

CAPTAIN FUTURE

MAN OF TOMORROW

15¢

FALL
ISSUE

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



FEATURING
**PLANETS
IN PERIL**

An Amazing Complete
Book-Length Novel
By EDMOND
HAMILTON

New! SPECIAL EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT

TRADE-MARK

FOR CIVILIAN WARTIME USE!



Made of special 5-ply fibre, new laboratory-tested design saves copper, brass, nickel, chromium and other metals vital to war use!



STRONG! . . . Made of special fibre sheets, tightly laminated in 5 layers, the tube is tough and hard. It will give long years of service!



WATER-REPELLENT! This new "Eveready" flashlight is protected by a special water-proof coating which seals out moisture.



LONG LASTING! . . . Drop it on concrete floor—this flashlight case can "take" ordinary abuse. It's actually more durable than millions of flashlights now in use.

METALS HAVE GONE TO WAR!

But metals or no metals, America needs flashlights . . . at home, in business, on the farm, in the factory . . . needs them for a thousand vital civilian uses.

And America shall have them!

This national need—made more pressing than ever by wartime emergency conditions—has been answered by the world's largest

flashlight-and-battery laboratory.

Here it is—the new "Eveready" flashlight made of tough, 5-ply fibre—tested and proven under severest laboratory conditions.

Yet it is made virtually *without* the use of metal. Soon available at all dealers!



NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
30 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation



The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

Keep flashlights loaded with dependable fresh DATED "Eveready" batteries—and have an extra set on hand for your light in case of long-continued use.

**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER . . .
Look for the DATE-LINE**



With the
United
States
at



WHAT ARE
YOU
GOING TO DO TO
HELP?



I Am Ready to
HELP YOU
Help
WIN THE WAR

A. G. Cooke
Director

**EASY TO LEARN
AT HOME!**

*Turn those precious hours
you may be idling away
around the house into price-
less knowledge which will
serve you all your life.*

**FREE "BLUE BOOK OF
CRIME"**

Gives the case histories of famous crimes and how they were solved by experts. This book has been an "eye-opener" to thousands. It told them how they could prepare themselves at small cost and in short time to fill good-pay, responsible positions in Identification Work. Send for it FREE today, stating age.

**This May Be Your Opportunity for
HELPING TO WIN THE WAR!!**

You're a good loyal American; you want to do your part! All of us can't be soldiers, or sailors, or air pilots, but we can serve. One way to do it is to master a trade or vocation which will help win the war and at the same time prepare you for a good position after the war is over.

CRIME IS AN ENEMY

Training which enables you to thwart crime within our own borders will help to win the war with the Japs and other foreign foes. You'll get such training through the I.A.S. Course in Finger Printing and other Crime Detection Methods, and you can *learn right at home*, in spare time, at small cost.

For 26 years the I.A.S. has been preparing ambitious men to fill responsible positions in Identification Bureaus throughout America. Today over 43 per cent of all the Nation's Identification Bureaus are run by our graduates.

Fascinating—Thrilling—Profitable

Scientific crime detection offers excellent opportunities now . . . and the future promises even greater possibilities. A recent Gallup poll shows that 69% of America's population wants every one in the U.S. to be finger printed *right now*. Hundreds of Defense Plants are now finger printing employees. The potential value of finger print training grows day by day.

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Now . . . when the demand for our graduates is greater than ever before . . . when new Bureaus and National Defense are finding need of more and more trained finger print experts . . . makes the present time the ideal time to get into this pleasant, profitable, thrilling work.

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Send For This Great Book Now

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7966, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Without obligation, send me the "Blue Book of Crime" and complete list of over 840 bureaus employing I.A.S. graduates. Also give me information regarding cost and terms.

(Literature sent *only* to persons stating age.)

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

Address

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

CAPTAIN FUTURE

WIZARD OF SCIENCE

VOL. 4, NO. 3

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By

EDMOND HAMILTON

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Join THE FUTUREMEN, Our Nation-wide Club for Readers!

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Read our companion magazines: The Phantom Detective, Thrilling Detective, Popular Detective, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Wonder Stories, The American Eagle, Sky Fighters, G-Men Detective, West, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Love, Popular Western, Everyday Astrology, Texas Rangers, Thrilling Adventures, Black Book Detective, Air War, Exciting Detective, Exciting Love, Exciting Western, RAF Aces, Exciting Navy Stories, Army Navy Flying Stories, Rodeo Romances, and The Masked Detective.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

I've Jumped My Pay!
 -AND IT'S NO SECRET HOW I DID IT

**Know
Radio**

EARN A RADIO TECHNICIAN'S PAY

IF you still have a low pay job—if the War has cut instead of jumped your pay—or if you now have a War job that you know won't last—take a tip from the hundreds of men who have jumped their pay by training at home in spare time to become Radio Technicians. Today these men enjoy good civilian and military jobs in a field with a bright peace-time future.

Here Is a Tested Way to Begin Earning More Money Quickly

Radio offers you the opportunity to make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full time Radio jobs paying up to \$50 a week. **MAIL THE COUPON.** Get the facts about how to learn jobs like these at home.

Why Radio Technicians Can Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

The Radio repair business is booming because manufacturers have stopped making new home

and auto Radios and the country's 57,400,000 sets are getting older, requiring more repairs, new tubes, parts. This is opening new opportunities for full time and part time Radio Technicians to get good jobs, or to open their own Radio repair businesses. Radio Technicians and Operators hold good jobs in the country's 832 Broadcasting Stations and in Aviation, Police, Commercial, Marine Radio, Loud Speaker Systems give good jobs to many. The Government is calling for Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians. Military orders for tremendous quantities of Radio equipment are keeping Radio factories busy, opening more good job opportunities. Men who know Radio are in line for extra rank and pay in the Army and Navy. Radio developments such as Television and Frequency Modulation, held back by the War, make Radio a live-wire field for the future.

Beginners Soon Learn to Earn \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Due to the boom in the Radio repair business, practically every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radios. I

give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts and instructions for conducting experiments and building test equipment to help you do better, faster Radio repair work. My 50-50 method—half working with the Radio parts I send you, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating; gives you valuable practical experience.

Find Out How I Train You at Home for Good Pay in Radio

MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send my 64-page Book **FREE.** It tells about my Course, the present and future jobs in different branches of Radio; the many calls for Radio Technicians today. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing and earning. **MAIL THE COUPON** in an envelope or pasted on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President
 Dept. 2J09, National Radio Institute
 Washington, D. C.

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS

**THIS FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS
HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY**

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2J09
 NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.

Mail me **FREE**, without obligation, your big 64-page book about present and future opportunities in Radio and how you train me for them.

Age.....

Name.....

Address.....

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



**EXTRA PAY IN
ARMY, NAVY, TOO**



Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. **IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!**



Plays on Radio

"I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio stations. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course."

*W. H. S., Alabama.



Found Accordion Easy

"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes *H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."

* Actual pupils' names on request.
Pictures by Professional Models.

DO YOU PLAY?

Say "Yes" Next Time They Ask!

Surprise your friends! Learn to play the piano or other musical instruments this quick, easy way. First lesson starts you playing real tune.

YOU'VE often been asked that question: "Do you play?" Everybody looks at you expectantly, waiting for you to sit down at the piano and entertain the crowd. Are you compelled to embarrass yourself and throw cold water on the party by saying "No"?

What a difference it would make if you could say "Yes". Think of the good times and popularity in store if you could only play the piano or some other musical instrument—the guitar, violin, accordion, saxophone or whichever one happens to be your favorite.

Well, you CAN. You can learn to play any musical instrument you please. You can do it by a method that's **EASIER AND QUICKER** than you perhaps ever thought possible. It takes only a few minutes a day at home, at your own convenience. You save the expense of a private teacher, so the cost is trifling.

Thousands Now Play Who Never Thought They Could

Does it sound too good to be done? Then remember this: *Thousands* have learned to play by this amazingly easy method. Thousands of men, women and children in all walks of life—in all parts of the world. People who had never played before, who knew nothing about music and had no special talent.

Imagine their joy, when, in a remarkable short time, they found themselves actually **PLAYING!** Imagine the astonishment of their friends! No wonder the fame of this amazing method spread until today, over 700,000 people all over the world have enrolled for it.

Music Made Easy as A-B-C

How is it possible to learn music so easily? What is this famous U. S. School method of home instruction? Here is the secret: this modern, short-cut method skips the tedious drudgery of old-fashioned methods. Instead, it starts you playing—a simple, popular tune in your very first lesson, another in your second lesson and so on. Fascinating print-and-picture lessons make everything clear. You see what to do—you can't go wrong.

Send For Booklet With Print and Picture Sample

If you would sincerely like to play a musical instrument, you will be thrilled by the free illustrated booklet and Print and Picture Sample that tells how easily you can learn. Mail the coupon or write for them today, mentioning the instrument in which you are interested. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Address: U. S. School of Music, 2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

Forty-fourth year. (Established 1898)

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2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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

Name

Street

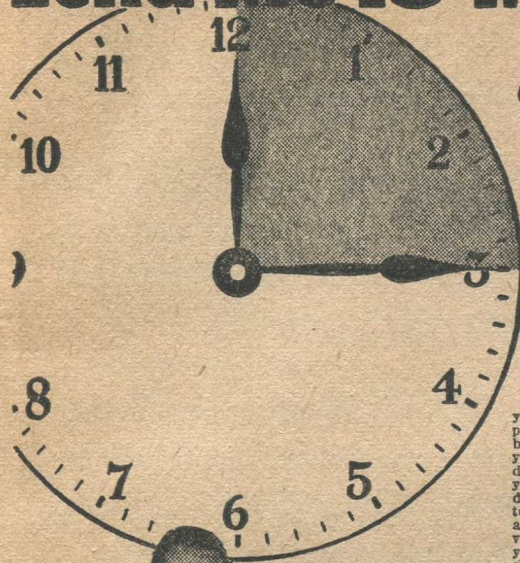
City..... State.....

NOTE! If under 16 years of age, parent must sign coupon.

Save 2¢ — Stick coupon on penny postcard

Lend Me 15 Minutes A Day

**..and I'll prove
I can make you
a NEW MAN**



Actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Charles Atlas

America's Greatest
"Builder of Men"

Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" **ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT.** That name is Charles Atlas!

In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his hands!

And now that the call is for men capable of helping America meet and conquer any national emergency, many thousands of others (even those already in their country's Army and Navy) are calling upon Charles Atlas to build the kind of men America vitally needs.

Here's PROOF Right Here!

"Results come so fast by your method that it seems just as if some magician put on the pounds of solid muscle just where you want them."
—W. L., Missouri

"Feel like a million dollars and have a 44" normal chest — A 2" GAIN!"
—L. A. S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. Have put two inches on my chest and 1/2 inch on my neck."
—B. L., Oregon

"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in."
—G. M., Ohio

I "trade-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men I 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.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double quick time! I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE and OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vice-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that there's not even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

**I Was a 97-lb.
Weakling**

All the world knows I was **ONCE** a skinny, scrawny 97-pound 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 only 15 minutes a day? 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!

What 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

Are you **ALL MAN**—tough-muscle, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

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!

**FREE THIS FAMOUS BOOK THAT TELLS YOU
JUST HOW TO GET A BODY THAT
MEN RESPECT AND WOMEN ADMIRE**

Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what "Dynamic Tension" can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. **RESULTS** I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a **NEW MAN**, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! **CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-Y, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.**

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-Y,
115 East 23rd St., New York City**

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."

Name (Please Print or Write Plainly)

Address

City State



LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT



THIS WAR is being fought by a big Army. It's an army that is called the United States.

Millions of us are in uniforms and many more millions are not, but how we happen to be dressed isn't what's important.

What is important is whether every one of us is in this fight, giving it everything we have. Any less won't win.

Whether you're a soldier on the firing line, or are backing him up as a soldier on the production line, you're fighting for the same things.

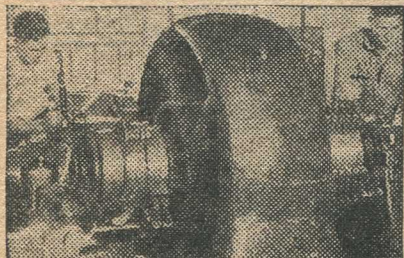
The decision, whether or not we are to live in a decent world as free men in the years to come, is in the making now. It's up to you, Soldier.

Robert G. Smith

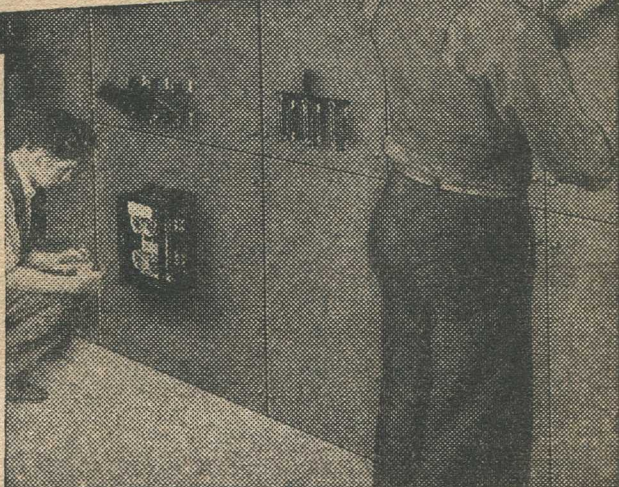
Colonel, G.S.C.
UNITED STATES ARMY

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Learn Without Books in 90 DAYS



Electricity is the mighty power behind our Victory Program. Trained Electrical men are needed. **PREPARE FOR YOUR PLACE** this amazingly easy way. **"Learn By Doing"** in 12 weeks. You don't need much money—I'll finance your training. **READ EVERY WORD OF MY MESSAGE ON THIS PAGE AND SEE HOW YOU CAN DO YOUR PART EITHER IN THE ARMED FORCES OR INDUSTRY.**



How Can You Best Serve Your Country Now? How Can You Best Serve Your Country After the War?

IF YOU'RE DRAFTED

If you enter the Army as a trained electrical man, you are eligible to apply for higher rating and bigger pay. In both the Army and the Navy, rated Electrical Workers hold mighty important jobs—just as skilled Electrical Workers hold vital jobs in civilian life. **AND THIS IS IMPORTANT:** There will be a **TREMENDOUS NEED for trained Electrical men after the war.** By getting your Electrical Training **NOW**, you will be ready for a **BIG PAY, BIG FUTURE JOB** after your service in the Army is over.

IF YOU'RE DEFERRED

Everyone cannot serve in our Armed Forces . . . Some may be too young . . . others too old . . . others with dependents . . . and others with some physical defect. If you cannot serve, don't be discouraged. **FROM 16 to 50, EVERYONE WITH PROPER TRAINING CAN SERVE IN WAR INDUSTRY . . .** turning out weapons and materials. And remember: Electricity in war time is essentially no different from Electricity in peace time. After the war you'll be an all-around **SKILLED ELECTRICIAN** ready for a good-pay Peace-time job.



H. C. Lewis

**GET YOUR TRAINING
NOW . . . PAY FOR
IT LATER !**

Coyne Training is **EASY, PRACTICAL!** You **LEARN BY DOING.** No dull books. No baffling charts. No reciting. Don't let lack of money stop you. You can get training first—then pay for it in easy monthly payments after you graduate. If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses, I'll help you get it.

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4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED**

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500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Send me your Free Book and tell me about your plans to help me.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....



FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

*Send Coupon
Don't Pay Until Relieved*

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

DISEASE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

The cause of the disease is not a germ as so many people think, but a vegetable growth that becomes buried beneath the outer tissues of the skin.

To obtain relief the medicine to be used must first gently dissolve or remove the outer skin and then kill the vegetable growth.

This growth is so hard to kill that a test shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy it; however, laboratory tests also show that H. F. will kill it upon contact in 15 seconds.

DOUBLE ACTION NEEDED

Recently H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It both gently dissolves the skin and then kills the vegetable growth upon contact. Both actions are necessary for prompt relief.

H. F. is a liquid that doesn't stain. You just paint the infected parts nightly before going to bed.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



GORE PRODUCTS, INC.

T.F.

814 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

don't **Worry** about **Rupture**

• Why put up with days . . . months . . . **YEARS** of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly **CRAVE** to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of rupturesufferers have entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained*. Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, *do not despair*. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented **AIR-CUSHION** Support Gives Nature a Chance to **CLOSE** the **OPENING**

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for free Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—**ANYONE** can afford to buy this remarkable, **LOW-PRICED** rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, to help Nature get results! Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!



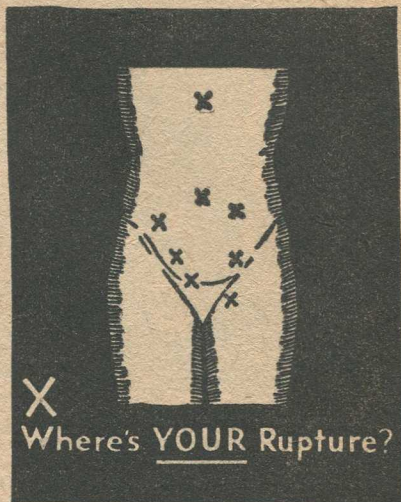
C. E. BROOKS,
Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now—**FIRST** get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. **THEN** decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is **SENT ON TRIAL**. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—**hurry!** All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!
Sent You in Plain Envelope **Just Clip and Send Coupon** →

Brooks Appliance Co., 182D State St., Marshall, Mich.



PROOF!

Proof of the value and outstanding merit of the **BROOKS APPLIANCE** is clearly shown by the fact that over 9000 doctors have ordered it for themselves or their patients. One doctor alone has ordered for his patients over 400 Brooks Appliances. Follow your doctor's advice! If he says you have a reducible rupture and advises a proper-fitting support, don't subject yourself to further delay, which may prove dangerous, but send us your name and address immediately. Stop Your Rupture Worries! Enjoy the comfort, freedom of action and physical security which this made-to-order appliance will give you.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
182-D State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your **FREE** Book on Rupture, Proof of Results, and **TRIAL OFFER**—all in plain envelope.

Name

Street

City State

State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐

It would take
a college education
to know 'em all



I Went Nuts in Liquor Stores —by don herold

I used to go crazy in liquor stores, trying to decide which brand to buy. So many brands! The confusion is terrific for the layman liquor layer-inner.

Then a friend told me his system. He said "I've settled on Old Mr. Boston as MY brand —no matter what type of fine liquor I want."

Me—I have too, now.

It turns out that Old Mr. Boston is the one brand name under which you can buy almost every known type of fine liquor. Other big companies make many liquors, but they give them many different names. It's baffling! It's befuddling!

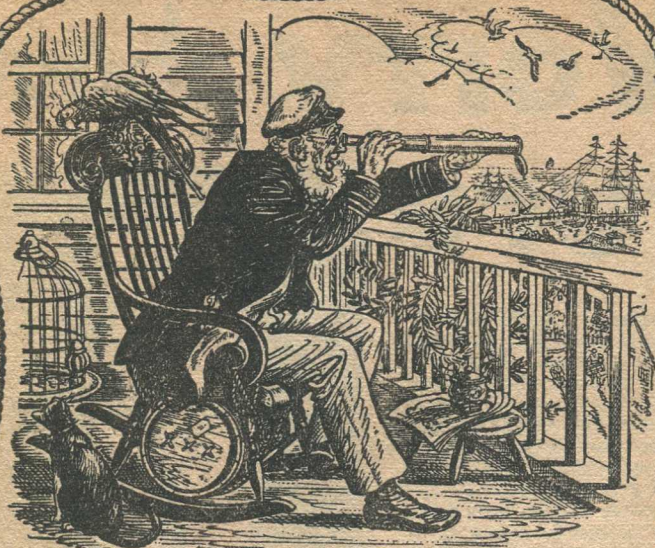
In the Old Mr. Boston line you can buy 30 different liquors, all under the one name, and all easy on the palate and pocketbook.

Old
Mr. Boston,
you're
my pal



You know Boston. And you know its fine old reputation for craftsmanship. Well, you can smack a taste of the old town's 300-year-old reputation for quality in every drop of every Mr. Boston product.

So why not try the Old Mr. Her-old plan and use Old Mr. Boston "as a handle by which to call your shots" when you want fine liquors?



Capt. Turnbull (1806-1900) — like other old salts of his day — rocked a keg of whiskey under his rocker. Its roll recaptured the motion of the wave-tossed ships on which he'd mellowed many a barrel of whiskey.

From Mellow Whiskeys "Rocked in the Keg" came the Idea for Rocking Chair!



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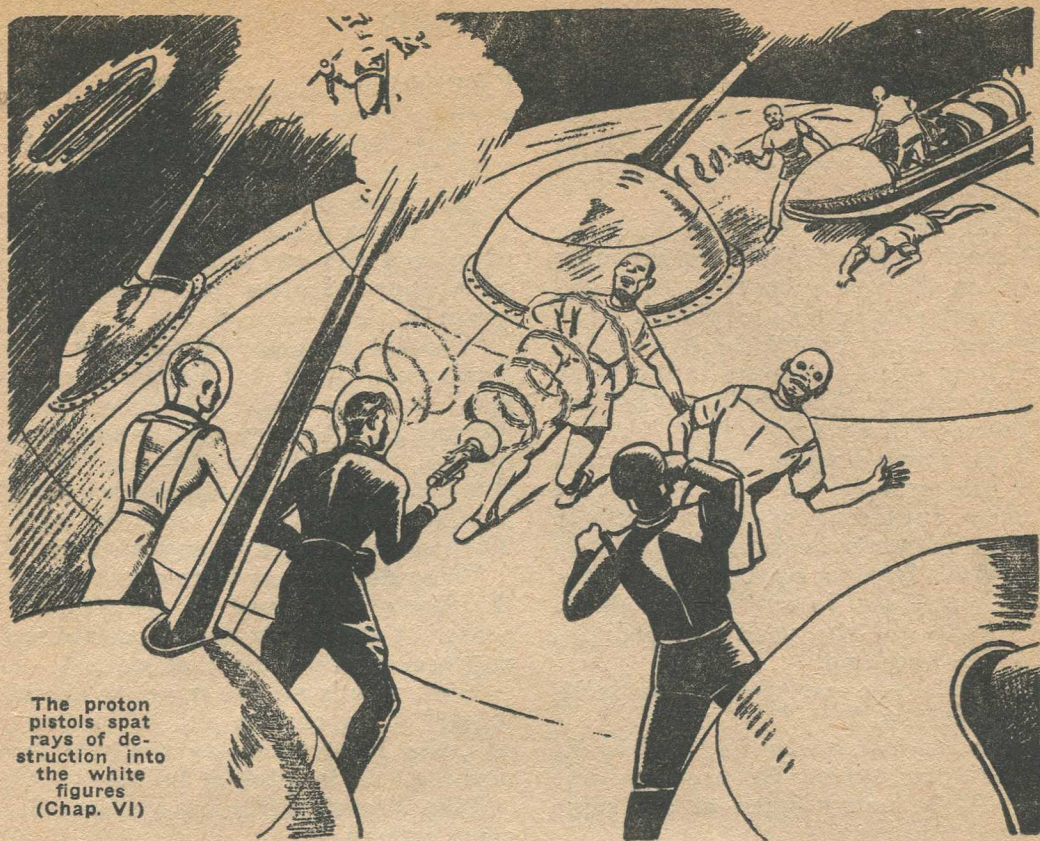
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The proton pistols spat rays of destruction into the white figures (Chap. VI)

Planets in Peril

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Through an Unguessable Abyss Fraught with Peril, Curt Newton and the Futuremen Set Out to Save the Remnants of a Great Civilization from Suicide and Destruction!

CHAPTER I

People from Beyond

LIKE a huge red eye, Mars peered down from the starry sky at the blossoming paradise of its little moon Deimos. This tiny satellite was a man-made fairyland, created by artificial air and water and gravitation.

Balmy night breezes set the tall trees to nodding in the pink planet-glow. Birds called from the shrubs that bordered little streams in the shadowy parks around metal man-

sions. To Martians, this Garden Moon was a haven of beauty and peace. But peace was far from the Martian who stood in front of a small chromaloy house, scanning the night sky.

"Why don't they come?" he muttered tensely to himself, his eyes desperately searching the heavens. "There's only an hour left—"

Tiko Thrin was an elderly Martian, a little, withered red man wrapped in a synthewool cloak despite the night's warmth. His incongruously big, bald head was tilted far back as his thick-lensed spectacles surveyed the starry

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

sky in an agony of impatience.

"The greatest event in the history of the Solar System—and they'll be too late for it!" he thought despairingly.

Then the little Martian scientist stiffened. A low drone of rocket tubes came on the balmy breeze. A gleaming speck was cutting across the stars, slanting down toward the little moon in a long glide. It grew into a sleek rocket cruiser that dived toward the Martian with a staccato roar.

Tiko Thrin skipped back in alarm. But the cruiser, its keel and brake rockets exploding spouts of atomic fire, was already landing smoothly on the lawn. Its door opened, and a slim, dark-haired girl in white space slacks emerged into the pink planet-light. She was laughing.

"What's the matter—did my landing scare you, Tiko?"

Joan Randall, Earthgirl secret agent of the Solar System Government, was a boyishly pretty figure as she came toward him.

"Where are Captain Future and the Futuremen?" Tiko asked quickly.

Joan waved toward the cruiser.

"There comes the Brain now. I brought him, and the others will be along soon."

A WEIRD shape was emerging from the cruiser. It looked like a square box of transparent metal, floating in the air upon almost invisible magnetic propulsion beams.

This was the Brain, one of the famous Futuremen. That square box was a serum-case in which ingenious mechanisms kept alive a living human brain. In the "face" of the case were the Brain's lenslike glass eyes, mounted on flexible stalks, and his microphone mouth or speech organ.

Once, long ago, the Brain had been an ordinary human Earthman. He had been Doctor Simon Wright, a brilliant, aging scientist. Death had claimed his failing body. But he had escaped that death by having his living brain removed surgically from his body and placed in this serum-case.

He came gliding silently through the soft planet-light toward the pretty

Earthgirl and the old Martian. Both of them knew him well.

"Why didn't Captain Future come?" Tiko Thrin asked tensely. "I told you in my message that it was urgent."

The Brain, poised beside them, contemplated the excited little Martian with expressionless lens-eyes as he spoke in his rasping voice.

