The little man was frowning as he drove the big car. Occasionally he would sneak a look at the dashboard or at Winant, or would bend forward and listen to the motors. Something was annoying him; simultaneously, he and Winant realized what it was.

The radio, forgotten since Winant had turned it on, was blaring away tinnily. Winant reached to switch it off, or to tune it in more clearly, but the little man was before him. Swiftly, with surprising strength, the heel of his hand descended on the knob and sheared it off. He hammered twice, *hard*, on the front panel of the radio and the blare stopped. A tube broken, Winant thought.

"Damn nuisance," the little man explained. "Radios distract the driver."

"Why did you buy it?"

The little one shrugged. "I didn't know I was buying a radio. They asked me what accessories I wanted, and I didn't know—how should I know? So I told them to put in whatever was usual."

That explained the superfluous foglights, spot-lights, chimed horns, and other gadgets he had noted subconsciously when he got in, Winant thought. The salesman, given a free hand, had netted himself some extra commissions. And it proved his guess: the man did have money.

Then the car slowed down before a large house, a private house on a block of large apartment dwellings. Steering the vehicle into the driveway, the little man parked it expertly, shut off the ignition, and threw open the door. They entered the house through the back way.

Inside Winant could find nothing to excite his interest. The furnishings were boringly commonplace. Meanwhile the other had removed his prince albert and, clad now in a shirt and trousers with bright blue suspenders, beckoned Winant toward a door.

"The machinery is in the cellar. I found it easier to set up there, and of course I didn't want the neighbors snooping. Come along."

He led the way down a flight of wooden steps.

Winant, somehow, remembers very little of the appearance of the cellar now. When

he walked through the door, something clicked in his brain, though he didn't hear it click. From then on, everything he saw came to him as if he were looking *through* his eyes rather than *with* them.

There was a confused jumble of brilliant steel and glass all distorted and flowing. And it is easy for him to remember cracklings and the smell of ozone and a surge of tremendous power as the little man threw a giant master switch; and a bit of homely musing that he uttered when he suddenly felt sick at his stomach due to the strangeness of it all: "The current to run this junk must cost a fortune."

He stood in front of a big, crackling vortex of whirling energy. It looked something like an ice cream cone wilting furiously under the attacks of a blow torch, he thought, only the ice cream was flame, and the "torch" was a weaving, singing pivoted bar of metal. Suddenly he felt a touch on his arm.

"Go on, step into it. It won't hurt you. How far into the future do you want to go?"

Winant was far from being an imaginative man.

"Two years," he croaked.

The little man did something to the machine that looked sometimes like a machine and sometimes like a distorting mirror.

"All right, mister, you can step in now."

Winant walked into the blinding glare.

THERE was nothing very alarming about what happened to him then. He felt an instant acceleration, powerful, but not unusual. He had suffered under a stronger pull in many an express elevator. The direction was not unusual, either; it was definitely up—or forward—or possibly a combination of the two.

The Fourth Dimension—he was not

flustered, mentally, at all, and was aware that he must be in the Fourth Dimension, or something of the sort—seemed much more like the express tunnel of a subway train than anything else. Things were flickering around him, the outlines of metal beams and lights moving in various directions. Except for the lights, it was very dark, nor did the lights seem to help him to see anything except their own shining selves. They resembled the odd lights seen over a swamp, or the light of a radium-faced clock: giving no real light but seemingly phosphorescent.

Very suddenly there was a swift braking, and Winant came to a halt. There was nothing to be seen that he hadn't seen before, but he was halted, stopped dead in the middle of black nothingness. Queerly the pillars, or beams, or whatever they were, kept flashing, and so did the lights. But Winant was perfectly motionless in every dimension: of that he was sure.

Then there was a gathering of forces that Winant could perceive but not identify, and, after that, a sensation of resistance, as though he were trying to break through a soft infinitesimally thin sheet of rubber.

Suddenly his whole universe reverberated with the sound of splintering eggshells, and he was through.

He was in the future.

THE first thing he noticed was stillness. At first, he could not make out what was wrong, but merely stood, stock still, waiting and listening for something. A sort of unease quivered in his stomach and he strained his ears trying to pick up the odd sound, until he realized there were no sounds. Only his heart banging away and the noise of his rapid breathing.

Nothing else. No automobiles, trolleys, subways, planes, or people.

He looked up and realized that no longer were there four walls around him. He was standing in a little depression which slanted away, running deeper until, he saw, it gave into a huge, great pit some hundred feet away. Of the large house there was no sign. There must have been an explosion, he thought.

There were buildings, or what was left of buildings, he saw. But they were some distance away. Where he stood was the large cleared space, the slight depression, and the enormous cavity. Rank grass and weeds had sprung up and, perhaps the distance of a half-block in another direction, was a pile of masonry and general wreckage. Weeds half concealed this, as well.

Even from where he stood, he could see that the nearest houses were empty. He turned slowly, looking carefully. In another direction he could see what had been a side street; this too was now twisted and broken by plant-growth and littered with bits of masonry and metal.

Above him, the sky was a dry blue, flecked with the tiniest wisp of cloud. There were no birds. And the silence was maddening.

He strode over toward the buildings he had noted, observing the shattered windows, dust and grime adhering to the remaining splinters of glass in them, the many breaks in the brickwork, and the gutted woodwork.

As he reached the nearest ruin, there was a sudden scurrying, and an enormous rat, almost the size of a cat, bounded out of one gaping hole in the ground at the base of the deserted apartment making a dash across the street. He started half uncomprehending then burst into semi-hysterical laughter as he recalled oratorical predictions that grass would grow in the city streets if certain persons were elected to public office.

He felt tired and old as he entered the doorway of the apartment house.

Strangely enough, there was not the

filth inside that he had expected to find. Dust there was in plenty; there were a few spider webs, further there were evidnces that rats, termites, and cockroaches had taken full advantage of the situation. Yet, he mused, the disaster could not have happened more than a year ago. His logical, observant mind told him that it could not have been long. There would be more traces of dissolution; pavements would be lost from sight; so would asphalt roads.

And the rats. The rats would be bolder —they would attack on sight. A clue lay in that last thought. Why hadn't the giant rodent attacked him? It couldn't be fear of man; rats were notoriously unafraid of men, even in the old days—old days—two years back—his shoulders sagged; what could it be except—

Except that provender was so plentiful that they did not need to attack living humans?

The thought was nauseating. He tried, quickly, to pass it from his mind, but could not. He turned to go out, wanting to get into the clean air again; just then, his eyes caught something in a corner, a sight that made him gag and rush for the doorway.

A pile of gnawed bones—*little* bones.

Something was flickering in the air as he emerged from the building. He stared, fascinated, wondering if this could be some form of alien menace. After what he had just seen about him, meeting up with a crew of Martians would have been no surprise. He wondered if there *had* been an invasion from outer space.

The stairs beneath him gave way suddenly and he was precipitated into darkness.

HE WAS surprised, not hurt, he soon found. No bones broken; nothing wrenched, no bad bruises or cuts that he could notice. A little light streamed in from above; matches gave him the once-over as to his condition.

He rose, slowly, brushing the dust from his clothes, noting that his trouser leg was slit badly and that there was a tear in his coat. He'd have to change before going into the office—he'd intended to stay up all night, dash into the office at 8, finish that copy and be through by 12. Then he'd take a couple days off because there'd be a big lull after the copy went out—but God help him if it wasn't out on time!

He struck more matches, looking around him. A dampish cellar. Rats no doubt would be plentiful here. Then he saw something in the corner something that moved and crawled restlessly.

It was—or had been—a man. It crawled on its belly, inching along, dragging useless legs behind it. The hair was filthy and matted. The eyes had a gleam in the semi-darkness. The arms, he thought, must be strong and well-developed.

It crawled over to him and stopped. Winant wanted to leave in nothing flat but there was a fascination about the horror that kept him rigid. "Hello!" he said.

The thing looked up at him, speculatively, he thought. "Hello! Hello!" he said. "I'm a friend. Can you talk?"

"Talk," croaked the crawling man.

"Are you alone here?" Winant knew he would have to try to start a conversation or start something. He preferred to try and make conversation.

The voice was a little more nearly human, now. "Alone. Alone here." The crawling man rested now, craning his neck up at Winant. Winant sat down. "Who are you?"

The man stared reflectively. "Have you always lived here? Like this?" Winant bent closer. "I'm a friend; you can tell me."

"Live here like this alone. Always."

It was no use, he thought. The thing was apparently able to understand, but whatever had happened to it had also

robbed it of memory. Which perhaps was something of kindness.

"Alone always," said the crawling man. His voice was a little clearer now. "You friend? You stay?"

"No," replied Winant. "I must go now."

He got up and strode away, looking for a means of egress. It occurred to him that he had better get back to the spot where he'd landed; otherwise the time machine might not be able to pick him up he'd be stranded in this year. He struck matches and found, at length, a door. It did not open.

Striking more matches he examined the hinges carefully and decided that it swung outward. He pushed against it. There was something on the other side. He put more weight now, banging his body upon it. It gave a little.

He decided that it would be better to shove than batter himself by trying to ram it. Consequently he strained at it, feeling it give a little at a time. Then he felt something at his ankle, a tugging.

It was the crawling man.

"You friend," came the voice. "You stay here always."

"No!" he said. "I must go."

"You stay!"

He tried to shove the horror away, but it wrapped its arms around his legs, dragged him down. He fought with it, broke free, but again it clasped his legs. He had to get away; he kicked out, striking the thing's forehead.

Winant reached in his pocket, drew out the matches and struck one, dropping the lighted match on the thing's hand. The hand jerked back and a howl of pain came from its lips. He struck more matches, shoved them in its face. It screamed and threw itself backward, then inched away with amazing rapidity.

The door gave to his pushing and he slipped through, ran up stone steps to the street. For a moment he glanced about him wildly, shrinking from the glare of the sun, then noted a familiar glow in the air. As he ran toward it, it took on the familiar vortex-shape.

KELLY'S luncheon with the Sales Manager had been a thing of gloom. Kelly knew he was under his quota—no one had to tell him that—so was every other salesman on the force—but it required the stinging honey of the manager's comments to rub it in his face. A hell of a trick, he thought, feeding a man just so you can insult him. He walked back. Kelly was a mild man and he did not want to vent upon a taxi-driver the wrath he felt for his Sales Manager.

It was still daylight, the sun at least an hour from the horizon; Kelly took up his camera, meaning to use the last roll of film in it. He made a couple shots of children in the street, and then, snapping a yellow filter over the lens to blank out some of the light from the blue sky, he took two shots of a particularly lovely cloud formation. That finished the roll. By now every drop of his anger had evaporated. He overflowed with sheer delight and hailed a passing cab.

At the hotel, he handed in the roll of film at the cigar counter, left a call for eight in the morning, and went up to his room to read the day's papers. Then he finished making out his reports and went to bed.

WINANT walked out of the vortex of flame much in the same manner as he had gone in. When he looked back, holding one hand to his hat-band, the vortex had vanished and there was a smell of burning flesh in the air.

In the corner, a bubbling heap of burning matter that looked vaguely like a crisp fried egg burdened the air with its smell. Winant clutched at his throat in nausea as the mass flopped and heaved, bulging two or three great eyes toward the ceiling

plaster. Coming down again and again on two red-hot terminals the eyes slowly tore to pieces. Floods of green mucus hissed into steam. Chunks of flabby bone and whole organs flowed away. The scene resembled an insurrection at a pie factory.

Nobody was around. The cellar was empty of life.

Winant clumped around the stinking mass and put his foot down on one end of a tough copper cable extending over the concrete floor. The cable was stretched and bent with the V pointing directly at the now smouldering wreck of a carcass. Recovering from a totally unexpected hot-foot, Winant suddenly understood. The quivering thing, whatever it was (and he was beginning to get an inkling), had tripped over the cable, torn it with tremendous force, and collapsed on top of two high-voltage terminals.

Winant ran from room to room of the house for about ten minutes until he realized that the little man wasn't there.

And, being the kind of man he was, he went down through the cellar and turned off the house current. The terminals cooled down. The machinery looked shiny and pretty for a little while and then melted together like a lump of babbit in boiling water.

When it was convenient to do so, he went home. No one had seen him arrive; at least no one had recognized him. No one saw him leave.

NEXT morning, Kelly rose on schedule and left the hotel. His films weren't developed yet, he found with some irritation; he'd have to wait until around noon, at the earliest, to get them. He went to his firm's New York office and reported for a final pep-talk from the Sales Manager.

By half past eleven he was free again, and he went over to Winant's office to keep their lunch engagement. But the girl at the switchboard, in response to his request to see Mr. Winant, said that Winant hadn't been in all day, hadn't phoned, and that no one knew where he was. Kelly cooled his heels in the anteroom for an hour, hoping Winant would eventually show up, then went back to his hotel to pack.

On the way to his room he stopped again at the cigar counter to inquire about his pictures. This time they were ready; he paid for them and stuck them in his pocket.

Just to make sure of things, he tried to get Winant on the phone as soon as he was in his room. The same response, though. He'd not been in; no, they hadn't heard from him; yes, she'd personally make sure that he'd phone Kelly the moment he came in. And, seeing that Kelly was an old friend of the missing man's, the operator added the purely gratuitous information that if Winant didn't come in soon, or didn't have a good explanation

for his absence, it might be just as well for him never to come in. Copy for the publisher's fall catalogue had to go out that day, and Winant was the man who had to send it.

Kelly's packing was simple enough. He traveled light by long habit, and it doesn't take much time to fill one suitcase and an overnight bag. When he completed it, he phoned the railroad terminal to check his compartment reservations, then sat down on the bed, eyeing the telephone.

Then he remembered his photographs.

He pulled the envelope of prints out of his pocket and ruffled through the bunch of cardboards, looking for his pet cloud shots. They were disappointing. He hadn't stopped down the aperture far enough, it seemed; the pictures were full of harsh blacks and whites, with no fine graduations of shade. Well, even after ten years as a minicam bug, he still had things to learn. Next time, he would do better.

The others came out okay. He held one picture, a telegraph messenger on a bicycle, the background a row of weather-beaten tenements, up at arm's length, admiring it. That one wasn't bad at all. He'd have to mount it, have a couple of extra prints made, and enter them into various contests.

He glanced hurriedly at the rest. One he looked at and did not comprehend. Then the shapes and planes coagulated in his brain, and he saw it clearly.

Where in God's name had he made THAT shot?

He slumped back against the head of the bed, staring at it. He began to breathe again, exhaling in a loud, rasping sigh that was partly a grunt. The muscles of his back and shoulders violently and involuntarily had contracted when he saw the picture. Now they relaxed slowly, and he trembled with great, jolting shudders.

The locale was easily recognizable. It was Times Square, in front of the Futurama. And he remembered what he had photographed: the little fat man in the prince albert.

But the little man wasn't there.

Or rather, something of him was there —a sort of misty outline that looked like a papier-mache make-ready frame. Draped over that frame was a ghastly, flowing, whitish thing with tentacles and staring eyes. A huge bulge of the creature at the edge where it began to blur a little hid a section of the sign, cutting out the words: "or your money back."

Stupid! A trick of the developer!

Or bad photography.

He looked at the tiny print again. It wasn't bad photography. He had rarely seen a clearer print.

Kelly got up and took out a cigarette. He took out a match, cupped it in his hand, struck it, and lit the cigarette.

He stood there in the middle of the floor, staring toward the innocuous-looking rectangle of coated paper that he had thrown on the bed. In a moment or so he became conscious of a pain in his right hand. He looked down; the match had burned itself out between his fingers. A huge white blister had already formed on each of the three. He threw the dead match to the floor, jammed his hurt hand into a trousers pocket and sucked on his cigarette. No smoke came into his lungs. He looked at the cigarette; it was broken almost in two by his shaking hand.

To hell with his train reservations! With great precision he extracted and lit another cigarette and went out.

"I'll find Winant and straighten this thing out," he mumbled to himself as he waited for the elevator.

But he didn't find Winant. Not even though he scouted in every conceivable place that Winant might be, even, eventually, put the police on Winant's trail.

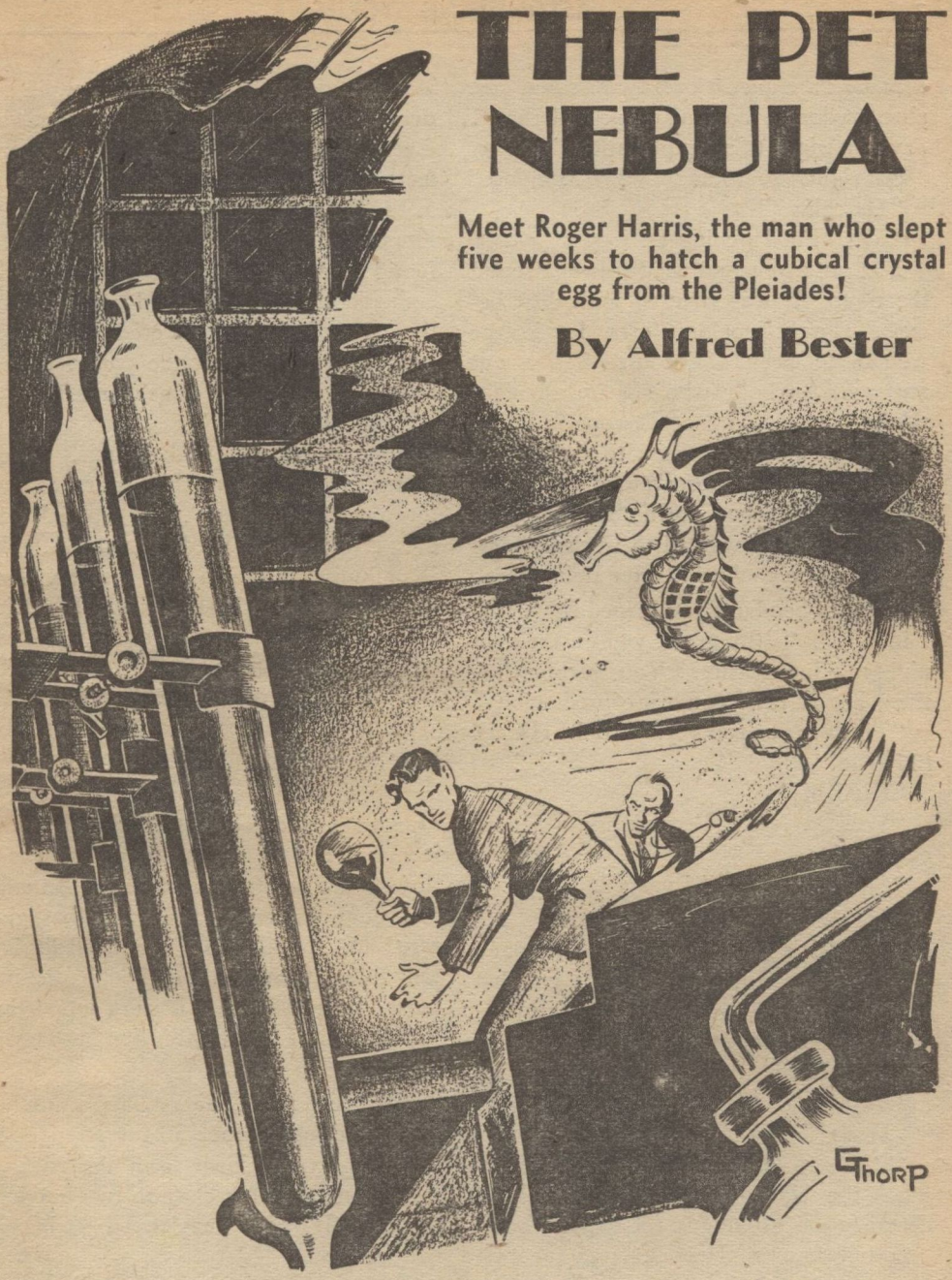
Nobody ever really found Winant again.

THE END

THE PET NEBULA

Meet Roger Harris, the man who slept five weeks to hatch a cubical crystal egg from the Pleiades!

By Alfred Bester



AT LAST I said: "You ought to get out of bed for meals, at least."

Harris shook his head.

"For meals," I persisted, "and to air the sheets. It isn't healthy, lying in bed for five weeks.

"Besides," I went on, "there's my reputation too. I can't take a class any more. The kids all grin and whisper and I can hear them saying: 'That Prof's got a room-mate who's been sleeping for five weeks.' "

"I'm not sleeping," said Harris.

"Then what the hell are you doing? I

demand an explanation. I can stand just about so much bohemianism, and then I have the right to an explanation."

All right," said Harris, "I'm hatching."

"Hatching?"

"Yes. I'm hatching an egg.

I let out a yelp and went tearing around the room. It was covered with dust because Harris wouldn't even let in the woman to clean. Of course he's a nut anyway. Anybody who sits up all night taking pictures with a telescope is a nut. You can get paid money to do that at our University Observatory, but not Harris. He turned down their offer because he said he wanted to work by himself. Said he could do better unhindered.

"Since when have you turned chicken?" I inquired. "Why aren't you on the roof nights taking pictures? You were cuckoo then, but at least you were predictable."

"This is astronomy," said Harris, "kind of."

"Kind of?"

"Well . . . yes. Because it's a square egg."

"Sq . . . E. . . . !" I gasped.

"Maybe I'd better explain." He grinned. "It's like this. I was in England last year . . . you remember? I got that fellowship to work with Breakthistle. Well, I found something there, and that's why all this year I've been working on my own hook. It's extraordinary!"

"What?"

"It has to do with Herschel . . . Herschel the elder. Because you and all chemists are so dumb I'll explain what everyone knows. Herschel was the first and probably the greatest of all modern astronomers. He was great for his unprecedented work on nebulae, and for the extraordinary number of perfect mirrors he made."

"So?"

"So I stole a Herschel mirror. Now listen. Herschel made thousands of mirrors, all of which were in use for decades after he died. But a certain few he soldered down in tins and put carefully away. Everybody thought that was just to protect them, but I had a hunch, I dug around in the Breakthistle Library where most of Herschel's papers are filed, and at last I found a remarkable thesis in code. I deciphered it and it revealed some strange things about those soldered down mirrors, so I copied out the paper, stole a mirror in a tin and came home."

"And now. . . .?"

"Square eggs," said Harris. "Yep. Herschel didn't want those mirrors used for a certain reason . . . especially he didn't want them used on nebulae. Not island universe nebulae, but the fiery cloud type you find in the Pleiades. He'd tried some weird curves and gotten weird results, so he wanted no more of it. I tried too. And . . . well, look."

HE threw back the blankets for a moment. He was lying with his knees drawn up, and lodged between legs and stomach, resting on the mattress, was a tiny square crystal. It was a perfect cube and quite radiant with a fire that glittered and sparkled in a beautiful display. One thing astonished me, though; the bed looked depressed, as if it were supporting half a ton. I mentioned that to Harris at once.

"Notice it?" he said. "That's another peculiar thing. It took all my strength to get this crystal down from the roof. I think it must weigh close to two hundred pounds. It'll get heavier too, when it matures."

"Heavier! Matures! Down from the roof!"

"Yeah. I set up that Herschel mirror according to directions and then built a strong solenoid field at the focal point. Them were the instructions. I set the 'scope on the Pleiades Nebula and waited. After a couple of hours the whole instrument suddenly collapsed . . . smithereens.

Smashed the mirror, but when I hunted around in the pieces I found this. Like Herschel said. He was vague, but he mentioned 'bringing fiery stuff to earth. . . .' "

"You mean recreate a nebula here on earth?"

"Could be. That mirror had some mighty peculiar curves, and his solenoid directions were like nothing I've ever seen. Anyway, he said hatch 'em like eggs, and that's what I'm doing. Only he didn't mention how long. I wish I could have got a hen, but hens won't sit on square eggs."

Then he squealed and I heard the bed begin to crackle. Harris rolled over quick and I saw him land on the floor with a smash as I dashed out to the hall for a fire extinguisher. For I'd seen something else: a thick spiral of smoke oozing up from the blankets. When I got back, Harris was on his knees rubbing his stiff frame, and a merry fire was burning in the middle of the bed. I heaved up the extinguisher to let go and Harris struck down my arm.

"Don't shoot, pard," he cried, "you might hurt 'im."

He crawled over to the bed and began yanking away the burning cloth and heaving it on the floor. I sprayed it hurriedly, with one eye peeled for developments. Then we heard 'chunk' and the sound of something landing on the floor. It seemed to me that the square egg had dropped through the mattress and was lying somewhere under the bed. It also seemed to me that the floor underfoot was buckling precariously. It hit Harris that was too.

"Heavy!" he muttered, shaking his head. "Damned heavy. And hot too. Herschel didn't say anything about that."

The floor joists began to creak and the flooring to slope as though we were having an earthquake. We got hold of the bed after everything was thoroughly quenched and pull it away to get a look at the egg. It lay in the center of a distinct crater and a cloud of smoking, charring carpet, glowing like a white-hot piece of glass. The acrid stench was blinding.

"Two more minutes," I yelled, "and we'll be on the floor below."

I grabbed Harris by the shoulder and tried to drag him out of the room. The floor was squealing in little cries, sagging with little heaves. The walls must have been reeling too, because plaster started to tinkle down and smudge everything with white. Tendrils of flame ran along the carpet from the blazing nucleus until the floor was a fiery star.

"Let's get," I shouted.

"No . . . wait!" answered Harris. "Watch it!"

Above the crackle of flame and the grind of beams, I heard a high-pitched whine. It swelled until it was almost deafening, then took on a lovely overtone as though a thousand violins were sounding the same harmonic. The blazing crystal egg split sharply in two. The floor ceased sagging. From the broken halves of the crystal I could see a flaming figurine arise.

IT WAS, perhaps, half an inch long; and shaped very much like a sea-horse. Arched neck, protruding eyes, flaring nostrils, and a tiny body that dwindled to a tendril. Most amazing of all was the way it blazed. It seemed to be made of pure blue-white flame, and it floated in the air like a tiny, brilliant sun that hurt our eyes.

"That's it," sighed Harris. "That's my nebula."

Then curious things began to happen. Every small object in the room left its place and drifted slowly through the air toward the flaming sea-horse. And as they approached . . . a comb, a toothbrush, a bunch of keys, two half dollars and a pack of cigarettes . . . the tiny thing veered around and snapped them up, one by one,

with its tiny mouth. It blazed even more brightly.

"Nebula!" I said. "That's no nebula . . . It's a thing! A living, intelligent thing."

"A nebula-thing," broke in Harris. "He's of the stuff suns are made of . . . perhaps a creature that lives in suns and fiery nebulae. Why not?"

But he couldn't say any more, in fact he couldn't even answer himself. The tiny nebula had finished its gobbling and apparently noticed Harris. I won't say recognized, although that's what it looked like. Certainly after lying in its egg alongside him for five weeks it should have known him. It flickered through the air toward Harris and made an inquisitive circle over his head. I saw Harris go up on his toes and then, with a violent effort, try to bat it away with his hand. Red welts puffed up on his face and hand.

"Hot" he gasped. "Like an arc-lamp . . . a million arc-lamps. And he pulls."

I backed through the door, for I'd felt the tug myself. Harris scrambled behind me, and together we watched the nebula's serene progress around the room. Every time it came with a foot of anything, a great black scorch appeared, and the remaining small things that were lying around continued to float up, as though to a magnet, and be devoured. Each time something went down that hatch, the tiny nebula blazed brighter.