"Captain Future and the other two Futuremen went to Venus a week ago," he declared. "They've been helping Ezra Gurney smooth out some trouble with the marsh-men there. But before I had Joan bring me here, I teleaudioed them to come on here. They should arrive at any moment."

"Why did you ask us to come here?" the Brain continued in metallic accents. "You interrupted an extremely engrossing experiment of mine."

"Yes, what's all the mystery about, Tiko?" Joan challenged. "You can't call the Futuremen on the run for nothing. It had better be big!"

Tiko Thrin's withered red face became solemn.

"It is big. What is going to happen here tonight will mark an epoch in the history of the Solar System." He paused dramatically. "I've established contact with another universe, and one of its people is going to visit me tonight!"

The Brain seemed startled, for his lens-eyes fastened sharply on the little Martian's face.

"You can't be serious!"

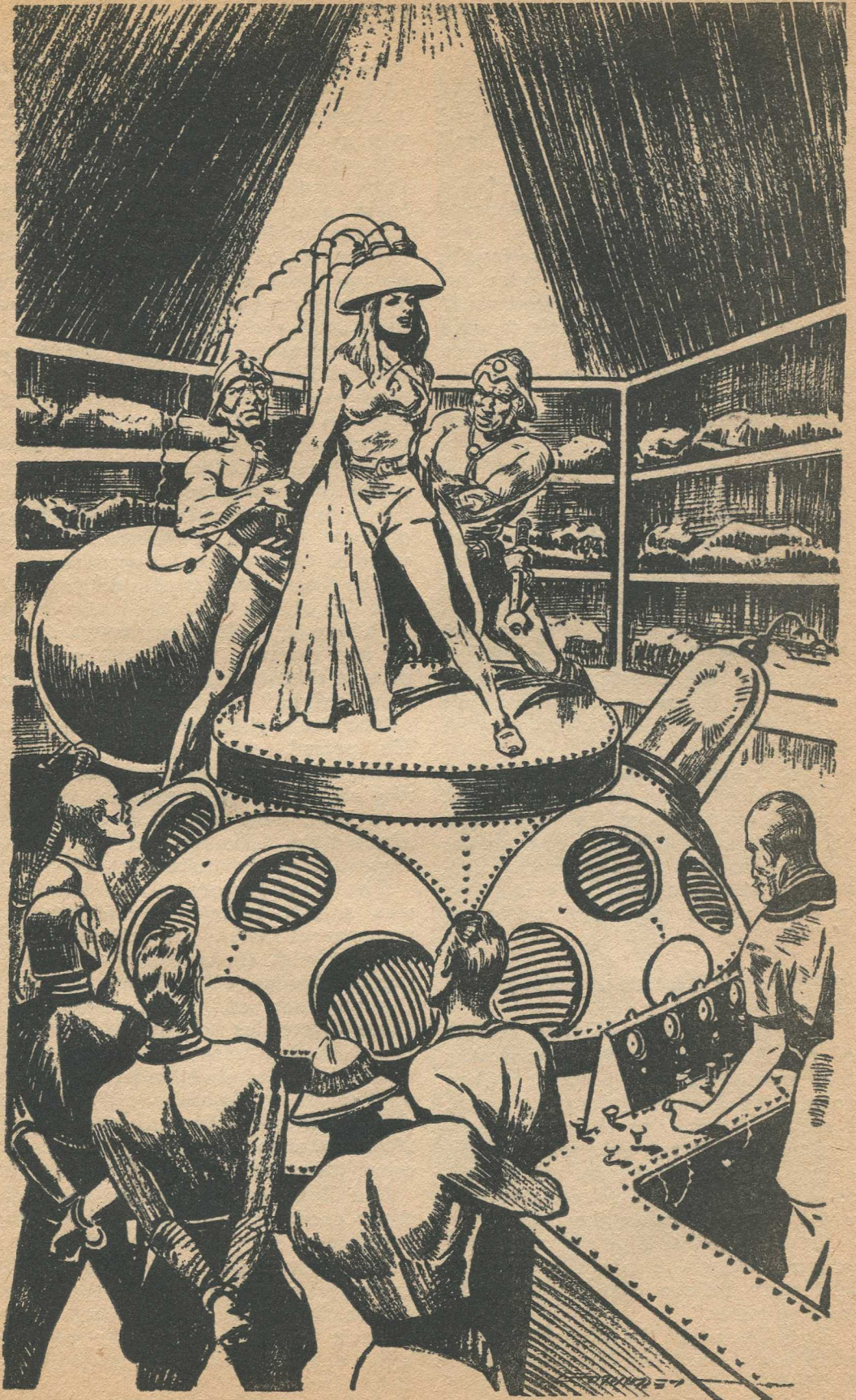
"It's true!" Tiko affirmed eagerly.

"I don't understand," Joan said puzzledly. "You know I'm no scientist. What do you mean by 'another universe'?"

Tiko Thrin explained.

"Our three-dimensional universe is limited and finite, for our three-dimensional space is *curved*. Thus our universe is a great three-dimensional bubble floating in the extra-dimensional abyss. It's been believed that there are other bubbles, other universes, out in that abyss."

"This other universe which I've contacted is such a bubble. It's unthinkable remote from us. I have calculated that it must be at least twenty billion light-years distant, but my power-beam reached it."



Shiri was the first to be placed upon the weird platform (Chap. XIII)

The Brain was incredulous.

"No System scientist has ever yet succeeded in sending a beam beyond our own three-dimensional universe," he stated.

"I know, and it wasn't *my* science that enabled me to do it," admitted Tiko Thrin. "You remember that queer race, the Allus, whom we fought on the comet-world—who were invaders from outside? You remember that we fell heir to all their strange scientific apparatus? Well, I've been studying and altering the Allus apparatus, hoping to be able to make contact with the inhabitants of another universe.

"And I succeeded! I sent out signals along a power-beam that I projected along the fourth dimension. The signals were quickly answered. For weeks, I've been in steady communication with the people of an unthinkably distant universe."

"But that's impossible!" protested the Brain. "The theory of relativity shows that the fourth dimension is non-spatial in nature. You couldn't send any beam along a non-spatial dimension."

"But I have," insisted Tiko. "I've talked with a man of that universe, have slowly learned his language. His name is Gerdek—he's of a human people who call themselves the Tarasts. And this man Gerdek is going to come across the abyss bodily tonight."

THE little Martian scientist rushed on.

"I've utilized the scientific secrets of the Allus to build an apparatus that would transmit matter, broken down into electrons, along my beam. I taught Gerdek, in that other universe, to build such an apparatus too. When both machines are turned on, solid matter can flash from one universe to the other on the beam."

"I want to see this apparatus of yours," said the Brain abruptly. "I still can't believe that it's scientifically possible."

Tiko Thrin led the way with nervous haste toward his little chromaloy house. The Brain glided close beside him in the pink planet-glow, while

Joan Randall followed with a feeling of increasing excitement.

Mingled with Joan's excitement was a dawning apprehension. This talk of a visitor from another universe recalled to her only too vividly those other terrible visitants from outside, with whom the Futuremen had struggled desperately. Remembering those alien Allus, she felt a chill of dread at the thought of another such visitation.

Her uneasiness deepened when they entered Tiko Thrin's laboratory. The room was crowded with electrical and physical apparatus. Four giant atomic generators droned softly at the end of the room, feeding power into tall accumulators connected by a maze of cables to various instruments. Many of these looming machines were devices of the alien Allus science.

The little Martian pointed proudly to a big object.

"There it is. The matter-transmitter and receiver, which will enable a man of that distant universe to come here tonight."

The Brain glided to the mechanism. He poised, studying it with his strange lens-eyes that moved uncanily on their flexible stalks.

"I see," he muttered. "You've adapted the Allus method of photon-transmission to handle electrons."

The main feature of the machine was a big, barrel-like chamber of transparent metal. Its interior walls bristled with thousands of tiny copper electrodes, all pointing inward. Complexities of wiring led from these electrodes to the tall switchboard nearby. This switchboard contained banks of dials and relays, and an ordinary speech microphone. Above the board was mounted a curious antenna of copper sheets in queer arrangement.

The Brain keenly studied the fantastic geometrical design of the copper planes.

"This antenna is hypothetically set to project or receive a beam along the fourth dimension," he admitted. "But it can't do it. No ordinary power-beam can travel along a non-spatial dimension."

"You'll find out differently in

twenty minutes," said Tiko Thrin. "That's when Gerdek is going to come through from his own distant universe."

Joan's nervousness increased.

"Tiko, I don't like this! Your machine creates a bridge between our universe and that other one. It might be dangerous."

The Martian blinked at her uncomprehendingly.

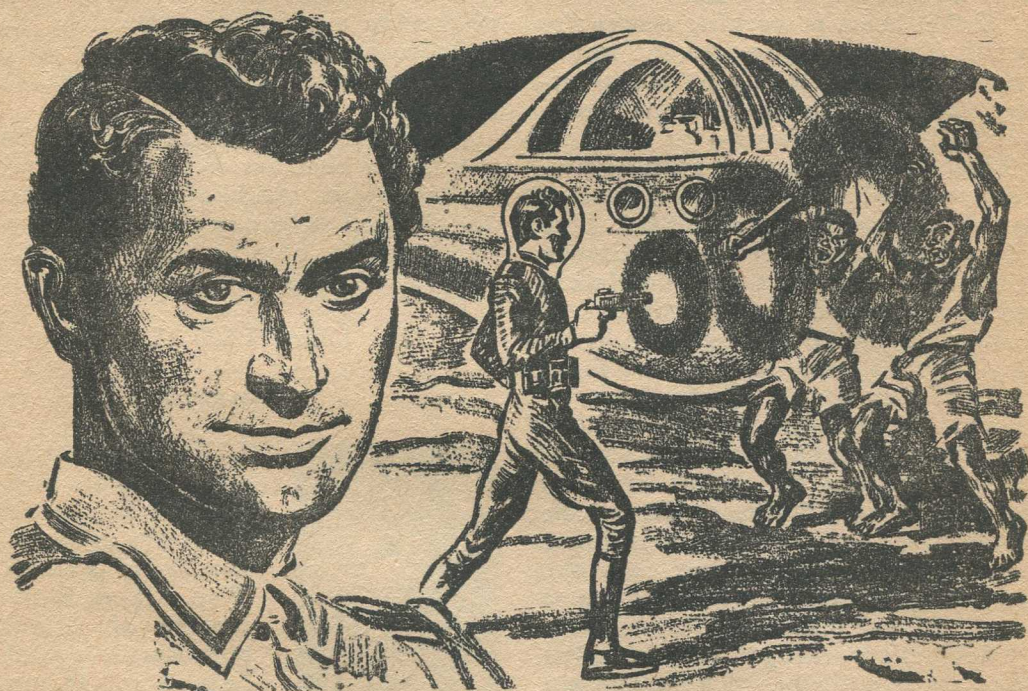
"There's no danger. The Tarasts—the people of that other universe—are humans like us. And Gerdek, the man who's coming through, is friendly. I've talked with him for weeks."

"I can't do that," replied Tiko hurriedly, glancing at the chronometers. "It's almost the time set by Gerdek and myself for the attempt. I'm going to call him now."

JOAN stepped back, but her lovely face was pale and troubled as she watched the little scientist working hastily at the switchboard.

"There's nothing to worry about," the Brain told her confidently. "His beam won't work along the fourth dimension. It can't."

Tiko Thrin had closed a series of switches. Tall vacuum tubes behind



CAPTAIN FUTURE

"He might *pretend* that he's friendly, so that you'll open a way for him into our universe," persisted the worried girl. "But we don't know that he's really friendly. We don't know that he's really even human!"

Tiko patted her hand.

"Don't worry, Joan. If Gerdek is hostile when he materializes in that chamber, I can instantly project him back."

"But it might not be so easy to do that, once he's here," Joan pointed out anxiously. "At least, wait until Captain Future arrives."

the switchboard silently lit up. A shimmering, pearly white glow enveloped the fantastic copper planes of the curious antenna.

In a moment, the little Martian spoke loudly into the switchboard microphone.

"Gerdek! Gerdek, nya kurul di rad!"

Strange call in a strange language! A call into the infinite abyss outside the known universe, a cry to an alien universe twenty billion light-years away!

Almost immediately, a deep, vibrant

male voice issued from the loud-speaker beside the microphone.

"Rasta, kol! Amal ta fafir mutin!"

Tiko Thrin turned a face glistening with excitement toward the girl and the Brain.

"He's there, ready to come through. He's going to turn on the transmitter I taught him to build—in two minutes, he'll be here!"

"I don't understand," whispered Joan to Simon Wright. "If he's really billions of light-years away, how could his reply come so quickly?"

The Brain, who was staring with a fixity that indicated astonishment, made a reluctant concession.

"If that beam *is* working across the fourth dimension," he said, "it would operate instantaneously by short-cutting the three ordinary dimensions. But I still can't believe—"

Tiko Thrin, sweating with excitement, reached a clawlike hand to close the largest switch on the board. The big vacuum tubes flared up brilliantly as the full power of the accumulators rushed into them. In the transparent chamber, a thread of crackling lightning stabbed from each of the thousands of tiny copper electrodes.

Joan Randall, watching with mingled awe and dread, saw those thousands of gushing threads of light coalescing swiftly at the center of the chamber. They formed a shining cloud, which almost faster than the eye could perceive grew more dense and definite of outline.

"Why, it's working!" exclaimed the Brain incredulously. "Those jets are electrons, drawn across the abyss and now reforming into their original patterns!"

Joan heard a bell clang warningly. A red light flashed on the switchboard. With a convulsive movement, Tiko opened the switches.

"Look!" shrilled the little Martian scientist exultantly. "It succeeded! I've opened a road to another universe!"

The shining haze inside the chamber was rapidly dissipating. Through it, they could vaguely discern a human figure. Then they stiffened with amazement as they saw that there were two figures in the chamber. They

were a man and a girl.

They were human in every respect—yet there was a subtle unearthliness about them. Their skin was a pure, marbly white, without a trace of color. Both the young man and the girl had hair of a platinum shade that was almost white. The man's hair was close-cropped, the girl's flowed to her shoulders in a wonderful torrent of platinum tresses. Both had dark eyes, with unusually large pupils.

The man was handsome, the girl of unearthly loveliness. The former wore a tight jacket and breeches of silky black cloth, the girl a loose black robe of the same material. They were staggering as they stood there in the transparent chamber—breathing with difficulty, seemingly under terrible strain.

Joan cried out in sharp alarm. The two in the chamber were looking out at their hosts. And both the man and the girl had suddenly drawn and leveled gunlike objects that were obviously weapons.

CHAPTER II

The Futuremen



LIKE a shooting star, a small ship hurtled across the planetary orbits of the Solar System. The sun and the worlds of Venus and Earth lay far behind it. It was racing at tremendous speed toward the red dot of

Mars.

The few officers of passing space liners and freighters who sighted that little ship recognized it instantly. Who was there in the whole System who did not know the *Comet*, ship of the famous Futuremen? Who had not heard the countless tales of daring forays to far worlds and stars made in that very craft by Captain Future, most adventurous of all planetees?

Curtis Newton, the young Earthman known to nine worlds as Captain Future, sat at the space-stick in the

crowded control room of the *Comet* and sang cheerfully to himself. He sang:

I'm only a lonely spaceman
With no world to call my home—

The dolefulness of the old space song was belied by Curt's high spirits. His head was cocked back, his mop of torch-red hair glistening. Humor danced in his gray eyes and tanned, handsome face.

Curt's long, lean figure, clad in a drab zipper suit to which was belted a slim, deadly proton pistol, was stretched out easily in the pilot's chair. His feet rested lightly on the cyc and brake-blast pedals, his brown hand loosely grasping the space-stick.

I've seen all moons and planets
But I still just like to roam—

Captain Future stopped singing, as a glance at the space sextant told him the *Comet* was approaching a dangerous meteor zone. He turned his head and called back to the main cabin of the ship.

"Come on up here, Otho! I'll need you soon to watch the meteorometers for me."

There was no answer to his summons. He heard, over the throb of the rockets, the mutter of two voices arguing back there.

Curt raised his voice.

"You cockeyed son of a test-tube, did you hear me call you?"

There was still no answer, for the disputing voices back in the cabin had now become loud and strident. Curt's own call went unheeded.

With an impatient exclamation, Captain Future rose to his feet. He snapped on the automatic pilot to hold the ship on course, then strode angrily back into the main cabin.

The two Futuremen back there were kneeling on the floor, so deeply engrossed that they hardly paid attention to Curt's entrance.

"Be with you in a minute, Chief," said Otho, without turning. "Grag and I are settling a bet."

Otho looked like a rather striking young man—a lithe, white-skinned individual with a hairless head and

slanted, glittering green eyes in a fierce, reckless face. But Otho was no ordinary man. He was an android, or synthetic man. He had been created in a laboratory, years ago. And he was more swift, more skilful, more dangerous than any normal man.

Grag, the other Futureman, was even more extraordinary. For Grag was a robot—a mighty, seven-foot figure whose manlike body was of massive metal. His bulbous metal head encased a metal-sponge brain that was the seat of his strong, strange mind. The robot's gleaming photo-electric eyes glanced up toward Curt, as he spoke in his booming mechanical voice.

"I bet my best proton gun against Otho's fire-ruby ring that my Eek could whip that miserable little pet of his," Grag informed him.

"Why, you must be space-struck," Curt Newton snorted. "Your Eek couldn't whip a fly—he's the biggest coward that ever lived."

"That's what I tried to tell him, Chief," chuckled Otho. "But Grag thinks that cowardly moon-pup of his has a chance. Just watch!"

EACH of the Futuremen had put his pet down on the floor. Otho's mascot, whose name was Oog, was a meteor-mimic, a fat little white beast with solemn eyes. It was an asteroidal animal that had the unique power of taking any form at will, by means of a protean cell-shifting ability.

Oog was ordinarily the mildest-tempered of animals. But Otho had prodded and teased him to fighting pitch. Now, Oog abruptly changed his shape and became an octopoid thing that advanced menacingly on Eek.

Eek, Grag's pet, was a moon-pup. It was a sharp-nosed, beady-eyed little gray animal, a little-known species that inhabited the barren lunar satellite of Earth. This particular moon-pup happened to be the most arrant coward alive, as Captain Future well knew.

"Go ahead and kill that moon-pup, Oog!" Otho incited his pet. He chorled. "Watch Eek run for it now,

He's frozen stiff already."

The moon-pup was indeed watching the queerly altered Oog advance menacingly, as though frozen. But Eek did not run away, as he always had done before when even the slightest danger threatened.

Instead of fleeing, Eek opened his jaws in a soundless snarl and suddenly flung himself upon Oog. He smacked Oog down, clawed him up and batted him down again, and then mopped up the floor with him. With a yelp of amazement and pain, Oog resumed his own shape and hastily fled.

"I told you Eek would whip him!" Grag boomed triumphantly. "You can just hand over that ring, Otho."

Otho had watched with incredulous consternation, and Captain Future too was astonished. Neither had expected Eek to fight.

"I must be dreaming!" Otho gasped. "That moon-pup was always afraid of his own shadow before. He must be either crazy or—"

With a sudden suspicion, Otho grabbed up Eek and examined him. He uttered an angry cry as he saw smears of gray liquid upon Eek's jaws.

"I thought so!" Otho exclaimed furiously. "You've fed him radium-liquor and got him drunk!" he accused Grag. "That's why he was brave."

Grag uttered a chuckling sound.

"What if I did give Eek a little stimulant that way? There was nothing against it in our bet."

Otho furiously handed over the fire-ruby ring.

"That's what I get for betting with a robot! You're not human enough to know anything about good sportsmanship."

"Not human? Says who?" belittled Grag angrily. "I'm a blasted sight more human than any synthetic rubber imitation of a man like you!"

Captain Future interrupted.

"Look, I don't want to bother you two too much," he said with dangerous politeness, "but we're approaching a meteor zone. It would be awfully nice if I could have a little help in the control room. Would it

annoy you to come forward and assist me, Otho?"

"Why, no, Chief," Otho answered importantly. "I'm always glad to do any little favor for—"

He ducked and dodged for the control room as Curt aimed a swift kick at him.

In the next half hour, Otho called out the readings of the meteorometers and Curt shifted the space-stick at each warning. The still-angry android interspersed his readings with loudly muttered comments upon the trickery of Grag, who had followed them forward.

Curt Newton grinned to himself. He was used to this perpetual bickering of Grag and Otho. He had heard it all his life, for Grag and Otho and the Brain had been with him since he was born.

The story of Curt Newton's birth and upbringing was one of the strangest in history. Years ago, a brilliant scientist named Roger Newton had fled from enemies on Earth and taken refuge on the wild, barren Moon. With him had gone his young wife and his strange colleague, Simon Wright, the Brain.

They had built a home and laboratory beneath Tycho crater. In it, a son had been born to Roger Newton and his wife. Here Newton and the Brain had pursued their experiments designed to create intelligent living beings, and had created Grag, the robot and Otho, the android.

BUT their enemies followed them, and killed Roger Newton and his wife. The murderers themselves met quick retribution. And thus the orphaned infant was left to the care of the three strange beings: the Brain, the robot and the android. These three, through the years, had guarded and reared the child upon the lonely Moon. And they had given him an education such as no boy had ever before received.

The Brain had supervised Curt's scientific education until the boy approached his tutor in wizardry of science. Otho had taught him swiftness and cleverness. Grag had carefully fostered his physical strength.

It was small wonder that Curt Newton grew up into a man of tomorrow.

The finest human scientist and most audacious planeteer in the System, Curt had so devoted his powers to fight for the System's peoples that they named him Captain Future, and called his three loyal comrades the Futuremen.

"Well, we're through that cursed meteor zone at last," announced Otho, turning with relief from the meteorometers.

He gestured to the bright red dot of Mars ahead.

"We'll reach Deimos in a few hours," he said.

"I don't see why Tiko Thrin had to drag us all the way out here to Deimos," complained Grag. "What's it all about, anyway?"

"Tiko wouldn't say, according to Simon," Curt replied. "He said only that it was imperative we come. It must be important. Tiko Thrin isn't a man to exaggerate."

"Bah! Those Martians are all nutty," Otho scoffed. "We'll get there and he'll have some crazy new scientific idea to tell us. You'll see."

The *Comet* rapidly swept closer toward the burning crimson sphere of Mars. Captain Future skilfully steered in a broad curve toward the hurtling little satellite of Deimos. He brought the ship down smoothly toward the shadowed night-side of the tiny moon.

The planet-lit face of the Garden Moon was clear as a map to Curt's eyes. Soon he was landing their craft on the tree-bordered lawn of Tiko Thrin's small chromaloy house.

"Hello, that's Joan coming!" Curt exclaimed, as he and Grag and Otho emerged into the soft planet-glow.

His pulse had jumped, as it always did, at sight of the slim Earthgirl he loved. She was running toward them across the velvety lawn.

"Something must be wrong," Otho muttered. "She's in a big hurry—"

But Curt had already strode forward to meet the girl. He greeted her by exuberantly picking her up in his arms and holding her high in the air.

"Show a little affection, Miss Ran-



The Cold One's limbs gave way beneath him.
(Chap. XVIII)

dall, or I'll toss you right off this low-gravity moon," he threatened cheerfully.

"Curt, put me down!" she ordered urgently. "Something has happened—something tremendous."

Captain Future's face sobered instantly, and he set her on her feet.

"What is it, Joan?"

She was breathless, her eyes brilliant with excitement.

"Curt, in the house are two people from another universe!"

As Curt Newton and the two Futuremen looked at her incredulously, she rushed on.

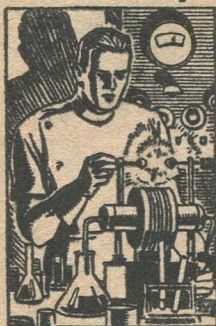
"They're humans, Curt, but they're not like us. The man's name is Gerdek, and the girl is his sister, Shiri. They materialized here less than an hour ago, by means of Tiko's power-beam—"

"Hold on, Joan!" Captain Future begged. "You're getting all mixed up in your excitement. You say that Tiko managed to bring these two people out of a different three-dimensional universe?"

Joan's dark head bobbed.

"Yes. He bridged the abyss between our universe and theirs with a power-beam along the fourth dimension."

"Impossible!" Curt exclaimed. "According to all relativity theory, the



fourth dimension is non-spatial. No beam could work across it."

"That's what Simon said at first, but Tiko did it," the girl insisted. "I admit I was scared at first. Especially since we had expected only the man Gerdek to appear, and didn't know that his sister was coming along with him."

"And Gerdek and his sister were alarmed, too, when they first materialized! It was sight of the Brain that

startled them. They thought at first he was some kind of mechanical monster, and raised their weapons to protect themselves. But Tiko soon convinced them we were all friendly. Tiko has been talking to them, learning their story—"

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S gray eyes lit with excitement, and he started toward the little house.

"Joan, come on—I want to see those people. If they really came from a different universe, Tiko *has* got something big."

"Holy moon-cats, I still can't believe it!" exclaimed Otho, hastening with Grag beside them.

"Curt, I've heard part of their story that Tiko translated for us, and it's a wonderful, heart-breaking tale!" Joan was saying as they hurried across the lawn. "The universe that Gerdek and his sister come from is a dying universe."

"Its people are fighting a terrible battle against extinction. And these two took the awful risk of being dematerialized and hurled across the abyss, in the hope of getting help here for their doomed people."

Captain Future and his companions stepped inside of Tiko Thrin's crowded laboratory, and halted. The tall, red-haired planeteer and the lithe android and mighty metal robot made a striking group as they stared.

Curt's eyes were fixed on the pale-haired young man and girl who had jumped up as he entered. He realized at once that they represented a race wholly unfamiliar to him. The marble whiteness of their complexions, the handsomeness of the man and the unearthly, platinum-tressed beauty of the girl were as subtly strange as their black garments.

Future had expected this man Gerdek and his sister to show astonishment at sight of his robot and android comrades. But, to his surprise, it was upon himself that the gaze of the man and the girl fixed instantly.

With eyes dilated by amazement, these two visitors from another universe stared at Captain Future's *hair*. Then they burst into excited speech in their own language.

CHAPTER III

National Hero

CURT NEWTON was dumfounded by the excitement which his own appearance had somehow stirred in the strange man and girl. They seemed unable to take their eyes off him.

He turned to the little Martian scientist.

"What are they saying, Tiko?"

"I didn't get it all," Tiko Thrin confessed puzzledly. "But as far as I can gather, it's your red hair that has excited them."

"My hair?" Captain Future echoed, mystified. "What's so unusual about that?"

The Martian questioned Gerdek and Shiri in their own language. They replied with an eager rush of words.

"They say," Tiko translated, "that none of their people has hair like yours. Their legends tell of a time when some of them had dark or even red hair, but now they are all a pale-haired people."

"Tell them we're more interested in their reason for coming here than in the color of their hair," Curt Newton said impatiently.

Gerdek and Shiri had by now got over their startled surprise. But the girl still had breathless emotion in her fine face as she looked at Curt.

Her brother was saying something to her in a rapid, eager tone. They scrutinized Curt's tall figure intently. Gerdek appeared to be excitedly proposing something connected with Captain Future.

Tiko Thrin looked perplexed.

"I don't understand this," he told Curt. "The man keeps harping on your red hair. He's telling his sister that because you're red-haired, you might be able to save his doomed people."

"Say, this is goofy!" Otho exclaimed. "How the devil is the chief's red hair going to save anybody from

doom?"

"Aw, these people must be still space-happy from their trip," growled Grag.

"We're getting nowhere," Captain Future said decisively. "Tiko, ask the man to tell us slowly what his universe is like and why his people are doomed. You translate for the rest of us as he goes along."

Gerdek nodded quickly when the little Martian made the request. He began to speak in low, eager tones, looking with a strangely hopeful expression at Curt. The girl Shiri searched Curt's face with her great, dark violet eyes as her brother talked. Tiko Thrin translated.

"Our universe is much different from this one of yours," Gerdek declared. "Like yours, it is a great bubble of three-dimensional curved space floating in the extra-dimensional abyss. But our universe is apparently much larger than yours in diameter. And ours is a dying universe, almost a dead one."

"Long, long ago our universe was much like yours. It contained hosts of hot, bright suns whose outpouring radiation supported life on myriads of planets. That was when we Tarasts rose to civilization and glory. The scientific powers of our race so expanded that we were able to spread out and colonize the worlds of hundreds of stars.

"The great hero of that long-past period of expansion was a scientist and leader named Kaffr, whose memory has been revered ever since by my race.

"But that was all ages ago. As time passed, millennium after millennium, millions after millions of years, the decline of our universe set in. Its suns could not pour out radiation forever. Each star, as the carbon-nitrogen cycle consumed its free hydrogen, waned and cooled. The inexorable laws of entropy were taking effect. The older suns of our universe ran down through the spectrum to dull red, and then were dark, cold cinders.

"The lights of our universe were going out, one by one! We could not halt that stupendous natural process—nothing could. Our far-flung race had

sadly to abandon the frozen worlds of the burned-out suns, and migrate to other stars. So began the first somber retreat of the Tarast civilization from the borders of our cosmic empire."

GERDEK paused for emphasis. "That retreat has been going on, ever since. For the last four million years, my people have abandoned one frozen stellar system after another. It has been a slow withdrawal, you see. A universe does not die in a day.

"Each generation during those four million years saw little retrogression during its lifetime—only the occasional abandonment of some star's worlds. It has been slow—but it has been very sure.

"In more recent ages, the cosmic retreat of our empire has been accelerated by two factors. One is the decay of our scientific powers, an intellectual degeneration that inevitably resulted from the psychological effects of our hopeless retreat. Very many techniques and knowledges were lost or forgotten as world after world was abandoned.

"We still retain and operate many mechanical devices, but the spirit of scientific experimentation is almost dead. We Tarasts are now, it is obvious to me, inferior to you people of this universe in science.

"The other factor that deepens the hopelessness for us is a more tangible and terrifying one. It is the threat of the Cold Ones. That is the name we give to a new and hostile race of intelligent creatures that has appeared in our dying universe.

"The Cold Ones are unhuman in many respects. They are the product of a disastrous chain of biological events that took place on the frozen planet of a dead star. They have advanced as we retreated, conquering world after world that we abandoned. For they can live in the endless icy darkness of airless worlds, where we would die.

"Our retreat, and their advance, have now almost reached the fatal climax. Most of our universe is already blacked-out by death, a vast wilderness of ashen bulks that once were

stars, and icy spheres that once were smiling worlds. The last millions of us Tarasts now huddle together upon the chill worlds of a few smoldering stars that are not yet completely dead.

"Now the Cold Ones are reaching toward that dying star-cluster that is our last refuge. Already they have established a base there from which they attack our crowded worlds."

Gerdek's handsome young face was quivering with emotion as he went on with his saga of a dying civilization.

"Is it any wonder that most of my people have lost all hope for the future? 'Soon,' they murmur, 'our race will be gone and the Cold Ones will inherit our dead universe. It is futile to resist the laws of nature.'

"So they have no more interest in science, in the glory of our past. Sunk in despair, more and more of them lose hope for the future of our race, and think only of the present. More and more listen to Vostol's plan."

"Vostol's plan?" Captain Future repeated, puzzled by the reference. But Gerdek went on.

"Only a handful of us have clung to hope and have tried to keep the ancient science alive," he said. "My sister Shiri and I are of that small group. We have exhorted our people not to surrender or to despair. We have told them that if the Tarast race can only endure, the time will come when our dying universe will be reborn to new life once more.

"For we of the little scientist group are certain that our universe *will* be reborn! We have found, among the records left by the brilliant scientists of our great past age, mathematical calculations that seem to prove that the laws of entropy will reverse themselves, when the cooling of our universe reaches a critical point.

"We ourselves have not the scientific knowledge now to understand all these ancient records, but we believe them and have tried to make our people believe them.

"But our people have not believed," Gerdek said sadly. "They have rejected the half-proofs we were able to present, and have listened instead to those like Vostol, who counsel surrendering to the inevitable and think-

ing only of our own immediate future.

"If we few scientists could only prove to our people that the rebirth of our universe will come, we would inspire them to new hope for our race and to new struggle against the advancing Cold Ones.

"That is why Shiri and I have come to your universe to ask for your help," Gerdek concluded. "When we first accidentally received your signals, we guessed your science was greater than our own decayed scientific knowledge. You, with your greater knowledge, would be able to give my people the will and the means to fight against racial extinction."

CAPTAIN FUTURE was a little staggered by the implied proposal.

"You mean that you want us to go out to that distant, dying universe of yours? Just how could we help if we did?"

Gerdek answered instantly.

"You, with your greater scientific knowledge, could convince my people that our universe will be reborn. And you could help us fight the powerful Cold Ones, help us to hang on until the great day of resurrection comes."

Curt looked doubtful. The girl Shiri saw the doubt on his face, and asked him a tense, quick question through the Martian translator.

"You believe that our universe will be revived, do you not? The ancient scientists of our race whose records we found were certain of it."

Curt Newton nodded.

"I'm certain of it, too. Our science of cosmogony tells us that a three-

dimensional universe like ours or your own will cool and darken and die only to a certain point. When the amount of entropy reaches that critical point, the dead universe will be reborn."

Joan looked astounded.

"Are you sure of that, Curt? I admit I'm no scientist. But I always had the idea that when all the stars of a universe were cold and dead, that universe would remain dead forever."

"No, that was the old idea of early physicists," Captain Future told her. "They believed that the second law of thermodynamics was immutable, that the flow of energy into lower forms was a one-way, irreversible process. But generations ago, as far back as the year nineteen forty-one, they began to see that they had been too positive about it.

"The great physicist Einstein of that era finally admitted that cosmic laws were immutable in appearance only, and that the Heisenberg principle of uncertainty might rule in cosmic as well as atomic physics. Millikan, his contemporary, had always insisted that the decay of a universe might only be part of a great cycle.

"Finally, J. B. S. Haldane, another famous scientific name of that age, propounded his theory of cosmic 'dynamism,' which asserted that a dead universe would be reborn in time.

"Haldane's theory set the cosmogonists of later generations on the right track. We know now, from searching mathematical investigation, that every three-dimensional universe has a continuous cycle of decay and

[Turn page]

NO FINER DRINK...



rebirth. It begins as a comparatively small bubble of three-dimensional space.

"But as the matter of its stars and its world melts into radiation, that bubble of space *expands*. That universe expands until it is a much vaster sphere, containing a welter of radiation and a few inert embers of burned-out suns.

"Then, when it reaches a critical point in size, the curved space of the bubble gives way under the strain. The bubble collapses upon itself just as a balloon blown too big will burst and collapse. The bubble of space becomes suddenly in that way a much smaller sphere, a much smaller universe. The immense amounts of free radiation, now compressed into that smaller universe, build rapidly into new nebulae, suns, planets."

Gerdek's dark eyes were brilliant with hope when he understood.

"Then if my people can keep their race alive until the critical point is reached and our universe is reborn, our racial future will be assured!"

Shiri impulsively grasped Curt's hand.

"If you could convince our Tarast people of that and could help them hold off the Cold Ones, you would have saved us."

Captain Future frowned.

"I'd certainly like to help your people. But—they wouldn't listen to your own assurances. Would they listen to us strangers, no matter what scientific proofs we presented?"

"They'd listen to *you*!" Shiri cried when Tiko had translated. "They'd believe anything you said—because of your red hair."

"My hair?" Curt looked blank. "I still don't see what that has to do with it."

SHIRI explained eagerly.

"We Tarasts have legends of a great hero of our race, whose memory is still venerated among us. His name was Kaffr, and he lived ages ago and led our people in the conquest of our universe."

"Tradition says that he had flame-red hair, something not seen among my people for hundreds of genera-

tions. Tradition also says that in the hour of our direst need, Kaffr will return from the dead to help his people."

Curt nodded understandingly.

"Sure, every race has old legends like that. But what about it?"

Shiri's great violet eyes flashed.

"If you, with your flame-red hair, appeared in our universe, you could tell my people that you were Kaffr himself, come back from death to help them. They'd believe you! And they would believe and do everything that you told them."

"Holy space-imps!" exclaimed Grag, astonished. "They want you to palm yourself off as their national hero, Chief!"

CHAPTER IV

Into Infinity



CURT NEWTON was stunned also by the proposal.

"It's a crazy idea," he told the two Tarasts vehemently. "How could I impersonate this fellow Kaffr? I don't know your language or your customs.

I may not look in the least like the man, aside from my hair."

"That would not matter, for nobody now knows what Kaffr really looked like," Gerdek assured him. "It has been ages since he died, remember. All that we have are just dim traditions—his superhuman powers, his intrepidity, his wisdom. The flame-red hair is the only definite point."

"And we could teach you everything you would need to know before you appeared to our people," Shiri added eagerly to Curt.

Captain Future hesitated. The adventure that offered itself seemed a mad one. To enter a completely alien universe—to pass himself off as the revered, half-deified racial hero of a whole people!

But a picture leaped into his mind. A somber mental vision of an unthink-

ably distant universe of dark, dead stars and frozen worlds; of a cold, unhuman menace that crept like a slow tide of horror toward the last, flickering stars and worlds that were the final refuge of a despairing human race.

He turned and looked at the Brain and the other Futuremen.

"I'm in favor of trying to help these people, even though this plan seems hopelessly risky," Curt stated. "But I can't take you into a venture like this against your judgment. Are you willing to go?"

Otho's slant-green eyes glittered with excitement.

"Go? Of course we go! Who'd miss a chance to visit a whole new universe? Why, it's the greatest opportunity for adventure we ever had!"

Grag agreed, in his rumbling voice. The giant robot never cared where he went, as long as Captain Future was leading the way.

The Brain spoke more deliberately.

"You do not underestimate the riskiness of this proposal, lad. If those people discover that you're only an impostor impersonating their racial hero, they'll tear you to bits."

Shiri looked troubled when that was translated.

"It is true, they would do that. But it will not be discovered. It *must* not be discovered!"

"Despite the risk," the Brain concluded, "I am in favor of trying it. In that distant, alien universe, opportunity for scientific research would be almost unlimited. And also, I want very much to investigate this puzzling fourth-dimensional beam-travel that Tiko Thrin has somehow devised."

"I am afraid you will not learn much about that," Gerdek warned him. "The journey from our own universe to this one seemed little more than a mad confusion of indescribable sensations."

Captain Future's gray eyes gleamed with that eager light that only great purpose and the lure of far cosmic frontiers could summon forth.

"Good, it's settled! Gerdek, we'll come to your universe. I'll do my utmost to carry through this impersona-

tion, if you think that's the only way in which we can succeed in helping your people. We'll bring our own ship, the *Comet*. We may need its resources before we're through."

Otho objected, pointing to the barrel-shaped chamber of Tiko Thrin's matter-transmitter.

"We can't get the *Comet* into that little chamber."

"Which means that we'll have to build a much bigger matter-transmitter of the same design," Curt declared. "Gerdek and Shiri will have to build a similar receiver of large size, at their end. It will simply be a matter of duplicating in a larger scale the mechanism that Tiko Thrin has already taught them to construct."

When the details of that were settled, the Tarast man and his sister prepared to return to their own universe. Gerdek wrung Curt's hand, and the platinum-tressed girl's violet eyes were wet and shining with emotion as she parted from Captain Future.

"You have given us new hope," she told him through Tiko Thrin. "We shall be able to predict that soon Kaffr will return to his people and save them. They'll be afire with hope."

"I only hope it won't end in tragic disappointment for them," Curt murmured uneasily. "I don't like impostors, even when they have as great a purpose as this one."

GERDEK and Shiri entered the transparent chamber, and Tiko Thrin closed it upon them. The little Martian scientist sweated at the switchboard. A haze of shining force enwrapped the two Tarasts as power was turned on. When it was shut off and the haze faded, the two had vanished.

"Just think—they're already back in their own universe, billions of light-years away!" marveled Tiko.

"I didn't like the way that girl eyed you," Joan told Captain Future half seriously. "I'm going to watch you when we reach her universe."

"When we reach it?" echoed Curt, startled. "Listen, Joan—you don't by any remote chance think I'm crazy enough to take you along on as dangerous a venture as this?"

Joan's brown eyes grew stormy. "Do you think I'd let you go off without me to a universe where all the women are platinum blondes?"

Curt chuckled, but then grew sober.

"Joan, listen—it's not just the danger you'd run that I'm thinking of. Someone ought to be here to help Tiko guard the matter-transmitter. If anything happened to it, we'd never be able to get back here."

"That's just an excuse to leave me behind," Joan declared indignantly. Then her face softened. "Oh, all right, Curt—I don't want to make it difficult for you. I'll stay here."

The following few weeks marked intense labor and preparation by the Futuremen. Out in the grounds of Tiko Thrin's little estate they constructed the larger matter-transmitter that was required. It was of the same basic design as the laboratory model, but its huge transparent chamber was ovoid in shape, the more easily to accommodate the *Comet*.

During intervals snatched from their work, Curt Newton and the Futuremen learned the Tarast language as best they could from Tiko Thrin. The big new transmitter rapidly took shape. But frequently the work was delayed when the Brain went into one of his reveries of abstract scientific speculation, from which it was hard to arouse him.

"I'm trying to fathom the theoretical basis of these transmitters," Simon Wright replied when Captain Future protested. "You know, lad, I still can't believe that the fourth dimension is really spatial in nature."

Joan asked a puzzled question.

"But, Simon, when we were fighting those Allus on the comet-world, you and Curt always referred to the fourth dimension of space."

"We meant the fourth *spatial* dimension," the Brain corrected. "That is really the fifth dimension, for according to the theory of relativity, the true fourth should be non-spatial."

Curt was impatient.

"Simon, in spite of the tenets of relativity, we *know* the fourth must be spatial, for we've seen that Tiko's power-beam can traverse it. We've no time now for theoretical considera-

tions. We can investigate the theory of it later."

"Oh, very well," muttered the Brain. "But I still can't understand it. Neither can Tiko, for he simply adapted the apparatus of the alien Allus without investigation of its underlying principles."

The big transmitter finally was completed. Its huge ovoid chamber glittered like a great jewel on the green breast of the Garden Moon, crowned by the towering antenna of copper planes in curious arrangement.

The night of the Futuremen's start was at hand. At this prearranged time, Gerdek and Shiri would be expecting them at the big receiver they had been building in their faraway universe. The *Comet* had already been eased into the ovoid chamber.

Joan clung to Captain Future.

"I'm afraid, Curt. I never felt this way before. A remote, alien universe—and you're going there to carry out an impersonation that means death if you're discovered. It frightens me."

"And I thought you were a real planeteer," he reproached her with pretended severity.

But he held her close, before he strode away.

JOAN stood in the planet-glow, rigid with emotion as she watched Curt's tall, lean figure enter the sleek little ship in the chamber. She caught the final wave of his hand from the control room, as Tiko Thrin closed the chamber and hastened to the switch-board.

A bursting blaze of shining force suddenly enwrapped the interior of the chamber and hid the *Comet*. Thousands of threads of lightning seemed to stream out of the haze toward the tiny copper electrodes that lined the chamber. Then they faded, and the haze died away.

Joan felt a strange chill as she saw that the big chamber now was empty. The little ship was dematerialized, gone.

The *Comet* and its four dauntless occupants had been hurled across the unthinkable abysses of an untraveled dimension to that distant, dying universe.

CHAPTER V

Dusk of Empire

CURT NEWTON had found the three Futuremen awaiting him in the crowded control room of the *Comet*, when he made his way into the ovoid chamber and entered the ship. Oog and Eek were wrestling play-

fully on the floor.

"All ready?" Curt had asked. "In five minutes we'll be hurtling out of this universe."

"Say, what would happen if Gerdek and Shiri didn't have their apparatus turned on to receive us?" Grag asked.

"What are you trying to do—ruin my morale before we start?" Otho demanded of the robot.

Curt had leaned forward at the window and waved to Joan, whom he could see standing outside the transparent ovoid chamber. He also descried Tiko Thrin at the big switchboard nearby. The little Martian was closing the last switches.

Then everything seemed to explode in a blaze of force. Captain Future felt the stunning shock of unprecedented energies in every fiber of his body. He had a sensation of falling into a bottomless abyss. Yet even though the powerful beam was hurling the *Comet* and its occupants across vast dimensions, Curt retained a measure of consciousness and was able to peer drunkenly out.

He had a nightmare vision of unreal spaces, through which the ship was hurtling at velocity inconceivable. It was not the void of ordinary space. This was the extra-dimensional abyss, whose super-geometrical tangle of complex coordinates baffled human perceptions. The perspective of this super-space was all wrong, impossibly curved and distorted.

Brilliant bubbles of shimmering, unreal appearance floated and streamed in this vast abyss. Each bubble was a separate three-dimensional universe

like his own, Future knew. Universes upon universes, dancing in the cosmic gulf like bubbles of shining foam! The *Comet* seemed hurtling amid those foaming universes in an impossibly complicated corkscrew curve, yet at the same time it seemed somehow to be flying in a straight line!

Captain Future had dared many alien realms in the past. But never had his mind felt so crushed and puny and helpless as now, in the unplumbed abyss of extra-dimensional spaces outside his own universe. His intelligence recoiled from the effort to comprehend this insane welter of curved spaces and the streaming rush of countless spherical universes.

Curt became aware that they were now somehow *inside* one of the bubble-universes. He vaguely sensed it as a distorted sphere of space which enclosed a brooding darkness. No glitter of brilliant young stars dispelled its night—nothing but cold, black cinders of burned-out suns, icy specks of frozen planets, and far away a cluster of smoldering red stars not yet quite dead.

The *Comet* seemed hurtling toward that cluster of dying suns, rushing deep into it toward a lurid crimson star around which circled five worlds. The innermost of those worlds loomed up—

There came again a sharp, wrenching shock that Captain Future felt through every fiber. He struggled against dizzy nausea, and realized that now his sensations were again those of his physical body. As his vision cleared, he found himself slumped in the pilot's chair. The Futuremen were staggering dazedly beside him, peering excitedly out of the window.

"Jumping sun-imps, we're not on Deimos now!" stuttered Otho. "Look out there!"

"I don't see anything much," Grag complained. "And I still feel awful dizzy."

The *Comet* was resting inside another transparent ovoid chamber exactly like the one they had left. But this chamber and its auxiliary apparatus stood on the paved floor of a dusky, open court inside some big building.

The building itself was a massive, ancient-looking structure of synthetic white marble. Its sheer walls rose all around the court for a hundred feet. There was visible overhead an oddly blurred square of dusky crimson sky.

"We've made it," Curt Newton said, his voice a little hoarse. "We're in Gerdek's matter-receiver—in another universe."

AWE fell upon the Futuremen, mingled with a feeling of incredulity. There was a silence, in which the scared Oog and Eek whimpered.

"You mean we're really twenty billion light-years away from our own universe?" Otho said unbelievably. "How could we come so far, so quickly?"

Curt struggled against his own strong feeling of unreality.

"We traveled across the fourth dimension, short-cutting the other three."

"It's still hard to believe that the fourth dimension could be spatial," muttered the Brain, with lingering doubt. "I meant to take data during our traverse that would solve that mystery, but was too overcome to do so."

"Look, there's Shiri!" exclaimed Otho, suddenly pointing out. "But who's that with her? It doesn't look like Gerdek."

Two figures were visible out there in the dusky court, running toward the chamber in which the *Comet* now lay. Captain Future hastily rose to his feet, shaking off the weakness that persisted in his body.

"Come on!" he said. "But leave Eek and Oog in the ship for the time being."

They emerged from the *Comet* into the big chamber of the matter-receiver, and passed out through a door of that chamber into the open court.

The air was surprisingly warm. Gravitation seemed about equal to that of Earth. Curt looked up quickly at the somber, dark red sky. What was that odd blur across it? Was it a transparent roof high above?

Speculation was cut short as Shiri

reached them. The Tarast girl, her platinum hair flowing down to the shoulders of her silky black robe, seemed possessed by tremendous excitement. Her pale, lovely face and big violet eyes held anxiety and fear.

"You have not come a moment too soon!" she cried to Curt. "A crisis is upon us. You alone can save the situation, but we must act quickly."

"Why, what's wrong?" Curt asked sharply. "Where's Gerdek?"

"Gerdek is at the meeting of the Council of Suns," Shiri replied rapidly. "He had to be there, to meet the accusations of Vostol and his party. He told me to bring you there the moment you arrived."

The girl's companion muttered to her in a tone of urgency. He was a fat, middle-aged Tarast, pale-haired like all these people, with a plump face now drawn by alarm.

"But why should I go to this meeting of your Council?" Captain Future was asking puzzledly.

Shiri replied hastily.

"Gerdek has been telling the Council for weeks that our great hero Kaffr would come back from the dead. He has made them this promise so that they would postpone acceptance of Vostol's plan. But now Vostol is demanding that my brother prove his assertion. The only way Gerdek can prove it is to produce Kaffr before the Council—to produce you."

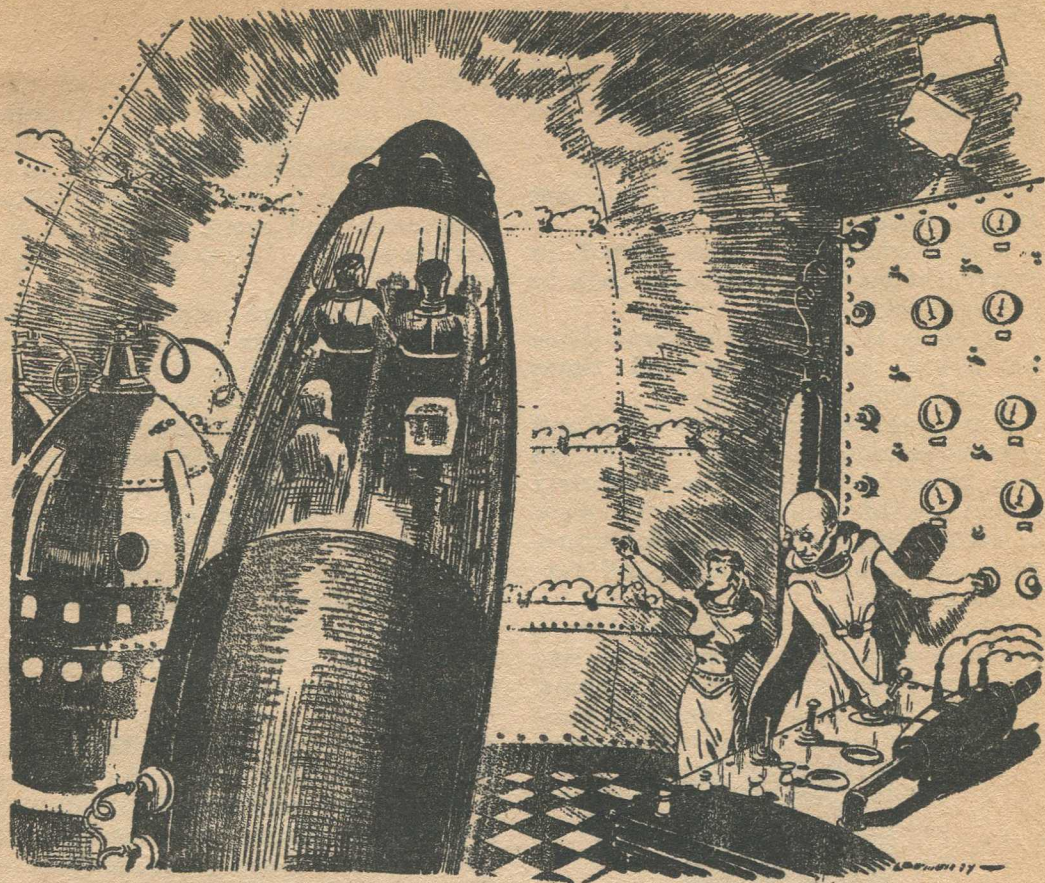
Curt was staggered.

"But we didn't plan that I should undertake to impersonate Kaffr until I had been coached for the part, so that I wouldn't make any slips!"

"I know, but now you must play your part at once," Shiri said urgently. "Vostol and his party have brought matters to a head. Unless Kaffr appears today, we of the scientist party will be forever discredited and everything will be lost."

Curt was appalled. To impersonate, without any preparation whatever, the great racial hero of these alien people! To convince them that he was that hero returned after long ages from the dead!