"With that heat," I hissed, "you didn't have to hatch him. He would have popped all by himself. Herschel must have been exaggerating."

"Yeah . . . old-fashioned guy," gulped Harris. He gave me a helpless look and I realized that I was probably half out of my mind with fear, talking about exaggeration with a thing like that floating around.

"Listen," I said, "this is no joke. We've got to do something before he burns down the city."

HARRIS managed to dash to his closet and then get out of the room with an armful of clothes. It was a close call, for the little nebula made an excited zoom for him. I slammed the door and peeked through a crack while Harris was dressing. Every time a fire started . . . which was about once a minute . . . I stuck the extinguisher nozzle through and sprayed it down.

At last Harris was ready.

"For what?" I wanted to know.

"You got me," he said. "Herschel may have been mixed up about that hatching business, but his general idea was right. You better give the horse a dressing down with the extinguisher. It might put him out."

We flung open the door and I let him have it full blast. The room was practically ruined anyway, so it didn't matter. But when the pump was exhausted, and most of the mist had settled down, there was the confounded thing sailing around as though it'd just had a bath. I could swear it winked malevolently.

"Listen, Harris," I said. "He's smart. Too damned smart and nasty for me. He's your baby . . . *You* handle him."

"No," said Harris. "I'll take him across the Quad to old Gobblewurst's laboratory. Gobblewurst could handle him, I bet."

"And how," I asked, throwing a book at the advancing nebula, "are you going to get Mister Arson across the Quad?"

"Like this," said Harris. He advanced a step and brandished his arms. Then he yelled: "Hey, come on!" a couple of times and backed away. The little thing twinkled like a Cepheid and followed him. Harris and I trotted on ahead of the heat wave.

"Affectionate little beast, isn't he?" said Harris.

We managed to get it out into the Quad and Harris kept it there, batting it away from his head with an old foil he'd picked

up on the way down. I ran back into the building and put out the dozen fires that'd been started. When I got down again, Harris was running around like a madman.

"Every time I hit it," he gasped, "a hunk of foil fuses off and I feel like I've hit a dam. And now look what he's up to!"

I heard the pop and tinkle of glass and I saw that lights were going out all over the Quad. The little nebula was floating up to one lamp after another, and one by one they'd fuse and blow out. The light of that fiery sea-horse flickered and blazed through the Quad like six thousand colored searchlights. It was weird. People were shoving their heads out of windows and yelling.

"He's looking for a friend," I said. "Must be lonesome, but I'll bet he's also hunting for reinforcements. He's mean. Come on, put a leash on him and let's get over to Gobblewurst before the Insurance company gets us."

Harris ran down the Quad and waved his arms some more. After a while . . . that is, after all the lights were out . . . the sea-horse floated toward him, and Harris and I ran across the lawn and hammered on old Gobblewurst's door. We tried to explain everything at once, but G. took one look at the nebula and motioned us in. It sailed in too as if it owned the place.

HALF the laboratory was wrecked by the time we got our story out, but Gobblewurst didn't seem to mind. That was surprising because although G. doesn't care about living on salami and iced tea and sleeping with salamanders, he throws a fit if you so much as look at one of his thermocouples.

"Ah?" he said. "Ah! So! Indeed! Really! My-my! Tsk-tsk!"

He didn't even bat an eyelash when six platinum crucibles floated up and were chewed down with relish. I could almost hear those fiery lips smack with gusto. Gobblewurst just sat there and clucked like a pig, and at last he told Harris to manuever his child into a certain corner. When the thing was there, Gobblewurst put his hand in front of a greenish glass screen that was just below and motioned me to look.

"Bones," I said, looking at the under side. "Looks like an X-ray."

"It is," smiled Gobblewurst happily. "Very odd creature you have there. I'm obliged to you for letting me see him. Pure Proton, he is. Atomic nuclei. That's why he's so heavy. Exerts a tremendous gravitational force for all his size. My goodness, he must weigh tons and tons and tons."

"Then why didn't he when he was in bed with Harris? And why wasn't he so hot?"

"Well," explained Gobblewurst, "he

was in embryo then. So naturally he wouldn't start getting heavy until the life-process began. Now that he's alive he'll just grow heavier and hotter. You see he feeds on atoms in any form. Splits off the electrons and digests the nuclei or protons into his body. The electrons are egested and they're what make him glow and cast X-ray shadows. Just alpha, beta and gamma radiations. . . ."

"Wait a minute!" I yelped. "What was that about growing?"

"He'll grow," repeated Gobblewurst irritably. "Grow and grow and grow. Like a hot sun. The sun's pure proton too, you know."

"But what happens to us? To the earth?"

"We'll be destroyed, no doubt . . . but that's not important just now."

Now I'm a chemist, and I pride myself that I'm as objective as any man on the faculty. I wouldn't care if the earth turned inside-out and Boogie-Woogied, only I'd already paid seventy dollars to have my doctorate thesis typed and I hated to see the money go to waste. I shoved Gobblewurst back and ran for his shelves. I grabbed a beaker of Nitric and let go for the sea-horse . . . just as a trial toss. The acid caught him full. He blinked and wiggled, and that was all.

I went down the length of the shelves and tried every corrosive I could think of off-hand . . . and I could think of plenty . . . but no soap. Gobblewurst and Harris danced around and tried to hold me back, but we were all too busy trying to dodge the vicious attacks of the nebula to do much with each other.

After an hour the lab looked as though it'd been put through a mangle saturated with aqua fortis.

FINALLY they hit me in the head with a five litre Erlemeyer and I went down in a haze of pyrex. When I came to, the first thing I saw was the nebula floating around looking bigger and hungrier than ever. Worse still, he was budding on the side like a hydra. I wondered how long it would be before there was an army. Then I realized old Gobblewurst was howling in my ear.

"Listen," he said. "There isn't anything that can stop it. I tell you it lives on atoms, any kind of atoms . . . it *loves* them like a double Kiss-Me frappe with tutti-frutti."

I lurched to my feet and gave him a cock-eyed look.

"Tutti-frutti to you, Gobblewurst," I gasped. I staggered around the demolished lab for a couple of minutes until my head cleared. Harris, I saw, was having real trouble. The little nebula was feeling his strength now, and wasn't playing games any more. He was systematically devouring everything that came close. He was getting bigger and more dangerous by the minute, and the bud on his side was becoming increasingly distinct. I knew we'd never be able to handle two . . . But how to handle even one?

"Radium burns!" called Gobblewurst. "We'll have to get out. Those radiations will kill us."

"Right!" I said, "and that's the answer. . . ."

I shrieked my plans while we ducked around the sides of the lab, and at last Gobblewurst and Harris got the idea. We left Harris on guard and G. and I hot-footed it down to the roëntgenology department. It took us half an hour to get the equipment together and convince the University powerhouse we weren't kidding. Then we tore back to the Quad.

Harris was practically out on his feet, his face and clothes seared with savage burns. The nebula was almost two inches long, and dragging real heavy stuff up to him. The stone walls were cracked and blistered, things were burning all over, and Harris was actually drifting up on his toes when we got to him and carried

him outside. Then we laid the wires to the main cables and prayed the power-house had sent us the current. We connected the Coolidge tubes . . . a dozen of them . . . set up the tubes in a ring around the room, weighted them with lead scraps so they wouldn't float, and switched on the power. It was there.

The lab was instantly drenched with a perfect crossfire of radiation. The nebula rocked in the center of the room, flared angrily and swept forward toward a tube. I held my breath and I heard Gobblewurst swear. If the thing got close enough to smash a Coolidge it would have a chink through which to escape, and then we'd really be finished . . . along with everything else.

It struggled forward with a violent effort, and to my dismay I saw that the bud at its side was wriggling, fully formed, in an effort to break loose. It inched up while we waited tensely. I heard the power screaming in the tubes . . . and then the nebula sagged under the barrage. The flaming color drained away . . . and as the deadly discharges pounded, it began to blow up. Swell, I mean. It puffed like a sponge in water, and we ran around the lab like nuts, yanking the Coolidges back so that they still covered the nebula.

Only it wasn't a nebula any more.

THE bottom edge hit the floor and went through like a knife through butter. The concrete gave and everything in the lab rocked and shuddered. The tubes clattered and crashed to the ground while the power cables spluttered and lashed out. Half the ceiling thundered down as the walls burst, and I saw the night sky through the rent roof. Gobblewurst darted forward to redirect the remaining tubes, and I caught his arm.

"Never mind," I shouted, "there he goes!"

The great mass of dulled matter had swelled until it pressed against the remaining lab walls. It spread them back, and as we all ran stumbling backwards, everything crushed downward and slid rumbling into the bowels of the earth. Then there was no more heat, no more radiation . . . nothing but a giant bottomless crater yawning where Gobblewurst's lab had been. Harris tottered to a halt, turned and stared.

"What happened?" he asked. As if he hadn't seen for himself!

"Dead," I sighed. "We've gone and killed your little playmate, thank God!"

He wanted to know how.

"Simple," spoke up Gobblewurst as though he'd planned the whole thing. "The nebula was pure proton. We submitted him to a barrage of Coolidge tube emanations, which are pure electrons. His body sopped up the free electrons, each proton acquired enough to reform it into an atom again. The heat and radiation were transformed into the energy of electronic orbits; he swelled until he was a mass of atoms once more, and sank. That's all."

"Huh?" said Harris.

"Look, stupid," I said. "Your pal ate protons and the waste product of his metabolism was electrons. We surrounded him with nothing but free electrons so he had nothing to ingest but his own waste. Get it? He died from auto-intoxication. They call it constipation in the ads. . . ."

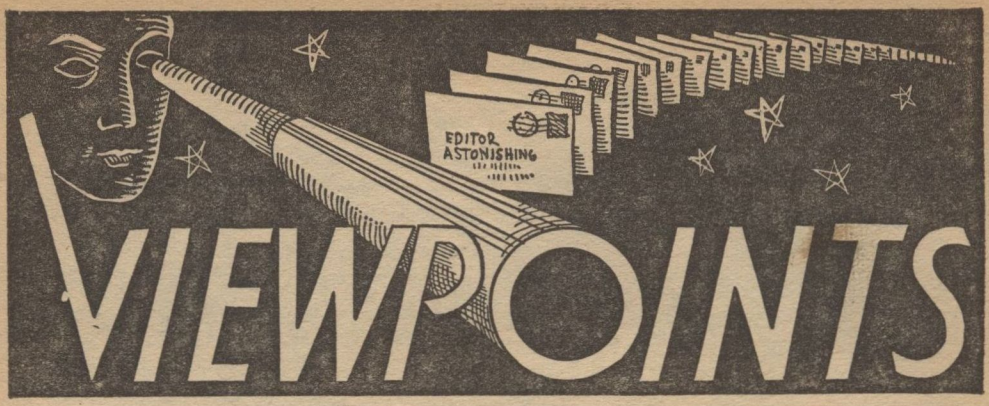
"No, no," cried Gobblewurst. "The free electrons were attracted by the protons and set up into orbits. Atoms were reformed and . . ."

But Harris and I were already headed home across the Quad.

"Well," croaked Harris. "It just goes to show you. Crime doesn't pay."

"Never mind," I said. "At least it got you out of bed."

THE END



Reaction Was Favorable

Dear Mr. Pohl,

If I know my science fiction, you have received, and are going to receive, a number of derogatory letters asking whyinhell you printed such a hare-brained, unscientifictional story as "Trouble in Time." Well, ed, here's one reader who's on your side. "Trouble in Time" was as delightful a piece of work as I've seen in many a moon. It did not, perhaps, have the polish given similar burlesques by one E. T. Snooks a few years back, but it was still most welcome. Here's hoping reader reaction will be favorable enough to warrant the printing of more such stories.

Otherwise, the December issue was no better, and perhaps a little worse, than usual.

Glad to see the two-way letter column. After all, you editors ought to have some way of getting back at us guys.—Lynn Bridges, 7730 Pitt, Detroit, Michigan.

Opinions and Suggestions

Dear Editor:

After reading the latest issue of your mag, I decided to sit down and type you a letter.

In regard to serials: I don't think much of them, because just when the story gets interesting one usually finds the legend, "To Be Continued." If, however, you insist on printing them, please, *please,* keep them short.

One suggestion. How about having a controversial corner where the readers can air out their pet theories on such subjects as Atlantis and Mu, or discuss such topics as "Are the canals on Mars really canals?" How about it, Ed., huh?—Carl Langewisch, Jr., 1579 English Street, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

● It seems to us that we already have such a department,—this is it! After all, what does the word "Viewpoints" mean if not the opinions and ideas and theories of those writing in it? Let's hear some of your own theories—we'll print 'em!—*The Editor.*

Disappointment

Dear Editor Pohl:

The December *Astonishing* was a bit of a disappointment in almost every branch of the mag. Sherry's cover can hardly compare to his work for "Invisible One". Out of fifteen illustrations there are about five of any worth. Only three of the six stories are mentionable. The rest of the issue seems pretty vague; I have only the unread serial installment to bolster fortitude enough to judge the next issue. The letdown is even more noticeable after the excellent preceding issues.

Gottesman is first with "Trouble in Time", refreshing short in the idiom of "wackiness" so popular in stf at present. The Morey illustrations were the best, too, with the only "full-paged framed" of the book. This author has seen print in only Fictioneers, Inc. publications, and I personally think he is a "find" of the

year. Only his first story—about some pirate, I think—failed to click with me.

The Asimov sequel is second, a great flop when compared to "Half-Breed", perhaps because the dynamic punch and awful suspense of the original could not be equaled, but most likely because there were so few pages in which to continue the adventures of this fabulous people.

"Age of the Cephalods" is third, with romantically quaint characters and a thin plot.

Next is the football cooperation between both authors and characters. This is another instance of "wacky-work" and also of starved wordage. I found the participants to be very hazy, and although the whole thing was just a game, the plot could have been improved.

At last the editor answers the readers. Good for you. But why not print all letters in the type used for answers?

Do have an improved issue next time! —Charles Hidley, E5, 2541 Aqueduct Avenue, New York City.

● Printing the entire "Viewpoints" column in this size of type would certainly allow us to print more letters—but fewer people might read them! For that matter, we could print the entire magazine in type this size or smaller. There would be a lot more words to read, but imagine the imprecations that would be heaped on our head by half our readers (the half that managed to read the magazine at all) when they developed *Myopia Scientifictionissimus,* or blindness induced by reading the tiny letters.

And incidentally the sequel, which struck you as being too short, was more than a thousand words longer than the original "Half-Breed"!—*The Editor.*

Art Criticism Dep't

Dear Mr. Pohl:

At the time of this writing I haven't as yet read any of the stories in the December Astonishing. But that's only incidental anyway, as I seldom care to comment on the stories unless certain ones appeal to me.

Now for a few comments on your artwork. Bok and Morey, in my opinion of course, are your two best artists. The more of Bok's work you use, the better. Hannes Bok's style possesses a certain unexplainable something that distinguishes him from other artists. You could easily drop Eron, Thorp, and Mayorga and they would never be missed. Illustrations that are unusually attractive (Bok's) often interest me in a story that I would ordinarily disregard. On the other hand, some of the work by Eron, Thorp, and Mayorga tends to disinterest me in certain stories when glancing at them, especially with short stories.

Here's hoping that I'll see Bok on the cover soon. Phil Bronson, 224 West 6th Street, Hastings, Minnesota.

Fan's Fanfare

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Taaa Daa! That is a fanfare of trumpets in case you didn't know. And they are for the one man crusade—"Doc" Lowndes, who got us the two-way column, Lowndes who is getting us more Bok, and now Lowndes who is going to get us a new cut for Viewpoints.

Asimov both surprises and delights with "Half-Breeds on Venus". Not so good as "Half-Breed", though.

I looked all through your mag and find only two of these superb Bokian illustrations—WHY?

I want more Bok, Bok, and Bok.

If you don't get better stories—I'll shoo you right off the planet Earth!

Did you see that: I yam a Careerist—Am I proud? I showed that to everybody in town, and now I am a rival for E. H. Crump's position, as Memphis' number one Citizen. Ha!

To Richard de Vries, here in Memphis, come on boy crawl out of your shell and join the Lunarites, Branch No. 11 of *The Science Fictioneers.*—Art. R. Sehnert, 791 Maury, Memphis, Tennessee.

Quicksands of Youthwardness

By Malcolm Jameson

A powerful serial novel of a planet where age reigned triumphant, and to be young was a fault which meant death!

Conclusion

Synopsis

THE space-explorer *Thuban,* coming within range of Sirius' dangerous gravitational pull, blows out its motors in the struggle to get away. The ship escapes from Sirius, but drifts aimlessly through space for months.

In its wandering, the *Thuban* approaches a "coal-sack" nebula in space, which the atlasses show to have the curious property of causing those who enter it to lose their memories. The ship drifts directly into the space-cloud, but since it is well shielded, the radiations have no effect on the crew. At the center of the cloud the radiations vanish, and the explorers see a planet. They land on it with the aid of jury-rigged auxiliary motors, and are surprised to find that the planet is inhabited by incredibly aged Earthmen, descendants of marooned spacemen and in some cases the wrecked spacemen themselves.

The explorers discover that not only will the radiations from the inside of the nebula affect memory, but it will also cause a person subjected to them to become actually younger! Every eighty years, approximately, the planet passes into the nebula on its orbit, and its entire population is rejuvenated.

Only the older inhabitants of the plant, however, can endure the passage through the nebula —those who are too young to start with become younger and younger still, until they die of their youthfulness, reaching an embryonic stage. The younger members of the crew of the *Thuban,* therefore, are treated with disrespect. Wishing to escape from the planet, they try to get all the crew together. But the planet passes into the nebula and the mysterious rays begin working, robbing people of their memories while they are being rejuvenated.

Dr. Elgar, a member of the *Thuban's* crew, is caught out in the unshielded open when the

planet goes into the dark cloud. Immediately he loses control of his body as his memory slips from him, operating in reverse, and he wanders aimlessly around until he is found.

Part Three

CHAPTER TWELVE

Forgetfulness

IT WAS dark in the space-lock. Daxon pushed Elgar ahead of him through the inner door and followed down the passage toward the control room, watching him narrowly. Suddenly, as he expected him to, Elgar whirled.

"What the Hell? Is this a dream—or what?" and he rubbed his chin, puzzled. "A minute ago I was shaving in our apartment at Tutl's. How did I get here?"

Then he noticed Daxon's rig of armor. "Masquerade? Joke?"

"Take it easy, kid," said Daxon, whipping off his helmet. "You've had a little stroke, but you're all right now. Go on into the control room and I'll tell you the whole story."

Elgar went ahead into the familiar control room, mystified. One of the crew there, the ship-keeper, said hello, but no more.

"Play I'm doctor and you're the patient," said Daxon, getting out of the awkward suit. "Tell me—what did you do today?"

"Quit kidding. You know damn well what I did today—I just finished telling you. I was at the library, digging through the history of the 15th Era."

"Yeah? And yesterday?"

"Well, in the morning I went to the Main conservation Unit and was talking to old Dr. Haarsn there. Then; in the afternoon, I was at the library, as usual—more history. Last night we played *tukulu* with Tutl, and I won twenty Athanatian *dollys*. *You* ought to remember that, you yelped enough over losing."

"That's all I want to know. All right. Now hang on to yourself and take aboard some bad news. For a doctor, you've certainly made a spectacle of yourself. Supposed to guard us against amnesia and the other cuckoo ailments of this dizzy planet. But what do you do? Get infected yourself!

"What you think was yesterday was over a week ago—ten days, to be exact. Since then, plenty has happened. This ship, the town, the planet—the whole damn works—is out in the black nebula again. The population has gone nuts, as far as I can see, and are spending their time wandering around in the dark. It doesn't seem to hurt 'em, so we haven't lost any sleep over *them*.

"But *you*—you who saw it coming—advised us—cautioned us—made up suits. *You* slipped. You've been lost two days, and believe me, I had a tough time finding you. I hung out at one of those food joints all day today, because I noticed that whatever else those old babies forget, they don't forget to eat. Sure enough, in you come, sorta dazed, and grab a package of chow out of the bin and a flask of torlberry juice just like one of the natives.

"I came up and spoke to you. You knew me all right. Said something about how funny it was the way Ronny was mad over the post-setting business and his chasing those . . . remember that?"

"Post-setting? Chasing what? No. Nor the food store thing, either."

"Anyhow, you acted like you were a little tight. What you were saying about Ronny faded out in the middle. You commenced eating like that was the only thing in the world. Then I dragged you along with me. You trailed like a lamb, babbling once in awhile about something that had just happened. Only every time you did that, it was something else—always a little further back. *Now* it's ten days.

"All right. Now that you are yourself again, I'm going to give you a play-by-play description of what's gone on while

you were out. After that, you can bring your medical mind to bear on it and tell us the answer—if there is any."

DAXON told of his fight in the hall of the temple. The embattled ancients got the best of him, must have knocked him out, for when he regained consciousness he found himself in a room in another part of the Temple. He was bound, but there was a priest sitting in the room, writing in a ledger. At his call, the priest looked at the clock, then came over and released him.

To his demand that he be let out, the priest merely said, "As you will," and led him down a corridor. He indicated a door, and started to withdraw. Daxon's suspicions were aroused. They had put up such stubborn resistance earlier, yet now their representative was quite willing to let him out at his first request. Daxon insisted that the priest open the door for him, and when the old man showed signs of fright, he seized him and bound him.

Suspicious of the door, suspecting a trap, Daxon hastily searched the building for other exits, and other priests. He found none. Most of the structure was filled with endless rows of filing cases or shelves of bound manuscripts. It was not until he reached the top floor that he found the habitation of the priests, but it had all the appearance of having been evacuated. In an upper hall he heard a trap door being lifted, followed by the crash of an empty wicker hamper flung down the steep staircase that led to it. Following the hamper, a man in a space-suit, evidently moving with some difficulty, started descending the steps, clinging to its rail with both hands.

Thinking it was one of his shipmates come to rescue him, Daxon rushed to the man. Getting no intelligible answer from him, he peered into the helmet and saw it was a total stranger. He managed to strip the space-suit off. It was another of the priests. Like the first one, Daxon left him bound, and although examination showed the suit was not one of the *Thuban's,* he put it on and mounted to the roof to see what the priest had been up to.

The first thing that struck him was the darkness. The sun had gone, and up there was the black fog of the nebula. The dome of the Temple, once his eyes became adapted to the gloom, shimmered beside him, as the hull of the *Thuban* had done, but the color was a pale straw. He thought he must have come out on the flat roof of an annex to the Temple, probably of a monastery.

Reclining on couches about the roof were hundreds of old men—priests— in the same condition of stupid lethargy in which he was later to find Elgar. Then he saw the purpose of the visit of the one whose suit he wore. Stacked on a low table were food packages, that inevitable ration of the Hygonians while in the dark. The priests, too, were submitting to rejuvenation, but with the difference that it was apparently under some control. They had left at least two on watch below.

When he went below, the last priest he had encountered pleaded with him to release him and return his space-suit. Daxon untied him, but declined to return the armor. Sobbing and wringing his hands, the priest implored, moaning that their very civilization was at stake. After a brief parley, during which he promised to return later, if he found his own shipmates unharmed, Daxon hurried downstairs. He unbound the priest there and left by the door first shown him.

THE passage to the Tutl apartment was not easy, dark as it was and the street so full of dazed wanderers, but he found it without mishap. Finding both the space-suits there, he knew that somehow Elgar had fallen victim, either to the mob in the Temple, or of the murk outside. Daxon made his way back to the Temple

and bullied the two frightened priests some more, but they swore they had detained but one—Daxon. Since the visibility was rarely more than a yard or so, Daxon gave up the search for the time.

Groping his way through the haze, bumping into straggling Hygoinans, he at last reached the ship and informed the others of the situation. All of them, except one left to keep the ship, donned armor and went back to the city. There, as the most efficient way to search, they scattered and picketed the food shops. The others were still there, hoping to pick up Captain Yphon, knowing that he must eat like the rest.

Elgar was hard put to accept what was told him. Yet he knew about the amnesia; he had seen it occur to the Captain. But even then, accepting every word that Daxon had just told him as the unalloyed truth, it was impossible for him to feel that the events of those other days that he had lived consciously and then forgotten were a part of his *own* experience.

The episode of the post-setting attempt —their visit to the Captain—the preparing of the space-suits—the final ceremonies at the Temple, and the subsequent fight: those things were credible, but no more real to him than if he had read them in a book. *He* figured in the action, certainly, but as a name only.

"Memory," murmured Dr. Elgar, thoughtfully, "is a damn sight more valuable asset than I ever quite realized."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Negative Light

WHEN they had rested and Daxon felt he had brought Elgar fully up to date on himself, they climbed back into their armor and went to town to help Ronny find the Captain. They took some powerful handlights, thinking they would be of assistance, but to their disappointment they were not. The mist, while greedy of the weak, phosphorescent illumination it drew from every object, seemed to have a fairly low saturation point. The rays of the lamps lit up the path for only a few feet. Beyond that, the fog actually reflected the light as a deep crimson, effectively blinding them as to what lay beyond. They turned the lights off.

They stopped on the causeway to rest, over the lagoon it bridged. The autumn treetops in the park which bordered it, brown and red but a few days ago, were barely visible now as green, brilliant in hue, even if the intensity was very low. Through the murk, they could not see the water, but following the rule of complementary colors every other substance seemed to follow, they assumed it to be a yellow.

"I found out what that deluminant stuff was for," remarked Daxon. "It has a use after all. Those balls they put on the lamp-posts shine white now. They are not much help as illumination, because the nebular gas is so absorptive, but they do enable you to steer a course. Inside the houses, though, where they hung the black cloth, you can see pretty well. But I warn you, don't touch anything that looks white. The air is warm enough, but those things are *cold*. I wonder why?"

"There can't be any nebular gas this low," speculated Elgar. "It's far too tenuous to penetrate below the stratosphere. But it is all around us, and the negative gradient is so great that substances here behave as if they were immersed in it.

"I've thought all along that this reverse metabolism is due to the negative nature of the light. Under the demand to give back the light it formerly absorbed, a cell, by an inversion of its growth process, could manufacture it and deliver it. With inorganic matter, like those black balls, we have different conditions. No amount of exposure to light would enable them to

store light. They absorb it, convert it to heat, and radiate it as such. Now place it in a strong negative field such as this, and what is the natural reaction? Topsy-turvy, mind you—we have to accept that?"

"Why, I guess it would absorb heat and radiate it as light," hazarded Daxon. "But say, if these old galoots are living backwards, *unliving*—why do they eat? Why don't they manufacture food and heave it up at the old meal times? Huh?"

"Your logic is swell," laughed Elgar, "but your premise is wrong. Work, no matter in what direction, requires energy. A shipyard requires power to break up a ship as well as assemble one. Friction is against you whether you pull the trunk here, or back again. So—a cell, whether evolving or degenerating, needs food for the work it does in reorganization."

THEY might have said more, but at that moment they heard a commotion in the direction of the city end of the causeway. Listening, they soon made out the stentorian voice of Captain Yphon, raging—threatening. In the lulls there would come the sound of more persuasive voices, silences, then a renewal of the outbursts. The party was approaching. It was Ronny and a couple of the men bringing the skipper home.