The audacity of the proposal seemed insane. And he did not know the meaning of all this talk about someone



Tiko Thrin closed the chamber and hastened to the switchboard. (Chap. IV)

named Vostol, who was apparently Gerdek's opponent and who had proposed some kind of plan. He didn't know anything, Curt thought dismayedly.

"Chief, it's crazy!" Otho echoed his thoughts. "You can't just walk in and say, 'I'm Kaffr!' Why, you can't even speak their language very well yet."

"Please come!" Shiri pleaded. "Your whole mission to this universe depends upon it. I'll explain as we are on our way."

THE agony of pleading on her pale face decided Captain Future. He resolved to take the plunge.

"All right, I'll do as you ask. Do you want the Futuremen to come with me?"

"Yes, they must come too. Such superhuman followers will strengthen your assertion that you are the legendary Kaffr."

She gestured toward the fat, anxious man hovering nearby.

"Dordo will guard everything here," Shiri explained. "He is utterly loyal to our party."

Her warm fingers closed upon Curt's wrist and she led the way hastily to a door in the wall of the court. They passed through cool, shadowy rooms and halls with walls of synthetic white marble and beautiful hangings of woven silk tapestries. The furniture was of shining metal, in bare, austere esthetic designs.

But everything in the place looked *old*. Dust filmed the bright colors of the tapestries, corrosion stained the metal chairs and couches. The marble floors and walls were crumbling and cracked in many places. All of the rooms had a musty, ancient look.

Curt's tall figure kept pace with the hurrying girl. Grag clanked along behind them and Otho hastened excitedly to overtake them. The Brain, cool and imperturbable as always, glided silently in the rear. Hurriedly they passed through the building and

emerged from it onto a broad open terrace, into a flood of somber red sunlight.

Captain Future paused, amazed.

"Good Lord, you didn't tell me that the place was like *this*!"

The Futuremen also halted in startled wonder as their eyes took in the astonishing vista.

"It looks like one of the dome-cities on Pluto, only a thousand times bigger!" Otho exclaimed.

They were looking across a vast and ancient metropolis of white buildings and green verdure. The countless structures of synthetic marble were of rectilinear, flat-roofed architecture, surrounded by colonnades and terraced gardens.

The whole city was enclosed by a gigantic transparent dome, that was supported by many massive columns. Through this vast roof fell the somber, dusky light of a huge dull-red sun



now sinking toward the horizon. Outside the hothouse city lay an arctic wilderness of snow and ice, whose frozen white wastes made strange contrast to the warmth and beauty within.

"Please do not delay," begged Shiri, as the Futuremen stared in amazement. "My flyer is waiting—we must hurry!"

The urgency of her plea impelled Curt Newton and his comrades toward the small craft that rested on the terrace. It was a curiously egg-shaped craft less than half the size of the *Comet*.

They entered it with Shiri. She dropped into a seat at the front and pressed simple controls. The flyer rose in the air with a hum of power.

"This craft operates by propulsion vibrations, like the *Comet's* high-speed drive," guessed the Brain, glancing at the machinery in the rear.

Shiri nodded.

"We have bigger ships of the same design, star-cruisers designed to travel the great distances between suns. Once we had thousands of such ships that came and went across all our cosmic empire. Now we have only a few left."

"You have more machines and scientific devices than I expected," Otho commented. "You told us that your people's science was almost dead."

"It is almost dead," Shiri answered sadly. "The ships and machines we have were all built long ago. There are few technicians among us now who can even repair them. Things wear out, and are never replaced."

She was driving the little flyer low across the hothouse city. There were other similar flyers abroad beneath the dome, but only a few.

CURT looked down with intense interest that even the coming crucial ordeal could not dull. The city seemed very densely populated. In its streets he could see great numbers of the pale-haired Tarast people, all wearing the silky black garments that seemed universal.

This place was ancient indeed, he saw. Many of the streets and buildings were in disrepair. In the dull red sunset, it all had a depressingly shabby aspect. Even the great dome that arched over the metropolis was itself patched in a number of places.

Shiri was speaking.

"This city, Beberos, lies on the equator of the frozen planet Tarasia. For ages, this place has been the capital of the Tarast empire. Here has always met the Council of Suns, which once ruled a domain that included every habitable world in our universe. But that was long ago. Now the Cold Ones hold most of our dying universe, and we really reign over only the worlds of this star-cluster."

"I've got to know what I'll be up against when I face your Council," Curt reminded her urgently. "How can I claim I'm Kaffr, when my appearance, my dress, even my use of your language will all give me away?"

"They'll not betray you," Shiri reassured him. "Remember, it has been

millions of years since Kaffr lived. They'd expect him to look and talk differently."

"I still think the whole scheme's whacky!" Otho objected strenuously. "These Tarasts may have decayed in scientific knowledge, but surely they're too intelligent to believe that a man millions of years dead can come back to life!"

"Tell them you were not really dead—only sleeping," Shiri said anxiously. "There're legends that Kaffr never really died, but would return when his people needed him, so it will fit in."

"All our knowledge of Kaffr is really only dim legend," she added. "The tradition is that it was he who first led the Tarast people out to colonize and conquer the rest of the universe. Probably he was really some able leader in the far-away age of our first expansion, whose name survived in dim legend."

"All that's really known about his appearance is that he was red-haired, so you won't be challenged on that."

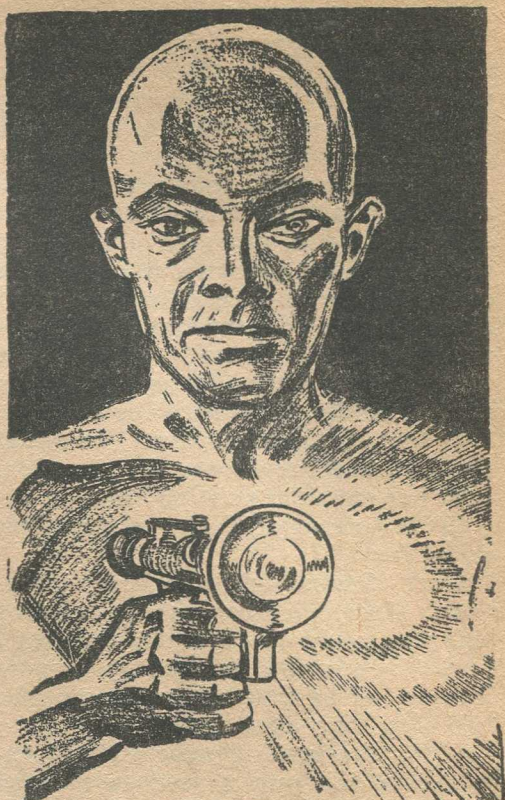
"But this Vostol you mentioned," Curt persisted. "You say he's an opponent of yours and Gerdek's party. What do you mean by that?"

"There's no time to explain fully, for we've almost reached the Hall of Suns," Shiri said rapidly. "You must understand that this cluster of dying stars is all of the universe we Tarasts now hold. The Cold Ones dominate the rest, and are now seeking to conquer this last stronghold of ours. They've established a base somewhere in the outer parts of the cluster, from which they launch frequent attacks on our capital here."

"Recently, the Cold Ones proposed a treaty with us. They would let us in peace, and attack our worlds here no more. In return, we were to agree that we Tarasts would have no more children. Thus our present generation would live in peace and comfort. After it died out, our race would be extinct and the Cold Ones would inherit this cluster, too."

Shiri's violet eyes flashed.

"Vostol and many others are in favor of accepting this proposal. They say our race will soon become extinct



OTHO

anyway, when our last suns die completely. We might as well have peace and happiness for this last generation, they contend. But Gerdek and I and others like us, who have sought to restore the ancient science, maintain that our dying universe will in time be reborn and that we must keep up the fight against the Cold Ones."

"However, Vostol's arguments have appealed greatly to the Council and the people. It will take a powerful influence to defeat him. You—the legendary Kaffr—may be able to do it."

"Some job you're being handed, Chief," said Otho pessimistically. "What happens to us if they discover you're an impostor?"

"You must not let that happen!" Shiri exclaimed distressedly. "You must guard against any slip, until we can coach you more thoroughly."

Captain Future realized that enormity of the task that was being given him. But there was little time to reflect upon its risky nature. Shiri was guiding the little flyer lower.

"This is the Hall of Suns," she said.

IT WAS a mammoth structure, this building from which once had been directed the government of a whole universe. It towered over the city Bebemos like a man-made mountain, dominating everything.

In cross-section, the great pile was a half moon. In front of its straight side was a big, crowded plaza, from which rose the giant stone figure of a statue in heroic size. As their craft slanted down past the statue, Curt noticed that the figure represented a man whose strong, idealized face was turned boldly up toward the heavens.

"What is that monument?" he asked the girl, and the answer she gave him over her shoulder startled him.

"It is a statue of Kaffr—of our great racial hero."

Curt Newton felt a sinking sensation. More and more, the audacity of this proposed impersonation unnerved him. How could he manage to pass himself off as that heroic figure who had died long ages ago?

Shiri was landing near a small entrance in the rear or curved side of the Hall of Suns. There had been great crowds of Tarasts on the front plaza, which it was evidently her purpose to avoid.

"This way," she breathed, leading the way out of the flyer. "There is a passage that leads directly to the stage of the Council Room."

Captain Future and his comrades followed her into the building. Curt could not help noticing that this mastodonic structure was ancient and crumbling, like everything else he had so far seen in the city.

They followed corridors lighted by luminous bands along the walls. They came finally to a door which Shiri opened for a few inches, after making a warning sign.

Curt heard a man's voice, powerful and clear, yet echoing as though through great spaces to his ears. Shiri abruptly grasped Future's hand.

"It is Vostol speaking now to the Council!" she whispered. "He is challenging my brother. Listen!"

Curt bent and peered through the crack of the open door. He found himself looking out into an interior amphitheater of colossal size. Tall

windows admitted the dying red light, to illuminate rising tiers of thousands upon thousands of white marble seats.

But most of those seats were empty. In the great, dusty room, only a few hundred Tarast men and women sat in the first tiers. So much had the once-mighty Council of Suns shrunk as its cosmic empire faded.

The tiers of seats faced a broad stage directly in front of the door through which Curt looked. Upon this stage were three Tarast men. One was an aged chairman who sat with his back to Captain Future. Another of the three was Gerdek, who stood a little to one side, his handsome face tense and almost desperate in expression.

The third man, speaking to the silent hundreds of the Council, held the center of the stage. Vostol, as Shiri had named the speaker, was a young, stalwart man whose voice rang out into the vast, shadowy hall with an accent of earnest conviction.

"I say again that Gerdek and his friends seek to dupe you like children!" Vostol was declaring ringingly. "They tell you a fable of the approaching return of Kaffr, only to ply you to their will. Can a man dead these millions of years come back to life?"

Gerdek spoke in defiant interruption.

"An ordinary man could not. But Kaffr had powers beyond those of ordinary men. All our legends tell us that."

There was a low murmur of agreement from the Council. It was expressive of age-old reverence for the great hero of the Tarasts.

BUT Vostol voiced the incredulity that was on the faces of others.

"Kaffr is a great legend, an heroic legend, but only a legend now," he declared. "I revere his memory. It is Gerdek and his fellow-conspirators who desecrate that memory by their lying assertions that Kaffr is on the eve of returning to our midst."

"He *will* return," Gerdek insisted desperately. "All the ancient prophecies predict that when his people need him most, Kaffr will come back

to lead them again. And we have found old records of predictions that make it certain the time of his coming is near at hand."

"But *when* will he come?" Vostol cried. "If you have proofs that he will come, you must be able to tell us the exact time at which mighty Kaffr will return from the dead."

Gerdek looked trapped and desperate in the face of that demand. The members of the Council were rising to their feet, shouting in an uproar of disputing accusations and assertions.

"It is now or never!" whispered Shiri frantically to Curt Newton.

Curt set his teeth, and strode suddenly out through the door onto the stage. The Brain and robot and android followed him.

For a moment, in the uproar of shouting dispute, no one noticed them. Then Gerdek's eyes widened as they fell on Captain Future's tall figure. The young Tarast uttered a shout that brought quick silence.

Gerdek pointed a trembling finger dramatically at Curt Newton.

"Kaffr comes back to us this very day," he cried hoarsely. "Kaffr is here now!"

CHAPTER VI

Under the Red Moons



SILENCE born of stupefaction held the vast hall. Dazed amazement was on the face of every Tarast there, as they looked unbelievably at the tall figure of Curt Newton. A shaft of light from the sinking sun struck

through the tall windows to touch his red hair to flame. Behind him were grouped the silent figures of the three strange Futuremen.

"Kaffr!" gasped the aged chairman of the Council of Suns, his eyes dilated by an incredulous awe. "It is he! The flame-haired one!"

And a swelling chorus of whispers that throbbed with utter excitement

came from the spellbound, staring Council members.

"Kaffr!"

Curt Newton, confronting those awed white faces, nerved himself for the ordeal. He was about to undertake the most audacious impersonation in history.

That meant that he must speak falsehoods now. He hated that necessity from the bottom of his soul. But he felt that it was justified by the fact that success of this impersonation might mean preservation of this desperate, dying human race.

A babel of cries was coming from the Council members. Confusion of unprecedented excitement reigned. Faces were afire with wild emotion as they looked up at Captain Future.

"Did I not tell you that Kaffr would return?" Gerdek was shouting eagerly. "He has come back to lead us against the Cold Ones!"

Vostol had been stunned and bewildered until now, staring at Curt and his comrades with the same unbelieving awe as the rest. But now Vostol seemed to recover from his first astonishment. A shade of doubt appeared on his aggressive, earnest face.

"How can this man be Kaffr?" he cried. "We all know that Kaffr died millions of years ago. I still say that not even Kaffr could come back from the dead!"

That cry of doubt momentarily checked the excited uproar. Curt saw the first signs of doubt appear on the faces of Council members. He realized that he must assert himself if the impersonation was not to fall through.

"I *am* Kaffr," Curt said solemnly. "And I did not die, ages ago. I went into a trance of suspended animation from which I have now awakened."

His voice rang out.

"Millions of years ago, I led the Tarast people in their first space-conquests of other worlds. I guided them in laying the foundations of cosmic empire. But I foresaw that a time would come when this universe would wane and die, and that then I would be sorely needed.

"So I entered that trance of suspended animation, arranging to wake when the remote time had come that

would see dire need of my leadership."

Curt gestured toward the silent Brain and robot and android behind him.

"My ancient comrades entered that trance with me, and have awakened with me. They, and I, have come to give our services once more to the Tarast people for whom we fought long ago."

A sigh of deep emotion came from his listeners. And Curt Newton rushed on, seeking to override all doubts in these critical first moments.

"Tell me—are we not needed now?" throbbed his clear voice, his gray eyes sweeping their faces. "Has the time come that I foresaw?"

The aged chairman answered, in a voice that was hoarse with feeling.

"Kaffr, if you are indeed our ancient hero, you come back to us at a truly fateful hour. Our empire is shrunken and dying. This Council of Suns of which I, Igir, am chairman, rules now only over this last cluster of waning stars and worlds that hold the surviving millions of our race.

"This last stronghold of ours is constantly attacked by the hordes of the Cold Ones, unhuman enemies whom the disastrous experiments of a Tarast scientist loosed upon our universe. Their attacks grow ever fiercer. And they say they will not cease these attacks unless we agree to stop having children, so that after this generation our race shall end."

THE old chairman gestured with a trembling hand toward the stalwart figure of Vostol.

"Vostol and many others sincerely believe it would be best to make such a treaty with the Cold Ones; for they say that our race must soon become extinct anyway, when our universe dies completely. But Gerdek and others who have sought to revive our once-great science, claim that our universe will be reborn in time and that we must fight on."

Curt Newton had listened tensely. He saw that the moment had come for him to fulfill the purpose of his impersonation.

"Make a treaty with the Cold Ones?" Curt cried in ringing tones.

"Make a treaty with deadly enemies? Is it possible that you can dream of doing that? If so, the Tarast race has decayed indeed since the long-gone days when your remote ancestors and I first conquered space!"

His voice flared.

"It is not the Tarast tradition to parley with menacing enemies, but to *fight*! It was so that we won dominion over other worlds and stars in the days gone by. It is so that you will revive the ancient glory of our all-conquering race!"

Curt's ringing words, the proud, martial appearance of his tall figure and of the grim Futuremen, seemed to act like a bugle-blast upon most of the men before him, reminding them of past glories of their race.

"Kaffr speaks truth!" a young member of the Council yelled. "We are no frightened cowards to cringe before the Cold Ones!"

"With Kaffr to lead us, we'll blast them from the sky!" cried another. "We'll never commit race suicide to buy a craven peace for ourselves."

Gerdek's handsome face was flaming with eager excitement as he saw that Curt's words were winning the day. Shiri had appeared now beside her brother, and was leaning forward to drink in every word.

"Furthermore," rang out Captain Future's clear voice, "I say that the man Gerdek is right. This dying universe will be reborn, in time. My comrades and I can give you scientific proof of it. You have only to hold on against all enemies, and the Tarast empire will rise again."

Shouts of enthusiasm greeted this assertion. Yet Curt's keen eyes noticed that many among the Council looked silent and a little doubtful, now that their first bewildered excitement was passing.

And Vostol was raising his voice above the uproar, demanding that he be heard.

"Members of the Council, will you let yourselves be carried away by brave phrases?" he cried. "We have as yet no proof whatever that this man is really Kaffr."

"Proof?" cried an excited Tarast. "His appearance is proof! Not for

ages has any man among us had flame-red hair like Kaffr's. And who but Kaffr would have such superhuman comrades as he has?"

"I demand that this man's identity be established by thorough investigation," clamored Vostol.

He was supported now by a number of voices. Other voices cried out angrily against the demand. The hall became a turmoil of excited shouts.

Curt looked tensely at Gerdek. His impersonation would soon be unmasked, if he were forced to undergo searching questioning before Gerdek and Shiri had coached him further.

"The devil!" Otho was hissing. "That Vostol is a born skeptic. They'd all accept you if it weren't for him."

"Shall I shut that fellow up, Chief?" growled Grag.

"No—hold it," Curt whispered. "I've got to carry this through somehow."

At this tense moment, the tumultuous argument in the great room was interrupted. A wild-eyed Tarast guard, gripping in his hand a gunlike weapon, came bursting in with a shout.

"The crowds outside the Hall of Suns have gone crazy!" yelled the officer. "They've heard that Kaffr has returned, and they're mad with excitement. The whole city is gathering!"

NIGHT had fallen outside. But through the tall windows came a deep, roaring sound like the thunder of distant surf. Tens of thousands of voices were shouting out there.

"Kaffr! Kaffr!" came the cry.

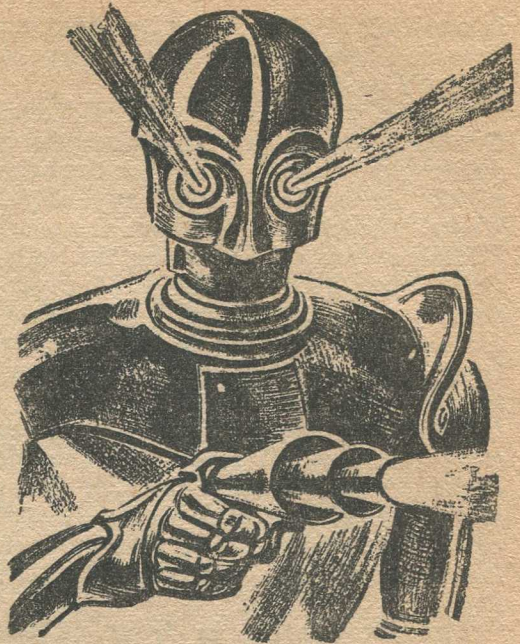
"They'll be pouring in here in a moment if Kaffr doesn't appear!" warned the guard officer. "They're insane with joy."

Igir, the old chairman, looked irresolutely at Curt.

"Then you must show yourself to the people, Kaffr."

"I protest!" flared Vostol. "It has not yet been proved that this man is the ancient hero."

"Listen to that crowd!" cried Gerdek. "The Tarast people do not need proofs—they *know* that the prophecies of legend have been fulfilled and that Kaffr has come back to save them. The mere sight of him will give them



GRAG

new courage."

Curt Newton felt an inner recoil from the necessity that faced him. It was one thing to impersonate the ancient hero before the Council. It was another thing to delude a whole people.

But this was why he had come across dimensional abysses to this universe. His imposture had no profit for himself. Indeed, he was risking his life to inspire these people and preserve them from extinction. He must go through with the job.

"I *am* Kaffr, and I will speak to my people!" Curt declared in high, vibrant tones. "Are there any doubters here who would dare try to prevent me?"

He stepped forward as he spoke, with the Futuremen following him closely. He moved down off the great stage and up the aisle of the amphitheater, in the direction from which the guard officer had come.

And the Council made way for him. Some there might be among it who doubted, yet superstitious awe made them step hastily back to clear a path for that proud, tall, red-haired figure and his three grim friends.

Gerdek and Shiri were close behind Curt. And the whole Council fell in instantly after them, sweeping along

in a tumult of electric excitement that drowned the persistent protests of Vostol's party.

"So far, you're carrying it off," said Gerdek under his breath, his breathing quick with tension. "But for the sake of the gods, don't make any slips! Vostol would seize on them at once."

Lights were shining along the halls, and Tarast guards with awed reverence in their eyes saluted Curt Newton as he passed. He emerged at the head of the excited party onto a terrace outside the Hall of Suns.

Night lay over Bebemos. Lights were gleaming all across the ancient capital. And through the dim curve of the transparent roof high overhead came the lurid light of two dull-red moons that were climbing into the sky.

The great plaza in front of the mammoth building was packed with a surging throng of countless thousands. They swirled and eddied around the colossal statue and against the front of the building. The light falling upon them revealed a sea of white faces that were all turned as one toward Curt Newton as he appeared.

The clamor of that tremendous throng died to a dead, absolute silence at his appearance. For a long moment that hush was uncanny. In it, the vast throng stared up at the tall, red-haired figure on the terrace. And then—

"Kaffr!"

That thunderous shout hit Curt in the face like a stunning wave of sound. It had in it a mad rejoicing almost beyond expression.

It was the cry of a people who looked out of a deepening shadow of cosmic doom and saw a savior. It was the cry of men who saw their hero of ages of ancient tradition, face to face.

"Kaffr has returned!"

CURT NEWTON quailed inwardly under the impact of that tremendous greeting. It was not really for him, that frantic acclaim. It was for the hero of the dim past, the man whose statue loomed high in the dark.

But the agony of entreaty on the faces of Shiri and Gerdek steadied

Curt. He raised his hand commandingly for silence.

"Yes, my people, Kaffr has awakened from long sleep to return to you in this hour of peril," rang his clear voice.

It almost seemed to Curt Newton, as he spoke, that the spirit of the real Kaffr was somehow whispering the words to him from the dead.

"I have returned to counsel you in this great crisis of our racial history," he went on. "And my first counsel is, not to despair or surrender to doom. The valor of our race won cosmic empires for us long ago, and it will save us now."

A flaming shout of utter faith and loyalty answered him. Again he raised his hand for quiet. But as the roar of the vast crowd ebbed, it was suddenly succeeded by a new and nerve-chilling sound.

A piercing, wailing note rose from somewhere atop the Hall of Suns, climbing in rapid crescendo to a screaming shriek that echoed across Bebemos like a chorus of demons. Within a moment, that eerie warning drowned out all other sounds.

"The raid warning!" cried old Igir, his face wild with alarm. "It means another attack by the Cold Ones!"

A Tarast officer came racing out of the building, saluting.

"A strong force of Cold One ships reported off Tarasia, heading toward Bebemos!" he reported to the old chairman.

Curt found Gerdek at his side in the wild confusion. The young Tarast was explaining feverishly.

"The Cold Ones have attacked Bebemos several times recently—they seek to shatter the roof that alone makes life possible here. They'll be on us in a few moments. It is up to you to lead the defense."

"But everything here is unfamiliar to me!" Captain Future exclaimed. "I don't know anything about your weapons or defenses—"

"It's a fight, and that's all we need to know!" cried Otho, his slant-green eyes glittering with sudden excitement.

"Just tell the people to take their

defense posts—they all know what to do!" Gerdek whispered hastily to Curt.

Captain Future quickly followed the suggestion. His raised hand brought silence except for the continual eerie shriek of the warning.

"People of Bebemos, to your stations!" he shouted. "Let me see tonight whether you can fight as your ancestors fought ages ago!"

The irresolution and startled panic of the throng instantly evaporated and there crashed out a yell of confidence and courage.

"We obey, Kaffr! With you to lead us, we'll destroy them when they come!"

The scene became one of uproar and confusion as the crowd broke up, men running in every direction to their stations of defense. Flyers roared low across the roofs of the city, and the screaming signal of warning never abated for a moment.

Tarast soldiery, armed with the gunlike weapons, were racing toward the giant columns that supported the great dome. Curt found himself and the Futuremen led hastily along by Gerdek and Shiri toward one of those great pillars.

"My station is in Turret Fourteen, and you had best stay with me," Gerdek was saying as they ran. "Hurry!"

Curt Newton was more than a little bewildered by the rush of events in this totally unfamiliar place. He understood nothing of the plans of attack or defense utilized by the opposing forces.

But he realized the desperate urgency of the moment. Without asking for further explanations, he accompanied Gerdek and Shiri. They reached the big pillar that was their destination. It was hollow, and inside it was an atomic-powered elevator. They shot rapidly upward.

THE car stopped. They emerged from it into a big turret that jutted up like a large blister from the curve of the domed roof. There were other turrets here and there over the roof, and they had transparent walls like the dome itself. From each turret protruded long gun muzzles.

Tarast soldiers were already at their posts at the guns here in Turret Fourteen. They wore space-suits, and Gerdek hastily snatched other suits from a rack and handed them to Curt and the Futuremen.

"Suits on!" he warned. "If the Cold Ones shatter the walls of this turret, the bitter cold outside would paralyze you at once."

"I don't need any suit," growled Grag, tossing aside the garment disdainfully. The Brain was watching with his usual imperturbability.

Curt and Otho followed the example of Gerdek and his sister in donning the suits and transparent helmets. Inside each helmet was an all-wave interphone to make conversation possible at short ranges.

"There they come!" yelled one of the Tarasts. He was pointing up toward the sky.

Captain Future looked up tensely through the turret's transparent wall. The scene was weird, with the two moons dripping bloody light upon the vast, curved dome of Bebemos.

Down through the lurid light, long, slim craft were swooping with unbelievable swiftness upon the city. Curt's heart hammered. The Cold Ones, the mysterious spawn of icy night who had overrun almost all this universe!

Guns of turrets all across the roof spat streams of small shells toward the diving ships. The shells, Curt realized at once, were atom-shells containing a charge of unstable matter that was released into a flare of atomic force wherever they struck.

The flares danced like lightning amid the diving attackers. Ships of the Cold Ones sagged and fell to crash on the roof. By the flares of their own destruction, Curt glimpsed their incredible nature.

"Good God, those spaceships are open!" he cried. "They're just fast space-sleds. How can their crews survive in airless space?"

"The Cold Ones do not need air to breathe," Gerdek said from the breach of the gun he was handling. "Ha—we got *that* one!"

But the diving attackers were loosing a hot fire of similar atom-shells

as they swooped. They seemed to concentrate their fire on the gun turrets. The flares bit holes in the tough substance of the dome.

Captain Future glimpsed, through the battle's mad confusion, a half score of space-sleds that swooped headlong to a reckless landing on the roof near a neighboring turret. He saw a horde of white, weird-looking figures jump from the sleds to attack that turret.

"They're trying to take Turret Thirteen!" yelled Gerdek in alarm. "If they take it, they'll use its own guns on the dome."

He tore open a door in the wall of their own turret.

"We've got to stop that!" Gerdek exclaimed. "Come on!"

Captain Future needed no second invitation. He had been itching to get into this fight, and here was the chance.

With Grag and Otho and Gerdek, and half the Tarast soldiers in their crew, they pitched out of their stronghold and ran across the surface of the vast dome toward the fight around Turret Thirteen.

Curt's proton pistol spat thin, dazzling rays of destruction into the vague horde of white figures hammering at the threatened turret. Otho too was shooting as he ran, and Gerdek and his soldiers were using their weapons to loose little, flaring atom-shells.

The Cold Ones turned savagely to meet this new attack. In the mingled light of the two red moons and the battle's dancing flares, the appearance of the attackers became clear to Curt for the first time.

"They're devils!" screeched Otho in horrified amazement. "Look at them!"

The Cold Ones were indeed ghastly figures. Their bodies were of human size and shape but they were not of flesh. They were of *bone*, gleaming, hard white bodies with skull-like heads from which two uncanny eyes looked forth with fixed, unwinking glare. They looked, indeed, horribly like human men changed by some dreadful metamorphosis into ossified creatures.

CHAPTER VII

On a Dead World



GRAG was in the thick of the fight around Turret Thirteen before he realized the enemy's uncanny nature. The big robot had plunged into the mêlée with a will, disdaining the use of any weapons except his

own mighty metal fists. Those fists smashed into the vague white figures of the Cold Ones with shattering effect.

Then, by the mingled light of the red moons and the exploding atom-shells, Grag saw his antagonists more clearly. At the same time came the amazed cries of Captain Future and Otho. The robot felt an equal astonishment.

"Jumping imps of Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "What are these things?"

The bodies of white bone, the skull-like, fleshless heads and faces, the glaring, unwinking eyes seemed born of a nightmare.

Captain Future's shout rallied Grag from his astonishment.

"Drive them away from the turret!" Curt was shouting.

The robot pitched into the fight. It had now become a swirling combat that seethed around the threatened Turret Thirteen. Cold Ones seeking to force their way into that turret had been taken by surprise by Gerdek's Tarasts and the Futuremen. The atom-guns of the defenders had already scythed down many of the weird, bony invaders.

The Cold Ones turned, using their own hand atom-guns. Deadly flares of force exploded all through the mêlée. Space-suited men and alien invaders slipped and staggered on the smooth roof. The raiders from the sky were still hotly attacking all over domed Beberos.

Grag's metal fists smashed into skull-faces like piledrivers. The robot felt bony heads split and shatter

beneath his blows. Atom-shells whizzed past him. The scene was a chaos of nightmare combat under the bloodlike light of the two climbing moons.

The Cold Ones who had landed on the roof gave back before the fierce attack of Tarasts and Futuremen. Their attempt to rush Turret Thirteen having been broken, they hastily retreated now toward their parked space-sleds. The whole great raid on Bebemos seemed to be ebbing.

"Don't let 'em get away!" Captain Future was yelling.

Curt and Otho were wielding their proton pistols with deadly effect.

He woke to sudden realization that a heavy metal cable was being hastily wrapped around his body.

"What the devil!" he roared ragingly, trying to get up and resume the fight.

It was too late. During the moment he had been dazed, the Cold Ones on the space-sled had seized the opportunity to bind him.

Furiously, Grag sought to break his bonds. Even his gigantic strength could not accomplish it. The metal cable was thick and strong, evidently having been designed for towing the space-sled in emergencies.

"Captured!" thought Grag furi-

*Captain Future and His Companions Battle for Survival on an
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IN

THE FACE OF THE DEEP

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COMING NEXT ISSUE



Cold Ones were falling like ripe grain before the reaper.

Grag had plunged forward after the retreating enemy. He overtook a group of them who were hastily leaping into their parked space-sled—a long, open, flat-decked craft with low side walls.

Booming his battle-cry, Grag jumped into the low craft after the escaping Cold Ones. One of the creatures was already twisting controls of the machinery at the stern. The space-sled suddenly rushed up from the roof into the night, with tremendous acceleration.

Grag was flung from his feet by the sudden jerk, and hit the deck with an impact that momentarily stunned him.

ously. "Captured by a lot of living skeletons!"

The space-sled was climbing into the night sky at a terrific rate. Its motive power appeared to be an electromagnetic vibration drive produced by the machinery at the stern. Such a drive, Grag knew, could achieve speeds many times the velocity of light.

The *Comet* was equipped with the same means of propulsion.

ALL the other space-sleds of the Cold One raiders were rising through the night also. They had broken off the attack on Bebemos, apparently having failed in an effort to take the Tarasts by surprise. They

shot in close formation out into open space, and started at high speed through the cluster of dead and dying suns.

"This is a nice fix to get into," Grag thought ruefully. "Wonder why they captured me instead of trying to kill me?"

He observed his captors more closely. He saw that these Cold Ones were not really skeletal figures, though he had applied that term to them in his rage. The arms, legs and torsos of the creatures were of human shape and size. But they seemed of solid white bone instead of flesh. The blank, bony faces of the skull-like heads were hideously noseless, though they had a mouth opening between hinged jaws.

The Cold Ones wore no clothing, except a harness of straps from which depended their hand atom-guns. Each had snapped his harness to a ring in the deck, and had secured Grag to a similar ring. Though their space-sled was now out in open, airless space, and though they had no protection at all from the cold void, the creatures seemed unaffected.

"They don't breathe air, any more than I do," thought Grag. "So they don't need to close in their spacecraft. And cold doesn't seem to bother them any more than it does me."

Two of the Cold Ones approached Grag's bound figure, snapping their harnesses to rings closer to him. They inspected him with those glaring, un-winking eyes that were horribly like big, pale jewels.

"This isn't a human like the Tarasts," Grag clearly heard one of the Cold Ones remark to the other. "Yet it was fighting for them. What can it be?"

"What do you mean, I'm not human?" bellowed Grag angrily. It was his most sensitive point. "Why, you skull-faced sons of perdition—"

He stopped suddenly, for he realized that out here in airless space his words could not carry to his captors. Then how in the world had he been able to hear the Cold Ones speak to each other, he wondered.

"If this creature is really a new device of the Tarasts," one of the Cold

Ones was now telling the other, "it would be well for us to investigate it thoroughly. That is why I ordered you to capture it instead of destroying it. We'll take it to Commander Njdd, at advance base."

Grag abruptly realized that in speaking to one another, the Cold Ones did not move their bony jaws. The fact was that his captors were not really speaking at all, though at first he had thought they were. They were conversing telepathically, and his brain caught their thoughts.

These creatures, the robot now perceived, would be wholly unable to communicate were it not for their well-developed telepathic faculty. For they spent most of their lives in airless voids where sound was impossible.

The two now left Grag to his own devices, and returned to the stern of the flying space-sled. Grag made another furious effort to burst the cable wrapped around him, but with the same negative result. He gave it up and twisted around to see where they were going.

The space-sleds of the Cold Ones, about forty ships in all, were flying at tremendous velocity through a veritable jungle of dead and dying suns. All about them in space were black, dead suns with frozen planets, and here and there an occasional star that still glowed redly with waning light. They were passing out through the close-packed cluster at the heart of which the capital of the Tarasts was situated.

Grag remembered that his captors had just mentioned an advance base to which they were now returning. He recalled also that Gerdek had referred to a base which the Cold Ones had established somewhere in this cluster, and from which they launched their frequent attacks.

"And when we get there, someone named Commander Njdd is going to look me over," Grag thought indignantly. "The idea of these bony horrors talking about *me* as though I was only a machine of some kind!"

HE was too occupied by resentment to feel any apprehension over his own fate. Grag never did

worry much about his personal safety, anyway. He had sublime confidence in his ability to take care of himself.

"Though I'd better think of something soon," he realized worriedly, "or else the chief will get anxious about me."

For hours, the Cold One raiders flew through the void at a velocity inconceivable for anything except vibration-drive ships. They approached the outer edge of the cluster. Beyond it lay dark and awesome deeps of space in which only a few scattered, dying stars relieved the gloom. This universe was, indeed, a dying one.

The raiders were now decelerating their speed. Their destination appeared to be a dead star at the edge of the cluster. It was a black, huge cinder whose fires were long since quenched. Around it revolved three small planets, all of which were sheathed in perpetual ice.

The space-sleds of the Cold Ones swept toward the third planet. They dropped rapidly through somber dusk toward its icy surface. There was no whistle of air, for this frozen world was too cold to have gaseous atmosphere.

"So this is their advance base," muttered Grag. "Wonder if the Tarasts know where it is. I suppose not, or they'd attack it."

He looked down, and saw with some surprise that upon the frozen white surface of this planet of perpetual night there lay a large city. The Cold One raiders were descending to land in an open square at its center.

The queer ships came smoothly to rest upon level ice. The captors of Grag did not unbind the robot, but rolled him off their space-sled and then dragged him across the icy surface of the square.

"This is a fine thing—hauling me around as though I were a pile of junk metal," thought Grag disgustedly.

He managed to look around as he was dragged across the square. It was dark as night on this dead, icy world. The only illumination was that which came from the cluster of dying red suns that stretched in a great drift across the black sky.

There were hundreds of Cold Ones

about. Scores of the low space-sleds were parked in the square and adjoining streets. And Grag now discovered that this city had once been a Tarast city. Its white marble structures were of the same architecture as that of Bebemos.

But it was a city of unutterable desolation and death, now. Long ago, it must have been abandoned by the Tarasts when the sun of this system had died. Ice was thick upon the marble roofs and upon the open spaces that had once been sunny, gracious gardens.

The unhuman, bony figures of the Cold Ones moving in it only intensified the somber effect.

GRAG was hauled into a marble building, which was obviously being used as the headquarters of this advance base. It was lighted by glowing bulbs, and in it a Cold One who wore a gleaming badge of office sat behind a table upon which was an unfamiliar apparatus.

"How went the raid on Bebemos, Ystl?" the creature asked the leader of Grag's captors.

Grag clearly caught the thought-impression of that telepathic question, and as clearly received his captor Ystl's answer.

"It was not very successful, Commander Njdd. Their patrols evidently warned them of our approach, for the Tarasts gave us a hot reception and we were unable to inflict any heavy damage on the city dome."

"Nevertheless," remarked Njdd telepathically, "these constant raids will wear down the Tarasts and influence them into accepting our proposed treaty."

The creature turned his hideously blank, bony white face toward the prostrate figure of Grag, inspecting him with unwinking eyes.

"What is that thing you have brought here, Ystl?"

"We don't know just what it is," Grag's captor explained. "It seems alive, though it's metal. It fought for the Tarasts with great strength, but we captured it. I thought we ought to bring it back to you for close inspection."

GRAG broke into the conversation, *thinking* angrily at the two Cold Ones who were staring at him with such infuriating superiority.

"You'll find out what I am when I get my hands loose! I'll mop up this base of yours so you'll think a meteor hit it!"

Njdd, the commander of the base, made a slight movement of surprise.

"Did you receive that thought, Ystl? This thing not only has life, it also has intelligence of a sort."

The commander seemed to make a decision.

"I am going to call Supreme Headquarters about this. They'll know at Thool what to do about it."

Njdd went to the apparatus on the table. It was a compact square box upon the face of which was a single shining knob.

The commander touched switches. Then he leaned forward and appeared to be staring intently at the shining knob. In reality, he was projecting his thoughts toward the object, for Grag was able to catch them.

"Commander Njdd at Advance Base in Cluster Two-twenty-eight, calling Supreme Headquarters on the world Thool!"

In a moment, there came a sharp thought-message that appeared to emanate directly from the shining knob.

"Headquarters answering. What have you to report?"

Grag began to understand. That square apparatus was a telepathic transmitter of some kind, designed to permit the transmission of ordinary telepathic messages across immense distances.

It was not hard for the robot to guess that Thool was the capital of the Cold Ones' power. It might lie far across this dying universe which the Cold Ones had almost completely overrun.

Njdd was delivering into the teletransmitter a concise account of the capture of Grag, and a description of the robot. There was a pause, and then came the reply.

"The captive you have taken is apparently a robot such as were manufactured by Tarast scientists in the

past. It is not human but can be used to serve humans. It is possible the Tarasts mean to make many of them to use against us. Therefore, you will ship the creature to us at Thool for examination, by the next patrol boat that you send in with reports."

Grag broke into an explosion of mental fury.

"What do they mean, I'm not human? I warned you fellows about making cracks like that!"

Njdd had turned off the telep-transmitter. He paid no attention to the robot's mental outburst as he directed an order at Ystl.

"Put the creature in one of the empty rooms and keep it bound. A patrol boat leaves for Thool tomorrow, and we'll send the thing on it."

The commander added his cold commendation.

"You did well to capture instead of destroying it, Ystl. I shall see that your meritorious action is brought to the attention of the Highest, himself."

Grag was dragged out of the lighted room and through a corridor that was part of the ancient building. He was hauled unceremoniously into a dusky, empty room and left there.

He lay, swearing to himself. It would be worse if the Cold Ones took him away to their distant, mysterious capital of Thool. Grag bestirred himself to find a way of escape.

His arms were bound tightly against his body by the thick metal cable. But by herculean efforts, he managed to twist one arm so that his right hand reached a certain part of his metal torso.

"Ah, that's better," grunted Grag. "Now if I can only get it open—"

There was a tiny locker built into Grag's metal side at that point. It contained small tools with which he kept his mechanical body in repair. He squirmed now to slide open the door of the little locker.

He got it open, and his fingers drew out a small file. He used it ordinarily to smooth out small dents in his metal hide. Now, he hoped to cut with it the cable that trussed him. The difficulty was that with his arms so tightly bound against him, he could hardly move the file.

WITH his super-strong fingers, he clumsily drew the file back and forth against the cable. His movement was so cramped that he could hardly make an impression on the tough cable. But he kept it up.

Grag could hear no sounds on this airless world. But he did receive vibrations through the floor. They told him of space-sleds landing or taking off outside the building, of Cold Ones moving nearby. None looked in at him, however. They assumed the heavy cable would hold him.

He had toilsomely filed half through the cable when he was startled by the appearance of a figure at the door. It was not a Cold One who looked in at him. It was a human—a young man in space-suit and helmet.

"Are you the prisoner the Cold Ones just brought back?" asked the man, staring in wonder at Grag's prone, mighty metal figure.

His question was audible to Grag. For Grag's electro-mechanical speech and hearing apparatus could receive from a space-suit phone.

"You're a prisoner, too?" Grag replied eagerly. "You must be one of the Tarasts."

"Yes, I am a Tarast and my name is Lacq," the other told him.

"Good, we'll get out of here together!" Grag exclaimed. "Here, you can help file away the rest of this cable."

Then Grag remembered with sudden alarm:

"Say, won't the Cold Ones in the front of the building catch our thoughts as we talk?" he asked.

"No. A thought-impression can be received only by one who concentrates his mind upon it," Lacq assured him. The young Tarast then asked, "Do I understand you to say that you're managing to cut your bonds?"

"Yes, and in a few minutes I'll be free. Then we'll crash out of here and grab one of those space-sleds for a getaway," Grag exulted. "I think I can start one of those craft."

"Wait here—I'll be back in a moment," Lacq said suddenly, and disappeared from the doorway.

In a minute the young Tarast was back. And with him came four of the Cold Ones. Lacq pointed accus-

ingly at Grag.

"You see, it is as I told you!" declared the young Tarast telepathically to the bony creatures. "Your new captive has almost cut through his bonds."

Grag was astounded, then enraged. "Why, you dirty traitor!" he cried to Lacq. "You're not a prisoner of the Cold Ones. You're working with them!"

CHAPTER VIII

Trail to Danger



CAPTAIN FUTURE, in the midst of that mad mêlée on the city roof, had glimpsed Grag rashly charging after the retreating Cold Ones. At once, he had realized the robot's peril. He shouted a warning

as Grag rushed onto one of the enemy's low space-sleds.

The warning came late. As Curt plunged forward in alarm, that space-sled took off with a rush. Almost at once, it was out of sight in the lurid red moonlight. The other surviving Cold Ones who had landed for the abortive attack on Turret Thirteen were tumbling into their craft and escaping also.

"They're breaking off the raid!" Gerdek shouted with heartfelt relief in his voice. "See, they retreat everywhere."

All across the vast domed roof of the city of Bebemos, the battle was dying away as the raiders turned and raced back out into space. The turret guns poured a last volley after them.

"They've got Grag!" Curt announced dismally. "He was on one of those space-sleds when they took off."

Otho exclaimed in alarm.

"Chief, what'll we do?" he cried. "We can't leave old Grag in the hands of those skull-faced devils!"

"We won't, never fear," Captain Future declared resolutely. "We'll get

him away from them, even if we have to follow them across this whole universe."

It was the unswerving loyalty of the Futuremen to one another that now came to the fore, the one-for-all and all-for-one spirit that made Curt Newton's little band such a formidable quartet of adventurers.

"Otho, go down and get the *Comet* and bring it up here at once," he ordered the android urgently. "We may be able to overtake those raiders."

"I'll go with him," Shiri volunteered, "and show him how to get your ship out of the city through the airlock in the dome."

Otho and the girl raced away upon their mission. The Tarast soldiers who had taken part in the fight were now hastily forming repair crews and spreading out to fix the small punctures in the dome.

"Is it wise for you to leave Bebemos now?" Gerdek was asking Curt worriedly. "Remember, you're Kaffr. The people expect your leadership—"

"As Kaffr, the only way I can really help your people is to find some powerful weapon against the Cold Ones," Curt replied quickly. "You need some weapon that will counterbalance your enemies' great numerical superiority. That's the only way you'll ever really defeat them."

"The first step in devising such a weapon is to reconnoiter the advance base of the Cold Ones, ascertain the most practicable method of attack. That fits in with the necessity of rescuing Grag."

"But we don't know where the Cold Ones' base is in this cluster," said Gerdek helplessly. "All we know is that their raids come always from the western part of the cluster."

"That makes it tougher," Curt admitted. "Still, we may be able to overtake them before the trail is lost in this jungle of suns."

The Brain, who had been hovering over the broken bodies of the slain Cold Ones called to Captain Future.

"Lad, look at these creatures. I never saw anything just like them."

Curt Newton joined him and examined the shattered bodies with in-

tense interest. He realized at once that these inhuman creatures who could live in an airless void were of a startling new order of creation.

The broken white bodies and limbs were composed almost wholly of rigid bone. The only parts not of osseous tissue were elastic, cartilaginous ligaments inside the hollow limbs, and the eyes and brain. The eyes were lenses of transparent cartilage. And the brain exposed by the shattering of one skull-like head was an organ of hard gristle.

"We can look these over later," Captain Future said hastily. "Here comes Otho with the *Comet*."

THE small ship of the Futuremen was streaking across the dome toward them. It landed quickly, and the door swung open.

"You and Shiri come along," Curt told Gerdek. "I'll need you to guide us in this cluster of suns, as far as you can."

Gerdek was worried.

"Vostol will be challenging your identity during our absence," he said. "The people and many of the Council are convinced that you are Kaffr, but he is not convinced. Our absence may tell against you."

"We'll worry about Vostol when we get back," Curt answered confidently. "So far, my impersonation of Kaffr is succeeding all right."

The *Comet* shot up from the glittering roof of Bebemos, angling steeply skyward across the icy wastes that surrounded the hothouse city. Curt and Gerdek divested themselves of the space-suits and went forward to the control room, where Otho sat at the space-stick, with Shiri near him.

Otho's little mascot Oog was rubbing himself rejoicingly against his master's ankle. But the other pet, Eek the moon-pup, ran anxiously from one to the other in vain search of its own master.

"The little mutt misses Grag," Otho commented. He looked inquiringly around at Captain Future. "What course shall I follow, Chief?"

They were already out in space. Curt peered keenly into the drift of clustered dead and dying suns that

spanned the black firmament.

"A little north of west, toward that pair of very faint stars," he directed. "I was watching Grag's captors when they disappeared, and they went in that direction. Use all speed, and we may overtake them."

Otho had switched into the high-speed vibration drive. The generators of the *Comet* were shaking the ship with their quivering drone. The little craft was now being hurled forward at a speed far in excess of that of light, by the powerful propulsion waves it jetted back.

Curt tensely scanned the vault ahead. They were flying almost due west into the great pack of clustered suns. Had they been young, living stars, it would have been a blaze of glory. But as it was the scene was depressingly somber with its vista of smoldering, old red stars and frigid worlds, and cold black embers of wholly dead suns.

Captain Future swept the void with the powerful telescopes of the control-room equipment but saw nothing of the Cold One raiders. It became apparent that they were too late now to overtake the enemy force.

"What'll we do, Chief?" Otho asked anxiously. "We can't very well search this whole wilderness of suns and worlds."

Curt turned to Gerdek and his sister.

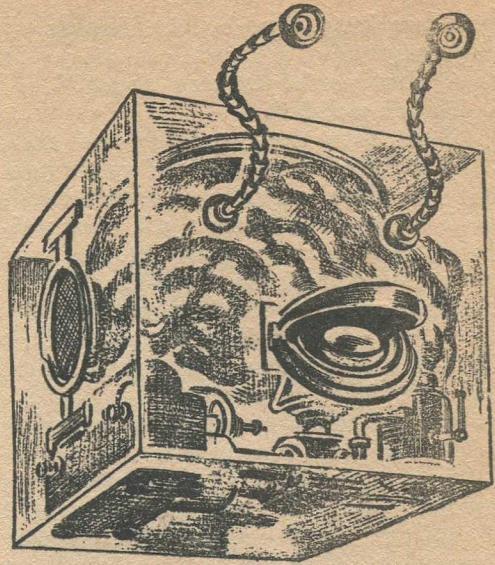
"Tell me, what's the most desolate and least-visited section of this cluster?"

Gerdek pointed a little to the right, where there was a region at the edge of the cluster composed completely of dead stars.

"That dead region there," he answered. "We Tarasts abandoned it years ago, for its worlds are too cold now even for our domed cities."

"Then head for that sector, Otho," ordered Captain Future. "It seems the most logical region for an advanced base of the Cold Ones. If their base is there, we may be able to pick up the trail."

As the *Comet* flew on a changed course toward the dark sector in question, little Eek pressed forward against the control-room window



THE BRAIN

with pitiable eagerness. The moon-pup seemed to sense they were hunting Grag.

Otho swore to himself as he looked at the somber, lifeless vista of dead suns ahead.

"Only a bunch of cursed nightmares like those Cold Ones could live in such a place. What are the creatures, anyway? They don't breathe, they have no flesh, yet they somehow look human."

"The human resemblance was very strong in those dead ones I examined," commented the Brain in his rasping voice. "It seemed to me that the creatures might be a strange variant or mutant of ordinary humanity."

"Your guess is right," Gerdek told him. "The Cold Ones came originally from our own human stock in this universe."

Captain Future was astonished.

"The devil you say! You mean that natural evolution produced such a quasi-human race?"

"No, it was not natural evolution that produced them," Gerdek answered gloomily. "It was artificial evolution."

CURT suddenly remembered something.

"Now that I think of it, old Igir said something at the Council about the Cold Ones being loosed upon this

universe long ago, by the disastrous experiments of a Tarast scientist. Is that what you're talking about?"

Gerdek nodded.

"That was their origin," he said. "It happened thousands of years ago. At that time the Tarast empire still held sway over almost all this universe. But already many of our suns were dying, and we were faced with the shadow of doom that has since become so dreadful. In those days Tarast science was still great. And our greatest scientists sought a means of combatting the growing menace of cold and night.

"One of those scientists was a man named Zuur, native of the world Thool that lies far across the universe from here. The sun of Thool was one of the first to die, and its people were transferred to other planets. But Zuur remained in his laboratories on frozen Thool, seeking a solution to the great problem facing our people.

"Zuur had a daring plan in mind. He foresaw that almost all our suns would soon be dead, and our planets cold and airless. He wanted to adapt the Tarast race to live under such conditions. His idea was to cause an artificial evolution of our human people into a new race which would be able to live on cold, airless planets.

"He was an expert in the technique of causing artificial mutations. He used that technique on certain Tarasts who had volunteered for the experiment, and produced thus a radical new mutation of the human stock. The mutants were humans completely fleshless and bloodless, their osseous bodies requiring only a few mineral elements for food.

"They could exist in airless space because they were not oxygen breathers. Cold meant nothing to them, for their bodies had no blood or liquids to freeze."

"So that was the origin of the Cold Ones," murmured Captain Future with deep interest.

"Holy sun-imps, you ought to have murdered that guy Zuur for turning loose such a bunch on you!" Otho exclaimed.

"Zuur met death at the hands of

his own creations," Gerdek said somberly. "He did not realize what a malign species he had created until they turned and destroyed him. Their minds, like their bodies, were not really human, and they were dominated only by a cold lust for conquest."