Out of the mist loomed first the stocky, well-knit form of the old captain. He was staggering like a drunken man in his aimless walk, veering from side to side, and now and then turning completely around. His purple robe of aristocracy gleamed dully in the dark as gold. Whenever his blind attempts at walking headed him back toward the city, the three men following him would turn him straight and push him forward again. It was then that the skipper would vent his wrath, bellowing that he wanted no interference from young whippersnappers. And almost in the same breath, he would forget all about it and stumble on blindly forward.

Like a group of drovers rounding up a sick bull, the Thubanites trailed him in an open semi-circle, heading him off on the turns, steadily herding him forward to home and safety. Elgar could not help grinning to himself in the dark at the rugged old man's individualistic attitude. Accustomed to command, but not in command of himself, he resented an interference which he could not understand. But it did not matter. He forgot each episode in the happening.

Once at the ship, Yphon, reacting as was expected, became normal the moment he entered the well-lit interior. He expressed the usual surprise at suddenly finding himself in an unexpected environment. He thought that an instant before he had been lying on the roof with his goggles on, giving dictation. Like Elgar's case, the date was established at ten days before.

There followed what was getting to be routine—the arguments to convince a victim that he had had amnesia. But the indelibly branded marks on arms and chest was irresistable evidence. Staring at them incredulously, he listened more and more patiently to the details.

With characteristic vigor, the moment he had all the facts, he began aggressively to plan how to escape the planet they were all anxious to leave, despite its alluring promise of immortality. It was apparent that the Hygonians either could not or would not aid them. Their best course was to help themselves. The duration of the dark period they could only guess at. No one wanted to sit and idly wait.

"Ronny," decided the Captain, "you say there is a shipload of telludium ore here. Take it. There is a power plant here. Break the seals and start it up. Build a furnace. Reduce the telludium. Among us we can make a pattern and cast a new spider. What with welding and patchwork, I think we can lift her—given enough time."

"TIME," observed Dr. Elgar, dryly, "is the one thing we have the most of. Here where we can be immortal if we choose, time has no meaning. So let's get going."

"What do you mean by that, Elgar?" asked Yphon sharply. "*I* haven't much time left—nor Angus, poor soul. And the local doctors have already condemned *you*. It seems to me that time is the very essence of our emergency."

"So it would be, if we submitted stupidly to natural forces like the old men here. But with careful control, we can make time stand still, turn back, or go ahead, as we need."

"Kindly drop the riddles, doctor. Make your point."

"Very well, Captain, I'll speak plainly. Ronny says, with so few men and light conditions being what they are, he cannot get the Kinetogen in working order under five years—perhaps not that soon. Telludium, you know, is a very intractable metal, even under ideal conditions. And after that, we have a ten-year voyage back to Earth. You can't make it, sir, as you are. Rejuvenation is just outside the door, and *you,* at least, must indulge yourself."

"No!" bellowed the Captain. "Not that way. I have never evaded anything yet—If I have lived my time and am to die, let me. Daxon can take over. But I want no immortality at the price of losing *myself*. Bah! *Read* of what you did—*be told* of what you did. Great Quivering Equinoxes! Is that *life?*" He snorted in disgust. "Why, Hell's Bells—on that basis, any damn fool that can read can make himself believe he has been through as many reincarnations as there are published biographies. No! I'll do my best to the last. That is all you have any right to ask me."

Yphon, with a last grunt of indignation, subsided into angry silence. Unknown to him, his rage at his tormentors on the long walk from the food store was still alive. He had forgotten the provocation, but the coursing blood and adrenalin in his veins had not.

Suavely, persistently, Elgar pursued his intent.

"How about your 'one for all—all for one' motto, skipper?" he asked, softly. "Aren't we all in the same boat—shipmates? This calls for teamwork. Will you let us down?"

Yphon growled. He knew what was coming. He had used it himself, demanding readiness for death, on occasion. Now, on this topsy-turvey planet, they were demanding *life*. But he ruled himself as rigidly as he did his subordinates. Appealed to in the name of the ship, he knew he must accede . . . Elgar was still talking.

"I have been in the fog, too, Captain. It is as simple as taking an anaesthetic. Hours, days, centuries I suppose, go like a flash. You have only to sleep outside. We will watch over you, and when the time comes we will bring you in—to take us home. It will mean but a second's oblivion, as far as you are concerned. Then you'll be back, hale and hearty, ready for *your* job."

The Captain glared at him, shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He could not say no. These men had just rescued him from such a sleep—one that if allowed to continue unchecked might take him back to childhood.

"Promise," he said gruffly, in tacit acceptance, "that you will bring me in soon. I do not want to go back a single day more than necessary—not to the place where I do not know you. I have *lived* this cruise; it is a part of me. I do not want to lose it. And give me time to prepare. I want to write in a little book, in my own hand, some very personal things. Things I could not tell you, and you would not ever tell me—things I must not forget. It will be a sacred little book that I will entrust to you."

There was no pretense of being hard-boiled among any of the circle of grim-

faced spacemen standing about the control room. Neither moist eye nor furtive gulp brought the gibe it might on another occasion.

"I think we are selfish enough, skipper," said Elgar, evenly, "to want to keep you as we've known you. You can go into the moonshine with every confidence."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Youth for the Captain

WORKING in the dark of Hygon proved to be distinctly difficult. They found the power plant without much waste effort, but the barricades about it were so strongly constructed that they had to return to the ship for tools to break them down. Behind them they encountered the door with its imposing seal and a posted proclamation invoking terrible curses on any rash enough to enter before the date to be set by the priests.

Once on the floor of the cluttered plant, even as experienced an engineer as Ronny found it next to impossible to trace the multitude of leads and connections between the many generators, pumps, transformers and switchboards. Weirdly luminous though everything on Athanata was, nothing could be seen whole—nature had come to be a jigsaw puzzle of bits of pastel lights within the three-or four-foot circle about one. But after a week of patient search, Ronny at last located the ubiquitous locker of detailed instructions. Robbing it of its contents, he carried them off to the Thuban for study. Blueprints, machine details, wiring and pipe diagrams, and operating instructions couched in the simplest language—everything was there. With those in hand an intelligent child could have started the plant—in the light.

While Ronny was groping in the dark of the plant interior, Daxon and his men broke into the Museum and ransacked its showcases for the small accessories and tools that Ronny had listed. Then they tackled the heavier job of unloading the battered *Gnat.* Trip by trip, staggering through the murk under the burden of sixty-pound bags, they transported a ton of the precious telludium quintoxide and dumped by the outer door of the powerhouse.

Elgar, in the meantime, had kept Capt. Yphon company. While the latter was busily writing his memoirs, Elgar was secretly making a harness for him. When at last Yphon resignedly anounced that he was ready, Elgar led him out the entry port into the dark. Unarmored, Yphon instantly fell under the hypnotic rays of the negative light. Helpless and unwitting as a somnambulist, he offered no resistance while Elgar hooked his harness about him and tethered him like a grazing horse to a stake. A comfortable cot was brought out, and a taberet loaded with food. Elgar carefully noted the hour and day in the *Thupan's* log, and instructed the shipkeepers in the care they were to keep.

It had been decided that for the immediate present Angus would be let be. He was far advanced in years and it did not seem possible that he could survive many months of forward living. For more than half a century he had accompanied Yphon to whatever ship he was commanding, always as his steward. It was with Yphon's consent they had abandoned him to the dark. Branded with full information, after the fashion of the Hygonians, there would be no trouble in identifying him, no matter how young he might become.

IT WAS a month before Ronny was ready to light off boilers in the plant. As soon as steam was up, he cut in a generator and turned on the lights. With the windows barricaded, the artificial light soon saturated the entrapped atmosphere. There were a few minutes when the plant was filled with red fog, but then it cleared. There, as inside the *Thuban,* they had nor-

mal light. At once the black gang went into the fireboxes of a battery of spare boilers and began tearing out their linings of fire-brick. These they piled in an unoccupied space on the main floor where they meant to erect their electric furnace.

Dr. Elgar and Daxon, being of little help here, turned their activities toward the Temple. They entered it through the same door by which Daxon had quit it. Inside, they found the halls dimly lit by a few candles, and on the top floor they found one of the priests alseep.

When they woke him, he was the picture of grief and despair. His companion had attempted to make a spacesuit to replace the one taken by Daxon. In the makeshift ray-stopper he had gone to the topside with a hamper of food for the brothers undergoing rejuvenation up there. But he had not returned. Some crevice in his improvised armor must have leaked and allowed his radiation to escape and amnesia had seized him.

The priest's anguish was so great and so genuine that Elgar listened sympathetically to his appeals for the return of the suit. The fear was not that the man above would die of starvation, but that they would not become youthful at the rate they should. Their source of energy would be cut off, and as normal metabolism is arrested by diminishing the food supply, so was the inverse. Their backward metabolism simply ceased. They failed to radiate, or radiated but faintly as inorganic matter did, with the result that at the dawn of a new era they would be old—too old to survive to its end. Later many would die of old age half way through the era—a disgraceful fate on Athanata.

Furthermore, the priest tearfully urged, without the superior knowledge of the priests to guide them, evil things would be done by the people in the first years of the Dawn. He pictured a world of children, playing thoughtlessly in the streets, hurling stones through windows, setting fires. In that day there would be no elders, no one to reprove—the city would be ruined, there would be deaths by accident, and in the absence of a strong guiding hand, starvation for most. Such a calamity would set back their civilization for many eras.

"Let 'em have it," suggested Daxon, all his hostility gone. After all, the Hygonians had treated the Thubanites decently. It would be cruel and unnecessary to injure them so deeply. All the Earthmen wanted was to be able to leave the place—to go home.

But though that was also Elgar's attitude, he saw here the golden opportunity to piece out the missing parts of the puzzle.

"On one condition," said he, sternly, to the suppliant priest. "Get your High Priest—I want to talk to him."

The priest's face had at first lighted, joy breaking through the myriads of wrinkles about his eyes, but when he grasped the condition his face fell. To depart from the schedule laid down for him was a great offense—to disturb His Holiness while recuperating was sacrilege. He feared his superior's wrath.

"O.K." shrugged Daxon, seizing the cue. "No big shot—no suit!"

The withered little priest trembled. His dilemma was a terrible one. Here were these young brutes who held the very existence, almost, of his race in their hands. Frail as he was, he could not resist them. Should he call his chief—for advice? His mental struggle was obvious to the two younger men who regarded him stonily.

"I will call him . . . but I must have a suit . . . I could not come back. But you must not try to talk to him *now* . . . he won't know who you are . . . he will not have heard of your ship. It will be better if you return in a few days; then he will have had time to study the record, will know all about your case and what to say to you."

WHILE the priest was gone, accompanied by Daxon to see that he played no tricks, Elgar considered whether he should force the interview now, or later. He would have the advantage of surprise on the one hand, but on the other he was anxious to learn the basis of the priestly reaction to the newly arrived space-ship. That could not be learned at once, for the dark had endured for a month. From his observations to date, it looked as if the ratio of effect was about three to one . . . that is, for every unit of time spent under its influence, the memory of three such units would be erased. By that reasoning, when the High Priest was brought into the light he would imagine himself to be in a period some weeks earlier than the landing of the *Thuban*. Elgar would therefore be a total stranger to him and time would be lost in explanations.

Yet he had to remember that the priests, while feeble, were numerous and crafty. The battle in the Temple corridor (which he had learned of from Daxon's account) had taught him respect for them. There was the chance that if he deferred the interview, he might return to find a trap set for him.

His thoughts were interrupted by a noise at the hatch overhead and he glanced up to see the two armored figures thrust a tall, gaunt man onto the ladder. The latter, as soon as his feet touched the floor below and his mental processes once more started forward, drew himself up haughtily and glared at Elgar.

"How came this barbarian within the sacred precincts?" he called out sternly, as if expecting his minions to come swarming to his aid.

But his frightened subordinate who had followed him down the ladder had tugged his helmet open and whispered something agitatedly in his ear. The High Priest

listened, frowning, and when he straightened up again, his belligerence was gone. He regarded Elgar in dignified silence, waiting for him to speak.

"We are Earthmen stranded on your planet," said Elgar, deciding that little could be gained by talking then. "We are about to leave it. Your people have been friendly and it is our wish to go with the least possible damage to you—perhaps we may even find a way to partially pay for your hospitality. Your own records will tell you about us. In two days I shall return to discuss these things with you."

As he spoke, Elgar was studying the man before him. He was obviously a man of the highest personal ability and magnetism. No doubt he was the real ruler of this country. His expression, necessarily under the circumstances, was one of repressed astonishment, but there was no mistaking the keen intelligence of his face. Elgar had made his decision though, not on the strength of his estimate of the man, but on his recollection that he held the high trump—the priests' space suit.

The little priest had gotten out of it, and Elgar was about to resume it. Without that, the ones above could not be summoned down, nor the two already below venture out onto the street. The threat to withhold it permanently ought to be a great lever in getting information out of this capable man before him.

Evidently similar thoughts were coursing through the mind of the man confronting him, for he smiled affably and said that it would be a pleasure to receive the visitors from Earth at their convenience.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Margin of Life

GROPING their way through the streets as they left, Daxon was full of questions.

"What I want to know, is why do they forget? I think I get your inverse metabolism idea all right, the getting young part. But as you get younger, why do you have to get dumber? And you call it amnesia—I always thought when you had amnesia you forgot everything."

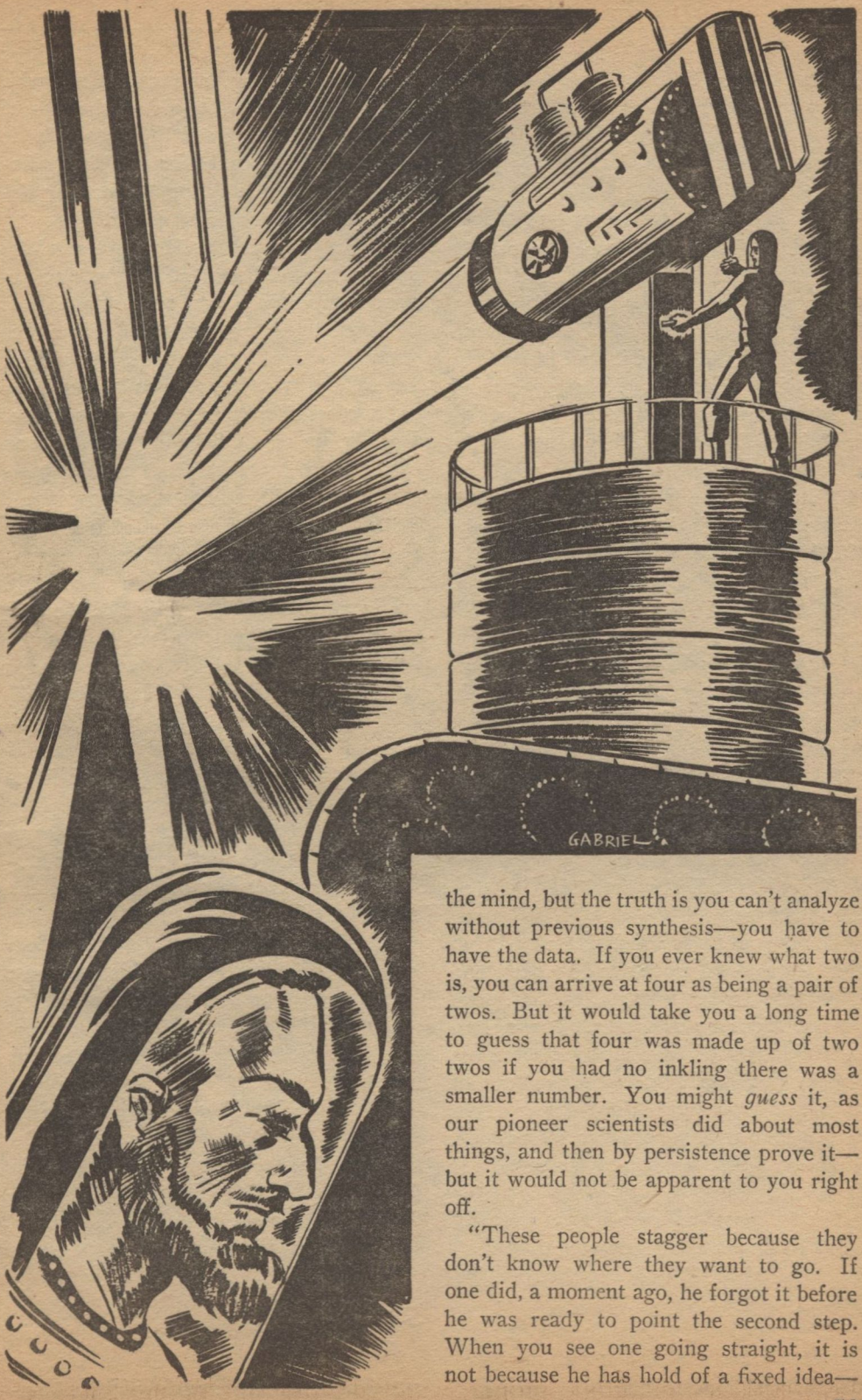
"Memory is probably a term to describe a certain group of brain cells. As a person experiences things, and the sensations reach the brain, changes occur in the cells. 'Calling to memory' perhaps is a term to describe the looking over of those cells by some perceptive power in the brain. By the evolution of them—the changes in them—the perceptive power knows what happened outside. That presupposes cells which differentiate and specialize, as we know ours do, normally.

"Turn the whole operation upside down, like here, and all that is undone. The cells, likewise in inverse order, simplify themselves and . . . pouf! your memory is out the window. The things recorded there never happened, so far as you know. It is like writing on a sheet of paper, then erasing it word by word, beginning with the last one."

"All right—I can believe that. But here's the hard thing. Take the skipper—take *you*. You knew me, you knew everything about yourself—your past, your medicine, the trip here—everything up to ten days before I picked you up. Why did you act so dumb? Why, boy—you were dopey—groggy. You'd fade away in the middle of a sentence like a sleepy drunk. Why weren't you at least as smart as you were ten days before?"

Elgar laughed, and fended off a glimmering Hygonian who had just bumped into him. "I was, but I couldn't *think*, any more than that old guy. My memories were all there, most of them, but they were static. Thinking, Sid, believe it or not, is dynamic—and more than that, it is synthetic.

"Analytic is a pretty word to apply to



the mind, but the truth is you can't analyze without previous synthesis—you have to have the data. If you ever knew what two is, you can arrive at four as being a pair of twos. But it would take you a long time to guess that four was made up of two twos if you had no inkling there was a smaller number. You might *guess* it, as our pioneer scientists did about most things, and then by persistence prove it—but it would not be apparent to you right off.

"These people stagger because they don't know where they want to go. If one did, a moment ago, he forgot it before he was ready to point the second step. When you see one going straight, it is not because he has hold of a fixed idea—

he can't have. It's because the same idea keeps on hitting him, like being hungry and wanting to find food. He is moved by a series of shoves, not by a steady pull."

THE space-suit of the priests Daxon had left at Tutl's house the day he escaped from the Temple. He had changed there to his own. They picked it up and took it with them to the Temple. Outside the door, they hid it well beyond the reach of any stray Hygonian by tucking it behind an ebony black statue standing in a niche. In the light, they surmised, the statue was white marble.

They found the High Priest in the same ceremonial robes he had worn for the ritual of the Shunning of the Sun. If he was impatient, he concealed it cleverly, for they had deliberately waited an additional day before calling. On the contrary, he was urbane and courteous in the extreme. The junior priest seated them in comfortable chairs in a sort of audience room and gave them each a beautifully chased golden goblet filled with rare torlberry wine. Then he discreetly withdrew to a corner of the room.

After the formal greetings, the Priest waited. It was Elgar who had demanded the interview.

His opening was brief. He stated that they were about to return to Earth, and upon arrival there would of course report on conditions on Athanata. There were some features of local life that were not understood. Perhaps, in the interests of a correct report, the High Priest might like to clear up some of those points.

The Priest bowed politely, signifying he would.

Furthermore, as an astragational aid, the Thubanites would appreciate data, if such existed, on Athanata's orbit. At that, the High Priest smiled.

"By good fortune, my assistant here happens to be one of our astronomers." Without further ado, he sent the priest to fetch the desired information. Then, with an engaging smile, he placed the tips of his fingers together and began to talk. It was obvious that he either was kindly disposed toward the young officers, or desirous of giving that impression.

"Since your recent call, I have carefully read the record. I am gratified that through your own initiative and energy you have managed to repair your ship. We regret your departure, for we need such qualities here. I assure you we would have liked to have helped you, but it was impossible. Equally, we would have welcomed you as citizens, but that likewise seemed impossible, as you will shortly see for yourselves.

"From what we have learned from your Captain, you Earthly cousins have progressed far beyond what we have. We are in a rut here, I see, and I hope that more of you will come to join us. You can help by spreading good reports of us. Our civilization needs new blood. But you will see when my son returns with the diagrams that our problems are rather special, which accounts for some of our shortcomings. Fortunately, we succeeded in persuading your Captain and one other to remain with us—I trust much to our mutual benefit. One of you, I presume, has succeeded him?"

Daxon, without batting an eye, nodded. Elgar was looking hard at his own feet. The entrance of the astronomical priest with an armful of books and a roll of maps relieved the tension. He spread the maps out.

"We have been unable to compute all the orbit . . . here only, from about the first quarter of the Era to the end . . . in the dark we can only interpolate. Roughly half of it is correct. Assuming symmetry, this dotted remainder may be taken as approximately true."

DAXON stared at the plan of the orbit. He would not have believed a planet could follow such a path without cata-

strophic climatic changes. It closely resembled that of the great comets of the solar system — elongated extremely — something near three billion miles in length. Its closest approach to the sun, adjusted for sun intensity, was equivalent to the nearness of Venus. Its outer edge must lie very near to the external face of the nebula. Apparently eighty years were spent within sight of the sun—another thirty in the dark. Thirty years!

"I marvel," said Elgar, "that stumbling onto such a bizarre planet without preparation or warning you managed to survive at all."

"Providence—luck—fate. Choose your term," said the High Priest, frankly. "Those in the *Gnat* were not so fortunate. She hit in the dark.

"I was in the *Night Dragon,* on my way to Tellunova to take the post of viceroy. I speak from the record, of course, as I remember nothing of it. We took the nebula to be thin and harmless. It lay in our path, so we cut through it. We blundered onto this planet just as you did, except that then it was over here . . ." and he pointed to a spot early in the Era, just after the emergence of Athanata from the cloud.

"During the passage through the outer mist, we not only lost our memories, but became much younger, children many of us. In those days, travel was slow, so fortunately there were no really young among us at the start. By a singular stroke of fortune, our doctor was ill at the time with an eye infection and had to be kept in a dark room. He escaped the effect of the inrays, and was able to take charge after we landed. The ship that was with us came down close by, and those on board her had undergone a similar experience. Under the direction of the doctor, we established this city.

"So began what we call Era One. Shortly after passing perihelion, the good doctor died—of old age. The rest of us lived on, attained great age. Then one day, the sky reddened, and we were plunged into darkness. And in what seemed like the next instant, we were in the light again, but all young once more. By young, I mean what you call 'in the thirties'.

"During the second Era we were joined by another ship, one that had come to rescue us. Toward the end of it many of the pioneers died of old age, in spite of our care. We had noticed in the beginning that during the previous dark spell we had eaten every scrap of stored food, so the next time we stored much more. We came out in the Dawn of the Third Era much younger. Then we hit upon the idea of shielding ourselves from the sun, especially when we were closest to it. By degrees, and by experimentation, we established the delicate balance of youth and age—the rhythm we live by. The sun and the nebula are exactly balanced, and so must we be, if we are to live among them. We age, speaking in earthly terms, about eighty years in the sun and lose as much in the dark.

"The slender margin we have against death at either end of the cycle you can readily see: Senile death on the one hand, or excessive youthfulness on the other."

"Excessive youth? That is a new term to me," queried Elgar.

"Yes. If the body is allowed to continue its retrograde development, it eventually reaches the infant stage. We have never discovered a way to make fresh milk available for use twenty-five or more years after open storage. And even if they had milk, it would help the infants little—they would continue to dwindle. There is a limit, you must see, to practical rejuvenescence."

"Oh, quite," observed Dr. Elgar.

"I AM curious," said Elgar, after hearing the details of the building of the city, and the colonizing of other portions

of the planet, "to know what your reactions are when you suddenly find yourself in the Dawn—quite young, and with most of your recollections lost."

"After the first shock—and I imagine there is always such a shock, it is quite pleasant. It is pleasant, you know, merely to be alive when you are young. Speaking now from memory—for I *do* remember the current Era, all but recent months—I will tell you how I felt in the beginning, and that will enable you to understand some of our customs.

"My memories had all been erased except of my childhood spent on your planet, in old Boston—I suppose you know the city. I was skating in the Fenway—and in a twinkling I was sitting here in this very room, a lad of sixteen, while another lad of the same age in a monk's robe was telling me that I was High Priest and supreme arbiter of the lives of millions of people. It was hard to believe—but he showed me books—long memoranda in my own hand, telling of power exercised in other years, and what I must do next.

"We evolved this system to minimize the chaos that plagues us in the beginning of every Era. There are four hundred priests in this unit. We keep two on watch—at the end of two months, they call two others, and so on through the Dark period. A year before the Dawn they call me. I have three months in which to convince myself of my mission and begin my self-education. Then we call the cardinals, and later other section leaders. By the time Dawn comes, we are aware of our identities and know the terrific responsibilities resting on us, youths though we will be.

"Outside, if you can imagine it, the coming light finds our whole population lying about the streets or in the open houses—children from ten to twenty. Like all populations, ours is a mixture of the intelligent, the stupid, and the vicious. With no elders to control, gangs of thoughtless youths—some you would term hoodlums—play havoc with the city. That is why we barricade things and seal the important places and the machinery before the Dark comes on.

"The control of such hordes of children is difficult. It was only by establishing the system you have seen—erecting the high authority of a mystic religion—that we could hope to cope with the mobs of young ravagers. At that, the first half of every era is lost in repair and elementary education. That is why our progress is so slow, by your standards.

"You see now why we must have our ray shield—we will lose control without it. There is no other power to assume it, if we fail. Utter chaos will result."

When the suit had been brought in and handed over to him, he concluded with, "You may wonder why we did not invite you younger men into the temple for the Dark period. It is true we could have adjusted your age by keeping you in here part of the time, but I assure you the risks attached are greater than the probable gains. It is a hazardous matter to bring a young and vigorous man into the light and subject him to what appears to be an abrupt and magical change in his environment. The danger threatens not only the one who awakes him, but the sanity of the subject. No one can know at what crucial point in his life he might be dwelling at the moment chosen to awake him. It was a risk we dared not take."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Ten Lost Years

TWO MONTHS passed after that interview with the High Priest. They had left him satisfied that the priests would attempt no injury. Presumably His Holiness returned to his rooftop to resume his youthward course.