"They multiplied swiftly on that world Thool, appropriating the scientific knowledge of us Tarasts," he concluded heavily. "Then they spread out to other worlds, conquering star after star until now they rule almost all this universe from their capital on distant Thool."

"If they're as numerous in this universe as you say, it's going to be hard to find a way of crushing them," Curt said thoughtfully.

"You must find such a way," Shiri told him anxiously. "The Tarast people feel that they are saved, now that Kaffr has returned."

CURT NEWTON felt the burden of impersonation heavier than ever. He began to comprehend the tremendous responsibilities he had taken upon himself in announcing that he was the ancient hero.

"We've reached that dark region, Chief," reported Otho at this moment. "Which way now?"

Captain Future stared a little baffledly into the wilderness of wholly black star-cinders that occupied this edge of the cluster.

"There's no sign of the Cold One raiders who took Grag," he said. "We'll have to quarter back and forth through this sector and search for their base."

Gerdek was skeptical.

"It would take years to examine every frozen planet in this sector. And unless we search each planet, how will we ever find them?"

"If the Cold Ones have a base here, as we think, their ships will come and go from time to time," Curt pointed out. "Once we spot one of their craft, we can trail it."

He realized the slenderness of the chance, as well as any of his companions. But no other plan of action seemed to offer even a remote hope of success.

OTHO sent the *Comet* veering to the left, to begin the toilsome task of quartering through the somber dead region. The change of course appeared to upset Eek. The little moon-pup had until now been pressing eagerly forward against the window. Now he began to run back and forth and to evidence strong signs of distress.

"Wait a minute, Otho!" Curt called suddenly as he observed the moon-pup's distressed excitement. "Turn back to the right. I believe that Eek is trying to show us the right trail."

"You don't mean to say that little creature has any idea which way the raiders went?" said Gerdek incredulously.

"Eek has some queer powers," Curt told him. "He belongs to a species that are non-breathing also, and that have developed extra-sensory faculties to compensate for their lack of speech. Eek is always able to find Grag, somehow. Maybe he can again, even at these distances."

Otho had turned back to their former course.

"Well, what does the little mutt say about this direction?"

Curt saw that Eek had ceased his alarmed antics with the change in course, and again was straining eagerly against the window.

"This seems to be the right direction, if that moon-pup is to be believed," Curt reported. "Keep on this course for the time being."

"So now I'm piloting under Eek's orders," growled Otho disgustedly. "That's a nice state of affairs!"

The *Comet* flew deeper into the dark region. They passed majestic, black spheres that once had been flaming suns, and ice-sheathed smaller globes that long ago had been green with life.

After an hour's flight, Curt again ordered Otho to change course as Eek began to strain toward the right window. The moon-pup's queer homing-pigeon faculties seemed operating more positively now.

They approached a gloomy dead sun near the outer edge of the cluster. It had three small, icy planets, and Eek figuratively exploded with excitement

when they began to draw near to the outermost world.

"That third planet is where Grag is, if the moon-pup is right," Curt declared. "Cut in gradually around it, Otho. If the Cold One base is there, we don't want them to sight us."

"If their base *isn't* there I'll boot that mutt clear out of this universe for leading us on a wild-goose chase," Otho muttered.

They swung in a spiral around the icy ball of the third planet. The surface of the world was shrouded in perpetual darkness relieved only by thin rays of distant stars. It was Gerdek and Shiri, whose eyes were accustomed to the dimness of this universe, who first drew attention to a dead Tarast city down on the distant horizon.

"And I can glimpse ships parked in its central square!" Gerdek exclaimed. "It must be the Cold Ones' base!"

Captain Future could hardly see the city itself but he had absolute faith in the keener vision of the two Tarasts.

"Drop down at once, Otho!" he ordered. "We'll have to land some distance from the place and approach it on foot."

The *Comet* hastily descended and landed in deep snow a few miles from the abandoned city. They had not been sighted it appeared.

Curt rapidly sketched his plan of action.

"Gerdek and I will reconnoiter the place, in our space-suits. We'll take Eek along. He ought to be able to lead us to Grag if they've still got him there. Otho, you stay here with Shiri in the *Comet* so you can get away if necessary."

CURT and Gerdek donned the space-suits, and then he picked up the frantically-excited Eek and strode out of the ship.

He and the Tarast found themselves floundering in deep snow that had lain upon this planet for centuries. It was frozen atmosphere as well as water, for this was now an airless world. The darkness was a little relieved by the white glitter of the deep snow.

They trudged forward in the direction of the distant city. The snow was in many places over their heads, forcing the two space-suited men to dig their own tunnel through it. But they were not going fast enough for Eek, who squirmed frenziedly to escape Curt's grasp.

Curt's iron strength was feeling the strain, and Gerdek was staggering on his feet, when they finally reached the edge of the deserted city. With only their heads projecting from the snow, they peered across the place.

"This is the ancient Tarast city of Arara," came Gerdek's panting whisper. "I recognize it now—it's been abandoned for ages."

"It looks it, all right," muttered Curt.

CHAPTER IX

Discovery



UNUTTERABLY dead and solemn was the snow-wrapped city, brooding beneath the dark sky. It was like an epitome of the somber history of this universe, of death and cold and night engulfing everything

in their conquering stride.

Yet there was life here, at this moment. Curt could discern dozens of dark space-sleds parked in the distant central square. And he could vaguely glimpse the uncanny white figures of Cold Ones moving there.

"Your comrade would probably be in one of those buildings, if the Cold Ones are actually holding him prisoner," murmured Gerdek. "But which building? We can't search them all without being discovered."

"That's where Eek comes in handy," replied Captain Future. "He can lead us right to the building Grag is in. We'll have a chance to get him away without being seen by those bony horrors."

Eek was indeed now quivering with excitement, and tugging toward the

distant square. The moon-pup sensed the nearness of its master.

Curt and Gerdek went cautiously forward through the deep snow, making their way through the deserted streets and approaching the square from the north. Using little Eek as a living compass, they found themselves guided toward a big marble building on the north side.

The Cold Ones who were using this dead city as an advance base appeared to confine themselves to the square and the buildings which bordered it. Curt and the young Tarast were thus able to reach without detection the rear of the big building in which, they were now certain, Grag was imprisoned.

"Be ready for a fight," muttered Captain Future, drawing his proton pistol as he entered the rear door of the ancient structure.

He and Gerdek found themselves in a dark corridor. They could hear nothing, due to the absence of atmosphere. At any moment, they knew, they might step directly into a group of the uncanny Cold Ones.

Curt continued to use Eek as a living compass as they crept along dim passageways. He and Gerdek ducked back behind a turn of the corridor as they glimpsed lights and moving shapes up at the front.

Eek wriggled in an access of crazy excitement, and squirmed out of Curt's grasp. The moon-pup scuttled into a nearby chamber.

Captain Future and the Tarast hastily followed. They entered a bare, dusky room in which Grag's mighty metal form lay bound by heavy chains. Eek was gambolling around his master in frenzied joy.

"Chief, am I glad to see you!" exclaimed Grag fervently, his electro-mechanical voice reaching their space-suit phones. "I didn't think there was any chance you'd be able to find me."

"You big bucket-head, you got yourself into this mess. I ought to have let you get out of it on your own," Curt growled. "I would have too, if we hadn't wanted to reconnoiter the Cold Ones at the same time."

He was working hastily at Grag's

chains as he spoke, using little flashes of his proton pistol to slice through them. Gerdek was keeping a tense watch at the door to the corridor.

"Aw, I'd have been out of here long ago if I hadn't been doublecrossed," Grag said defensively as he rose to his feet.

He told Curt briefly of Lacq, the young Tarast who had betrayed him to the Cold Ones.

"How was I to know he was working with those devils?"

Gerdek turned, his face incredulous inside his helmet.

"I can't believe that any Tarast would join the Cold Ones!" he exclaimed. "We've never had a traitor like that in all our history."

"Well, you have one now," declared Grag. "That fellow Lacq is hand in glove with the Cold Ones."

Captain Future's face lit to a sudden inspiration.

"Listen. Could we get hold of this man Lacq and get him out of here?"

"Yes, let's seize the traitor and take him back to Beberos for judgment," Gerdek agreed passionately.

"I'm not thinking merely of punishing the man for his treachery," Curt said impatiently. "You know we came here with the idea of learning as much as possible about the Cold Ones, so that we could try to devise new methods of attack on them. Well, if this man Lacq has been allied with the Cold Ones, he must know a lot about them. We could get him to divulge that knowledge, I'm sure."

"I think Lacq is somewhere in this building yet," Grag said. "He's looked in here a couple of times."

"We'll try to find him," Captain Future decided. "It's a devilish risk, but it's worth it if we can get hold of that traitor and learn all he knows."

THEY nerved themselves for the risky attempt. Both Curt and Gerdek held their weapons in readiness for instant action. Grag picked up Eek with one hand and balled his other into a fist, as they started cautiously back out into the corridor.

Things suddenly happened with explosive swiftness. As they entered the dim corridor, they came almost

face to face with three Cold Ones and a space-suited man coming along the passage.

"That's Lacq!" yelled Grag, plunging forward. "Take care of those devils and I'll get him!"

The bony Cold Ones drew their atom-shell guns with phenomenal speed. But they could not match the superhuman swiftness with which Captain Future shot.

Three bursts of blazing force streaked from his proton pistol faster than the eye could follow. The three unhuman creatures tumbled forward, their skull-like heads shattered before they could fire.

Grag had seized Lacq's throat and was squeezing grimly through the traitor's space-suit. The man went limp and unconscious.

"Don't kill him, you idiot!" Curt cried to the robot. "Out of here, quick!"

They ran down the corridor toward the rear of the building. But the fight had not gone unnoticed. Two Cold Ones appeared at the front end of the passage.

Captain Future turned and shot with the quickness of a wolf's snap. He and Gerdek and Grag, the latter carrying the unconscious Lacq like a child, burst out of the building and started through the dead, snow-wrapped city in a run.

Curt glanced back. Space-sleds were rising into the dark sky above the square, like hornets suddenly aroused.

"Hurry!" he yelled. "The alarm's out and all the Cold Ones there will be out looking for us."

They had reached the edge of the city, were floundering out through the great drifts of snow in the direction of the *Comet*. Up across the stars of the brooding sky came the searching space-sleds.

Grag led the way, his mighty form crashing a path through the high snow despite the unconscious burden he carried. But they were less than a third of the way to the *Comet*, when one of the space-sleds furiously quartering across the heavens came diving toward them.

"They've spotted us! Duck into the

snow before they blast us!" Captain Future cried.

"They're not going to blast anybody!" Grag exclaimed. "Look at that!"

From ahead, a shining metal thunderbolt whizzed above them to attack the swooping space-sled. It was the *Comet*, and its heavy proton guns were belching deadly beams that smashed at the enemy craft.

The space-sled was ripped from stem to stern by those deadly rays. It fell, a whirling mass of wreckage and bony white bodies. Other enemy craft came rushing across the sky immediately. But the *Comet* was already swooping down toward the three fugitives in the snow.

"In with you!" Curt yelled as the open door of the hovering ship yawned beside them.

They tumbled into the air-lock and Future slammed shut the outer door.

"Okay, Otho!" he cried.

Whizz—roar! The *Comet* stood on its tail as Otho flung it out of the path of the onrushing space-sleds.

Captain Future and his two companions were flung against the wall as they scrambled with their senseless captive toward the control room.

"Take the guns, Chief!" Otho cried from the space-stick. "Simon's been using them, but he's a little slow for this party."

Otho's slant-green eyes were blazing with excitement as he flung the *Comet* all over the sky to outmaneuver the attacking space-sleds.

"Quit playing around and haul tail out of here before those devils gang up on us!" Curt ordered him. "There's too many—"

HE WAS interrupted by the raging swoop of two enemy craft, that came in from the quarter with their guns spitting atom-shells.

Otho avoided the shells by a twist of the space-stick, and Captain Future let go with two bursts of the port proton gun. The beams caught one space-sled squarely, grazed the other closely.

Then the *Comet* zoomed skyward before the Cold Ones could attack again. Otho corkscrewed the ship's

flight until the space-sleds seeking to pursue were thrown off by the ships superior speed. By that time, they were far out in space from the frozen world.

"We've left them for good," Curt said, panting. He removed his helmet and mopped his brow. "Lay your course back to Tarasia, full speed."

Otho was looking around at Grag.

"I see you hauled that big cast-iron idiot out of his jam, Chief," he commented sourly.

"No thanks to you, you misbegotten son of a test-tube," retorted Grag. "It was Eek who led the chief right to me. Yes, sir! Eek's brilliant intelligence located me, just as he found the chief for us that time on the comet-world. What would we do without him?"

"Oh, devils of space, now he's going to start bragging about that miserable moon-pup again!" exclaimed Otho in exasperation.

"What did Oog ever do to brag about?" demanded Grag. "That thick-headed little pet of yours can't do anything except sleep and eat."

Captain Future ignored the argument as he stared keenly back into space. They had definitely shaken off the pursuit of the Cold Ones. The space-sleds could not match the *Comet*'s high-speed drive.

As the ship continued to throb faster than light through the great cluster of dead and dying suns, on its return rip to Tarasia, Curt went back into the cabin with the Brain. Back there, Gerdek had stripped off Lacq's space-suit. The young traitor was regaining consciousness.

"What happened?" gasped Lacq, his pale young face dazed as he looked bewilderedly around.

"You've been captured and you're being taken back to Beberos to meet the fate you deserve, traitor!" Gerdek burst out. "The Council of Suns will sentence you to the Unbodied indefinitely for your treachery."

"You mean that this man was working with the Cold Ones?" Shiri said incredulously. "Oh, no, that's impossible."

Lacq seemed crushed by despair.

"You've ruined everything by tak-

ing me prisoner!" he cried. "You've wrecked all my plans."

"We've ruined your plans to help the Cold Ones," spat Gerdek. "Even being condemned to the Unbodied is too good a fate for *you*!"

"What is all this about the Unbodied?" the Brain asked puzzledly.

Before Gerdek could answer, Curt Newton intervened. His eyes and voice were hard as he spoke to the abashed young prisoner.

"Lacq, I don't know what this punishment is that Gerdek refers to, but I gather it's unpleasant," Curt said. "Your only chance to avoid it is to cooperate with us. You must know a lot about the Cold Ones, and we want to hear everything you know."

Lacq looked up at Curt Newton for the first time. His eyes dilated in amazement as he stared at the red-haired planeteer and then at the unhuman, hovering shape of the Brain.

"Who—who are you?" he mumbled to Curt. "You're no Tarast—"

"He is Kaffr!" Gerdek said forcefully. "Kaffr himself, come back from the dead with his comrades. Ah, that unnerves you, traitor!"

Lacq had started violently as he heard the name of the Tarasts' ancient legendary hero. He peered frozenly at Curt's face.

"It's true—you do look like Kaffr," he murmured in awe. A wild joy appeared in his eyes. "Kaffr, come back to help our people!"

"The Tarasts are no longer *your* people, traitor!" said Gerdek.

"But they are!" Lacq declared earnestly. "I am no traitor, really. I pretended to be one, yes. I joined the Cold Ones and offered to help them, but only because I had a plan to aid my own people."

"Lies!" said Gerdek contemptuously. "The fellow is trying to squirm out of his treachery. Didn't he betray Grag to the Cold Ones?"

"I didn't know the metal man was a Tarast ally," Lacq protested. "And I was desperate to gain the Cold Ones' confidence, to aid my plan. That is the truth!" Lacq went on. "My plan was to find the hidden secret of the Cold Ones, the secret vulnerability which would enable us to conquer

them if we only knew it. It is the one thing in this universe of which they are afraid."

CHAPTER X

Disaster



CAPTAIN FUTURE was instantly alert.

"What's this you're saying? You claim that the Cold Ones have a vulnerable weakness that nobody knows about?"

Lacq's head bobbed excitedly.

"Yes, Kaffr. It is so."

"Do not believe him," Gerdek advised Curt heatedly. "No Tarast has ever heard about any such secret weakness of the Cold Ones. How would *he* know anything about it?"

"I know," Lacq replied simply, "because I am a descendant of the man who first created the Cold Ones. Zuur, the scientist, was my remote ancestor."

Captain Future felt dawning excitement.

"Zuur, the man who produced the Cold Ones by artificial evolution on the world Thool? You are descended from him?"

"That cannot be so," Gerdek declared. "For Zuur's family perished as he did when the Cold Ones he had created slew him."

Lacq shook his head.

"No, Zuur's family did not perish, though everyone thought they did. They had left Thool before the fatal experiments began. After the tragedy, they changed their family name."

"They did so," he added with a trace of bitterness, "because all the Tarast race blamed Zuur for creating the Cold Ones. They knew this universal resentment and hatred would extend to the dead scientist's family."

Shiri looked excitedly at Curt Newton.

"It sounds like the truth to me, Kaffr!"

Curt reserved judgment.

"Let's hear your story," he told Lacq.

Lacq spoke with earnest eagerness.

"I will tell you, Kaffr. Perhaps my plan is not yet lost, now that you have returned."

He talked rapidly.

"We of my family have always kept secret the fact that we are descended from Zuur, of such unhappy memory. But some of the papers and notes of our unfortunate ancestor, we have always preserved. Recently, I examined those papers for the first time.

"I found little in them worthy of note. There were records of experiments, but these I could not understand; for you know how much our scientific knowledge has decayed. But I did find among the papers a last letter which Zuur had written to his wife from the laboratory on frozen Thool.

"Zuur wrote:

"My latest attempt to create a new mutant race of humans, to fit the changed conditions of our universe, has been a failure. These new mutants can endure cold and airlessness, as I had hoped. Their osseous bodies require only simple mineral elements for sustenance. They are highly intelligent, too, though their intelligence is of a coldly malignant type. This leads me to think my process changed the human mind or soul, as well as the body.

"But despite their intelligence and capabilities, they are a failure. For though they can endure the most extreme conditions of cold and hardship, they have one hidden weakness in their makeup that would render them vulnerable to extermination by anyone who knew it.

"So I am going to destroy them and try again, in order to develop a different mutant of less malignant type who will not possess this dangerous and vulnerable weakness."

Lacq paused a moment, and then went on earnestly.

"That is what my ancestor Zuur wrote in his last letter. It was the Cold Ones he was writing about, and whom he meant to destroy. He never did so, however. The Cold Ones must have guessed their creator's intention—for they killed him first. Then they

spread out from Thool, increasing in numbers and invading all the universe."

Captain Future felt a growing excitement.

"This vulnerable weakness of the Cold Ones to which Zuur referred—was there no hint of its nature?"

Lacq shook his head.

"No, there was not. I searched through all the surviving papers of Zuur which my family possessed, but without success."

"Lad, if we could learn that secret, vulnerable point, we could destroy the Cold Ones!" exclaimed the Brain.

LACQ'S head bobbed.

"That was my plan! I reasoned that the secret might exist in records made by Zuur in his laboratory at Thool. If I could find and search Zuur's records there, I would hold power to eliminate forever the menace of the Cold Ones.

"But how was I to get to Thool to make such a search? It seemed impossible, for distant Thool is now the capital of the Cold Ones' power. On that forbidding, icy world far across the universe lies the central city from which their king reigns. How could I reach and search that world?"

"I decided that my only chance lay in subterfuge. I would become an ally of the Cold Ones, a supposed traitor to my own race. In that way, I might be able to reach guarded Thool.

"But though they accepted me as an ally because of false information I gave them, the Cold Ones would not permit me to go to Thool. Then you came and captured me, Kaffr."

Curt Newton asked a keen question.

"Even if you had got to Thool, how could you have much hope of finding the secret of the Cold Ones' vulnerability? Wouldn't Zuur's laboratory and records be gone, after all this time?"

"No, the laboratory of my ancestor Zuur still exists on Thool," Lacq asserted. "I learned from the Cold Ones whom I 'joined' that the laboratory is still there. I gathered that the creatures shun that place of their creation. They say the place is haunted by terrible danger."

Curt Newton's gray eyes gleamed.

"Lacq, I believe your story. And I think it gives us the chance I've been looking for. The chance to devise a weapon with which the Tarasts can hurl back the Cold Ones for good!"

Gerdek looked doubtful.

"You think the Cold Ones really have such a vulnerable weakness? But what could it be?"

"I haven't an idea," Curt admitted. "But Zuur knew what it was. He created the Cold Ones; he knew more about them than anyone else. If we could go to Thool and search his records—"

"Go to Thool?" Gerdek repeated. "You talk as if it were easy! Do you think you can just speed to Thool in this ship without trouble?"

"I suppose it wouldn't be easy," Captain Future conceded. "But we've got into some tightly guarded places before this."

"You don't know of what you speak," Gerdek said emphatically. "You would not have one chance in a million of reaching Thool. That icy world lies far across our universe, countless leagues away."

"All those vast spaces and their dead suns and worlds are patrolled and inhabited by the Cold Ones. Their ships are everywhere. You'd never get through."

Shiri nodded troubledly.

"And even if you did by some miracle win through the Cold One patrols, you'd find Thool so guarded that you would be discovered and seized almost at once," she warned.

"I am afraid they are right," Lacq said discouragedly to Curt. "No Tar-

ast ship for centuries has succeeded in even getting near Thool. It would take every star-cruiser we have to smash a way through to it."

Captain Future's eyes flashed.

"Then we'll gather every Tarast star-cruiser for just such an attempt! We'll assemble a force and make a swift surprise raid across the universe to Thool. Once we overcome its defenses, we can find Zuur's ancient laboratory and search his records."

The three Tarasts seemed dumfounded by the suggestion.

"But my people never have dreamed of carrying the attack to our outnumbering enemies!" gasped Gerdek.

"That's the very reason why the Cold Ones won't be expecting a savage assault on their capital," Curt retorted.

LACQ'S face lit up.

"Kaffr, only you would have thought of such a daring plan! And it could succeed! Before the Cold Ones could rally their far-flung forces to the point of counter-attack, we would have had a chance to find my ancestor's secret. With it, we could repel all their hordes."

"But will the Tarasts agree to make such an attack?" Curt Newton asked anxiously.

"They'll follow Kaffr anywhere!" Shiri told him eagerly.

"Good!" Curt exclaimed. "We'll soon be back in Beberos. I'll propose the plan to the Council of Suns at once."

Taut impatience possessed Curt Newton as the *Comet* flashed through

[Turn page]

NO FINER DRINK...

for Salesgirl—or Sailor



the cluster of dying suns, toward the heart of the shrunken Tarast empire. Curt felt the thrill of the offensive he had planned, the audacious, desperate foray that he would lead across this waning universe to the guarded citadel of the Cold Ones' power.

The risks would be great, he knew. But they were worth taking, when there was chance of finding the ancient secret that would give them power to destroy the treacherous enemy. For that would mean that the Tarast race could live in safety, until the future day when their universe was reborn and their cosmic empire once more expanded.

The *Comet* swept down through red sunlight toward the vast, gleaming dome of Bebemos that lay like a shining bubble on the snow. Day had come again to the Tarast capital, during the adventurers' absence.

"Land on the spaceport outside the city gate," Gerdek directed Otho. "There, where you see the star-cruisers parked."

There were a dozen of the Tarast star-cruisers, ancient-looking ships battered by much use. They were of the same general design as the *Comet* but were somewhat larger.

"We can assemble a force of about forty star-cruisers from all our worlds," Gerdek told Captain Future. "It is all we have left."

Curt nodded thoughtfully.

"It won't be a very strong force, but it should be enough for the surprise raid on Thool."

They left their ship at the spaceport and hastened through the bitterly cold air to the gate of Bebemos. The warmth of the hothouse city was exceedingly welcome.

"Now to the Council to tell our plan!" Curt said eagerly.

A party of Tarast soldiers approached them. Their officer's pale face was masklike as he spoke to Curt Newton.

"Stranger, you and your comrades, and Gerdek and Shiri also, are commanded to appear before the Council of Suns," he said. "My men will conduct you there."

"You can't mean that you're arrest-

ing *Kaffr*!" cried Gerdek.

The officer's voice was stern.

"Vostol claims that he can prove absolutely that this stranger is *not* Kaffr. The Council will judge!"

CHAPTER XI

Checkmate



CURT felt a shock of dismay at this dire information. He had assumed that his impersonation of the ancient hero would not now meet serious challenge. When he had left Bebemos, the wild cheers of the Tar-

ast people for Kaffr had still been ringing in his ears.

But it was now evident that Vostol had remained unconvinced. Determined to unmask Kaffr as an imposter, Vostol had apparently used the Futuremen's absence to gather evidence of some kind against them. And this disastrous turn of events came at the very moment when Curt was planning to use the prestige of his position, to lead the Tarasts in an expedition that might mean their eventual salvation!

"I knew it was unwise to go and leave Vostol to plot against us!" Gerdek was exclaiming, in a tense whisper. "What can his proof be?"

"We'll worry about that when the time comes," Captain Future muttered. "Don't lose your nerve. Everything depends on our maintaining my impersonation of Kaffr."

The officer took a step forward.

"The Council is waiting!" he said shortly.

Curt murmured a hasty word to Lacq, who seemed stunned by this crisis.

"You leave us, Lacq—I'll get in touch with you later," he ordered. "And don't worry. We'll carry out our plan as soon as this is smoothed over."

Lacq nodded earnestly.

"I'll do as you say, Kaffr."

Curt turned calmly to the others of his group.

"We will go with these soldiers to the Council."

"Say, I don't like this—" Otho began rebelliously, but Curt silenced him with a sharp glance.

They went through the streets of Bebestos toward the distant, looming pile of the Hall of Suns, with the soldiers marching behind them. There were throngs lining the marble avenues, but from their midst came now no wildly enthusiastic shouts of "Hail, Kaffr!"

The Tarast populace watched the suspects pass in troubled silence. The people seemed stunned by the possibility that their miraculously returned hero of legend might be an impostor.

Curt Newton grimly resolved to carry through his impersonation at any cost. It was not for his own sake—it was for the sake of these people who now watched him in such stunned silence. Only with the prestige of the legendary hero could he hope to lead the Tarasts to victory over the malign fate that threatened them.

As they passed beneath the gigantic statue of Kaffr and into the Hall of Suns, Otho whispered worriedly to Curt.

"Chief, we're walking into a trap! There's no telling what they will do to you if Vostol can really prove you're an impostor!"