They were two months of dreary back-

breaking work, carrying material from storehouses and the museum to the powerhouse where Ronny had set up temporary living quarters for himself and crew. The furnace was growing, brick by brick, and the huge electrodes were being fashioned. Daxon's men were moving, a few pounds at a time, provisions from one of the city's reserve storehouses to the *Thuban*. The supply of compressed oxygen was being repleted.

Elgar stayed close to the ship in order to release the ship-keeper for heavier work. He spent many anxious hours in the dark outside, watching the writhing, muttering Captain. Although not one bit of it could

register on his memory, the old man was unhappily living backward, his "present" always slipping into the deeper past, and his efforts to grasp it futile, his utterings incoherent. The last remark of the High Priest weighed heavily upon Elgar—about the peril of awaking a man in his prime. What would happen when Yphon came to? Where would he think he was, and what doing? He had always been an active man—a violent man, even. And was the three to one rule dependable? Might not the ratio be greater, further within the nebula?

One night when all the others were off in the city sweating with the crank telludium ore, Elgar became unable to bear the suspense longer. He undid the leash that held Yphon, and gently propelled him into the passage of the *Thuban*. As the Captain walked on in, Elgar closed the door and snatched off his helmet.

The skipper's back was to him, but he saw him suddenly go tense, as if galvanized by a lightning bolt. Like an angry tiger, he sprang into the deserted control room. A swift sweep of his glance took in the fitted ray screens, the periscope . . . and the vacant chairs before the switchboards.

"*Where* is Daxon—Ronny!" he bellowed, and his eyes were filled with anxiety—high indignation glared there, too. "How dare they leave their posts at a time like this! Are they insane? *We are falling into Sirius!*"

With one great stride he reached the indicator panel, and his jaw dropped. The photometer needle bent awkwardly, trying vainly to record negative light, while the ray-sorters danced madly in no-man's land. The gravimeter stood at .95, practically Earth gravity, when a moment ago it had been 24 and increasing. With a hoarse cry he snatched at the power controls standing at "Off" and threw them full forward, but there was no answering thrill from aft. Nature had gone crazy, or. . . .

Believing his ship falling dead, his instruments awry, and their posts deserted by his trusted crew, the anguish of the Captain was terrifying to behold. With a groan of anguish he started in great bounds for the engine room. Elgar tried to stop him.

"Out of my way!" shouted the Captain, and in the urgency of what he regarded as their extremity, he hurled the doctor against the bulkhead and leapt down the passage. Bruised and frightened, the doctor picked himself up and hurried after. The Captain was standing on the threshold of the engine room door, weaving about on his feet. Astounded, incredulous, his amazed eyes were fixed on the empty floor where once the mighty Kinetogen had purred. Nor was there a human being in the room. Aghast, the veteran space skipper trembled with rage at the unaccountable treachery of his crew—or of his own senses.

"You have been ill," urged Elgar, clutching him by the elbow. "We are safe, all of us. We have landed on a planet—the others are ashore."

Dazed, the Captain dumbly stood, while Elgar made frenzied appeals. In time, the Captain began to understand. Blank astonishment succeeded his anxious rage of a few minutes before.

"Read the log, first, Captain. I will show you where to start—it has been a long time. Then I will tell you more."

PERSPIRING profusely, frightened to his very marrow, Elgar huddled in a chair while the Captain hurried jerkily through page after page of the *Thuban's* log. When he finished that, Elgar silently handed him the diary which he himself had kept on the way into Athanata. After that had been eagerly, but almost incredulously read, without a word Elgar gave him the little sealed book in which the Captain had recorded his innermost thoughts.

While the Captain read, Elgar paced the deck. The High Priest was right. It

was a rash thing to cut blindly into a man's past without knowing what is there. Supposing the Captain's mind had been back in the days before the *Thuban,* in the famous old *Alicia,* where he knew none of these here, barring old Angus. It was a matter of history the thrilling crises through which the *Alicia* passed. "Typhoon Yphon" the old man had been called in those days, "Hell on Wheels"—competent, yes, and beloved by those close to him, but a devilish hard man to approach. Elgar shuddered.

Awe-stricken at the possibilities, he drew a sigh of relief as the Captain came to the end of his notes and laid the book aside.

"I'm damned," said Yphon, softly and there were tears in his eyes. *"And I missed all that."*

The doctor could not answer. There was a lump in his throat that was choking him. There was a tense five minutes of silence, then Yphon slowly arose. He walked over and patted Elgar on the shoulder.

"No reproaches, boy. The idea was all right. I like the natural way best—that's all. Come on now, give me a space-suit. I want to see this famous city of tidal life. I'm going for a little walk."

RONNY—Ronny the morose, the taciturn, the unassuming—was working like a beaver. Uncomplaining, with the patience and dogged persistence of a Sisyphus, he plugged at his smelting. One year it took his improvised furnace to produce the first batch of telludium. Then, ironically, as they poured it into the homemade mold of the starboard sector of the Kinetogen spider, the whole squirming mass blew up. Ronny was the best operating engineer in the galaxy, but as a production man he had to learn as he went. He had not allowed enough vents.

He surveyed the ruined bay of the powerhouse, his dispersed metal and shattered mold. There was only one thing to do. Recharge the furnace, redesign his mold, try again.

So it went—delay, vexation, setbacks, failure. The stark arithmetic of the situation could not be ignored, as the fifth such year passed. It would take another three—it might take another five. The youngest of them was now past forty, some beyond fifty. And after the takeoff, there were ten years yet to come.

Though all the while rejuvenation was theirs for the acceptance, yet each shrank from it. Yphon's mournful remarks deterred them.

"Why not take it in little doses?" suggested Elgar, one night. "The shock is in proportion to the time traversed, and the things you miss. Our days now are all alike, and who minds missing one of them? Let's not go back, but try to hold our own. Let's write our orders for tomorrow, then

sleep outside, with one man on watch inside to bring us in, like the priests do."

Several tried it. In a few days all of them were doing it. Eight hours sleep, in the dark, was their ration. It wiped out the twenty-four hours before; each night they went back one day. There was no shock, because like the Athanatians, they knew the phenomenon; it was a part of their memory before losing control.

So, with piecemeal rejuvenation, they made time stand still during the long, tedious years all hands were engaged in the struggle with the refractory telludium and the difficult spider castings. Ten in all had gone by when the glad day arrived when all the Kinetogen parts were standing about the engine room. There was nothing left but assembly and the tests; then they would go home, quit this accursed planet with its miscalled immortality.

There remained one thing left to do outside. They must retrieve the wandering Angus. He should be about sixty, now—probably not too much changed to recognize, and furthermore, he was branded with his name. But the Captain had known him for the past fifty years, and would recognize him at sight, and he himself insisted on conducting the search.

He found him in the usual place, a food store. Back at the ship, his awakening followed the regular pattern—astonishment at seeing his Captain grown so old . . . the unfamiliar ship and her personnel. He thought he was in the old *Alicia,* out on the fourth planet of Achernar. He cried like a baby when he learned the truth.

For many days the Captain stayed close to him, relating yarns from their joint experience. Captain and steward—there was a gulf of rank between them, but they were both men, had been shipmates and shared a thousand heavens and hells. And the background of their talks was the steady tink-tink of hammers, the clang of metal against metal, as the cursing Ronny pieced the welded fragments of his great machine together to let them out of this last one.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Rebirth

ON HIS last trip to the plant, as a matter of decency, Ronny tidied the place up as best he could. Outside, men were putting up the barricade again.

"It's an unholy mess," he said, ruefully, looking over the wrecked engine room, the shattered machines and the frozen flows of diamond-hard telludium slag. "It's a dirty shame to leave anybody's engine room like this—but what else can we do?" He pulled the switch for the last time and hauled fires from the boilers. Daxon thought, too, of the disordered condition in which he had left the looted food store, and the rifled museum cases. The Hygonians had been decent to them—it seemed ungrateful.

"I know what to do," volunteered Ronny, suddenly, "there's a lot of stuff left in the *Gnat,* worth its weight in radium. Why not write the old bozos a thank-you letter and tell 'em what to do with it. It'll more than pay for what we've spoiled."

That night they drew up a resolution of thanks and apology. To it they appended a treatise on the use of the rare ores in the museum, and added three technical books from their own ship's library. Taking the offering, Elgar and Daxon started out for the Temple, but before they had gone far, Elgar darted back to the ship. He wanted the notebook in which long ago he had transcribed the cryptic code numbers branded on Yphon and Angus. That must be their file designation in the secret archives of the priests.

The trek to the Temple was uneventful. The door they had used before they found sealed, but they broke the seal and entered

the familiar candle-lit hall. No one met them. Unmolested they climbed to the top floor, where both the priests of the watch were asleep. These were not rheumy-eyed centenarians, but men in advanced middle age, their hair was thicker, and blackening. Quietly the officers laid their offering beside one of the sleeping priests and as quietly withdrew from the room.

Five minutes later they were on a lower floor, searching the lockers of the "ZR-17" series, the letters which appeared in both their numbers. A little later they were on hands and knees poring over the batches of papers they had found and dumped onto the floor. There were the Hygonian diaries of both the men, edited with many interlineations and notations in priestly red. They found a large dossier on the Thuban's crew in general, a sort of Athanatian secret service report. Daxon chuckled to find his every movement and utterance had been noted and filed. He had had no idea that he was being watched so closely.

SUDDENLY his eyes started. He was about to throw out a folder marked "Ark-Bishp, Nu-Teksis" as not belonging to this file. But the folder *did* belong there. The letters dealt with the activities of one Earthman—Ubsn—doing some exploring in the mountainous west. They were complaints to the High Priest of the arrogance and lack of deference shown by the nosey Earthman. He had evidently ridden the local elders with a high hand. The last letter in the jacket was:

> Temple of the Ark-Bishp, Nu-Teksis, Greetings:
>
> In compliance with your orders, we have drugged the upstart Ubsn, and while so drugged, secured him. We send him to you by special plane. Please acknowledge. No. 87. AB.
>
> Great Temple, Hygon.
>
> Endorsement. Acknowledge to 87. Confine prisoner in unit K of prison ward, sub-temple 9, Hygon. Release with other prisoners fourth hour of Dark. Order of No. 1. H.P.

"So now we know what they do with their prisoners," commented Daxon.

"Yes," ejaculated Elgar, excitedly, "but don't you see? Ulberson's up here somewhere—lost in the dark. Why, he must be a little boy—he wasn't any older than you—wonder we haven't bumped into him."

"So what?" said Daxon, indifferently. "At any age, he'd be a pain in the neck."

"I know, but the skipper'd never feel right if we went off and left him here. He prides himself on never having abandoned a man anywhere."

BUT THAT find was nothing compared to their next. It was a memo attached to the bottom of Yphon's personal file. It read:

> After careful analysis of this man's diary and record, it is ordered that in the 18th Era he be given the dossier of the Prizdint to study and instructed in the duties of that office. As soon as ready, place him in charge. The said Yphn shall be assigned numerical designation No. 2. Prizdint of 17th Era will be shifted to governorship Mexko province—No. 245. Alter his records to that effect. By order No.1. H.P.

"I always did think that High Priest was a smart egg," observed Daxon, as Elgar tucked the order away inside his armor.

"But look how they push them around like pawns," said Elgar, as the full implications of the document became clear to him. "Unless they told him, the skipper would never know he had ever had anything to do with the *Thuban*. I wonder if they tell the deposed Prizdint who he used to be?"

On the way out, they stopped long enough in a room where they had seen a

map of Hygon to locate Temple No. 9. They ceased to wonder why they had never seen a little boy in the street—it was in an out-of-the-way part of town.

Two hours later, they had established their vigil in that locality's food store. Their wait was long, but not uninteresting. It was to be their last view of the Athanatians in all the glimmering weirdness of their auto-illumination. In the end, they were rewarded by the entrance of a boy of perhaps eight years.

He had thrown away his undergrown clothes and was wrapped in a cloth that must have been very dirty, judging from the varied scintillescence of it. He toddled to a bin and reached. His stature was against him. Twice he failed to reach the coveted food package, and as often he would kick the bin and scream, and roll about on the floor, bawling.

"That's him," Daxon muttered grimly, and grabbed the child.

"MY NAME is Hubert Ulberson" he told them, under the cabin lights of the ship, "and when I grow up I'm going to be a famous explorer. Where's my mama—I wan' some candy."

"We will take you to your mama. But there is no candy—not now," said Yphon, kindly, much affected by the child.

"YOW! Wan' candy . . . gimme some candy—you dirty old man."

"Take him away," said Yphon, and there was sadness in his voice. "I'll reason with him later."

The Kinetogen was humming. Screens were set, all was ready. About the Kinetogen were banks of neutralizers, killing its powerful thrust as it spun in its docktrial. 10, 15, 20, 25 . . . at half throttle. Plenty of anti-gravity, enough even to tackle the Dog Star with, if it had to be done. Ronny had done a swell job.

"Standby to lift," said the Captain. At his feet lay the High Priest's order, the bit of paper that would have made him Prizdint of Athanata. He had glanced at it, and discarded it with an impatient snort. To his mind it was an empty compliment.

"Ready, sir!" reported his officers in unison.

"Take off."

In an hour, Athanata would be well below. Once clear of her faint pull, their gravimeters would show them which way to go—it could not be far to where they would once more see the fair, white stars and the decent black of the clear void. The Kinetogen thrilled—the ship was alive again—they were lifting.

But the little boy, pouting and whining, was back in the room, pulling at Ronny's tunic.

"Wah! I don't wanna go. Wanna play out there!"

"Come here, son," said Yphon, gently.

"Nasty old man—I hate you. Ol' fishface! Yaa-a," and an impudent red tongue stuck out.

"COME HERE!" A heavy paw seized the squirming neck of little Hubert and dragged him toward a waiting lap.

"I learned one thing in Athanata," said the skipper, firmly, as he turned the kicking, biting brat over his knee, "and that is that out here you can always get another chance. . . ."

Hard-faced spacemen were at their taking-off posts, hands on controllers or rheostat knobs. Their eyes did not waver from the dials before them, but their ears were trained backward to catch every sound in the room behind, nor did any face lack an exultant grin.

"Now, son . . ." and the hairy right hand had tugged away a nether garment, revealing a patch of quivering pink flesh . . . "*this* time, if you don't grow up to be a MAN . . . it won't be old Pol Yphon's fault."

Smack! (yow!) SMACK! (BAW!) *SMACK!*

THE END

THE KING'S EYE

By James MacCreigh

The old Venusian tribal king had an immense hatred and distrust for Earthman—and two marooned explorers found the rest of his tribe even worse!

CHESTER WING shoved the cards away from him and rose with a snarl on his lips. "Damn you and your sleight-of-hand, Farrel," he lipped. "Cut it out!"

"What?" innocently asked Farrel Henderson, Wing's partner in exploration.

"Dealing from the bottom—that's what. I know we aren't playing for money, but I still don't like the idea of losing every hand."

"Oh, calm down," suggested Henderson, rising himself. "I was

only joking. We'll quit playing if you feel that way." He sauntered over to the quartz viewplate, stared at the fetid swamp that was dimly visible through the steamy fog. The scenery was pretty uninspiring, being nothing better than a steam-shrouded tangle of vegetation, mostly dull greying white. All Venusian landscapes were much alike; all revoltingly wet and unpleasantly hot. "What a place to blow a rocket-tube," he muttered, less than half to Wing.

Wing nodded vaguely, no longer angry. "Hope to Heaven we get out of here soon," he said fervently.

"How much longer do you suppose it'll actually be before the tube's ready?" inquired Henderson.

Wing cocked a thoughtful ear at the faint humming sound that told of the automatic repair-machines at work, extracting isotopic beryllium from the constant flow of swamp-water that passed through its pipes, plating it in layers on the steel core that was the mold for their new rocket-tube. "Maybe two days," he pronounced finally. "At least, the tube ought to be ready then. Whether or not our fine-feathered friends will do something to keep us here is something else again. I don't feel very happy about that—though there isn't really much that they could do, once we get the new tube in place."

IT HAD been a bad day for the Earthmen when they'd been forced to land in this particular section of Venus. The local tribe of natives had developed a positive allergy to Earthmen, the result of a fracas that had occurred years before, when planetary pioneering had been newer. Wing had never got all the details from the reticent tribesmen, but it had had something to do with the great *Venustone* that was now on exhibition in the Hall of the Planets, back in Washington on Earth. The Stone was really a huge red diamond, but its great size and unusual coloring had made it highly valuable. Wing couldn't blame the chief for regretting its loss to the tribe. Probably the Earthman who had taken it had "paid" for it with trumpery beads or colored cloth—at gun's point. That sort of trade dealings was all right, of course, for the more ignorant Venusians, but the chief hereabouts—he was really a king, and "Ch'mack" was as close as Terrestrial lips could come to reproducing the verbal click and splash that was his name—was no less intelligent than the average Earthman.

"Hey!" Henderson's cry broke in on Wing's absorbed reverie. "Who's pounding on the lock?"

Certain enough, there was someone scratching on the airlock, obviously desirous of attracting attention. Wing refocused his gaze, saw, just visible at an angle through the quartz port, a hideously furred, troll-like creature, manlike in face, resembling most nearly a web-winged caricature of a kangaroo in body.

"It's one of Ch'mack's boys," said Wing. "Suppose we're in trouble again?"

"You don't mean again," Henderson shrugged expressively. "You mean yet. Ch'mack is about the touchiest living thing I've seen. I don't know why—*we* never did him nothing. Let's find out what he wants anyway. Go talk to the messenger."

"Me? Why me? Go yourself!"

"All right," Henderson sighed, contemplating the mucky terrain. "Let's both go. Here!" He tossed a wire-coiled sort of helmet at Wing, who caught it deftly and slipped it over his head. Henderson donned one also, and stepped into the airlock. The wire helmets were perceptors—what you might call telepathy-radios, allowing the explorers to converse mentally with the Venusians. No human could have spoken the Venusians' native tongue.

A touch on a button closed the inner door, sealing off the ship; as soon as that

was closed, the outer door of the lock opened automatically. Henderson and Wing grabbed at their nostrils, and stepped out on to Venusian soil.

Humans could breathe Venus' air indefinitely, providing they didn't overexert themselves. The CO_2-rich atmosphere contained enough oxygen for life, though not as much as did Earth's. But it also contained a variety of rank, hot odors, most of which resembled decaying fish.

Wing marvelled at the fact that so disgusting a smell wasn't actually poisonous, and turned to the Venusian waiting. "What do you want? he inquired, ungraciously but without attempting to give deliberate offense.

"Ch'mack wishes to see you," the Venusian thought back, hostility in his tones. "Come with us." The Earthmen might have refused, but they suddenly discovered that there were more Venusians than one present. And all of them were armed.

They went.

"WHY will you not admit your purpose here?" bellowed Ch'mack suspiciously. The Earthmen shrugged and didn't answer. They had been asked that question, or a variant, a dozen times since that quiz began. And Ch'mack had refused to tell them just of what they were suspected. Nor had their perceptors been able to penetrate his will-shielded mind. "I know what you want," he went on vindictively. "Don't think that I do not. I know almost everything. But admit it to me!"

"Modest cuss," thought Wing "below the threshold"—i. e., without sufficient intensity for the thought to be telepathed. Aloud he said, "I don't know what you mean."

"Fool! Do you think you can hide things from me? I know what you are after," repeated the king. "And you won't get it!" With a furtive movement he stuck his hand into his pouch, the only article of clothing he wore. He seemed reassured at what he found. "No, you won't steal it," he continued. "I won't let you! But you must be punished for wanting to steal it. I will see that you are punished."

"Steal what?" inquired Wing, annoyed.

"Steal what! As if you didn't know. My Eye, of course!"

Wing and Henderson exchanged puzzled glances. The king had two perfectly good eyes, that was true enough, but certainly neither of them had any intention of stealing one. The king glared at them heatedly. For a second it seemed he would actually walk over to them, violating the tribe's eon-old custom and actually setting his feet to the ground, to strike them. Then he looked away, a cunning smile spreading over his face, seemingly plunged into deep thought.

"Ah," he said finally. "I have been trying to think of a punishment for them, but I cannot. My mind is too subtle, too delicate, to think of a fitting doom. Besides, we must make absolutely sure that they are guilty, must make them confess. I shall refer the matter to the Tribune!"

The Tribune! The hapless two knew what that meant. The Tribune was an old institution in all Venusian tribes, apparently a relic of the laws that had governed Venus when it was a unified, planet-wide democracy. It was a group of a dozen or so of the leaders of each tribe, the most powerful men in them and generally the oldest and bitterest as well. To appear before a Tribune was akin to appearing before a highly refined and super-deadly Spanish Inquisition. It was a rule of the Tribune that confession must precede punishment. But any kind of a confession would do, and the Tribune was perfectly willing to use torture to obtain it. Often the "questioning" was worse

and more to be feared than the punishment itself—for the worst punishment was merely death, and death is always too abstract a concept to be feared with the heart, only with the mind.

Henderson felt his companion nudging him. He looked—Wing had flicked the switch that turned off his perceptor, was motioning to him to do likewise. "Listen," spoke Wing tensely as soon as Henderson had prevented the transmission of the words, "we'd better give in to them. Time works for us; it'll be a while before they can summon the Tribune. Maybe we can stall them off until the tube's ready. If we make a break for it now we can probably get away all right—but what'll we do then?"

Henderson comprehended. "Okay," he said. "But we better hang onto our guns —Hey!" His surprise was justified; before his very eyes, Wing stiffened and fell heavily to the ground. Then he felt a sharp sting in his own thigh and realized, as he collapsed in his turn, that they had both been shot with paralysis darts.

And as he lay there rigid, he cursed himself. For a smirking Venusian face bent over him and took away the gun he'd just determined to retain at all costs.

WING had no clear idea of how long it was before he felt the first muscle-twinges that indicated that the effect of the dart had begun to work off.

The first thing he did was to move his eyes. The particular sector of the wall on which they had been permanently focused had become boring.

He discovered that he and his companion were in a sort of cage; bars of Venus fern-wood, floor of some rocky, cement-like material. It had a door, and the door was standing invitingly open. But Wing could only look longingly at the door, and not pass through it, for he and his partner were very securely tied with rope twisted from the "veins" of the fern-wood leaves, as strong as cobalt-steel, and tougher.

They were alone in a large room, their cage only one of a dozen or more, but all the others empty. Beside the cages the room held a good many seats and benches, and a lot of equipment at which Wing looked only briefly. Its purpose was too plain for his nerves. It was torture tools, and all ready for use.

Wing kicked and rolled over, touching his companion, who was also back to normal. "What do we do now?" asked Henderson, carefully keeping fear from his voice.

"Wait. That's all we can do."

That was true enough. Wing knew their bonds were amply secure; there was no chance of immediate escape. To make plans now would be stupid, for they had no idea of what chances the future might offer.

So they waited, passing the time in desultory conversation. In twenty minutes or so one of the Venusians peered in the door at them, widened his eyes when he saw they'd regained the power of movement, and went away again. "This is it," said Wing, and Henderson nodded in agreement.

It was it. In a moment the door was flung open wide and in solemn procession, entered the Tribune.

Wing thought they were the toughest-looking representatives of their kind he'd ever seen. They were every one members of the nebulously defined aristocracy of their tribe.

The two Earthmen were unceremoniously unbound and yanked from their cage. Dragged to a brace of high-backed fern-wood chairs, they were bound again, to the chairs. That was no pleasure, for these chairs had been designed for the different Venusian anatomy—and, being for the exclusive use of the Tribune's prisoners, hadn't been intended for comfort anyhow.

The Tribune took seats, all but one. This one, apparently the Chairman, advanced threateningly toward the Terrestrials. He reached out to touch Wing's head. Wing feared the beginning of the torture and strained desperately against the ropes, but the Venusian merely wanted to turn on Wing's perceptor. When he had done the same to Henderson, he lanced a thought at them, menace implicit in his manner.

"Earthmen," he thought, even his mind-vibrations coming ponderous and slow, "confess to us and save yourselves pain!"

"Confess what?" Henderson flashed. "We told you—we came here only because our ship was wrecked. We had no intention of harming you, or of stealing your king's 'Eye', whatever that may be. As soon as our ship is repaired, we will go away."

The Venusian's next thought conveyed an impression of sardonic laughter. "Go away! Earthmen, you will never go away from here. Not alive." His demeanor had been hostile; now it became aggressively menacing. Like a scourge the thought came: *"Confess!* We know that you came here to steal the Eye. We know that your pretended ignorance of the nature of the Eye is a bluff. Let us end all bluffs and lies. The Eye—I shall say it to keep you from using this line of evasion any more—is a great, red, sacred gem, the twin of the one that was foully stolen from us forty years ago. Now that I have broken down that veil of lying—*confess!*"

The Venusian stepped back, panting with the vigor of his thoughts. He eyed his two prisoners intently. Seeing that they had resolved not to answer, he angrily motioned toward a pair of guards stationed near the door. Together they lugged up a heavy, squat metal basin, in which burned a fiercely hot flame.

The two Terrestrials realized that the torture had come, and braced themselves for it.

But they weren't to be tortured just then anyhow, it seemed, for, before the torture could commence, there was a disturbance at the door and a new Venusian burst in. "The King is dead!" he screamed, the thought beating on the brains of the Earthmen while the gibberish of his voice resounded in their ears. "His body has been found on the throne. He was murdered!"

WING and Henderson had suddenly become secondary matters. The Tribune left the room in a flurry—though not so fast but what the guards returned the pair of Earthmen to their cages, retying them. In a moment the hall was empty again.

"This is not going to help us at all, Farrel," Wing said with dark foreboding. "Of all the things I didn't want to happen. . . . I don't care who killed the king. I know who's going to pay for it. Us."

"Shut up," growled Henderson, who knew that. His eyes were fastened on his own wrist, where he was fighting the ropes with his fingers. "Let's think about getting out of this place. The monkey that tied me up was in a hurry, and I know a couple of things about ropes, anyhow. He didn't notice the way I kept my arm poked a little away from my side. I've got a little slack here. If I can find something long and narrow, I think I can pry that knot open."

Wing flopped painfully to his side. "In my pocket," he grunted, contorting himself so that Henderson could get at it. "It's a fountain pen. Will it do?"

"No," said Henderson, extracting it. "But I'll make it do!" Holding it in his teeth, he slipped it into the precious inch of slackness he'd created, pried, and stretched the inch to two. A moment later his arm was free; he shed his own bonds and quickly got to those of his companion.

"Let's get from here," muttered Wing when they were both standing, trying to

massage the pain from their hurt limbs. "If we use our perceptors occasionally, just flip them on and off, we'll be able to catch thoughts and see if anyone is looking for us."

They moved quietly to the door and stood in attitudes of intense concentration as they "listened" for sentries. Their questing minds could find no trace of anyone watching, so they slipped out the door and broke for the surrounding jungle at a quick, space-consuming walk. Their perceptors they continued to use at intervals. For their purposes, the things had a great defect; they broadcast thoughts quite as well and as far as they received them. . . .

The uniformly grey Venusian jungles, with its toadstool plants and fern-like trees, offered no pleasing prospect to the two explorers as they slogged their way along as quietly as possible. They had to take immense care that the apparently dry spots they stepped on were really what they seemed. Bogs and swampholes freckled the Venusian terrain.

WING shoved an overhanging creeper out of his way and stood straight, panting. Suddenly he stiffened. "Look!" he whispered, piercingly. "Just ahead."