"Yes, let's turn around and crash our way out of here to the *Comet*," Grag proposed uneasily.

"And give up all hope of helping those people, just when we've found a plan for doing so?" Curt retorted. "No, we're sticking it out. Vostol can't prove anything."

He wondered what kind of evidence Vostol had gathered. No time for speculation now! The moment of crisis was at hand, for they were entering the Council Hall.

Every member of the Council of Suns was in his seat. The tiers of dusty, empty seats loomed far up into the shadows around this group of hundreds who silently watched the Futuremen and Gerdek and Shiri, as they appeared upon the broad stage. Old Igir, the chairman, came forward.

But Captain Future was first to speak, for he meant to carry the fight to his enemies. His voice rolled out wrathfully to the Council.

"Is this the welcome you give Kaffr when he comes back from battle against your enemies?" Curt demanded. "Was it for this that I returned to my people—that they might arrest me like a common criminal?"

IGIR shrank back a little from Captain Future's thundering accusation. Doubt and lingering awe showed on his troubled face.

"If you are really Kaffr, we apologize," he said hastily. "But charges have been made that you are only an impostor who seeks to deceive us. We must investigate such charges."

"And who makes those charges?" Curt flared, his narrowed gray eyes sweeping the faces of the Council. "Who is it here that challenges my identity?"

Vostol promptly rose and stepped up onto the stage.

"I make them! I say that you are not Kaffr, and that you have conspired with Gerdek and his party to play this rôle."

Vostol's strong face had not a quiver in it as he faced Captain Future. The passionate determination in his eyes was unflinching.

The man's sincerity and strength were unquestionable. At another time, Curt would have admired him for so standing up against the influences of superstitious legend which had awed most of the others. But he realized the danger of this man's obstinate skepticism.

"So it is Vostol who still talks against Kaffr!" Gerdek was exclaiming angrily. "While Kaffr is out fighting our enemies, Vostol whispers baseless accusations against him."

"My accusations are not baseless," Vostol replied firmly. "I will prove them beyond doubt."

A chill feeling of uneasiness touched Captain Future. The confidence of Vostol worried him a little. But he did not show it outwardly.

"If you have proof that I am not Kaffr, why do you not present it?" he challenged the Tarast.

"I intend to do so," Vostol said grimly. "I shall prove that instead of being Kaffr, you are an adventurer from a remote world outside our universe, who has conspired with Gerdek and Shiri to impersonate our ancient hero."

Curt felt momentarily dumfounded. By some means, Vostol had penetrated the truth!

"Chief, he's found out!" Otho whispered in alarm to Captain Future. "Let's get out of here while we can."

"Stay where you are," Curt muttered. "It's his word against mine. He can't prove it."

Vostol had turned and was making a signal. A pair of Tarast soldiers who had apparently been waiting in an antechamber now came out onto the stage. With them, they brought a prisoner.

The prisoner was a fat, plump-faced Tarast man of middle age. His features were gray with terror. Curt recognized the man at once, as the follower of Gerdek who had been with Shiri when the Futuremen had first arrived in this universe.

"It's Dordo!" Gerdek was murmuring in a strangled voice. "Gods, if he's told anything to Vostol—"

Their worst apprehensions were quickly confirmed. Vostol spoke to the fat, terrified Dordo in a ringing voice.

"Dordo, tell the Council everything you know about this stranger who calls himself Kaffr!"

Dordo's terror-stricken gaze wandered from the stern features of Vostol to the incredulous, horrified faces of Gerdek and Shiri.

"I didn't want to tell him anything, Gerdek!" wailed the fat man. "But he threatened me into it. He threatened to have me condemned to the Unbodied if I didn't!"

Captain Future realized instantly that exposure was at hand. It seemed doubtful that he could carry off his impersonation much longer. His hand dropped unobtrusively to the hilt of his proton pistol, and he made an imperceptible signal to Grag and Otho and Simon Wright.

Curt had instantly decided that if all else failed, they would force their

way out of this situation. The fate of this whole human race depended upon Zuur's secret hidden somewhere on distant, forbidden Thool. He must not give up the plan to attain that secret, no matter what happened.

DORDO was pouring out his confession in a gasping voice to the astounded Council of Suns.

"—and so Gerdek and Shiri brought the red-haired stranger and his comrades from realms outside our universe, by that means. They wanted him to pose as Kaffr, so that the Tarasts would reject the proposed treaty of the Cold Ones, and—"

Curt Newton whispered an almost inaudible word to his Futuremen.

"Now!"

His proton pistol flashed into his hand as he spoke, and its muzzle covered Vostol. Otho and Grag, tense and dangerous, had drawn their own weapons in the same instant.

"No one will move," Curt rapped. "We are going out of here. Gerdek—Shiri—get around here behind me."

The Council of Suns seemed petrified by the swiftness of the Futuremen's action. Vostol flushed an angry red.

"So you think that you can escape, now that you have been unmasked as a lying impostor!" he grated to Captain Future.

"I'm no impostor—I *am* Kaffr," Curt retorted, still dauntlessly maintaining his impersonation. "But I can see that you are persuading this Council otherwise. I don't intend to let my plans for helping the Tarasts be ruined by your stupidity."

"We are leaving here and we are taking you, Vostol, as a hostage," he continued shortly. "No one else will leave this building."

"Wait a moment, false Kaffr!" exclaimed Vostol, his eyes flashing. "I was expecting some such attempt as this on your part when we exposed you. And I prepared for it. Look up there!"

He gestured as he spoke toward the empty tiers of seats that rose in the shadows above the stupefied Council members. Tarast soldiers holding leveled atom-shell guns had risen sud-

denly to their feet up there. And their weapons were trained upon the Futuremen and their comrades.

"You can doubtless kill me," Vostol was saying firmly to Captain Future. "But your own life and the lives of your fellow-conspirators will pay the price."

There was a moment of frozen silence in which Curt Newton realized that he had been effectually checkmated.

The soldiers up there in the shadows could pour a deadly hail of atom-shells down onto the stage. And while he and the Futuremen might be able to fight their way out, Gerdek and Shiri would die in the first crashing volley.

Nor could he get out of this by threatening Vostol's life. Vostol was honestly convinced that he was performing a great service to his people by exposing Curt's impersonation. Vostol, in his obstinate way, would let himself be killed rather than see the Futuremen escape. And Curt knew he couldn't really kill the man—that had only been bluff.

Otho's slant-green eyes were blazing and his voice came in a sibilant hiss.

"Shall we fight it out, Chief?"

"No, please!" Shiri begged agonizedly. "There must be no bloodshed. These people simply do not understand—"

"Unless you drop your weapons, I will order the soldiers up there to open fire!" came Vostol's stern warning.

Captain Future knew that he was beaten, for the time being. He could not precipitate a slaughter of innocent men who were honestly doing what they thought was their duty. Even if he made the attempt, the chances of getting away in the *Comet* would be slim.

"Drop your pistols—we can't start a killing here," he murmured to the Futuremen. "I'll have to talk our way out of this."

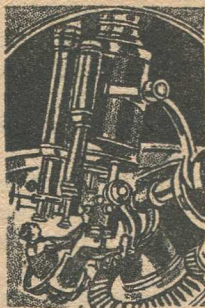
"But, Chief—" Grag started to protest strenuously.

Captain Future repeated his command.

"Do as I say, Grag."

CHAPTER XII

The Unbodied



THEIR proton pistols clattered to the floor. At once, Vostol made a signal and Tarast soldiers hastened out onto the stage. While the other soldiers kept their weapons trained on Curt and his friends, these men

quickly bound the hands of Captain Future's party.

They used heavy metal cuffs capable of restraining even Grag. That Vostol had made his plans in advance was evidenced by the fact that the soldiers also brought a net of metal mesh, which they flung around the Brain. Effectually made a prisoner by the net, Simon sputtered wrathfully.

"Let me talk," Curt Newton said in a taut, low voice. "I've got to convince them that we're here as friends, not impostors."

Vostol had turned toward the petrified Council.

"Now you see that I spoke the truth when I said this man could not be Kaffr! You have heard a confession of Gerdek's conspiracy from the lips of his own follower."

"It is so," muttered old Igir dazedly. He looked crushed. "And only yesternight, we were rejoicing because Kaffr had returned."

The Council of Suns seemed to feel the same tragic shock of disappointment as the old chairman. Their pale faces mirrored despair.

"I tell you, I am Kaffr!" Curt Newton declared. "It is true that I came here from realms outside this universe. But it was in those outer realms that I spent the long ages of sleep of which I spoke."

He was not convincing them—he saw that. Their faith in his super-human identity had been shattered by Dordo's damaging confession.

"You must believe me!" Curt urged desperately. "I only came because Gerdek and his sister called on me to

help your doomed people. And I can help you, if you will only let me.

"This universe will in time be re-born," he continued earnestly. "The Tarast scientists of old who prophesied that were right. And if you can defeat the Cold Ones, your race can live until the rebirth of this universe makes possible the reestablishment of your empire."

"Kaffr speaks the truth!" Gerdek cried appealingly to the incredulous Council. "And he has found a chance to defeat the Cold Ones decisively. There is a secret that will enable us to shatter them forever, if you will only follow Kaffr's leadership—"

"You talk of Kaffr, when we have just proved that this impostor is not Kaffr!" Vostol exclaimed harshly.

He addressed the Council with an earnest sincerity that was unquestionable.

"I seek only the happiness of our people. And I say that we must accept the inevitable fate that our race approaches the end of its history. In spite of vague and baseless claims to the contrary, we *know* our universe will soon be dead, for its last suns are dying even now.

"Therefore, the Tarast race can endure but a few more generations, in any case. Why should we inflict the misery of a terrible existence on those last few generations, people who will gradually freeze and die until the last wretched survivors are killed by the Cold Ones? Why not make this present generation the last, and with it bring the life of our race to a peaceful, happy conclusion?"

"We can do that," Vostol continued earnestly. "We need only agree to the treaty proposed by the Cold Ones, and promise that this will be our last generation and that we will have no more children. If we do that, the Cold Ones will stop attacking us and we last Tarasts will have peace."

Old Igir spoke in a slow, heavy voice.

"You are right, Vostol. There seems nothing else to do now that Kaffr, our last hope, has proved a fraud." The chairman addressed the silent Council. "Do you assent to make a treaty with the Cold Ones?"

In a dead silence fraught with the tension of a fateful decision, the Council members reluctantly raised their hands in affirmative vote.

"Don't do it!" begged Gerdek, agonized. "You're committing race suicide when you agree to make this treaty!"

They ignored his appeal. Reaction from the shattering of their faith in Kaffr had compelled their surrender to Vostol's plan.

ILD IGIR was addressing Vostol. "The Council has decided. Are you ready to negotiate the treaty with the Cold Ones?"

Vostol nodded.

"When the Cold One envoys first proposed the treaty, they gave me one of their telep-transmitters with which I could call them if we decided on acceptance. I have it here now."

He brought out the square apparatus that was used by the enemy race for long-distance transmission of telepathic messages. Vostol touched the switches of the compact instrument, and then seemed to stare in concentrated silence at the shining knob upon its face.

Several minutes passed silently, while the Council and the prisoners tensely watched. Then Vostol turned off the telep-transmitter and straightened.

"I established telepathic contact with the Cold Ones' capital at distant Thool," he reported. "Their ruler, Mwvr, spoke to me. When I told him we had decided to accept their proposal, he requested me to come to Thool to negotiate the treaty."

"Mwvr promised me safe-conduct to Thool," Vostol added. "I am to go in a star-cruiser marked with a silver circle, and all patrols of the Cold Ones throughout the universe will be instructed to let that cruiser pass."

Igir nodded haggardly.

"A star-cruiser will be made ready for you at once. But what shall we do now with the false Kaffr and these other convicted conspirators?"

Vostol and all the members of the Council looked at Curt Newton and his fellow-prisoners. There was a momentary silence.

Then Vostol spoke heavily.

"We have no choice," he said. "They are too dangerous to be allowed freedom, and they have merited our heaviest punishment. They must be imprisoned with the Unbodied."

"Oh, *no!*" exclaimed Shiri, with a little cry of horror. The same horror was reflected from the face of her brother.

Captain Future wondered puzzledly again what there was about this mysterious punishment of the Tarasts which so terrified people. As he wondered he was raising his voice in final desperate warning.

"You are sentencing your race to death needlessly when you reject my leadership!" Curt cried. "I tell you, you must not make that treaty!"

Igir, ignoring him, was speaking troubledly to Vostol.

"Many of the people still will believe that this man is really Kaffr. There may be riot and dissension if we announce that we've condemned him to the Unbodied."

"Then do not announce it yet," advised Vostol. "Announce merely that the charges against Kaffr are still being considered and that judgment has been deferred until later. Then, after I have returned from Thool with the treaty we can explain all to the people."

"We will do that, then," Igir decided.

With pity in his eyes, the old chairman faced the soldiers.

"Take the prisoners down to the vault of the Unbodied," he directed.

Captain Future and his friends were conducted out of the great hall and down winding stairs that dropped, level after level, into subterranean chambers beneath the Hall of Suns. The stairs were hewn from solid rock, and there was no light except for a few glowing bulbs.

"Don't give up hope, Gerdek," Curt muttered to the crushed Tarast beside him. "Things aren't finished yet. Even if Vostol concludes the treaty at Thool, there'll still be time in which to fight against it."

"No, there will be no time then," Gerdek replied hopelessly. "For if the treaty is signed, then at once the

whole Tarast race will be required to submit to self-sterilization which will forever destroy the power of my people to have children. That will mark the end of our race."

CURT NEWTON frowned at this information.

"That shortens down the time-limit, all right. It means we'll have to escape imprisonment before Vostol actually reaches Thool and signs the treaty."

"Escape?" echoed Gerdek incredulously. "You don't know what you're talking about. There is no escape from the Unbodied!"

"Don't you believe it," Captain Future retorted confidently. "I've been in lots of queer prisons in my time, and I escaped them all."

"But they're not going to put us into any prison!" Gerdek exclaimed. "You don't understand. The Unbodied are men and women whose minds are dissociated from their bodies."

Curt started.

"What in the world are you trying to tell me?" he demanded.

"Chief, it doesn't sound so good to me," Otho hissed uneasily.

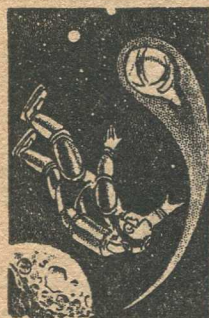
"It's the truth," Shiri affirmed tragically. "Long ago in the great age of Tarast science, a machine was invented which could dissociate the mind from the physical body. The body then lies like dead, while the mind wanders as a bodiless phantom entity. We do not now understand completely the principle of the ancient machine, but we still can operate it."

"And it is used for the punishment of criminals," Gerdek added hoarsely. "Imprisonment would be impractical, in our crowded cities. So condemned criminals are sent into the Unbodied for definite terms, their minds expelled from their bodies to wander like homeless ghosts."

Captain Future felt an icy shock of dismay at this horrifying information. It seemed incredible, yet it was scientifically possible—

"So *that's* why all you Tarasts fear the very mention of the Unbodied!" Otho was saying, appalled. "And that's what they're going to do to us!"

CHAPTER XIII

Phantom Prisoners

THEY had now reached the lowest subterranean level. The guards, watchfully covering the bound prisoners with their weapons, halted them in front of a massive metal door with a complicated combination lock.

"The vault of the Unbodied!" whispered Shiri, her great violet eyes wide with shrinking horror.

Curt's mind was in a turmoil. He had to think of something, and think fast. He couldn't let them put him into a horrible state like that.

The old chairman, Igir, had followed them down the stairs and was now touching the studs of the massive lock. The door clicked open. Captain Future and his fellow prisoners were thrust sternly through.

They found themselves in a dimly lighted space of forbidding aspect. It was a big, vaulted rock chamber whose chill was freezing. Most of its interior was occupied by tiers of transparent coffins, in which lay men and women whose faces were stony and unmoving.

"They are not dead—they are only frozen bodies whose minds have been wrenched out of them," Gerdek murmured hoarsely. "We'll soon be like them."

"Not much *I* will!" bellowed Grag. "Nobody's going to file *me* away like that!"

And the big robot made convulsive efforts to break his metal wrist-cuffs. Curt Newton and Otho were making equally fierce efforts.

It was in vain. The stout metal cuffs held even Grag. And the Tarast soldiers rushed in and seized them, holding them helpless.

"No use," Curt told the Futuremen. "It's my fault for getting you into this."

Igir was giving orders to the Tarast guards.

"Put the helmet of the machine on the girl. She goes first."

The Tarast soldiers dragged Shiri toward a large, squat machine in the center of the vault. Complexities of electrical coils and tubes were covered by a round copper platform. From the high back of the machine bulged a big copper bulb, mounted on insulated standards.

Shiri struggled wildly as she was forced onto the platform. Her black robe was torn away, her slim young body unclad except for the white shorts and halter she had worn beneath. While the soldiers held her, a curious hemispherical glass helmet was forced down upon her head.

Gerdek was shouting in hoarse rage, and Curt Newton was struggling furiously to go to the girl's help. But before they could accomplish anything, old Igir closed the switches and turned a rheostat.

"Gods of Space!" choked Otho, appalled by what followed.

A blaze of green force gushed from the copper bulb and struck the glass helmet that enclosed Shiri's head. She reeled from the impact.

The mysterious energies striking her helmeted head flowed down through her body to the copper platform on which she stood. They bathed her in such fierce light that her skeletal structure was half revealed. The green rays gave an uncanny green tint to the Tarast guards around her.

Then Shiri's body went limp and lifeless. Igir gave an order, and the girl's body was placed in a coffin. Captain Future was now dragged to the machine. And he felt a freezing horror as he vainly struggled.

He had divined the nature of this instrument of ancient Tarast science. The human mind was really a web of electric force imposed upon the neurones of the living brain. This machine wrenched that tenuous electric web from the brain and embodied it in a pattern of immaterial photons!

Grag was raging madly.

"If you do that to the chief, I'll kill every man on your Council!"

Igir's aged face was pale.

"I hate to do this to you all, even though your deception merits it," he

told Curt. "But I must."

The glass helmet had been forced upon Curt's head. The green blaze of force struck Captain Future's helmeted head squarely as Igir turned on the mechanism.

Curt felt as though that stunning force was streaming through his skull, tearing with cruel fingers at his brain. His mind was a dazed whirl of roaring force. He had lost consciousness of his own body . . .

GRADUALLY he recovered semi-consciousness to realize that the agonizing force had stopped. He seemed to be floating in silent, dim obscurity.

"It didn't work!" he thought with wild hope. "I'm still conscious—"

Then Curt began to realize that he possessed a changed perception of his surroundings. He could not really see, now. His mind received illusory sensations of things about him, by some other sense than sight.

He perceived vaguely that he was floating in mid-air in the gloomy vault of the Unbodied. Igir and the Tarast soldiers were taking a limp body off the machine. It was Curt's own body!

"God, it's happened!" Captain Future thought, appalled. "I'm just a mind—a disembodied mind living only in a pattern of photons!"

His body—his own body—was being put in one of the glass coffins. Yet he, the mind of that body, the real Curt Newton, floated here!

"But how is it that I can *perceive* anything if I'm just a pattern of photons?" he wondered wildly. "I have no eyes or ears now."

Curt soon guessed at an explanation of that mystery. He was now an immaterial electric entity, and as such was sensitive to all electrical vibrations. It was by the reflection of electric waves that he vaguely "saw" the outlines of things, just as a ship's crew can "see" through dense fog by invisible infra-red vibrations.

The strange perception of his disembodied mind was not really like clear sight. He perceived only the dim outlines of solid masses, yet it was enough for recognition of his surroundings.

"What am I going to do?" he asked himself, dazed by horror. "What can I do, as a bodiless, photon-pattern mind?"

Curt's attention was drawn to the fact that the Futuremen and Gerdek, one by one, had by now suffered the same fate as himself. Their lifeless bodies were being placed in the glass storage coffins. Igir and the Tarast soldiers were leaving the vault.

"All of us—disembodied minds!" Curt thought tragically. "The others must be floating as phantom minds like myself, right here."

He could not "see" his comrades by his strange sense of electric vision. But he knew that all of them must be near him, transformed into ghostly photon-entities like himself.

Captain Future had an idea. Even if he couldn't "see" the rest, perhaps he could speak with them telepathically. Then at least the phantom prisoners would be able to discuss their situation.

"Grag! Simon! All of you—can you hear me?" he thought with great concentration.

He waited then, floating in the dim obscurity of the gloomy vault. But there came no telepathic answer.

"Shiri! Gerdek!" Again he uttered the telepathic cry. "Surely some of you can hear?"

There was no response. And Curt Newton's horror deepened as he realized that he was completely isolated even from those who had been disembodied like himself.

He could not "see" his fellow Unbodied ones, any more than they could perceive him. For all of them consisted now only of immaterial photons.

Neither could he contact the others telepathically. That, he knew, was because his tenuous new photon-body was unable to project a telepathic electric vibration of sufficient intensity to register upon another mind.

"This is worse than death!" Curt thought. "I'm like a bodiless ghost, that can dimly see but that can't be seen, and that can't speak to or be heard even by its fellow-ghosts."

Most dreadful of all to Captain Future, he would never now return to

his own universe. He thought of the familiar Earth that he would never see again. He thought of Joan Randall, waiting for him—

"Simon! Otho!" he uttered in a fierce telepathic cry. "You've got to answer me!"

BUT still there was no answer. And that, to Curt Newton, was almost the last straw. He felt madness close to him. And he rallied against it with supreme determination.

"I won't give up!" he thought with wild passion. "Somehow, there must be a way out of this. If I could only find help—"

But could he even move? He was a photon-creature floating upon the magnetic currents of this planet. Would it be possible to breast those currents by a concentrated effort of his electric being?

Curt essayed the effort. He found that the heightened pulsation of his mind's electric web did cause him to drift slowly in one direction.

He continued his experiments. It seemed that by concentrated thought, he could reverse the polarity of his photon-body and cause it to flow with or against the streaming magnetic currents on which he floated.

"If I can get out of here and find somebody—" he thought with a haggard gleam of hope.

He managed to drift toward the door of the shadowy vault. It was shut and locked from the outside. But Captain Future found himself drifting weirdly *through* the massive door.

That startled him, at first. Then he realized that his immaterial photon-being was naturally able to pass through solid matter. More than ever, it made him feel like a wandering ghost.

He drifted up through the stairways of the great Hall of Suns, seeking to reach the Council Hall. He made many movements in wrong directions, for control of this new method of locomotion was still very awkward and uncertain with him. But Curt was learning fast, now.

He reached the upper level of the Hall of Suns. His strange electric

perception "saw" everything vaguely and unreally. Yet, when he entered the Council Hall, he could perceive that it was quite deserted.

"Then Vostol has already left on the mission to Thool!" he thought despairingly. "I may have been in this existence for hours."

Hopelessness was crushing even his indomitable resolution. He felt that awful shadow of madness creeping closer upon him.

Curt suddenly realized that a man had entered the Council Hall. He had slipped in at a side door, in a peculiarly stealthy fashion, and was looking tensely around. With suddenly resurgent hope, Curt recognized him.

"Lacq!" he thought in a wild telepathic cry.

It was in fact the young Tarast, the descendant of Zuur whom they had brought back to Bebemos with them. Curt moved toward him.

"Lacq, listen!" he cried telepathically. "This is Kaffr speaking to you! I need your help!"

Lacq gave no sign whatever of having received the thought-cry, though Curt repeated it over and over again frantically.

Captain Future's sudden new hope swiftly died. He realized that his tenuous, immaterial photon-body could not project a telepath vibration strong enough for Lacq to hear.

CHAPTER XIV

Into the Darkness



LACQ had been startled and dismayed when the Tarast soldiers had arrested Captain Future and his comrades as they entered Bebemos. He had stood stunned until Curt had whispered to him to leave them,

and wait until they got in touch with him.

That order, Lacq had dazedly obeyed. He had slipped away from

Curt's group and the soldiers had not stopped him, for he was not on their list. In worried wonder, Lacq had watched the prisoners marched away by the guards toward the Hall of Suns.

"They arrested *Kaffr*!" Lacq told himself incredulously. "They must have gone mad."

Lacq had not a doubt in his own mind that Curt was really *Kaffr*. The young Tarast had been utterly convinced, not only by the red-haired planeteer's appearance but also by his determination and resourcefulness.

As the *Comet* had returned to Bebe-mos, Lacq had been filled with wild hope for the future. *Kaffr*'s intention of leading an expedition to Thool promised to achieve Lacq's cherished plan—discovery of his ancestor's secret and the vulnerability of the Cold Ones.

Lacq had cherished that plan for years. It was the one great goal of his life. For its success would not only mean the smashing of the Cold One menace. It would mean vindication of his ancestor Zuur, whose memory had been hated by his people for the terror he had unleashed.

Now all these wild new hopes had been suddenly imperilled by the arrest of *Kaffr* and his comrades. Lacq could not understand. He ventured a question of one of the Tarasts, who stood in troubled silence as the prisoners were marched away.

"Why do they arrest *Kaffr*?" Lacq asked bewilderedly. "Has the Council gone crazy, to do such a thing to our returned hero?"

The man he addressed answered troubledly.

"It is said that charges have been made that *Kaffr* is not really *Kaffr*—that he is an impostor."

"They must be mad indeed to listen to such charges!" Lacq said hotly. "Anyone can see that it is *Kaffr*!"

"That is my opinion too," said the man. He went on worriedly. "*Kaffr*'s return gave us our first hope for years that we might defeat the Cold Ones. If they should prove now that it is not *Kaffr* at all, there would be universal despair."

That seemed to Lacq to be the attitude of all the troubled, tense crowds

that filled the streets of Bebe-mos. All seemed to be praying desperately that the hope given them by the return of their great hero might not now be snatched away from them.

Lacq's uneasiness was great as he made his way through the throngs toward the Hall of Suns. And that uneasiness was not only for *Kaffr*, and for the fate of the expedition to Thool. It was for *Shiri* as well. Lacq had been strongly attracted by Gerdek's beautiful sister.

He waited with the tense crowds gathered outside the Hall of Suns. For a long time they stood there. Then a low murmur of voices went up as Vostol hurriedly emerged from the building.