There was a glint of metal through the trees. Wing and Henderson stared at it intently. It was a metal building, as unlike those of the town behind them as the Coliseum is unlike a Twentieth-Century baseball grandstand. The degenerate Venusian architecture with which the two were familiar, stacked up against this new building, would have seemed unbearably shoddy.

The building was metal, some sort of steel, apparently, but obviously rust-proof. The corners of it were weathered to soft curves, they saw as they slipped closer. It was *old*.

Octagonal, it had no windows at all, as far as the two explorers could see. The structure was thirty feet or more in diameter, about the same in height.

"This is no place for us, Chet," whispered Henderson. "That place is probably crawling with Venusians. Let's go!"

Wing nodded agreement and turned.

But didn't go far. He spied a flicker of motion in the underbrush not far away. He tugged at Henderson's sleeve, pointing silently.

Henderson looked first at Wing's face, then at the indicated spot. Fern-trees, he saw, and the toad-stool growths, and the vines and sinkholes.

And something else. He couldn't quite . . . yes! He saw it clearly and grabbed Wing's shoulder. "It's a *snake!*" he whispered hoarsely, panic in his voice.

Wing nodded, silently pointed toward the tower. A "snake"—really a lizard, fast and deadly poisonous—was nothing to play around with. Their only hope of life was to get away before it spied them.

The snake, it seemed, wasn't especially hungry, though there was never a time at all when a Venusian snake wasn't willing to take just a little bit more food. But it wasn't actively *looking* for a meal. Consequently, it didn't see them right away.

But eventually it had to—and did. When they were less than fifty feet from the tower, having progressed a hundred away from the snake, there was a sudden commotion in the undergrowth and it came slithering with immense speed toward them, its great, cone-shaped head waving from side to side, the horizontal jaws opening and closing as the rudimentary, clawed hands flailed the air.

The two adventurers caught sight of the monster coming at them and rapidly decided what to do. Together they broke for the building, then dashed around it, searching for a door. Luckily, there was one, and it was unlocked. They flung themselves inside, slammed the door and braced their backs against it just as the snake rammed it.

A glance around made them wonder if they had done right. The Tribune tortured, agonizingly, before it killed; the snake, at the worst, would eat them alive, a matter over with in a few minutes. For, though no living thing was visible, there was no dust or rust—and the place was lighted with several burning torches.

Wing headed silently for the only visible doorway, Henderson following.

They emerged into a huge room. What they had been in before, they realized, had been only an anteroom. This new auditorium comprised almost the entire structure. They had entered at the very front: just before them, on a dais, was a sheeted recumbent figure. The dead king, Wing thought swiftly, but thought no more about it.

For occupying the room with them, their heads bowed in mourning, were half a hundred armed Venusian natives!

THE confusion that followed was terrific. They were seen immediately, and a babel of voices arose.

Wing thought with frantic speed, and evolved a plan. Before the Venusians could recover from their shock, he stepped quickly to the side of the dais, and screamed at Henderson:

"Snap on your perceptor! Tell them to stay back! If they take one step forward, I'll turn the table over and dump his immortal majesty on the ground!"

Henderson shouted joyously as he comprehended the plan; and immediately did as he was bid. There was sudden consternation among the Venusians as his sacrilegious words smote them to a standstill. The person of the King was inviolate! Never was he allowed even to walk on the bare ground or floor, was carried from place to place in a palanquin, could stand or sit only on a specially consecrated throne or dais. To have his corpse desecrated horrified them beyond words.

One of the Venusians, the leader of the Tribune, stepped forward.

"What do you wish of us?" he asked.

Henderson spoke for both of them. "A guarantee of unhindered passage to our ship; and freedom to leave in it as soon as we can."

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Astonishing Stories, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1940. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Astonishing Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business managers are: Publisher, Fictioneers Inc., 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Fictioneers Inc., 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 2nd day of October, 1940. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 26, Register's No. 2-W-178. (My commission expires March 30, 1942.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

"That is impossible," said the Venusian flatly. "You killed Ch'mack. We cannot permit the king's murderers to live."

Henderson swore, gazed vainly at Wing. Wing took part in the discussion. "We didn't kill Ch'mack," he said. "How was he murdered?"

"As you know, he was stabbed."

"We were in a cage when that happened. How could we have killed him?"

The Venusian laughed sardonically. "Fools!" he cried. "Do you think to deceive us as simply as that? Ch'mack was killed while you were supposed to be paralyzed. You escaped from your bonds—do not deny it; we know you were able to do it, for you did so a second time to make your escape—killed him and returned to the cage, knowing that you would have a better chance of escaping for good in the confusion after his body was found."

Wing cursed without hope. "What can you do with people like that?" he murmured to himself.

Henderson said, "Why not let us go? We swear, by any oath you ask us to take, that we had nothing to do with the death of Ch'mack. You cannot harm us, for if any one of you makes a suspicious move, we'll dump his corpse on the floor. Better that his murderers—even if we were his murderers—go free, than that the soul of Ch'mack be refused admission to the special heaven of royalty because its body has touched the unhallowed ground."

"You are still a fool, Earthman," thought the Venusian heavily. "You cannot remain on guard forever. Sooner or later you may fall asleep, or even look away for a second. If not, then you will starve to death in a few weeks, or die of thirst, agonizingly. We can afford to wait. . . . Earthmen, we will make you an offer. Step back from the body of Ch'mack, and we will kill you where you stand, for you must die. If you do not do this, you will die soon anyhow . . . but slowly. If not of thirst, it will mean that you have fallen into our hands. And *that* death will not be pleasant."

WING'S stomach wrapped itself into a tight hard knot. There was one hundred per cent of truth in what the Venusian was saying. Death he really did not fear—but the slow wait for death, or the absolute certainty of its coming if he accepted their offer, was infinitely horrible to him.

"Chet!" Henderson's urgent cry brought the faint flicker of new hope to Wing.

"What is it?" he asked, looking up to see Henderson removing his mind-reader, which he had already switched off.

"I have an idea. While they were talk—wait a minute," he interrupted himself sharply. "Forget that. I—um—I think if I go down and mingle with them, maybe I can grab a gun and we can get away. You stay by the body, and dump it if anything happens."

That was why Henderson had removed his mind-reader, thought Wing; he didn't want the Venusians to know what he was doing. Henderson was already moving toward them as Wing assented, "Okay," cheerfulness in his voice for the first time. He prepared to transmit to the Venusians the order not to move; then realized that they'd know it already because it had been in his mind, and—

His heart dropped again, and his stomach screwed up even tighter than before. Oh, what a fool Henderson was, he thought agonizedly. Henderson had told him the plan; therefore, it had been in Wing's mind; therefore, by courtesy of the efficient perceptor, the Venusians knew all about it. He swore, dully.

BUT what was Henderson doing? He was gesturing to one of the Venusians—the one who had spoken, the head of the Tribune.

"Chet," Henderson called. "Tell this guy to stop running away. I won't hurt him. I just want to talk to him. Tell him to let me put the perceptor on him. And *don't argue!*"

Though puzzled, Wing complied.

"And you are still fools," the Venusian sneered. "This one thinks he can surprise me, take my rifle. But look!" and he loosed his weapon-belt, handed it to another Venusian. Now openly contemptuous, he said, "Tell him he can put that thing on me!"

Wing relayed the statement in English. Very carefully, Henderson slipped the mind-reader on the Venusian's forehead, and snapped the switch on. Then he shouted to Wing, "Chet, for God's sake, *repeat what I say!*"

With blinding speed, he grabbed the Venusian's pouch away from him, ripped it open, and held on high—the Eye!

"Tell them that here is the murderer of their king!" he screamed to Wing. "Tell them!"

But Wing didn't have to. For the Venusian was wearing a perceptor; surprised by the lightning attack, for a moment his defenses were down, and every person, human or Venusian, in that chamber felt the cold impact of the thought,

"Of course I killed him. But YOU will die for it!"

He was wrong, and comprehended his error immediately, as he saw the staring faces of his compatriots around him. He saw how he had been tricked—but too late. He ripped the mind-helmet from his head, dashed it full in Henderson's face, leaped for the door.

Henderson fell, hurt and unconscious, to the floor. So great was the turmoil caused by surprise that the criminal made good his escape from the building. But the others followed him, drawing their weapons, shouting and screaming as they ran.

Wing leaped to the side of his comrade. Henderson wasn't severely injured, he found; merely unconscious, and cut about the forehead. As Wing was chafing his wrists to revive him, he heard a great babble of shouts and a volley of rifle fire from outside. In a few moments the Venusians began to trickle back, very grave in appearance.

"Earthman," thought one of them, "you are free. Please leave as soon as you can. You have brought us enough sorrow."

More cheerful instructions than that Wing never hoped to hear. "Did you kill him when you shot at him?" he asked.

The Venusian stared at him. Ponderously he replied, "We were not shooting at him. We killed a snake. It had been lurking just outside, and *it* killed him. Now . . . go." And he turned away.

HENDERSON had lost a lot of blood, and was pretty weak. Still, he had regained consciousness in time to help Wing replace the rocket tube, now all repaired. They were all set to leave now; without formalities, Wing touched the firing keys, timing the rockets to thunder in sharp, staccato jerks, "rocking" the ship free of the hole it had dug for itself in the mud.

In a moment the powerful suction of the mud was broken. Wing slammed down an entire row of keys; the ship creaked and groaned; the mighty rockets shoved them forward with immense acceleration, and in a moment they were roaring through the atmosphere, their ship ripping the air to shreds as they sped for the high vacuums where they could really make speed for the nearest Earth colony.

Wing cut half the rockets, and touched the lever that brought out the tiny, retractable stubby wings. Even in the stratosphere, where they were, their immense speed made wings useful. It saved fuel, for one thing, and, more important to Wing, it made conversation possible by cutting down the noise. Wing had been too anx

ious to get away from the Venusian town to bother with questions; now he succumbed to his curiosity, turned to Henderson, and said:

"Now spill it. How did you work that little trick?"

Henderson smiled weakly, but with triumph.

"Well, I knew that neither you nor I had killed Ch'mack. It had to be one of the Venusians. Which one? That I had to find out. . . .

"But there was a logical suspect, if you followed the detective-story pattern, and looked for the motive. Someone stood to become King after Ch'mack died. I thought that might be a powerful inducement to killing. . . .

"And while you were talking to them, *I* was trying to read their minds with my perceptor. I couldn't make a great deal of progress with any of them,—but one of them had me stopped cold. He was very intently *not* thinking about the murder. I figured that was sort of suspicious, and I saw that he was the guy who'd inherit the king-ship, so . . . I took a chance. It worked."

"Good for you," applauded Wing. "You got us out of a pretty damned tight mess." He sat complacently at the controls, smiling into the black sky ahead as the ship sped along. Suddenly his smile clouded. "If you couldn't read his mind, how did you know that he had the Eye?" he asked.

"Oh, that," said Henderson proudly. "I didn't. I mean, he didn't. I knew that he *didn't* have the Eye, because I did. I found it on Ch'mack's body, and planted it on the other guy for effect. I knew that it would take a real shock to make him think 'out loud' about the killing, so I provided one. And that," he said, hastily pursuing his advantage, "is all due to my 'sleight-of-hand' that you're so fond of criticizing. I hope you'll be a little more respectful about it in the future."

"I will," agreed Wing happily. "In fact, soon as we land I'll let you play cards with me again."

"For money?" particularized Henderson.

"Well—" Wing hesitated, then grimly agreed. "Yes, for money. I guess I owe you something." He resumed his sunny smile at the sky. "Well, it's too late to do anything about it now, but I wish I could have got a closer look at that Eye," he said a moment later. "Seemed to me that Ch'mack was a lot more worried about keeping it than even its value warranted. I wish I had it to find out why."

"Do you really wish you had it?" grinned Henderson.

"Uh-huh. It ought to be. . . . Say! Did you—?"

"You bet I did!" Henderson cried. He took the object in question from a pocket and tossed it at his colleague. "Here—catch!"

THE END

Magnus' Disintegrator

By Ray Cummings

John Magnus was a conscientious man. Even the act of leaving the world, he thought, should serve some altruistic purpose.

THE two men faced each other in the weird, eerie glow of light. Their glances crossed like sliding rapiers as they glared with hatred. For an instant the lurid room was silent. Outside the oval, metal-framed windows, beyond a little patch of private woods, the glow of the great city of New York of the year 2000 radiated up to paint the clouds with a spectrum of prismatic color.

"Funny we should wind up here like this, eh Rance?" the older man rasped. His slight figure was drawn erect as he stood in the center of the room where the

big disintegrator already was throbbing, whining with the current turned into it—whining like a monster on a leash, eager to get at its prey.

The younger man was backed against the wall where a big fluorescent globe on each side of him painted him with their glare. He was a stalwart, handsome, dark-haired fellow in the uniform of a private aircar operator. Terror was on his face as he stared into the muzzle of the older man's gun.

"Have you gone crazy, Mr. Magnus?" he gasped.

"Crazy? Oh no, I've just come to my senses." John Magnus shook his leonine head with its mass of iron-grey hair; and then he laughed sardonically. "Funny thing, Rance. Just an hour ago I had decided to kill myself. Then I found out about you and Carole and I forgot to do it. And now you and I wind up here. Stand still, you fool—want me to drill you? I will if you try to jump me."

"Mr. Magnus, listen—you're just excited. You've got me and Carole all wrong. You—"

Again the older man laughed. "We've finished with that, haven't we? I thought we had. And you don't want to die, do you? Well, that's where we differ. I don't mind it."

"What are you—are we going to do here?" young Rance muttered. His dark eyes were alert despite their terror as he gazed into the muzzle of the little heat-gun in Magnus' hand.

"Do? Why, we're going to die—for the advancement of science! What could be a more worthy death? We're going to operate this disintegrator until it explodes and kills us. You've heard about it, Rance? So dangerous an experiment—after the last two explosions—that the Federal Safety Bureau frowned upon any more such trials. Well, we're going to do it anyhow, you and I. We'll die, but the recording dials here, telling what happened up to the instant of explosion, will make the next experimenter successful. Cheap power, Rance! Power almost without cost—that will be our donation to the world, though we won't live to see it."

He rasped out the words with vehement irony. "That's worth dying for, isn't it? The year 2,000—we'll make it a momentous year in the development of science. Carole will find us both dead, but she'll be proud of us."

"You—you're mad," Rance gasped.

"Oh no I'm not. Just amused at the way things came out between you and me."

THERE was a touch of hysteria in the older man's laugh. Through the windows to the east he could see that the stars were paling with the coming dawn. This dawn that he had never expected to see. John Magnus, the failure. He had failed at everything, even the disintegrator. But dying like this wasn't failure. He could envisage the final success somebody else would have, using this knowledge that now would be gained. The industry of the world revolutionized. Life made easier for millions of people. It was worth dying for that.

"Come on now, Rance," he was saying grimly. "I'll tell you what to do—your part's simple enough. We're martyrs to science. You'll have done at least one worthy thing in your rotten life."

The prodding muzzle of his gun shoved Rance to the seat at the disintegrator's spectroscopic eye-piece. "I'll explain what you do in a minute," Magnus said grimly. "Just sit quiet now."

With the gun in his left hand he kept the cowering Rance covered. And then slowly he moved the levers that controlled the current flow. The big disintegrator throbbed more audibly; its whine went up a notch in pitch—monster unleashed, eager now that its opportunity had come.

John Magnus' mind was a chaos of des-

perate excitement as he held his gun on the frightened Rance. Just a few minutes now and they would both be dead. Martyrs to science. . . .

Queer, turgid circumstances which had brought John Magnus and Peter Rance now to the end of their lives . . .

EARLIER that night John Magnus had decided to kill himself. Not by an experimentation with the disintegrator. That needed two operators. When he had built the big apparatus after two previous failures, he still had not realized quite how dangerous it would be to make a third attempt. But when the Safety Bureau investigated and decided against it, Magnus had not been willing to search for two suicide volunteers. He could probably have gotten them, of course—two poor devils willing to kill themselves for money which their families needed. He had decided against it. For nearly a year now the big disintegrator had been standing ready, but untouched.

Then had come the failure of all Magnus' gigantic business enterprises; and tonight he had planned to end it all by shooting himself. Vaguely he had thought of the disintegrator. But there was no time now to get anyone to work it with him—even if he had been willing to let someone else kill himself, which he was not.

So he had decided that he would drill himself, in his rest-room at three A.M. At two-thirty he was sitting slumped in his chair, with his back to the door of the room. The big oval which he was facing admitted a yellow-blue sheen from the great city outside. It painted his slight sprawled figure, glowed in his mass of iron-grey hair. He could see, through the window, the distant shining terraces of the metal city. Carole's car, with Rance the family operator at the controls, would be a little oncoming dot, widening to seem a squat-winged insect until all in a moment it would drone past the window and land on the roof stage. But it wasn't in sight yet.

Half an hour, and then he would drill through his heart. There would not be another dawn for John Magnus, only the dawn of the Unknown. He could picture the stir it would cause, the blaring of newscasters' voices in millions of homes tomorrow morning:

> John Magnus commits suicide. Head of the International Sub-sea Freighters succumbs to depressive mania worrying over the loss of the Nautilus. Drills himself at the trinight hour alone in his library. His personal affairs in chaos. International Freighters probably will cease operations. The sailing of the Nemo, sister vessel of the ill-fated Nautilus, scheduled for today, has been cancelled.

The end of John Magnus. The world would ring with it, for a few minutes, and then forget. But Carole would not forget. He was sorry for Carole. Her mother had died so many years ago—and John Magnus had been so very busy. Too busy to be much of a father to Carole—too busy of late even to realize that she was now eighteen, and very beautiful. Old Mrs. Thompson, his housekeeper, had reminded him of that, just a few days ago. . .

He shifted uneasily in his chair as he waited for Carole to arrive. Queer that she hadn't returned yet. She had gone up into Westchester, to a dance at the Livingstons; had told Mrs. Thompson she would be home by two. He wanted now, so much to say goodnight to her. It would be goodbye, though she wouldn't know it—until afterward.

TEN minutes passed, and still Carole hadn't come. Magnus' fumbling hand slid open his desk's front compartment; and his fingers gripped the little heat-gun which presently would drill its tiny searing blast through his heart. The metal grip-end was chill to his touch. Chill and rigid—like death.

John Magnus, the failure. How easy now, so near the end, to look back upon his mistakes. If he had not mushroomed International Freighters beyond his capital. If he had not quarreled with Lloyds, refusing insurance for the Nautilus, underwriting the ship and cargo himself which now were irrevocably lost in the bottom of the Nero Deep. Perhaps he was fated. Too many irons in the fire. Maybe his work on the disintegrator last year had been a mistake. If it had succeeded, it would have brought back his failing fortunes. But it had not. Or maybe, after that second little model had, like the first one, exploded and killed two men—maybe Magnus should have dropped the idea, saved his time, thought and money, instead of building the big model on the new principle. It was housed in a lonely laboratory building, near the end of Long Island.

Just another of John Magnus' failures. Oh well, a little shot from this gun—and that would be the end of all his troubles. His life insurance was all that Carole would need. But he must say goodbye to Carole now. Hold her—his little daughter who so surprisingly had suddenly become a woman—hold her just one last time in his arms.

It was too bad now that he had had so little time to be with Carole, these last good many years. . . .

From where he slumped in his chair, pondering the wreck of his career, summoning his courage to end it, John Magnus could see across the blur of his desk and out the window beyond. The city spires and the skeleton legs of the landing stages were white as bleached bones in the moonlight.

And suddenly he tensed, sat up, peering through the window. To the left, one of the out-jutting terraces of the big building was visible. Carole's aircar had just landed there; its helicopter vanes were still slowly circling. And beside it, on the terrace in the moonlight two figures were standing—the slender, white-robed Carole with the tall, dark-uniformed outline of Rance at her elbow. He should have been standing there respectfully receiving her orders for tomorrow; or guiding her along the cat-walk which led down into the living room. But he wasn't. One of his hands was on her slim shoulder as he stood looking down at her. They were talking; and suddenly Magnus saw her arms go up around his neck as Rance held her in a close embrace.

John Magnus in that moment sat bolt upright, stricken, with his breath stopped. The two figures presently broke apart; then Rance got into the car, its vanes whirred, slowly lifting it up until it disappeared in the direction of the roof-stage. Carole, with her cloak held around her, came down the catwalk. The moonlight gleamed with platinum tints in her mass of pale-gold hair piled on her head—hair which was disheveled from Rance's embrace. In a moment an angle of the building hid her.

AT HIS desk in the library, Magnus sat motionless. The little tilted mirror on the desk showed him that the corridor door behind him was open. He reached; lighted a small hooded desk light. It cast a pale circle of illumination upon his head and shoulders. His thin, square-jawed face was set and grim.

He heard her step in the corridor as she went toward her bedroom. She had to pass here; she would see his light.

"Oh, is that you, Father? Up so late?"

He turned in his chair as she came into the room. Yes, she was indeed beautiful. How she had grown, these last years—tall, slender graceful as a lily; refined, sensitive little face, framed by the tendrils of her pale-gold hair. She cast aside her rustling cloak as he rose to kiss her.

"You shouldn't be working so late, Father," she said. "You look tired."

"I haven't been working. Sit down, Carole. I want to talk to you a moment."

She sat obediently facing him. "Yes, Father?"

"Did you have a nice time at the Livingston dance?"

"Why, yes. Just fine. How did you know I was going to the dance?"

"I—I asked the help," he said. "Old Mrs. Thompson told me."

"Oh. I see."

He sat with his big-knuckled hands clasped between his knees. He was staring down at them. "Meet any nice young men there, Carole?"

"Why, yes. Of course, I guess so."

"Why I ask," Magnus said abruptly, "you can see the northwest terrace from here where I was sitting. I saw you say goodnight to Rance."

That startled her. He had been aware that she was puzzled by his questions; surprised at his interest. Now she stiffened and her eyes narrowed.

"Oh, you did?" she murmured.

"Yes, I did. Rather unusual good night for one of my employees and my daughter, don't you think, Carole? Seems like it might need explaining."

"Oh—yes—"

He said grimly into a little silence, "Well, go on."

Their gazes crossed. Adversaries. It wasn't what he wanted at all, so that he added, "Carole, dear—"

At once she melted. "Oh, Father—" Her dress rustled and glinted with the moonlight and hooded desk lamp as she rose, sat on the arm of his chair and slid her white arm over his shoulders. "I—we—we were going to tell you tomorrow. Oh, we knew you'd be surprised. But you see, it's so wonderful—"

"What's wonderful?"

"Our love. Us going to be married."

Neither of them were aware that out in the dim, padded corridor behind them, a tall dark-uniformed figure had come and was standing by the door, watching and listening.

"MARRIED?" Magnus echoed sardonically. "So that's his plan? To marry you for the Trust Fund I made inviolate for you. Half of it when you marry—all of it when I die, plus my insurance."

"We—he doesn't want your money, Father. Oh, you don't know Peter. You can't realize — our love — you don't know—"

"I know him all right. I've employed him two years and he's a good flyer." He put his cold hand on top of hers. "I'm a judge of men, Carole. And I've heard—well a lot of things about him—about his private life, with women."

"Don't you dare talk like that," she gasped. "I won't listen. I—"

"What a fool I've been not to have taken better care of you, Carole." She tried to struggle away from him, but he held her. "Maybe it's nothing I could legally prove against Rance," he asserted, "but I can tell you, I'm not going to let you marry him. It would wreck your life—"

She got her hands loose and stood up, confronting him. Her little chin was up; her rouged lips quivered. Out in the hall, the clock chimed three. The hour beyond which Magnus had decided he would not live. But he had forgotten that now.

"I didn't know Rance ever flew your car," he was saying. "I just heard that tonight from Mrs. Thompson. I thought old Thompson always flew you, unless you went alone."

"There's a lot of things you haven't known about me," she retorted.

That cut him; it was so true. He could feel his face flushing. "Well, you can't marry him—"

"I'm of legal age—"

"Without your money? You think he'd marry you? I'll take it away from you."

Would he marry her, trusting that Magnus later would relent rather than see her in want? Perhaps he would.

"What—what are you going to do, Father?"

He was reaching for his buzzer. "Have him in here. We'll see how much he wants you, how much your money." Then a sudden thought checked Magnus. "Not tonight," he said grimly. Then he laughed strangely, a little wildly so that Carole stared at him, puzzled. "Not tonight," he repeated. "Rance will have to fly me over to the dock. Ought to start right now—conference with the Captain of the Nemo. Hadn't realized it was so late. We'll talk about this tomorrow, Carole, dear."

He held her to him and kissed her. His last farewell. He was still smiling that queer, twisted smile as he kissed her again and sent her to bed.

"NICE night for flying, eh, Rance?"

"Yes, sir. It is."

With its helicopters whirring, the small aircar lifted vertically, with the rooftop of Magnus' home dropping away beneath it. Then they slanted up into the starlight. The night was clear, glistening with moonlight. Magnus grimly sat beside his operator, covertly studying him. Handsome damn fellow. Queer how Magnus, intent only upon the vortex of his giant business enterprises, had scarcely given a thought to the talk he had heard about the fellow's private life.

"Nice flying on a night like this, Rance?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

Magnus' breath sucked in. He laughed. "Dammit, man, can't you add anything? I'm trying to make conversation. And you might drop the sir. It isn't—exactly necessary now, between us."

Oh, Rance knew what he meant all right. He started; and then he murmured, "I don't understand that, sir."

"Oh, yes, you do. About Carole. She told me, just a few minutes ago, that she loves you. Wants to marry you."

Rance turned now and his dark eyes were narrowed. "Did she?"

"And I'm not going to let you marry her. You want her money, don't you?"

"Well—do I?" Then Rance suddenly showed his cards. He grinned insolently. "We're alone here—let's talk plainly. I heard you trying to blacken me with her. You can't prove anything that she'll believe. So we'll be married. She's a handsome little thing—worth any man's interest. So in a few days we'll—"

"You damned—" Magnus' hand slid toward his jacket pocket where his little gun lay cool and sleek. But he relaxed.

"Suppose she has no money?"

That made Rance laugh. "Oh, I guess you wouldn't let her starve as my wife. That's a chance I'll have to take. Her beauty is worth it—for a while, anyway." He seemed eager to taunt Magnus; he slumped back at ease behind the controls, chuckling to himself. And then he added, "Don't get so charged up. I just thought we ought to show each other where we really stand. You're an intelligent man—you know when you're licked."

"Yes, I guess I do," Magnus muttered. "So that's where we stand?" His breath was almost choking him. His hand came suddenly out of his pocket. He was panting, and he laughed unsteadily. "You're all wrong, Rance. That isn't just where we stand."

"Why—why, what the devil—" Rance's jaw dropped; the color faded from his face as he gazed at the leveled gun.

"We're not flying for the Brooklyn dock," Magnus said grimly. "Head us northeast. . . . Damn it, do what you're told." He prodded with the gun.

The aircar swung. "Where—where are we going?" Rance muttered. Oh, he was a coward all right. Terrified, trembling as he gazed from the gun-muzzle to Magnus' grim set face. But he was alert; like a

trapped rat, trying to find an escape. "You're not going to—kill me, Mr. Magnus? Now, listen, about Carole—"

"We've talked enough about that," Magnus rasped. "You fly us—and I don't think you'd better try anything queer—"

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see. Don't worry, I'm not going to kill you. We're going to do something important for science. I'll give you directions. My Montauk work-shops. You've never been there, Rance? Well, you'll be interested."

THE north shore slid beneath them. Rance sat stiffened tense, with Magnus' gun at his ribs. Then at last they landed at the edge of the lonely patch of woods on Magnus' deserted little stage.

"Nice set-down, Rance. As I told Carole, that's one thing about you—you're a good flyer."

He pushed Rance ahead of him along the woodland path. The big metal and concrete laboratory building was dark and silent in the starlight. Magnus unlocked its door. Then they were in the laboratory room. The preliminary warming current went into the intricate apparatus of the disintegrator; the fluorescent globes beside it bubbled with their lurid greenish saffron glare.

And the big disintegrator was throbbing and whining. Nearly a year it had waited, set and ready; and now its chance had come.

"Are you—have you gone crazy, Mr Magnus?" Rance was gasping. Magnus had backed him over against the wall; the greenish glare made him look ghastly as a dead man. And then Magnus forced him to the disintegrator, where he sat on the stool, cringing, with the spectroscopic eye-piece beside him. He gasped,

"I'll do what you tell me. This—damned thing, will it kill us?"

Magnus chuckled.

"Well, at least it's a worthy death," Magnus told him. "Do you want, even a small chance to live?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Well, then you'd better listen to how you're going to help me." There wasn't even a small chance, of course—but no use of telling him that. Swiftly he explained. The tiny grains of sand already were trickling into the pressure chamber, deep within the big apparatus—grains to be bombarded by the neutronic fluorescence. Rance must closely watch the mag-

nified, prismatic image of them—watch and tell what he saw of the spectroscopic change which would presage the beginning of the disintegration. And Magnus simultaneously would alter the quality and intensity of the current. The dials would record it—dials that no matter what happened, were built to remain intact so that the next experimentor would have the benefit of their records.

"You see," Magnus was saying, "we want the sand-grains to be prepared by specific gradations for that instant when the molecules will overcome their cohesion and fly apart."

Ah, there was the trouble—though Magnus saw no need now to say it! The disintegration, no matter how slowly the gradations of preliminary break-down transpired, would come all at once! An explosion which would be the end. . . But he must carry the record of transition as far as possible. . .

"You—you think I can do what you want?" Rance stammered.

But Magnus didn't miss how alert the fellow was—how closely he was watching the gun-muzzle. Damn cowardly rat; and he was still hoping that he could get out of here. But he couldn't. And he didn't deserve to.

"Of course you can do it," Magnus chuckled. He shoved at the current-levers. Now, only a minute or two. . . The end of everything. But it was worth doing.

HIS life and Rance's—to benefit the world. He could feel his heart racing, thumping. His breath seemed to catch in his throat, and a band seemed squeezing his chest. This damnable excitement. Not so easy to die, bravely with your mind only on the advancement of science. . . . Dear little Carole. This would save her from Rance. At least that he could do for Carole. The whirling current-dials and the levers swam before his gaze, but he tried to steady himself. Beside him the two big fluorescent globes boiled with the deadly disintegrated chloride and monoxide products with the neutronic current bombarding them. . . .

"Anything yet, Rance?"

"No sir, not yet."

Then the alert Rance, interested only in saving himself, saw that Magnus' gun-muzzle had wavered. He lunged to his feet, hurled himself upon Magnus. Then they were struggling, swaying as they gripped each other.

"Got you," Rance panted. "You fool—you can stay here and die—to hell with you—"

They were struggling for possession of the gun, and suddenly it was fired, with its bolt stabbing past them. There was the tinkling of glass mingled with the hissing of the shot as the gun-blast struck one of the big fluorescent globes.

Magnus went over backward, with the younger, more powerful Rance on top of him. Then Rance broke away and leaped to his feet, trying to get to the closed door. But he staggered. The broken globe was flinging acrid luminous fumes around the room—lethal fumes which spread in amazing expansion so that all in that second the entire air was polluted. Rance gasped. Just one gasp. Then the poison, swift and deadly, was absorbed into his blood. He twitched with a horrible paroxysm, unconsciousness coming so swiftly that he was still balanced on his feet. Then his knees buckled. He was dead when he hit the floor.

BUT Magnus was still alive. The volatile fumes were less dense at the floor level. Magnus was choking, his senses reeling, but he had the strength to crawl for one of the windows, holding his breath as he drew himself up.

And he stared numbly at the turgid, fume-choked room. The short-circuited current was out of the big disintegrator.

It stood silent, inert. No, not quite silent! From deep within it now a little rumble was sounding. Magnus stared with the room swimming before his gaze. The big turbine wheels were stirring! Just a trembling quiver; then a little forward hitch. Then slowly revolving. . . Faster. Smooth and fast. . . A whirling turbine, powered only by the slow, progressive disintegration of the sand-stream. . .

Success at last for John Magnus. . . He realized it dimly as his senses reeled and he slumped limp on the window-sill. And all his pent-up emotions broke within him —so great a flood that the surge of it flung him off into the abyss of unconsciousness. . .

From a vast, far-away emptiness John Magnus felt himself struggling back. Then at last he opened his eyes; saw the swimming, blurred vision of Carole's anxious face bending over him, with the white wall of a hospital room behind her.

"Queer thing," he murmured. "That globe got broken just at the right time to make the disintegrator a success. That saved me, Carole—"

"Oh Father dear, you're all right now—"

"Yes, all right now."

He clung to her hand, thinking of how he would guide her in the future—help her build her life firmly even while he was building the great power industry which would revolutionize the world.

Success at last for John Magnus.

THE END

EDITORAMBLINGS

IF YOU'VE been following the letters that have appeared in our Viewpoints column every issue, you've noticed that a surprisingly high proportion of them are unanimous on one point: that modern science fiction suffers from one great fault; its stories are too short. The popularity of our first serial, which we are concluding in this issue, is only one of a good many signs and portents that longer stories are wanted.

Now, we cannot present really long stories in *Astonishing Stories* unless we run them as serials. We have done that once already, and may do so again; but that does not solve the question. What is needed, clearly, is a magazine which will *specialize* in long stories—in novels.

Well—such a magazine is coming out. The name of it is *Super Science Novels*. It is not entirely a new magazine, but is our old companion, *Super Science Stories*, all decked up with a brand-new policy.

It will be a larger magazine than was its predecessor, and will cost a nickel more. But we think it will be worth the increase in price—more than worth it, for no short story can ever hope to be as good as a really good long one.

The first issue will be dated March, and its feature novel—a *long* one—will be "Genus Homo", by L. Sprague de Camp and P. Schuyler Miller. Watch for it—it will be out January 20th.

About all we have space left for, this issue, is our regular report on the stories in the last. Here it is: Taking top place was Isaac Asimov's "Half-Breeds on Venus". Second came "Trouble in Time" by S. D. Gottesman, and third was the installment of the serial. (Watch "Quicksands" climb when the reports on the last installment come in.)

—THE EDITOR.

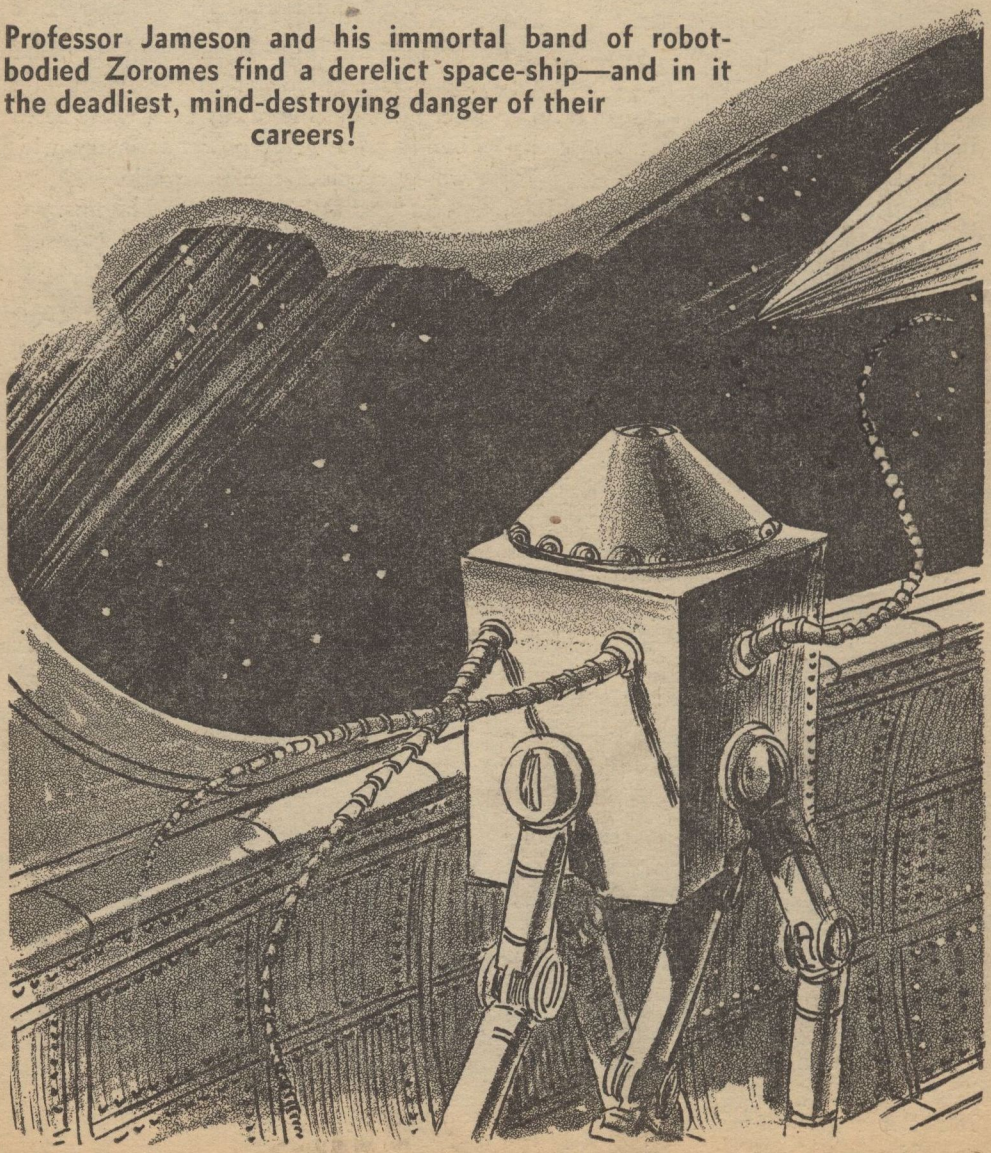
COSMIC DERELICT

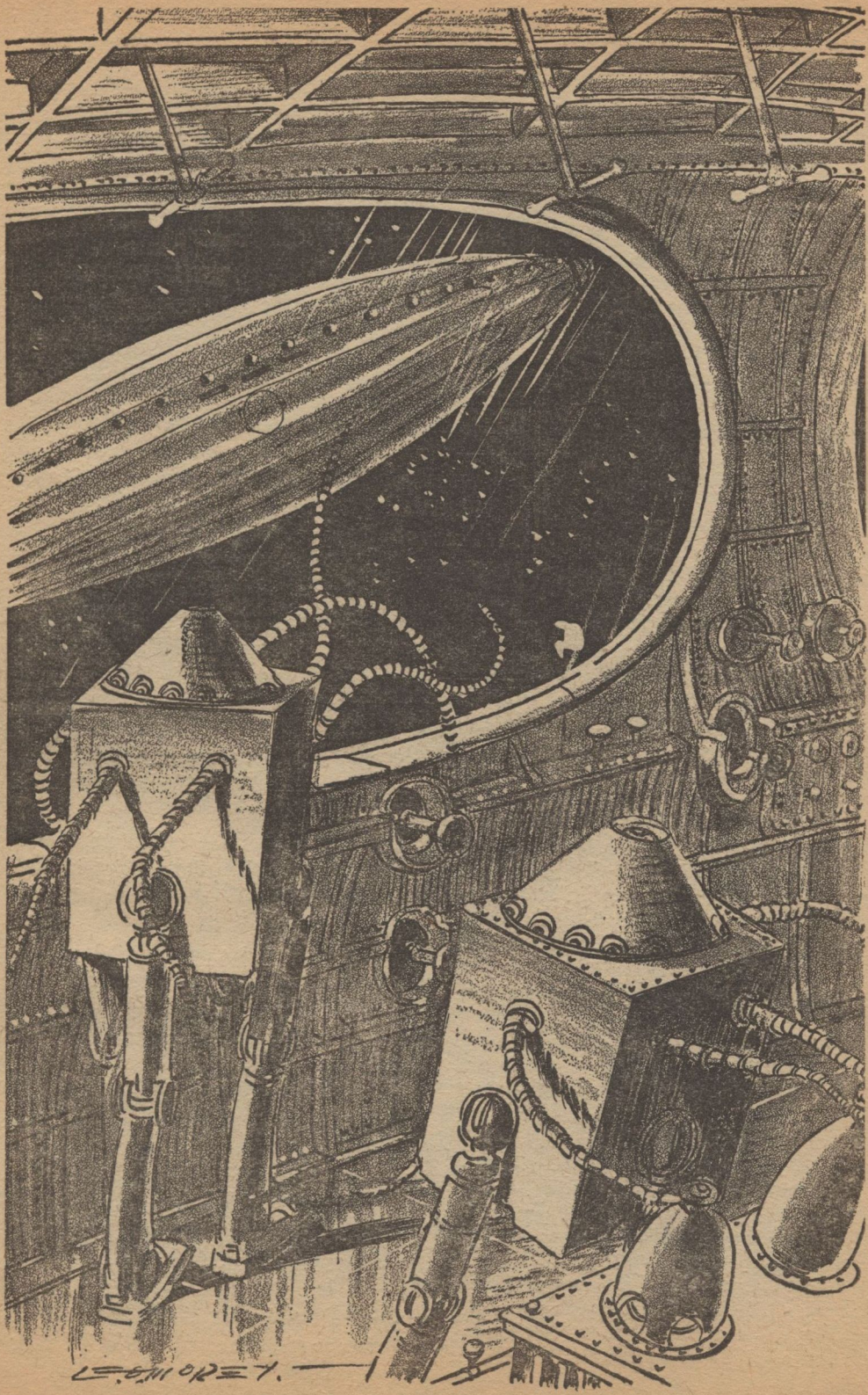
By Neil R. Jones

INTRODUCTION

THE last chapter of Professor Jameson's life came to a close in 1950. His was a strange, secret will left in the hands of a nephew. Douglas Jameson found that his uncle had built a space rocket to carry his earthly remains into the graveyard of space where it was the professor's contention that organic matter suffered no deterioration. The funeral rocket was to become a satellite of the earth in the lonely wastes between worlds. The Egyptian embalmers, in the professor's opinion, had merely scratched the surface of an interesting experiment. He expected to remain perfectly preserved until that far-flung age in the future

Professor Jameson and his immortal band of robot-bodied Zoromes find a derelict space-ship—and in it the deadliest, mind-destroying danger of their careers!




L.E. MOREY

when the earth, its rotation slowed to a standstill, one side forever facing the sun, eventually fell back into the dulled brilliance of the flaming body from which it had been hurled on its career at worldbirth.

The wandering meteors provided the professor with his greatest problem. Automatic, radium repulsion rays were finally built into the rocket and equipped with sensitive detectors and a system for transformation of sunlight into energy.

Millions of years passed since the night the professor's nephew sent the cosmic coffin speeding upon its endless journey. The professor's theories were vindicated, but his eventual anticipations were interrupted. Fate stepped in forty million years after. Space wanderers from a distant world of another system, ever on the move to explore new planetary systems in a search for the unusual, found the professor's funeral rocket in the shadow of the dying world, a lifeless, untenanted world which memories had even deserted long ago.

These space wanderers were mechanical, their bodies made of metal. Only their brains were organic, once situated in the skulls of an intelligent race of flesh and blood creatures but now transposed to coned heads of metal, governing a cubed body, four metal legs and six metal tentacles. Shuttered, television eyes surrounded the base of the coned head; while from the apex, a single eye looked straight upward.

The Zoromes recalled to life Professor Jameson's brain and transposed it to one of their mechanical bodies. He was offered the opportunity of travelling with the machine men on their exploration of eternal adventure. For a time, a melancholia arising from the effects of the desolate earth and its long gone civilization depressed the freshly revived brain of the professor, and he unwisely contemplated an end to his weird situation. But between eternity and death, he chose the former and embarked on an amazing series of adventures.

Eternity, however, was not the definite heritage of the Zoromes. In fact, it might well be discarded as a literal term and be applied only relatively. Immortality was theirs as long as no damage was suffered by their metal heads. Parts of their bodies when worn out were replaced. Professor Jameson, known among his metal comrades as 21MM392, had seen many of his mechanical brethren die. He had verged on that perilous eventuality himself a good many times in his travels with the Zoromes. He had also seen machine men created from living subjects. There were 5ZQ35, 454ZQ2 and 92ZQ153 who had originally been Tripeds on the planet of the double sun, and on a return to the home world he had seen a female Zorome, Princess Zora, become 119M-5, and her dead lover 12W-62. It was with a new expedition that the professor and 744U-21 had set forth into a new territory of cosmic exploration not yet related upon the record books of the home world.

CHAPTER ONE

The Derelict's Passengers

WITH a metal tentacle, Professor Jameson pointed to the world in the rear of their passage. At a distance astern of less than twenty thousand miles, the planet still loomed large and commanding, occupying a large section of the star-sprinkled sky within its halo of atmosphere.

"It seems strange, 6W-438, that we found no intelligent life on that world."

"There are still three inner planets to explore. We may yet find an intelligent species in this system."

"Life, even of low intelligence, is the exception rather than the rule," 744U-21 reminded them. "We have found life on but seven worlds in the last twenty-eight planetary systems we have visited, and all but one of these worlds were divided up among two systems. We did gather interesting scientific data, however, in a good many cases."

"This system shows signs of being peculiarly well adapted for life forms," the professor pointed out. "We may strike something of interest among the inner worlds."

"First, we must explore this lone satellite of the fourth world. It is strange that there is but one moon among all five worlds. Possibly, on closer approach to the inner world, we shall see smaller ones we missed through distant observation."

The satellite in question grew on their

vision as the mother world behind gradually dwindled. 20R-654 piloted the space ship in a broad, sweeping curve around the little moon. As detectors and divinators of all kinds were trained upon the little moon, Professor Jameson, by the side of 744U-21, who was estimating the satellite's diameter and density, saw that their earlier approximation of seventeen hundred miles diameter was only slightly in excess of the exact.

"There is a strong concentration of metal at one spot we passed," 65G-849 announced.

"Return that way and we shall seek it out," 744U-21 relayed to 20R-654 at the controls. "Cruise closer to the surface."

Close to the surface, in their parlance, meant at an initial safe distance of several miles above any possible spires of rock or mountainous terrain rising up suddenly from beyond the moon's close horizon. They dropped gradually nearer the rough, airless expanse of desolate surface and slowed their speed as 65G-849 reported stronger emanations. At one point, he reported the metallic concentration to be highly localized. Then the ship passed beyond it, for the emanations diminished in strength quite rapidly. 65G-849 made a confusing report, however, as they returned to the point of highest recording. The radiations were weaker.

"We have strayed off the line to one side or the other."

"No, we were above the same topographical features both times."

"Check your instruments again and give specific directions to 20R-654."

This was done, and a startling discovery was made.

"We are not over this metal concentration! We are under it!"

Surprise and interest was immediately manifested by all thirty-eight machine men.

"A sub-satellite!"

The mysterious object was quickly found. It was small, they noticed, as the ship maneuvered to sunward.

"Another space ship—smaller than ours!"

"Signal it!"

"They do not receive anything, at least, there is no response."

"It is not under its own power. It is drifting."

"Abandoned, possibly."

"Or its crew dead."

"A derelict."

"We shall soon learn," said the professor. "5ZQ35, 19K-59 and I shall board it, if we can effect an entrance without help."

THE three machine men put temperature equalizers over their metal heads to protect their all-important brains from the low temperature of space. They were let out of an airlock from which they drifted across to the derelict. On closer examination, the professor saw that it was a space ship, one of a crude fashioning, as if its creators were still in the pioneering field of space flying. From experience, he guessed that it was a degravitator type, one of the slower methods of space travel. For one thing, he could discover no rocket exhausts.

It was 5ZQ35 who found the means by which entrance was effected. A round port projected from one side of the faceted ship. With the built-in heat ray in one of his tentacles, a peculiar equipment carried exclusively by the professor, the machine man patiently cut away the hinged apparatus for opening the door. 19K-59 and 5ZQ-35 waited; then assisted in lifting and twisting out the tight-fitting cover which was secured inside at one edge. Again, Professor Jameson found it necessary to use his heat ray, creeping part way through the opening, his cubed body jammed tightly between metal jaws before his heat ray released the entrance hatch entirely. As numerous mechanical eyes

watched from the space ship of the Zoromes, Professor Jameson disappeared inside the derelict, closely followed by his two metal companions. Through telepathic observation, they followed the discoveries of the three.

Once inside, the rapid flow of mental information centered about the mechanical details of the space ship—until 19K-59 came across the first corpse. It lay slumped before an instrument board. Their initial impression was a four-legged creature with a short body extending horizontal rather than vertical, and an echo of the machine men's construction was found in the four tentacles which now drooped disconsolately in death. A long neck grew from the center of the body, supporting a head which the expert eyes of the machine men readily recognized as capable of generating an intelligence sufficient to solve the mechanical details of space flying. Two knoblike eyes were filmed with thin lids. The creature's accoutrements, as was generally found universal, were designed more for practical detail rather than adornment. Seven of the creatures were found. How long they had been dead, it was difficult to determine.

"Probably from one of the inner worlds," 6W-438 deduced. "They appear to have known that death was coming. They just sat there and waited for it."

"The moon is inhospitable. They could have found no help there if supplies or fuel were needed, or if faulty mechanical details were responsible for their drifting like this."

"Their faculty for making sounds is subordinate to their faculty for understanding each other mentally, like we do," said the professor, examining one of them closely. "As in most stages of civilized advancement, their hearing is not very strongly developed."

"Let us see what 744U-21 says to resurrecting their brains to life in the coned heads," 5ZQ-35 suggested. "Then we can learn their story."

"It has been a long time since we discovered a species to be advanced as far as this," Professor Jameson reminded them. "If 744U-21 is agreeable, it might prove well."

More of the machine men transferred from their own ship to the derelict. The matter of attempting to bring the strange creatures back to life was discussed, and it was decided that if the first trial showed good effects, the other six would be recalled.

The selected corpse was taken aboard the ship of the Zoromes and preparations rapidly consummated for brain transposition and the resurgence of life forces, whereafter the brain in its metal case would call out various chemical necessities stored in the apex of the coned head for its continuation, purification and rejuvenation.

CHAPTER TWO

Resurrection

BOTH 744U-21 and 6W-438 were masters in the art of resurrection and brain transposition, and they immediately took over. The fact that the subject's brain appeared to be excellently adapted to transposition precluded a great deal of preliminary preparation and special treatment. Where the brain structure of the subject was found at wide variance with the brain structure of the Zoromes, the metal heads, which had been constructed for their own individual use, were given detailed rearrangement of neuronic-impulse transformers, distributing centers of cerebral nutrition and eliminator conductors, to mention a few of the more common and pressing necessities.

This done, and the brain properly ensconced in its new setting, the release of a synthetic life force was consummated

from attached apparatus, causing the needed stimulation for the revived and continued functioning of a dormant brain. It was a delicate and exacting business which 744U-21 and 6W-438 undertook. The machine men mentally probed the brain for signs of returning consciousness, watching for subconscious impulse deep in the inner mind as a prelude to complete recovery.

The appearance of the unmistakable signs heartened them. Then followed a chaotic preambulation of disconnected thoughts. The machine men found that it called for a distinct mental effort on their parts to detect the thoughts of the creature's brain, and Professor Jameson made the observation that given complete command of their faculties, this species might easily hide their thoughts from the mental perceptions of the Zoromes if they chose to do so.

As consciousness reasserted itself more strongly, the mechanical eyes of the head became focussed on the nearby machine men and other objects. Disbelief and bewilderment were both reflected from the brain. The Zoromes caught mental graspings at sanity, as if it were an elusive quantity, and wonderment if this were a post prelude to death, or an afterlife. 744U-21 impressed upon the creature's mind the facts concerning what must have been his fate and how they had transposed his brain and recalled it to life. Reiteration of the facts was necessary, yet the initial idea of death was soon realized, for memory served in this capacity. The machine men discovered, through associate thought, that something had gone wrong with the space ship between planet and moon, and that the moon had been the destination to be reached.

WHEN the ideas of what had happened were clearly understood, the machine men told the creature about themselves, and they told him that he was like them. From him, they learned that he was one of an intelligent race of creatures who lived on the third world. He and his six companions had been upon a space expedition to the fourth world which they occasionally visited.

"What were you going to do on the moon?" 6W-438 asked.

Their informant seemed taken off balance momentarily, wondering how they knew. He was told of the associate thoughts of his which had been read.

"There is a terminal on the moon," he replied. "Others who waited for us must also have died there."

"Is the terminal airless? They, too, may still be preserved if they are intact."

"The moon is airless, and the atmosphere in the terminal must have soon passed off after they died, for there must be someone always to keep the machines working."

The creature expressed keen satisfaction that his six companions were to be resurrected and made into machine men. He conjectured on what time had passed since death had overtaken them. He was stunned by the professor's observation that he had lain dead in space forty million of his planet's years before the machine men found him.

Movement of the new machine man's mechanical appendages was awkward at first, but he soon mastered a smoother control. His first act was to try and determine the length of time he and his companions had been dead. He went about this by means of astronomical observations with the help of the Zoromes. Careful measurements of star constellations assured him that no such abyss of time such as Professor Jameson had mentioned had elapsed since his death. Solar observation also checked this fact. He next figured the positions of the five planets and the single moon which he assured the machine men was the only satellite in the entire system. His figures

eventually yielded the fact that he and his companions had been dead either seven of his planet's revolutions around the sun, eight hundred and ninety-one or else two thousand fifty-three. Observations of comparatively close stars precluded the possibility of longer periods of time, and it was considered almost beyond doubt that the last mentioned period was also doubtful.

"You will find your world almost the same as when you left it," Professor Jameson told him.

"The world—but not its civilization," the creature observed. "Much can happen in eight hundred years."

"That would be about eleven hundred of my earthly years, figuring your time to mine."

"There's another way to figure this problem if we can find two comets."

This was found to be more difficult, due to the obscure positions of the comets, but they were figured in all three time positions and sought after by the powerful glasses of the Zoromes. One comet could be found in none of three spots, yet this was blamed possibly upon a bright cluster of stars which would have formed a background in case the comet lay in the seven year spot.

"It has either been but seven years or else the two thousand year juncture is too far out in space to be seen."

They looked for and finally discovered the second comet—in its most difficult position for observation, yet spectroscopic analysis by the special telescopic eye of 4F-686 eventually proved it conclusively for what it was.

"Seven years!" Professor Jameson exclaimed. "It is even possible, perhaps, that those in the moon's terminal still live on if they had sufficient supplies."

He from the third world expressed sad negation. "It was because of a shortage of supplies that we went to the fourth world."

CHAPTER THREE

Ytremv's Gratitude

THE machine men recalled to life the remaining six brains and gave them mechanical bodies. They were entirely successful in all but one instance. One of the brains suffered mental lapses and occasional stoppage of impulse like that of a cataleptic trance. Much was learned about the civilization of the third world, yet Professor Jameson became obsessed with the idea that much information was being withheld. These creatures were secretive and were capable of holding a secret from the probings of the machine men even as the latter were capable of shutting off their thoughts from others.

Through a mental association with certain sounds, the machine men learned that he whom they had first brought back to consciousness was articulately known as Pfrengt.

The third world was Dmypr, and the moon of the fourth world, Vroblz, was known as Zrm.

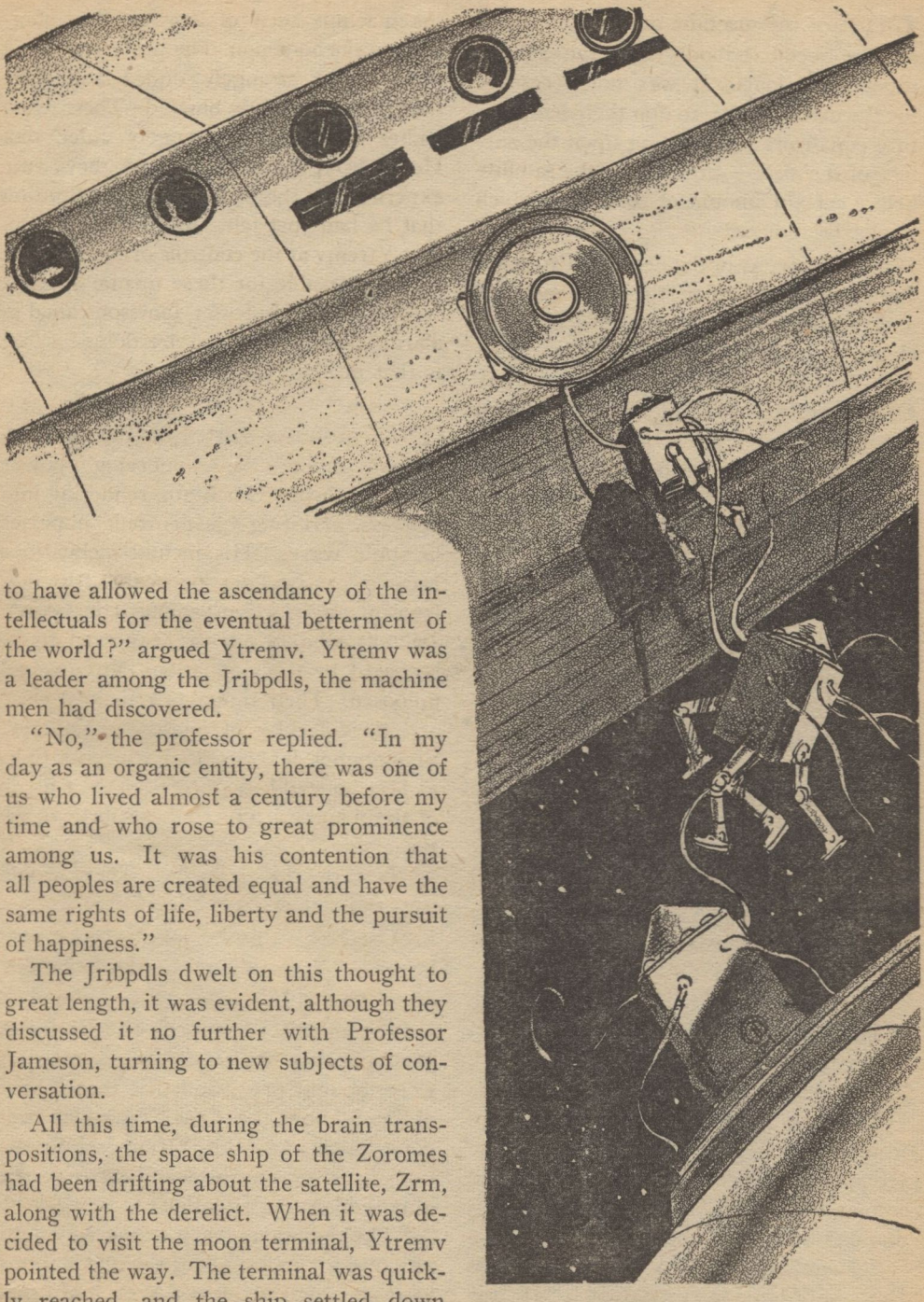
"We, too, have attained a proficiency in bringing the dead back to life," said Ytremv, "in the cases where irreparable injury to a part of the body has not been suffered, but brain transposition is entirely out of our realm of possibility."

"If those at the terminal are found as perfectly preserved as we were, we can bring them back to life again if we can get them to Dmypr safely."

"We can help you in that," 744U-21 assured them.

The Jribpdls, as they called themselves, were keenly interested in the space ship and its operation, and they learned rapidly. They were also interested in the travels of the machine men, and they learned how the Zoromes had lately freed a race of feline men from oppressive, scientific masters.

"But would it not have been better



to have allowed the ascendancy of the intellectuals for the eventual betterment of the world?" argued Ytremv. Ytremv was a leader among the Jribpdls, the machine men had discovered.

"No," the professor replied. "In my day as an organic entity, there was one of us who lived almost a century before my time and who rose to great prominence among us. It was his contention that all peoples are created equal and have the same rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The Jribpdls dwelt on this thought to great length, it was evident, although they discussed it no further with Professor Jameson, turning to new subjects of conversation.

All this time, during the brain transpositions, the space ship of the Zoromes had been drifting about the satellite, Zrm, along with the derelict. When it was decided to visit the moon terminal, Ytremv pointed the way. The terminal was quickly reached, and the ship settled down beside a curved knoll which was all of the terminal which projected above the surface of Zrm. Eleven Jribpdls had been left below, the machine men were told.

"It will be necessary to take them to Dmypr in an airless chamber of the ship," said the professor, "if you have hopes of recalling them to life."

FIVE of the machine men accompanied the metal Jribpdls into the subterranean terminals. It was not necessary for the machine men to don their temperature equalizers for stepping upon the surface of the airless satellite, for the satellite held a certain amount of solar heat which it slowly radiated.

Here again, as in the derelict, Professor Jameson looked upon the final gestures and attitudes of life frozen in death. All eleven Jribpdls were accounted for. Several had died the easy way—in sleep. Others, seeing ahead of them the drawn out horrors of the inevitable, had gone forth from their heated and air-filled sanctum to meet death. These were found in an antechamber, or airlock, slumped over each other in a tangled heap. Still others had followed routine up until the end. They were found sitting at instrument boards, ready to contact the space ship which never came, which had drifted helplessly into the attraction of Zrm.

What interested the Zoromes primarily, however, were fixtures and scientific apparatus in the terminal which they were eager to have the Jribpdls explain to them. Ytremv stepped over to one of the machines and gave it a quick examination and adjustment. A sudden paralyzing dizziness struck at the professor's brain but quickly passed.

"Did you feel that?" he asked the others.

"I felt nothing," 12W-62 replied. "What do you mean?"

The remaining Zoromes regarded him wonderingly. The thoughts of the Jribpdls, however, were concentrated among themselves, and their mental radiations flew thick and fast.

"Something stabbed at my brain," Professor Jameson explained. "It was somewhat of a coincidence. I thought it had something to do with that machine near Ytremv."

But there was no further comment from the machine men of Zor on the unexplained phenomenon. The professor found their brains strangely dulled and their thoughts indistinctly blurred. Their metal bodies had become strangely quiet, too. He realized instinctively that they were experiencing the same cerebral sensation that he had just felt. And he knew, too, that Ytremv at the controls of the machine was responsible for these mental spasms.

"Ytremv!" Professor Jameson called in alarm. "Stop what you are doing! What is that machine?"

THE professor started for the machine, but again the unnerving power throbbed through his brain, rendering him helpless, arresting his neuronic impulses in static waves. His mental inclinations became passive, yet he realized a malevolent satisfaction among the seven Jribpdls who in no way appeared to be bothered by the emanations Ytremv had unloosed. Their thoughts remained clear and their faculty of motion unhindered. Summoning his impaired concentrations as best he could, the professor sent a call of alarm and warning to those above in the space ship.

"Beware the Jribpdls! They would trap and render us helpless!"

"Useless!" Pfrengt mocked the professor. "Your thought concentrations are of no avail!"

It suddenly occurred to Professor Jameson that the subterranean quarters were thought proof and that those above did not know the treachery which was going on below. But Ytremv's information dispelled this idea and gave rise to a more alarming situation.

"The radiations reach a long way, fully one of your miles. Those in the ship are as useless and helpless as you, only they have no idea what has happened to them. Our own brains are different than yours and require a different frequency wave to affect us."

The seven Frankenstein creations the Zoromes had made went about examining their dead organic brethren and seemed satisfied with their condition. Professor Jameson was aware that his companions were more deeply afflicted by the disrupting power than he was, for he seemed unable to communicate with their dazed minds.

"Why are you doing this?" he demanded of the Jribpdls. "What madness has overcome you?"

"No madness," Ytremv replied. "We want your ship so that we can return to Dmypr, and we want no meddling outsiders putting the affairs of our world in what they think is proper order. About you, here in this terminal, are the proper rulers of Dmypr, including myself, who were driven out of their world. We have the means of conquering and ruling again. Millions will effectively support us when we return.

"We shall leave you here on Zrm. The temperature of the moon is high enough to keep your brains unaffected. Perhaps some day when our work of conquest is finished you shall be allowed to make yourselves useful in our employ."

The dazed professor did not catch the exchange of thoughts between the metal Jribpdls, but it was evident that they had decided it best to take the machine men of Zor out of the terminal. The Zoromes were picked up and carried out upon the moon's surface where they were dumped upon one side of their cubed bodies. The professor found the eye in the apex of his coned head pointing directly at the knoll of the terminal. To one side lay the space ship.

HE watched the seven Jribpdls enter the ship and return, each carrying a machine man who was dropped unceremoniously upon the ground. Five such trips were made until all the machine men of Zor lay in scattered profusion and helplessness on the surface of the moon, bodies piled together with legs projecting at grotesque angles. The professor caught the idea from the Jribpdls that the mind disrupter affecting their brains was to be left running on their return to Dmypr. No chances were being taken with the resourcefulness of the machine men despite the fact that they were marooned on Zrm. The Jribpdls wanted to find them easily overcome when they returned, and not organized for resistance or trickery. The Jribpdls were too proficient in these phases themselves to overlook the possibility in others.

The professor saw 454ZQ2 lying a short distance from him, while 22K-501 and 377X-80 were half supported in semi-upright positions by the cubed body of 8L-404. The professor gradually felt his mind growing more alert as he searched the brains of his nearer companions and found only weak, dazed queries. As his own brain became clearer, those of his companions became more blank.

The Jribpdls had done something to the machine's adjustment. The minds of his fellow machine men had become more deeply afflicted, while his own coma had lifted somewhat. He found that he was able to move, but he wisely remained quiet. What had happened? It did not take the professor long to decide. Like the Jribpdls, his earthly brain was on a varying frequency from that of the Zoromes, although it was more closely allied to them than the Jribpdl mentality. What had happened, he reasoned, was the fact that preparing to leave Zrm for Dmypr, the Jribpdls had set the frequency disturbance to a finer and more complete control over the collective mentalities of the Zoromes. From a partial effect over the professor's brain and a near total clouding of the Zoromes, the new setting had practically removed the professor's mental impotence.

He saw the Jribpdls hurrying back and

forth between the terminal and the space ship. They were moving much of the paraphernalia and apparatus of the terminal into the space ship. Professor Jameson was suddenly seized with the inspiration to stow away on the ship and wait for a chance. He tested movement of his metal legs while the Jribpdls were out of sight. Then he froze to inaction as one of the new machine men 6W-438 and 744U-21 had created to their own disaster appeared out of the terminal carrying a piece of mechanism in tentacles he had not yet become accustomed to using efficiently. It was Cnibml, the defective brain transposition. Halfway to the space ship, as the professor watched, Cnibml stopped suddenly, while the machine he was carrying slid to the ground from undirected tentacles. Cnibml had become afflicted with another of his temporary mental lapses.

With the speed of thought, an alternative, a desperate one, to the idea of stowing away, flashed before the professor, and he acted upon it. He rose to his feet and rushed upon Cnibml, seizing the new machine man much in the same manner as he and the other Jribpdls had seized upon the Zoromes and cast them out of their own space ship. Fearful that another of the Jribpdls might issue from the ship or terminal before his work was accomplished, Professor Jameson carried the machine man back to the position where the Jribpdls had deposited him. He assumed the old position with Cnibml beside him. He was none too soon. Pfrengt and Mnarspl, each carrying one of the organic Jribpdls, issued from the terminal and walked towards the ship. They looked in surprise at the piece of mechanism Cnibml had dropped and continued on into the ship.

The professor lost no further time. Quickly, he pushed himself to a convenient position beside Cnibml's head. Cnibml, coming slowly to his mental faculties, became aware of a sensation of heat against his metal coned head. Pain and bewilderment caused him to express alarm which the professor quickly squelched with further rapid application of his heat ray. Cnibml was no more. Seeing no one in sight, the professor placed the body with the damaged head among the more conglomerate heaps of machine men, rolling the metal cube of 168P-75 over the head to conceal it. Then he went and leaned against the side of the space ship where he remained motionless and waited. Outwardly, his mind carried but one impression. He was Cnibml, and his brain was too confused to realize what had happened. It was in this position that Ytremv and Pfrengt found him.

"There he is!"

"He's coming out of it. Do you suppose he will always be like this?"

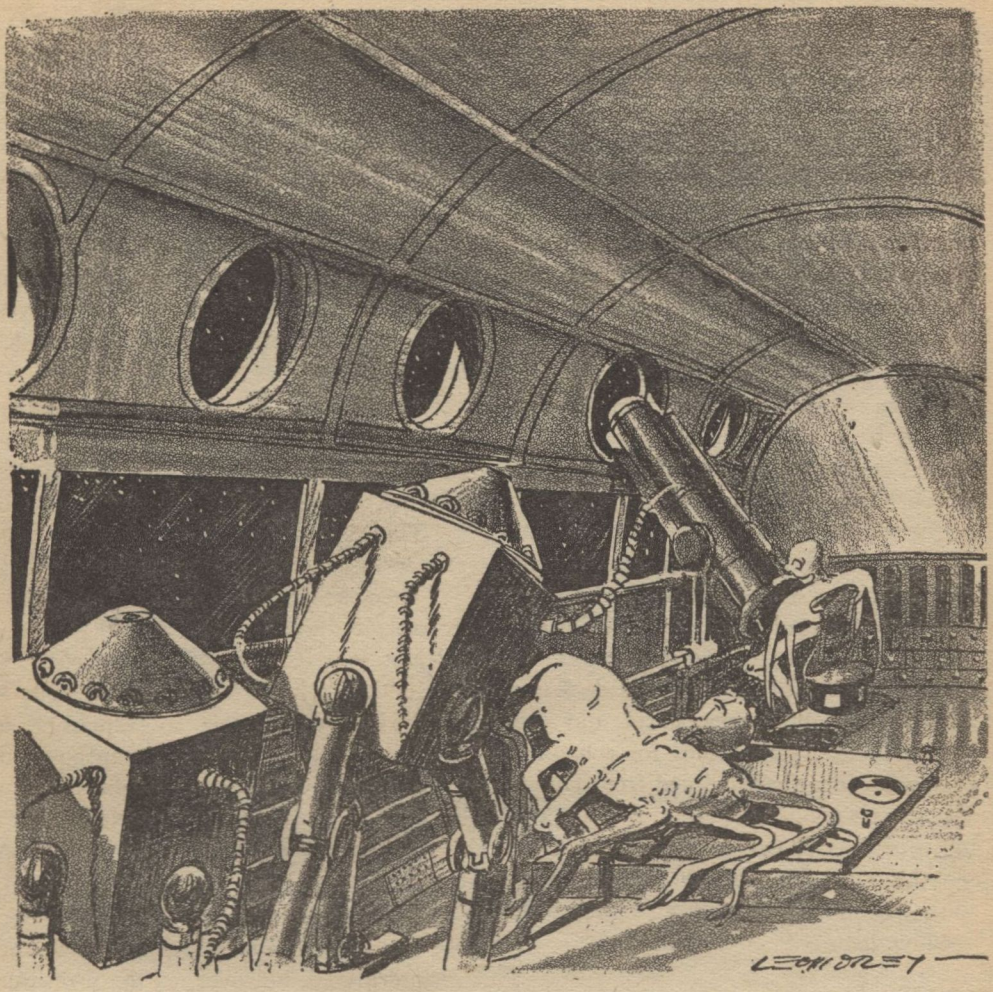
"He may die some time in one of these comas, or some time he may recover from them entirely," said Ytremv. "We cannot put too much dependence in his consistency when we get back to Dmypr. We must bear with these lapses."

And so Professor Jameson was accepted by the Jribpdls as one of them. They found his memory also affected. He did not recall a great deal of what he should have remembered. At first, the professor's mental lapses were frequent, but as he learned more about the Jribpdls and the world from which they came they found cause to consider a marked improvement in his condition.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Mysterious Broadcaster

THE machine men of Zor were left stranded on the moon, helpless under the radiating spell of the machine which darkened their brains and dissembled their impulses. The Jribpdls, although unable to handle the space ship skillfully, never-



theless made good speed, and were more than pleased with the quick transit they could never have made with their degravitator ship. Dmypr continued to grow larger.

By the time the third world filled a large part of the sky before them, Professor Jameson had learned that he had fallen in with political criminals who had been exiled from Dmypr for planning to overthrow the world government of their species and rule as absolute tyrants. He learned that their plot had failed and they had barely escaped with their lives in the fastest space ship at their command. Paradoxically, they had among them many of the best scientific minds of the planet, and this fact had figured largely in their near success. A losing pursuit of them had nevertheless crippled their ship, and they had barely reached the terminal on Zrm. Here, they had made repairs and had stayed. But once their food supplies threatened to run short, it was necessary to make a trip to the nearby world of Vroblz. They reached Vroblz safely and were nearly back to the moon when the ship gave out.

The professor learned that much of their following on Dmypr was synthetic. Besides the mental disrupters, the Jribpdls possessed propaganda coordinators which

worked on a principle along the same lines as the other machines except that they did not render the victims helpless. There were only certain mental types of Jribpdls, however, over which the propaganda coordinators exercised control.

It was the plan of Ytremv and his metal companions to visit an isolated outpost where they would find friends and the means of bringing back their dead comrades of the moon's terminal to sentient consciousness and activity.

Professor Jameson found their destination to be a village on an island. They landed at night so as to conceal the space ship. Ytremv did not want publicity; neither did he wish to scare his old friends by appearing suddenly among them in the weird entity of a machine man. All seven machine men could not leave the ship, so only four went, the professor among them. They crept through the darkness, sending thought waves ahead and preparing their organic allies for what had happened since they had fled from Dmypr seven years ago. They also outlined glowing prospects of eventual conquest. Even so, the flesh and blood Jribpdls were somewhat unnerved at first sight of the machine men.

THEY were taken to laboratories where Ytremv wished to get his plans under way at once. One of the first steps was to remove the dead Jribpdls from the space ship and apply methods of resuscitation. It was in the laboratories that one of Pfrengt's metal feet crumbled to pieces in the joint.

"That is strange," said Ytremv. "One of mine is about worn out and ready to be replaced. We must be reshod. Go to the supply room of the ship, Kfazc, and bring new ones."

"But I have tried," said Kfazc, holding up a worn foot. "I need two—or shall, soon. These metal feet of ours seem a defective lot."

"Something to do with our walking about Zrm, possibly," offered Gmejd.

"I thought we had plenty of everything in the way of new parts aboard the ship," said Pfrengt. "I investigated before we started. There is no shortage of anything else?"

"None," Kfazc replied. "Only feet."

"We must stay in good mechanical condition in order to do all that we have laid out ahead of us," said Ytremv determinedly.

"Let us make a fast trip back to Zrm and take feet from the bodies of the Zoromes?" the professor suggested to Ytremv.

"That is a good idea," Ytremv approved.

"Then let us start," urged the professor. "No time is to be lost."

"Not you, Cnibml," Ytremv checked him. "Kfazc and Mnarspl will pick a crew. I dare not trust so responsible a task to you. Your brain transposition is still defective, and you might suffer a lapse at a crucial moment. Never fear, there will be much for you to do here on Dmypr."

Ytremv was aware of the professor's ill-concealed disappointment, which he misinterpreted, however, as the professor knew he must.

The ship started back to Zrm in charge of Kfazc and Mnarspl. Ytremv's veto of Cnibml's going appeared vindicated when the latter went into a coma shortly after the space ship rose into the starlit night.

THE conspirators suddenly learned one day that their secret was out—that their presence and their intentions were being broadcast to an entire world over the mental broadcasting units. A mysterious, dark-cloaked figure was the disseminator of the unbelievable information. The conspirators tuned in on one of his revelations.

(Continued on page 96)

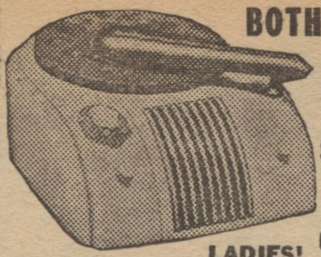
GIVEN BIKE

Nothing To Buy!

BOYS—GIRLS!
SEND NO MONEY—
Mail Coupon

Fully equipped—Balloon tires and all. NIFTY! Choice of Cash Commission. SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE colored Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE, used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with popular picture FREE). Remit and select premium as per catalog. SPECIAL: Choice of thirty-five premiums given for returning only $3 collected. Nothing to buy! New picture helps sales. Act Now! Write or Mail Coupon! Salve and pictures sent postage paid by us.
WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.
Dept. PP-91-H TYRONE, PA.

BOTH GIVEN



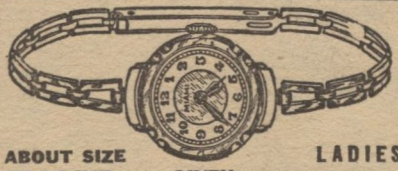
NOTHING TO BUY!

SEND NO MONEY

MAIL Coupon

GIVEN LADIES! BOYS! GIRLS!

Choice of cash commission, Combination Phonograph with self-starting motor, plays 12 in. records, good radio reception, or Portable Dry Cell Radio with four miniature tubes and dynamic speaker, ready to play. Get the news! Simply give away FREE beautifully colored art pictures with famous White Cloverine Brand Salve used for chaps, surface burns. Salve easily sold at 25c a box (with FREE Picture). Remit and select premium, or keep cash commission per catalog. Other Radios Given. SPECIAL: Choice of thirty-five premiums given for returning only $3 collected. 45th yr. Squarest plan. Nothing to buy. New patriotic flag picture peps sales. Be first. Write or mail coupon now. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91-K, Tyrone, Pa.

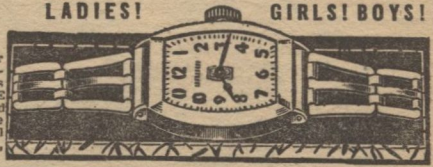


ABOUT SIZE OF A DIME

BOTH GIVEN

Nothing to Buy—
Send No Money
MAIL COUPON

LADIES! GIRLS! BOYS!



GIVEN

Valuable watches, other premiums or liberal cash commission GIVEN—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit as per catalog. 45th year. Be first. Nothing to buy! Write or mail coupon NOW! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91-L, Tyrone, Pa.

GIVEN NOTHING TO BUY! BOYS

Send No Money Mail Coupon!

Iver Johnson Bolt Action 22 Cal. Self-Cocking Safety RIFLE—22" long. STURDY! THIS Rifle, Cash, or, choice of other valuable premiums given—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored Pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts. Salve easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE). Remit and select premium per catalog. 45th year. Nothing to buy! Act Now! Write for Salve and pictures or Mail Coupon! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91-M, TYRONE, PA.

BOTH GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY — SEND NO MONEY—

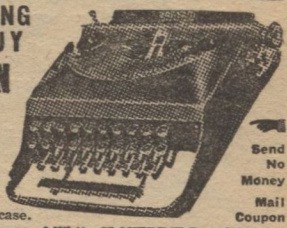
MAIL COUPON NOW
Premiums or Cash Commission

Boys
Girls
Start
Today
Mail the
Coupon

Nothing to Buy

Standard guitar, Indian blankets, other musical instruments, other blankets, other premiums or cash GIVEN—JUST give away free pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE for chaps and mild burns, easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit per catalog. Write or mail coupon now! WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc., Dept. PP-91-R, Tyrone, Pa.

NOTHING TO BUY GIVEN or CASH



Send No Money Mail Coupon

Real portable typewriters, with carrying case.

JUST dispose of White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE at 25c a box (with FREE picture) and remit per catalog. Be first. Nothing to buy. Write or Mail coupon! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91-P, Tyrone, Pa.

MAIL COUPON

Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Tyrone, Pa.
Premium Division, Dept. PP-91-2, Date.....

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE Brand SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving popular picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per catalog sent with order, postage paid.

NAME .....

RD or BOX No..... ST.....

TOWN..... STATE.....

Print Your Last Name Only in Spaces Below:

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON ON A POSTAL or MAIL COUPON in an envelope NOW! Which premium do you like best?

COSMIC DERELICT

(Continued from page 94)

"—and I solemnly tell you peoples of the world that once again you are being faced with a crisis such as you went through more than seven years ago. These self-centered, scientific fiends you considered dead are back again, ready to play their same heartless game—to turn your government to their own ends, to establish a tyrannous rule and bring supreme power into the hands of a chosen few. They possess clever machines which affect the brains of those who listened to their propaganda years ago, and many of such become their unwilling minions the moment the revolt flares and these machines are set to working. More than this, these enemies of society now have seven formidable robots to do their bidding. Beware of them.

"Listen to me. When the revolt comes, everyone who is now giving me attention rush to the aid of your government and overwhelm those who blindly follow the dictates of the machines trained upon their brains. Beware also of forces—"

"A traitor!" exclaimed Ytremv frenziedly. "One who knows all our plans!"

"What can we do?"

"We must start the revolt before Kfazc and the others return. We must get it under way before we are further blocked. Have all five of our machine men here at once. Have you seen Cnibml lately?"

"Yes," replied Gmejd. "He was in one of his comas, however."

"Go and bring him, if he is able to come. When I last saw him, he was not right, either."

The machine man left to perform his errand. A hurried mental call brought Ytremv and the others to Gmejd.

"Cnibml is dead!" Gmejd exclaimed, pointing to the motionless machine man. "We others have checked, and he has been like this since the ship left for Zrm!"

THEY made a hasty examination. It was Ytremv who first caught at the truth and figured much more from it.

"He is not dead, for there is nothing in the head to die! This is a dummy, an empty-headed machine. What's more, Cnibml was never among us since we left Zrm. It was a Zorome posing as Cnibml! I am certain of it, now that I look back. He must have rigged up this dummy aboard ship and brought it off in the darkness when we landed ready to use it in an emergency."

"How did he escape the mental disrupter?"

Ytremv had no reply for this and stated as much. "He must have caused our feet to corrode and wear—and destroyed the stock of metal replacements!"

"But where is he now?"

"Aboard that ship stowed away to try and rescue his friends back on Zrm."

"Or else he is the mysterious broadcaster!" said Pfrengt.

"Either, but if he is doing the broadcasting, we can set a trap and stop that soon enough."

The broadcasts, however, terminated suddenly. Government officials broke in upon one of them as the mysterious broadcaster was carefully reiterating the text of his usual theme with emphasis upon what each individual should do when the revolt came.

"You are reported to be an enemy posing as our friend and advisor," challenged one of the officials. "Information has reached us that you are one of the robots you yourself have described. You are reported to be spreading further propaganda in a subtle manner so that these machines will control even more victims than before. Come, unveil and prove yourself."

"It is not true," the cloaked figure countered. "I am glad that you have learned some of the truth of my assertions.

Whoever you may find me to be, I am your friend."

An official stepped forward and snapped away the cloak with a quick motion. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

The Siege of the Citadel

CLOSE upon the heels of the murderous killing by a machine man, the revolt which the mysterious broadcaster had warned about broke out in scattered sections of the world. Government buildings were seized, and law enforcement groups demoralized. The small standing armies were torn by internal dissension, and the officers fought among themselves.

Meanwhile, the mysterious broadcaster had been unveiled. Before the officials of Dmypr stood a metal cubed body upheld by four metal legs and carrying six tentacles. A circle of television eyes regarded the officials from a coned, metal head.

"You are one of the robots!"

"I am no robot."

"Where is your control point?"

"In my head. I have a brain the same as you, and it is not made of wheels and bits of metal any more than yours."

"You are one of the murderers!"

"I am not one of them, though it is true that the murderers you mention are made like I am. I am trying to save your world from their domination. That is why I have been giving out this information."

"More of their cleverness!" cried one of the officials. "We must find all of these machines and destroy them!"

"You must give up," said the chief spokesman. "Destructive forces are levelled at you from all directions. Offer no resistance. Do not try to kill. You are in a trap which has been prepared for you."

The officials stood aside and motioned

for the machine man to step through the doorway by which they had entered. Outside the broadcast chamber, he found himself the center of a group of purposeful Jribpdls who held pointed rods directed at him menacingly. He was told to proceed under pain of destruction to be unloosed upon him if he balked or showed signs of resistance.

HE WAS taken across the city in an airship and jailed. Besides being confined in a strong cell, the machine man was heavily chaimed, and a guard stood outside a grilled opening and watched him. It was not until the dawn of the following day that the machine man was brought forth for examination. He found himself in a great audience hall, looked upon curiously and in awe by government officials and scientists of Dmypr.

"Who and what do you claim to be, if not a robot of our enemies" he was first asked.

"I am a machine man with an organic brain which once belonged to an intelligent flesh and blood creature of another world. In a broad point of view, I was somewhat like yourselves."

"How did you come to know Ytremv, Xsmylx, Pfrengt and their associates? We thought them dead several years ago. Their space ship was reported destroyed and lost."

"They were dead. We brought their brains back to life after transposing them from their dead bodies to our machines. We found seven of them in a derelict floating about Zrm."

"You resuscitated them so that they might again harrass and threaten this world with their evil, perverted genius?" the interrogator hurled wrathfully.

"We, as well as you, have come to realize our mistake—but too late. The conspirators overcame our brains with a strange mechanism and we were left on

Zrm while they stole our ship and came here. Our space ship is a great many times swifter than your degravitator ships."

"We know the mechanism of our enemies well. It paralyzes mental consciousness. But if you were left on Zrm, how did you manage to get here?"

"I am 21MM392," the machine man replied, "and I am originally from a race of creatures unlike the Zoromes both in physical aspect and brain structure. Aside from a preliminary affliction, I escaped the static waves which overcame the mentalities of the other machine men. Their complete helplessness called for a frequency wave which left me unharmed. I killed one of their number and posed in his place. When we reached Dmypr, I escaped and have been trying to head off the revolt, or at least to insure its lack of success."

At this point, the speaker called for an analytical study of the machine man by scientific colleagues. They pronounced the facts admitted by the machine man in relation to his physical structure to be true.

"We would know more about you and your intentions," the chief spokesman summed up the general opinion. "You will be held but not destroyed, while we wait for further developments before taking any action either with you or against you."

PROFESSOR Jameson was led back to the locked cell where he had languished since the broadcasts had been terminated. Again he was carefully chained, and the guard was posted. No chances were being taken with him. Certain members of the assembly had been careful on that stipulation.

Yet that which was guarded against happened. The guard was found with several chains encumbering him. These

had been burnt through from an application of intense heat. The locks on the various gates and grills were found to be in a like condition. The machine man had escaped. The sensational news was greeted with mixed feelings. Many were glad. Others were fearful, waiting for him to strike.

Professor Jameson, escaping from the bastille at night, skulked among the shadows and carefully searched for an airship or other means of getting out of the dangerous neighborhood of his incarceration where a coming search would certainly be made when the alarm was raised that he had escaped. In the graying dawn, he found a hangar and broke inside. He was glad to find a small craft of a type with which he had familiarized himself during his broadcasting tour of the various large cities on Dmypr.

He rose into the sky and headed for Tstzlrg, the great capital city where the machine men of Dmypr held the citadel and where the fighting was most intense. The city of his captivity lay still in sight behind when he became aware of pursuit in the form of several large, growing dots against the sky. He pushed his speed to the limit and turned on the mental reception. He found that his escape had been discovered and that he was being pursued with the object of preventing him from joining his metal companions in Tstzlrg where he was reported to be heading.

With the speedy little airship, the professor knew it would be but a short time before he reached the capital city. Meanwhile, the pursuit gained steadily. They were in firing distance by the time Tstzlrg loomed on the horizon, and whistling sounds sobbed through the atmosphere close to the little airship, while yellow puffs ahead and to each side marked explosions. Professor Jameson adopted a swerving course.

AS HE neared the citadel, he noted an absence of aircraft which became explicable when a barrage of projectiles exploded all around him and sent the ship into a dizzy spin. Those pursuing him, though puzzled at this unfriendly act on the part of the machine man's allies, retired and were followed by the anti-aircraft fire which crippled one ship and forced it to an emergency landing. The professor caught glimpses of large forces of Jribpdls, and combats raging in the streets surrounded the citadel.

He flew above the citadel in the face of intense fire, looking for a landing. Several projectiles struck the ship, and it started falling. Another hit it. More whistled past. Desperately, the professor tried bringing it out of its spinning drop as he had done before, but this time there was no possibility. It was incapable of of further flight. The citadel expanded rapidly in his mechanical vision, and then came the crash on a low roof of the huge structure. Professor Jameson suffered a bent leg and was terrifically shaken up, but he never lost consciousnes for even a split second. He was out of the wreckage as quickly as he could manage and hurrying across the roof to a hatch.

Professor Jameson seized a bewildered Jribpdl he came across and held the luckless creature in a painful grip as he extorted what he wanted to know in regards to the citadel and its arrangement. Momentarily, the Jribpdl was stunned by the uncommon behavior of what he believed to be one of his own leaders.

Learning what he wished to know, Professor Jameson dropped the terrified Jribpdl and followed a mentally sketched route to the upper levels of the citadel.

The professor found the chamber he was looking for, where the propaganda coordinators and mind disrupters were located. He found several organic Jribpdls overlooking a battery of the propaganda

coordinators. Word had now flashed through the citadel of his presence, and he was no longer mistaken for one of the mechanical Jribpdls. Opposition was given him, but he dispatched it ruthlessly, and those who did not succumb to the heat ray were glad to escape. One of them, struck on the head by a metal tentacle, fell stunned.

Professor Jameson was glad to find several mind disrupters. The Jribpdls were unable to use these in the conquest of Dmypr at this stage of the fighting due to the fact that they had no personal protection against the common frequency necessary. It was not like turning their power on the machine men of Zor.

CHAPTER FIVE

Castaways on the Moon

THE professor rapidly set to work manipulating the various controls of a mind disrupter in an effort to find the mental frequency of the Jribpdls and paralyze their mental faculties. He knew that it would work upon both factions if he could only discover the right combinations. All fighting within a mile of the citadel, as well as in the citadel itself, would freeze into immobility.

The Jribpdl who had been stunned was recovering from his unconscious state, and the professor watched him, examining his mental processes for a hint of success. Then suddenly he received the mental shock he had first felt in the terminal on Zrm, and he almost lost the faculty of motion. It was a dangerous business. He managed to twist a dial, and the feeling of helplessness passed off. He was on the right track. The professor continued to slowly exercise the controls. Once more, he passed his own wave frequency. He heard running feet.

An explosion against the wall beyond

the professor warned him of his peril. He saw one of the long rods poking its dangerous length through a doorway. Organic Jribpdls were massing outside. The one Professor Jameson had stunned with a blow from his tentacle suddenly acquired motion and resolve. He staggered to his feet and ran for the doorway. But he never reached it. He stopped suddenly, swaying a moment before he fell, as if struck by an explosive missile from an excited and irresponsible compatriot in the doorway. But there had been no mistake. Professor Jameson realized this as he watched the mind of the Jribpdl cloud and knew that at last he had hit upon the right mental frequency. Another explosion roared about his head and something took him by the shoulder and hurled him violently to the floor. He recovered his feet rapidly to be prepared for any emergency. The Jridbpdls in the doorway were succumbing, however, to the waves of mental static, and they fell helplessly mong the weapons they had brought to blast the machine men into submission.

PROFESSOR JAMESON lost no time. He raced through the galleries and chambers of the citadel. Jribpdls lay motionless on all sides. He knew that in the nearby vicinity of the citadel both friends and foes were likewise stricken. The problem of consolidating the advantages must fall to him alone. He knew that he must remove the heads of the mechanical Jribpdls or otherwise incapacitate them. The rest of the conspirators must be locked up. He finally discovered a broad storeroom capable of being shut off from the rest of the citadel. Rapidly and tirelessly, he commenced carrying inert Jribpdls into the great storeroom, all the while seeking Ytremv and his three metal companions. But they were evidently on the upper levels, held by the grip of the mind disrupter.

The professor decided to search for them. For one thing, the storeroom was becoming filled, and additional space was necessary to confine the rest of the Jribpdls. Then too, the professor was commencing to wonder how many of these Jribpdls he was carrying into the storeroom were unwilling victims of the propaganda coordinators. These machines were located in the same room as the mind disrupters, and Professor Jameson had a mind to destroy these without further delay. It would be well to check on the mind disrupter, too.

In reaching the chamber of the machines, the professor searched the various levels on the way up. He found more of the organic Jribpdls but none of the machine men. He wondered if they had fled the citadel, but the idea did not seem to fit the circumstances. They must be on the higher levels, above that of the machines. He found the mind disrupter working smoothly. He had also discovered more jail space for the remaining Jribpdls in the citadel. But first he meant to destroy the propaganda coordinators, for their effect was far reaching. Then, he meant to hunt down the mechanical Jribpdls.

With heat ray and kicking mental feet, Professor Jameson quickly reduced the machines to fused and broken parts. His attention was absorbed in this work when he heard a clicking noise foreign to the sounds made by himself. He turned rapidly as the eyes on one side of his head caught a movement in the doorway where organic enemies had lately sought to destroy him. The machine men rushed down upon him, and he was overpowered before he had a chance to use his heat ray. Another came through the doorway upon the heels of the first three, leaving the professor subdued and wondering what means of nullification and self protection Ytremv and his machine men had found against the mind disrupters.

THE Zorome 454ZQ2, aboard the space ship on Zrm, became stricken with a sudden throbbing of his brain which passed off into a dulling influence rendering him helpless. He called out mentally in alarm; then became aware, as his senses reeled, that others in the ship about him were similarly affected. He lost all consciousness. When he came to his senses again, he was laying on the surface of the moon. He saw the mechanical Jribpdls carrying his companions out of the ship as he had probably been carried. His confused brain debated on the treachery which must have occurred. He did not know how it had been done, but he gathered the malevolent intention of the Jribpdls. To one side of him lay a tangle of machine men partly piled on each other. On the other side of him, he recognized 21MM392. Helplessly, he watched the last machine man brought out of the ship, and then came an endless procession carrying apparatus and dead Jridpdls out of the terminal and into the space ship.

He saw one of the new machine men pause and become immobile. He recognized the Jribpdl who had been unfortunate to have constituted a poor subject for brain transposition. 454ZQ2's hazy mind became mildly bewildered as he saw 21MM392 suddenly rise and attack the quiescent machine man. No, he was carrying him back where the rest of the machine men lay. Then 454ZQ2 witnessed the quick end to Cnibml from the profesosr's heat ray—and 21MM392's subsequent masquerade as the defective machine man. While his affected mind pondered these matters in his helpless condition, the space ship left, disappearing among the stars and bound for the third world of the system.

454ZQ2's dulled brain eventually caught the significance of the professor's act. He knew that whatever force held him and the others had escaped the earthly

brain of the professor and that the machine man was taking all the advantage offered from the fortunate circumstances. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he was different, too, from the other Zoromes. So were 5ZQ35 and 92ZQ153. They had originally been Tripeds on the planet of the double sun. He noted, too, that none of the other machine men around him were capable of thought. With a gradual growing mental power, he concentrated his faculties upon them. Their minds were blanks. He sent out a weak call to 5ZQ35 and 92ZQ153 but received no reply. Either they were unconscious, like the others, or else their perceptive faculties were too dulled to hear him. He finally relaxed into a coma.

The great world of Vroblz went through half its phase like a diminshing lamp in the starlit sky before 454ZZQ2 caught a faint message from 5ZQ35. They talked over the situation, and 454ZQ2 told him about 21MM392's escapade. As 5ZQ35's mental radiations grew plainer, 92ZQ153 entered the conversation. The latter was wedged beneath several Zoromes piled in haphazard positions atop him.

"Whatever holds us this way is in that terminal," said 5ZQ35. "Did they leave someone here?"

"We are alone. They all left—all except the one 21MM392 killed."

"If we could only reach that terminal."

454ZQ2 made a great effort to move, but found he had not even neuronic impulse to wiggle a tentacle tip, but he remained hopeful. All three machine men who had once been Tripedes were gaining in mental clarity.

WHEN Gmejd and Mnarspl heard the frantic alarms from their organic brethren in the ship and on the moon's surface, they rushed out to find a bewildering and desperate situation. The ma-

Classified Advertising

Agents Wanted

YOUR OWN DRESSES FREE and up to $22 a week selling famous Harford Frocks. Hundreds of sensational bargains. Send dress size, age. Harford, Department S-241, Cincinnati, O.

Antiques—Indian Relics

SWORDS, daggers, pistols, curios. Catalog 10c. ABELS, 860 Lexington Ave., New York.

Aviation

AVIATION APPRENTICES—Technical Training for entering Aviation as Apprentices. Write immediately enclosing stamp. Mechanix Universal Aviation Service. Wayne County Airport, Dept. U21, Detroit, Michigan.

Baby Chicks

COLONIAL CHICKS low as $5.40 per 100. Time Payments. World's largest hatcheries. Leading Breeds. Also Sexed and Hybrids. Big Chick Almanac Free. Colonial Poultry Farms, Pleasant Hill, Mo.

Educational

Correspondence courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold. Rented. Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain catalog FREE. Write NELSON COMPANY, 500 Sherman, Dept. B-218, Chicago.

Female Help Wanted

SPECIAL WORK FOR MARRIED WOMEN. Earn to $23 weekly and your own dresses Free. No canvassing, no investment. Write fully giving age, dress size. Fashion Frocks, Dept. BB-1026, Cincinnati, O.

For Inventors

INVENTORS:—HAVE YOU a sound, practical invention for sale, patented or unpatented? If so, write Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 31, Washington, D. C.

Inventions Wanted

CASH FOR INVENTIONS, patented, unpatented. Mr. Ball, H-9441 Pleasant, Chicago.

Old Money Wanted—Rare Coins

Sensational Offer. Certain Cents worth $750.00; Nickels $500.00. Biggest value coin book published. 1941 Edition. 36 pages illustrated with actual photographs. Special price 10c. American Coins, Box 3507-T, Cleveland, Ohio.

WILL PAY $12.00 EACH FOR CERTAIN LINCOLN PENNIES! Indianheads $200.00. Dimes $1000.00. Catalogue 10c. Federal Coin Exchange, Columbus, Ohio.

Foreign Banknote and Catalogue 10c. N. Schultz, Salt Lake, Utah.

Old Gold Wanted

GOLD $35 OUNCE. Ship old gold teeth, crowns, jewelry, watches—receive cash by return mail. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Free information. Paramount Gold Refining Co., 1500-C Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minn.

Patents

INVENTORS—Don't delay. Protect your idea with a Patent. Secure "Patent Guide" and "Record of Invention" form FREE. Preliminary information furnished without obligation. Write CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN, Registered Patent Attorney, 1B26 Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—patent your invention. Secure booklet "How to Protect Your Invention." No obligation. McMorrow and Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 150-B Barrister Building, Washington, D. C.

PATENT your invention. Your ideas may be worth money. Responsible firm—66 years' experience. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKS of patent facts. C. A. SNOW & CO., 612 Snow Building, Washington, D. C.

chine men of Zor who had lain so helplessly on the ground were swarming into the ship. The Jribpdls outside the ship were dying as their ripped space suits let out their air and heat upon the cosmic wastes of Zrm. As the two machine men stood dumbfounded, they were rushed to the ground by fully a dozen Zoromes who quickly took them to pieces, tossing their heads unceremoniously into the ship and losing little time in getting under way to Dmypr.

"We can thank you, 454ZQ2, for crawling so slowly but surely to the terminal and stopping that devilish machine," 744U-21 praised the one time Triped.

"The strategy of pretending we were still helpless when the ship came back was somebody else's idea," 454ZQ2 returned.

"Let us hope that nothing has happened

Classified Advertising

(Continued)

PATENTS: Low cost. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 573, Washington, D. C.

Photo Finishing

8 ENLARGEMENTS and films developed, 116 size or smaller, 25c coin. Special Introductory Offer: Enclose this ad and negative with your order for double weight hand colored Enlargements Free. ENLARGE PHOTO, Box 791, Dept. PPM, Boston, Mass.

ROLLS DEVELOPED—25c coin. Two 5 x 7 Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Gloss Deckle Edge Prints. CLUB PHOTO SERVICE, Dept. 16, La Crosse, Wis.

DOUBLE SIZE PRINTS. Roll developed. 8 prints all enlarged to nearly postcard size 25c. Willard Studios, Dept. 35, Cleveland, Ohio.

Poems—Songwriters

Songwriters, Interesting Proposition. Write PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO, L-54, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.

POEMS WANTED to be set to music. Free examination. Send poems. McNeil, Master of Music, 510-A South Alexandria, Los Angeles, Calif.

WANTED—Poems for musical setting. Submit for consideration. Phonograph transcriptions made. Keenan's Studio, PP, Box 2140, Bridgeport, Conn.

SONGS—SONG POEMS WANTED. No Charge For Melodies. Free examination. Hollywood Recording Studios, 87D5 Preuss Sta., Los Angeles.

SONGS AND POEMS WANTED—No Publication Costs. Radio Music Company, Dept. PP, 5517 Carlton Way, Hollywood.

WANTED! ORIGINAL SONG POEMS. Richard Brothers, 30 Woods Building, Chicago.

SONGWRITERS, Write for free booklet, Profit Sharing Plan. Allied Songs, Box 507, Cincinnati, Ohio.

to 21MM392 on Dmypr," said 6W-438. "If I know him, he will do all he can to defeat Ytremv and the revolt."

"We can only wait and see."

"If anything has happened, we may not be too late to help him."

"Or avenge him."

Under control of 20R-654, the space ship of the Zoromes sped to Dmypr at a rate far transcending the satisfied efforts of its recent operators. On reaching the third world the machine men did not even land but captured an airship out of the sky. From its occupants, whom they took aboard and who proved to be loyal defenders of the government, they learned of the fight going on at the world's capital.

When they reached Tstzlrg, they found a strange phenomenon in the vicinity of the great citadel. For a mile around in every direction, it was a city of death. Beyond that circle, fighting raged back and forth, but no living creature in that area moved. Cautiously, 744U-21 placed a landing force of ten Zoromes on the roof of the citadel headed by 6W-438. Rising once more into the sky, ready to protect the landing party from above, the machine men made a strange discovery. The three Jribpdls they had taken aboard from the airship were dead. It had happened since they had entered the strangely quiet zone of the citadel. An examination by 27E-24 contradicted the accepted condition of death.

"They are under the same power of mental paralysis that we were on Zrm!"

"The mind disruptive force again! In the citadel, probably! That is why everything is so quiet about its vicinity!"

"It is attuned to the frequency of the Jribpdls."

"But it may easily be turned on us by changing the frequency! Cruise higher, 20R-654, so that we shall be sure to be above its zone of operation!"

DESCENDING from the highest point of the citadel, the ten Zoromes hunted carefully through the different levels, placing a guard upon their thoughts and staying on the alert for signs of the mechanical Jribpdls. It was the fortune of 29G-75, 377X-80, 160P-75 and 57L-426 to discover the first machine man. He was bending over amid a litter of mechanism when they silently rushed him. It was in the struggle to separate the machine man's mechanical parts from each other that 29G-75 made a startling discovery.

"21MM392!"

"29G-75! I thought you were Ytremv and his machine men! You were so secretive—and so sudden!"

"We thought you were one of them!"

29G-75 radiated his discovery to the rest of the machine men in the citadel and urged them to look carefully on the higher levels for the mechanical conspirators. Spreading out in a careful, detailed search, the Zoromes soon found them. 12W-62 and 41C-98 discovered a small chamber where the four machine men had hidden themselves when they felt the first warnings from Professor Jameson's search for the right mental frequency. They had no mind to be found helpless, and there had been little time for them in which to act.

"There is much for us to do," said the professor. "The revolt is doomed, now. We must reach a broadcaster, a powerful one. Then we must strike with the space ship at points necessary. All propaganda coordinators must be detected and put out of operation."

The work of the machine men was rapid and efficient. The threat of the conspirators was removed, and the machine men made amends for their unfortunate mistake in creating machine men from enemies to the welfare of Dmypr. They helped the peaceful and intelligent Jribpdls a long way upon the path of scientific progress.

When they left the system of five

worlds, six coned, metal heads were left behind in the citadel at Tstzlrg. Six immortal brains lived on in the metal heads, but all connections of the heads necessary to direct metal bodies and limbs had been carefully removed. The six living brains were undying prisoners, and from their mechanical eyes they looked upon generation after generation of organic Jribpdls who had heard of their strange, legendary adventure and had come to look upon them in awe.

THE END

WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT YOU?

No ONE respects the man who doesn't carry his share of the load.

In your work, do you lack the training you need to hold up your end of the job? Do your fellow workers say: "We have to do our work, and his too!"?

Students of the International Correspondence Schools are almost always respected and well-liked—because they are *trained to do their jobs well!* And they're ready for a more responsible job when opportunity knocks!

Think it over! The coupon will bring you complete information—show you how you can become eligible for a trained man's position.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF SERVICE TO AMBITIOUS AMERICANS

1891 ★ 1941

BOX 3278-G, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Fire Bosses
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Fruit Growing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Mfg. of Pulp and Paper
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Poultry Farming
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalmen's
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ French
- ☐ Grade School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Lettering Show Cards
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

"Calling All Cars!"

A MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY SAVES UP TO 30% on GASOLINE!

OR COSTS NOTHING TO TRY

Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills —gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power — greater speed — quicker pickup — faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing *automatically* as required to save dollars on gas costs.

VACU-MATIC "Scores" Again

SETS NEW COAST-TO-CHICAGO RECORD

BOB McKENZIE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
COAST TO COAST

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State Street
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3-1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

Yours very truly,
Bob McKenzie

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.

Signed Notary Public

AGENTS Get Yours FREE For Introducing

Vacu-matic offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. If you help us introduce it to a friend, you can obtain your own free. Check and mail coupon today.

Fits All Cars

Easy To Install

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

The Vacu-matic Co. **Wauwatosa, Wis.**

SEND THIS *Free Offer* COUPON

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-538 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Please send full particulars about VACU-MATIC, also how I may obtain one for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in Agency Proposition.

WE SAVED OVER $50.00

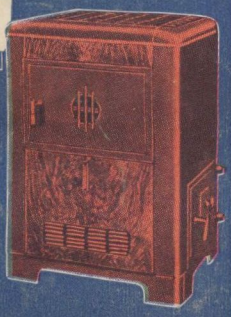
FACTORY PRICES

30 DAYS TRIAL

KALAMAZOO GAVE US UP TO 18 MONTHS TO PAY

136 Styles and Sizes

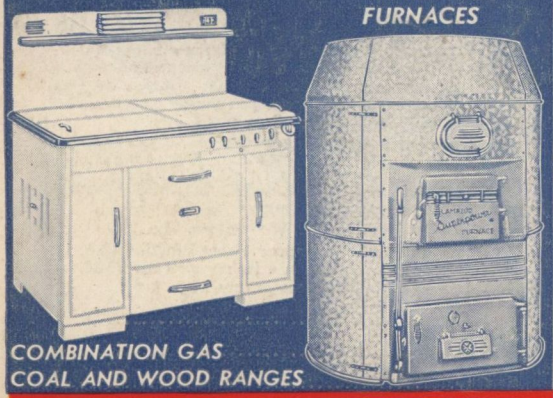
GAS RANGES



HEATERS

COAL AND WOOD RANGES

FURNACES



COMBINATION GAS COAL AND WOOD RANGES

"A Kalamazoo Direct to You"
Trade Mark Registered

Write your name and address on coupon below. Mail today—Get sensational New Free Kalamazoo Catalog.

New **FREE** *Catalog*

America's outstanding values in Ranges, Heaters, Furnaces—alive with new features, new ideas, new equipment. Easiest terms—*up to 18 months to pay. Direct-to-You Factory Prices.* 30 Days Trial. 24 hour shipments. Satisfaction or money back. More bargains than in 20 big stores. *Over 1,600,000 satisfied users.* 41 years in business.

Sparkling New Gas Ranges with every late feature (for bottled, manufactured, or natural gas)—*New Coal and Wood Ranges that save you* ⅓ to ½. *Dual Oven Combination Coal-Wood and Gas Ranges* (which can be equipped to burn oil). *New Coal and Wood Heaters. New Oil Heater bargains. Oil Ranges.* Nearly 300 Factory Stores in 14 states. Ask for address of store nearest you.

Kalamazoo Stove & Furnace Co., Manufacturers
501 Rochester Ave., Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Sirs: Send FREE FACTORY CATALOG.
Check articles in which you are interested:

☐ Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges ☐ Oil Ranges
☐ Coal and Wood Ranges ☐ Coal and Wood Heaters
☐ Gas Ranges ☐ Oil Heaters ☐ Furnaces

Name.....
(*Print name plainly*)

Address.....

City.....*State*.....