"Vostol, has the Council made decision regarding *Kaffr*?" cried many eager voices.

"*Igir* will give you news—I cannot," Vostol answered, and hastened away before he could be questioned further.

Lacq was more uneasy than ever. He decided to follow Vostol. But he learned little by doing so.

For Vostol went directly to the spaceport outside the gate of Bebe-mos. There a star-cruiser had been made ready, and a silver circle had been painted boldly upon each of its sides. Vostol entered this ship and it sped rapidly out into space.

Puzzled and worried, Lacq returned to the Hall of Suns. Soon a cry rose from the crowd as the Council chairman, old *Igir*, emerged.

IGIR looked haggard as he spoke to the tense throng.

"The charges against *Kaffr* are still being considered, but no decision has yet been made," he told the people. "Return to your homes, and announcement will be made to you later."

Unsatisfied and in uneasy silence the Tarast populace slowly dispersed from in front of the Hall of Suns. But Lacq remained.

"Something is very wrong," Lacq told himself with deep anxiety. "They've done something to *Kaffr* and his friends, but are afraid to announce it just yet to the people."

He continued to wait and watch. He saw the members of the Council of Suns leave the building. But Kaffr and his comrades did not come out. They were still in there somewhere, perhaps imprisoned.

"I've got to find out what's happened!" Lacq decided finally. "If Kaffr needs help—"

He put his decision into instant execution. Without attempt at concealment he hurried up to the entrance of the mammoth building. Tarast soldiers brusquely barred his entrance. But Lacq's fertile mind had already fixed upon an expedient.

"I bring important dispatches from the world Raskol!" he snapped, mentioning another Tarast planet in the star-cluster. "For the Council secretary!"

His assurance of manner and assumed impatience impressed the guards and they stepped back.

"You'll find the secretary in his office."

Lacq breathed more easily as he made his way through the dusky corridors of the great structure. He was past the guards. But now a new difficulty arose. Where in this vast pile would he search for Kaffr?

He decided to investigate the Council Hall first. Slipping into it by a side door he found the great amphitheater silent and deserted.

Lacq looked around, vainly seeking some trace of Kaffr's presence. Then his eye was caught by a small, square apparatus that rested upon a table on the great stage.

He approached and examined it wonderingly. Yes, he was right—it was a telep-transmitter such as were used by the Cold Ones for long-distance transmission of telephatic messages. Lacq was familiar with the instruments from his former association with the Cold Ones.

"But what's a telep-transmitter doing here?" he asked himself mystifiedly. "Did they capture this from the Cold Ones?"

He turned the instrument on, with a vague hope that he might catch something on it that would explain the mystery of its presence.

Next moment, Lacq received a stag-

gering shock. From the shining knob of the telep-transmitter a frantic telephatic cry came to his mind.

"Lacq! This is Kaffr speaking to you!" vibrated that wild thought-message. "Can you hear me?"

"Kaffr?" cried Lacq aloud in his amazement. Then he repeated it as a thought directed into the instrument. "Kaffr, where are you?"

The answer added to his stupefaction.

"I am right here beside you, Lacq."

Lacq looked wildly around. There was absolutely nobody in sight in the vast, silent amphitheater.

"You can't see me," Curt Newton's desperate thought reached his mind. "I'm one of the Unbodied now."

LACQ felt a freezing horror.

"Gods, did the Council condemn you and your comrades—"

"Yes, they imprisoned us all among the Unbodied," Curt's thought answered. "I've been nearly crazy. I 'saw' you enter this hall, but couldn't reach you telephatically, because I could not project a strong enough electrical thought-vibration to affect your mind."

"I was hoping that you'd turn on that telep-transmitter," Curt continued. "Grag had described the instruments to me. I knew that since it was an apparatus designed to receive and amplify faint, distant telephatic messages it would amplify my own faint call so you could hear."

"Kaffr, this is ghastly!" Lacq answered wildly. "What shall we do?"

"You still believe I'm Kaffr?" Curt asked him.

"Of course I do!" Lacq replied with utter faith.

"Then you must help me and my comrades escape from the doom of the Unbodied."

"But how?" Lacq asked bewilderedly. "I know nothing about the way in which men are made Unbodied, or returned to normal."

"I'll try to direct you," came Curt's thought. "Pick up the telep-transmitter, first. You'll have to carry it with you, for only through it can I maintain this mental contact with you."

LACQ shakenly picked up the compact instrument. Curt Newton gave him quick orders.

"You must go down to the vault of the Unbodied, where our bodies and the machine that transformed us are. It is on the lowest under-level."

Like a man moving in an unreal dream, Lacq left the silent Council Hall and went stealthily through the corridors to the stair. Following Curt's continuing directions he went down level after level of the stairs. More than once Curt gave quick mental warning of guards or other persons ahead of him.

Finally, Lacq stood in the gloomy shadows of the lowest level. Facing him was the massive door of the vault of the Unbodied.

"This door is locked, Kaffr," he reported dismayedly. "And I do not know the combination."

"Neither do I, but I think I can find it out," Curt replied. "In this phantom state, I can pass through solid matter. I think I can penetrate the secret of the lock by entering and examining it."

Lacq waited tensely. It seemed nightmarish to think that Kaffr was close beside him, as an invisible, immaterial photon-being who was able to pass into the solid matter of the lock and examine its interior.

After what seemed a long time, Curt's mental voice reached him again through the telep-transmitter.

"I think I've figured the combination, now. Here are the figures."

Lacq mentally noted them down. Then he pressed the studs of the lock in that order. With a click, the massive door swung open! Lacq felt a surge of rising hope as he entered the gloomy, shadowy vault.

He looked around in awe. Near him loomed a squat, bafflingly complex machine. Beyond it towered tiers of glass coffins, each of which contained a lifeless man or woman.

The Unbodied! The bodies in those coffins were mere frozen husks from which the living mind had been expelled to roam in a new, immaterial photon-body like a homeless ghost.

"You will find my own body in a coffin on the last tier," came Curt's

direction. "Put it on the top of the machine."

Lacq found the coffin in which the waxen-faced, lifeless figure of the red-haired planeteer lay motionless. Chilled by the uncanniness of the whole proceeding, he placed Curt's body atop the machine.

"Now what shall I do?" he asked into the telep-transmitter. "I don't know how to operate this mechanism."

"Neither do I," came Curt's mental answer. "I shall have to examine its design, to figure out how it can be used to draw the mind back from a photon-pattern into the brain."

There was another wait for Lacq, much longer than before. It seemed to him that the whole attempt was hopeless. How could anyone penetrate the secret of this ancient machine? Not even the Tarasts who now used it knew its principle—they merely operated it by tradition.

Perhaps Kaffr could solve a scientific mystery that was beyond anybody else? Lacq's faith in the greatness of his hero kept hope alive in him during that long, torturing wait.

At last Curt Newton's thought came again to him from the telep-transmitter.

"I believe that now I understand the operation of this machine. Put the glass helmet on the head of my body, and then reverse the two upper switches."

Lacq obeyed. Then came crucial order.

"Now turn the lower rheostat handle slowly toward the left, stopping at the tenth notch."

The young Tarast did so. As he moved the lever, the machine began to hum with power. White radiance streamed now from the copper bulb and hit Curt's head. Soon, Curt Newton's lifeless body began to stir!

Curt opened his eyes. Then with Lacq's help he staggered off the top of the machine.

"God, what an experience!" Captain Future said hoarsely.

CURT was shaken as he had never been before. He only now realized the awful mental strain he

had undergone during the time in which he had been one of the ghastly Unbodied.

He steadied in a minute, and grasped Lacq's hand.

"You have saved us, Lacq. And you've saved the one chance still left for your people."

Lacq's eyes shone with the emotion that he felt at this high praise from Kaffr. He helped Curt transfer Otho's limp body to the machine.

Otho leaped up with a yell when the re-transformation had been effected.

"Devils of space, did I dream all that or was I really a phantom? Chief, I seemed to be a cursed ghost—"

Curt hastily checked his babbling, and put him to work restoring their comrades. Grag and Simon and Gerdek and Shiri, one by one, woke to life as their disembodied electric mind-webs were drawn back out of the phantom photon-patterns into their own proper bodies.

The horror of the experience was stamped on the faces of all the humans. But it could not erase from Captain Future's mind one paramount consideration.

"Do you know whether Vostol has departed on his mission?" he cried to Lacq.

"I do not know what mission to which you refer," Lacq answered puzzledly. "But I saw Vostol leave hours ago, in a star-cruiser that was marked for some reason with a silver circle."

"He's gone!" groaned Curt to the others. "He's already on his way to Thool to conclude the treaty with the Cold Ones."

Gerdek's pale face was tragic.

"There is no more hope, then. For as soon as Vostol reports the signing of the treaty, my people will carry out the self-sterilization that means the end of our race."

Shiri was sobbing. Lacq's face was aghast as he began to realize the significance of Vostol's departure.

"We're not beaten yet," Captain Future gritted. His gray eyes flared with indomitable resolution. "There's still a chance, if we can get to Thool and find Zuur's secret *before* Vostol concludes the treaty."

"But we can't go to Thool now,"

Lacq said despairingly. "Since the Council has condemned you, Kaffr, they'll never agree to your leading a force of Tarast star-cruisers to attack Thool."

"I know that," Curt said grimly. "It means that we'll have to go without any Tarast fleet. We'll have to get to Thool on our own."

Lacq was stunned.

"You mean—just the seven of us to attempt to reach Thool in your ship and find the secret? But that's impossible!"

THO shrugged coolly.

"We Futuremen have done a few things before this that people thought could not be done."

"But you can never do this!" Lacq burst out. "Thool is far across this universe and there are whole networks of the Cold Ones' patrols to block the way. We'd never be able to get through!"

"And even if we did," Gerdek said hopelessly, "what could our little band hope to do at Thool? That mysterious world is the very citadel and core of the Cold Ones' power. How much chance would we have of searching out Zuur's ancient secrets before we were captured?"

"I've an idea that might possibly get us through the Cold Ones' patrols," Curt rapped. "When we got to Thool, we'd have to take our chances. It's risky, I know. But it's the only chance we have left. Are you with me?"

Gerdek's face suddenly flamed.

"Of course! I think it means our death, but I'd rather die out there fighting a last fight for my people, than to stay here and be thrust back into the Unbodied."

Lacq's eyes too were glistening.

"Kaffr, I'll follow you anywhere!"

"Then we must reach the *Comet* and start at once," Curt said coolly. "At all costs, we must get to Thool before Vostol."

Shiri had donned the black robe that had been torn from her when she was thrust into the Unbodied. Lacq took the arm of the trembling girl as their little band moved rapidly up the shadowy stairs.

THEY reached the ground level of the Hall of Suns without detection. But the guards at the entrance turned to shout an alarm when they saw the party. Grag's great fists stunned the men into silence before they could give the alarm or use their weapons.

Night lay over Bebeamos now. The streets of the hothouse city were almost deserted. Gerdek led his band by little-used ways to the main gate of the city. They emerged into the freezing air outside the domed metropolis, and ran at once toward the *Comet*.

A few seconds later, the *Comet* rose steeply from the spaceport and shot up through the light of the red moons into the void. Almost at once it was out of sight, racing out into the darkness of the dying universe on its desperate flight toward distant, mysterious Thool.

CHAPTER XV

Graveyard of Suns



OUT from the cluster of dying suns that was the last stronghold of the Tarast race, there stretched the awesome darkness of a blacked-out universe. Only a few scattered red sparks of faraway, perishing stars

broke the boundless gloom. Everywhere else reigned the brooding blackness.

The *Comet* seemed to hesitate in dread as it emerged from the cluster into this vast realm of death and night. Curt Newton was at the controls, and he brought the little ship gradually to a halt. It floated motionless in space.

"Why are we stopping here?" Gerdek cried worriedly. "Cold One patrols may run upon us at any moment."

"That's why I'm stopping for a moment—so we'll have a better chance of getting through those patrols," Curt replied, getting out of his pilot's

chair. "You remember I said I had an idea that might do it."

"What's your idea, Chief?" Otho asked alertly.

"The Cold Ones," Captain Future reminded him, "gave Vostol's ship a safe-conduct to Thool. They ordered him to paint a silver circle on its side, and said their patrols would be instructed to allow such a ship to pass. Well, we're going to mark the *Comet* in the same way."

"Jumping sun-imps, I get it!" Otho exclaimed excitedly. "The Cold One patrols will think this is Vostol's ship, and let us by."

"But Vostol's ship is ahead of us, Kaffr," Lacq protested. "The patrols will have already seen it pass, and will know we're a fake."

"We'll curve out on a different course to Thool than the direct course Vostol will be taking," Captain Future explained. "By not following him directly, there's less chance of our being sighted by any enemy patrols that have already seen his ship."

"But it will take us longer to reach Thool by an indirect route," Shiri said worriedly. "Vostol will get there long before we do."

"Not if we snap into it and quit talking," Curt declared impatiently. "Grag, get a can of liquid chromium while I get into my space-suit."

Presently Curt Newton, in his protective suit, and Grag went out through the ship's air-lock door and hastily began the task. Their magnetized shoes held them to the *Comet*, as they rapidly painted a shining circle in liquefied chromium upon each side of the ship.

Curt clambered back inside with the robot, and quickly divested himself of the protective suit.

"That should get us through any patrols that haven't already seen Vostol pass. Now let's get out of here."

He took the pilot's chair again. Once more the small ship leaped forward in space. Curt turned the full power of the high-speed vibration-drive generators into the drive-ring at the stern.

The *Comet* built up velocity with incredibly rapid acceleration. Only the cushioning protective stasis,

which Curt had learned was also standard equipment in the Tarast and Cold One ships, enabled their bodies to withstand the acceleration. They were soon traveling faster than light itself, yet still the space-speed needle crept across the dial.

Captain Future laid the course at Gerdek's directions. The world Thool lay many light-years across this universe. Curt learned its exact coordinates, then plotted their course to take them in a broad outward curve to the distant capital of the Cold Ones.

Racing, rushing, humming through the vast void at ever-increasing speed flashed the *Comet*. Its occupants seemed hurtling into a chartless darkness. There was no gleam of stars or nebulae to serve as sky-marks. There was almost nothing except the somber blackness.

"At last," said the Brain in satisfaction, "I'll have opportunity to take some data on the exact dimensions of this spherical universe."

And Simon, in whose chill, strange mind scientific considerations were almost always paramount, applied himself to the battery of powerful telescopic and other instruments back in the ship's main cabin.

CURT NEWTON remained in the pilot's chair, anxiously scanning the detectors that might at any moment give warning of the approach of Cold One craft. These vast reaches were crisscrossed by the enemy's patrol and traffic routes, he knew. He hoped fervently that his stratagem would get them through to Thool.

"But the time is short—so short," Curt murmured forebodingly to himself. "It won't take Vostol long to conclude that treaty."

The Brain came into the control room then, to report the results of his investigation to Captain Future.

"Lad, I've made an approximate appraisal of the dimensions of this spherical universe. It is more than two billion light-years in diameter, many times larger than our own. And it's still rapidly expanding."

"I do not understand that," said Lacq hesitatingly. "Does our universe

really expand?"

The Brain explained briefly.

"The diameter of a tri-dimensional spherical universe depends directly upon the amount of matter in it. For matter tends to warp space in a closed circle around it, by the Einstein gravitation effect. The more matter there is, the more space is warped inward and so the smaller its diameter.

"As a universe grows old and its suns melt into free radiation, there is less and less matter in it. Consequently, the gravitational warp of space is weaker. Thus the curved space of that universe continually expands. It expands until it reaches a critical point, at which the continuum of space can no longer stand the strain. At that point, the bubble of curved space bursts and collapses into a much smaller sphere."

"And that is when our own universe will begin to be reborn, is it not?" cried Gerdek eagerly.

"Yes, it is so," agreed the Brain. "The sudden collapse of the spherical universe, into a much smaller sphere, causes the welter of free radiation in it to be transformed slowly back into solid matter."

"But I don't see how radiation could be turned back into matter," Lacq frowned puzzledly.

"It's quite simple," Simon answered a bit irritably. "The sudden compression of that vast amount of electric radiation into a much smaller enclosure crowds that welter of force into whirling maelstroms. Those whirls of energy coagulate particles of electric force, or electrons. These join into atoms of dust, which in time gather in nebulae that spawn new stars."

"To think of our own universe being revived by new suns and worlds like that!" exulted Lacq. "How soon will it happen?"

"It will happen very soon, by my calculations," the Brain said. "I estimate that within five thousand years, this universe's expansion will reach the critical point. It will then collapse and slowly be reborn."

"Five thousand years!" repeated Lacq, dismayed. "You call that very soon?"

"It's only a moment in cosmic time,"

put in Captain Future. "That's what Simon meant."

Lacq's face fell.

"I had hoped that I myself would live to see it happen. But it makes no difference. Our descendants will see it."

"If we have any descendants," Gerdek reminded him soberly. "That's why we must keep the Tarast race alive at any cost. If it can hold out on our last worlds till that future day of rebirth, its glory will live again. When that day comes—"

A bell ringing sharply from the instrument panel interrupted. Curt Newton's eyes flew to the panel. The needle of one of the detectors was bobbing nervously.

"Two objects approaching us from the left quarter!" Captain Future exclaimed. "They must be Cold One patrol craft!"

HARDLY had Curt spoken, when out of the black vault of space on their left came rushing the two craft his instruments had detected.

Their identity could not be doubted. They were long black space-sleds, open except for a low wall around their decks. Heavy atom-shell guns were mounted on swivels at prow and stern. And the decks were occupied by the hideous, bony white figures of Cold Ones.

Otho had jumped to the proton gun.

"I can blast 'em before they know what's hit them, Chief!"

"No, don't—there must be others about and the alarm would go out," cautioned Curt. "We'll gamble on our stratagem getting us by."

A blinker was flashing from the prow of one of the approaching space-sleds, in long and short flashes.

"It's in the universal code—they're asking us to verify our identity," said Gerdek quickly.

Curt handed him a torchlight.

"Signal back that this is the ship of Vostol, on his way as ambassador to Thool."

Gerdek obeyed. The two Cold One patrol craft, satisfied by the answer and the sign painted on the *Comet*, turned back out into space.

"So far, so good," rumbled Grag.

"It looks as though your trick will take us through, Chief."

"It will unless we meet patrols which have already sighted Vostol's ship," Curt reminded him. "Keep your fingers crossed."

The *Comet* sped on and on through the great shroud of the dying universe. As vast distances fell behind, the somber gloom of this nightmare journey oppressed everyone's spirits. For the only suns and worlds they passed were dead, black, ashen bulks with planets that were balls of glittering ice circled by haunted moons.

To the Futuremen, this seemed a universe of ghosts. To their Tarast companions, this endless empire of death and night brought heart-breaking memory of days long dead, when their conquering race had flourished on thousands of smiling worlds.

Now the spreading hordes of the Cold Ones were inheriting it all, planting their swarming cities on the frozen planets and webbing the darkness with their routes.

Time dragged on and on. Hours and days seemed meaningless measurements out here in the drear infinite. The strain of terrible suspense told upon them all—all except the Brain, who continued his imperturbable investigations, and Grag, who played fondly with Eek.

They were challenged again by Cold One patrols, but again their stratagem let them pass. Now, however, Gerdek began to get anxious.

"We are approaching Thool," he said, looking nervously ahead. "The danger from the patrols will be greater now."

Captain Future understood.

"Yes—the patrols near Thool will be much more likely to have seen Vostol's ship already pass."

They peered into the dark abyss. It seemed a black blankness, yet their instruments disclosed that it was a region singularly crowded with dead black stars. There were scores of such cosmic cinders ahead.

"It's a great graveyard of suns," murmured Curt Newton. "Which of them is the system of Thool?"

"Thool lies deep in this region," Gerdek answered. "It is the single

planet of one of the largest of the dead stars."

Dread haunted his eyes as he spoke. All the three Tarasts seemed oppressed by uncanny fear as they drew nearer to the mysterious, forbidden capital of the Cold Ones. For generations, the very name of Thool had been to their people a synonym for horror.

Curt was at the controls as they flew deeper into this great graveyard of suns. He made every effort to give wide berth to the dark stars and worlds they passed. For the Tarasts had told him that most of these were inhabited by populations of the Cold Ones.

On many of them could be seen the glimmering lights of enigmatic cities.

Yet, Curt's precautions to avoid all enemy traffic proved a failure, for two more Cold Ones patrol craft suddenly rushed on them from ahead.

"Give them the same signal—that this is Vostol's ship," Captain Future told Gerdek quickly.

GERDEK did so, but as he interpreted the blinker flashes of the patrols' reply, his face stiffened in alarm.

"They say: 'Vostol's ship passed us many hours ago on its way to Thool. Either that ship or your own is misstating identity. Stand by while we come aboard to investigate you, or we will attack.'"

"That does it!" exclaimed Grag. "Our trick didn't work this time."

"Grag—Otho—action stations!" yelled Captain Future. "Here they come!"

The two space-sleds of the Cold Ones, as the *Comet* refused to slacken speed, came racing toward it with their guns pumping fused atom-shells that exploded in a blaze of dazzling force.

The shells did not find their mark. The greatest space-fighter of his own universe was at the controls of the *Comet*, and he had flung the ship into a dizzy corkscrew space-spin an instant before. Curt hurled the craft right between the space-sleds in the crazy maneuver.

Grag and Otho were pumping the

heavy proton guns like mad. The blazing bursts of beams stabbed to right and left. The space-sled on the right was sliced in half as Otho's gunnery found its mark. And Grag's unerring marksmanship shattered the other.

"Got 'em both!" exulted Otho. "I guess they didn't know the old *Comet* carries a sting."

"I hope to heaven we got them before they flashed an alarm," Curt Newton said worriedly. "We'd better try to make Thool as fast as we can."

They were all keyed to highest pitch of tension as they flew on and on into the great labyrinth of dead suns.

Finally, Gerdek pointed ahead with a hand that quivered a little.

"Thool!" he whispered.

Here, in the heart of the great graveyard of stars, there loomed a dead sun of enormous size. Around that colossal cinder circled a single large icy planet.

It was the mysterious world that was their goal. Thool, the capital of an alien race, the core of the Cold Ones' power! Hostile and forbidding, it bulked huge in their telescopes. Wrapped in dusk of perpetual night, its surface was a glittering white waste of ice and snow from which protruded the menacing black fangs of naked rock mountain ranges.

"The city Thool, which the Cold Ones call by the same name as the planet, lies halfway between equator and north pole," murmured Gerdek.

"Yes—I see the lights," Captain Future nodded tautly. "How near to it were the laboratories of Zuur?"

Lacq answered that.

"Zuur's laboratories were in caverns in a deep gorge that cleaves the mountain range north of the city."

"That's too near the city for comfort," Curt said grimly. "But we'll go in low from the north to avoid being sighted."

He brought the *Comet* down fast toward the far northern icefields of the frozen planet.

Then he sent the ship scudding low through the dusk, toward the black range of cruel peaks that towered north of the capital.

As the *Comet* swung down over the mountains, the Futuremen glimpsed the lights of a great city miles away on the southern plain. The infra red telescope clearly disclosed a metropolis of starkly square black structures, dominated by a mammoth cubical building which rose from the edge of an ancient, snow-filled river bed.

"That is Thool, the city," breathed Gerdek, with mingled hate and dread.

"It must be swarming with the cursed Cold Ones," muttered Otho. "Look at the space-sleds flying above it."

Captain Future perceived that the snowy river bed which bisected the distant city led northward into the mountains over which the *Comet* was now flying. The river that long ago had flowed in that bed had eroded a deep gorge through the tumbled ranges.

Curt steered toward it.

"This must be the gorge," Lacq affirmed. "There's no other in sight, Kaffr."

CURT swung the *Comet* down between the fanged black peaks, into the deeper dusk of the gorge. It was a wide, winding chasm, walled by rock cliffs, its floor covered deep with snow or frozen air.

Captain Future sent the ship flying deliberately along the chasm, while they all watched tensely for some clue to the location of the ancient scientist's laboratories.

They had followed the gorge for several miles before Shiri cried out and pointed.

"See—those holes in the western cliff! Could they be the cavern laboratories of Zuur?"

"It fits the description in my ancestor's papers," Lacq said excitedly.

"We'll soon find out," Curt declared, and slanted the ship down toward a landing.

The apertures Shiri had discovered were artificially squared openings in the base of the west cliff. They were partly blocked by the deep snow. The *Comet* sank almost out of sight in that snow when they landed.

"Put on your space-suits," Curt warned as they prepared to emerge for

exploration. "The tester shows no atmosphere at all on this planet."

When they had their suits on, Grag opened the door. Masses of snow fell into the airlock. They floundered out through it, and started in awkward progress toward the nearby openings in the cliff.

The darkness was thick here at the bottom of the great gorge, though the white sheet of glittering snow made vision possible. As they struggled forward with their heads barely above the snow, they unexpectedly encountered recent trails of several other creatures.

The trails were big, wide ones, as though heavy bulks had been dragged somehow through the white drifts. The adventurers stopped, amazed.

"What left those trails?" Otho exclaimed sharply. "Do you suppose the Cold Ones have just been here?"

"No, these are trails of creatures much larger than that," Curt declared. "Are there other forms of life here?" he asked Lacq.

"I don't know," Lacq answered. "Maybe there are. The Cold Ones who spoke of this gorge said that they always avoided it because it was haunted by danger. You remember I told you that, Kaffr."

Curt did remember. And it added to the uneasiness he had felt ever since they had approached this dark, forbidden world.

"It's perilous to stand here," he told them. "Come on."

They struggled on toward the nearest opening in the cliff. They could see now that it was a high doorway in the solid rock. It was a little above the floor of the gorge, and carved stone steps led up to it.

"Zuur's ancient laboratories!" cried Lacq. "It must be!"

Suddenly out of that open door in the rock lumbered a monstrous creature, the sight of which froze them with incredulous horror.

It was of elephantine bulk, a dark, furry mass on huge legs, with a hideous snouted head armed with a single heavy horn.

It glared at them with stupid, un-winking eyes. Then it charged down upon them.

CHAPTER XVI

World of Dread

CAPTAIN FUTURE and Otho flashed their proton pistols with all the phenomenal speed for which they were famous. The two narrow, brilliant beams of force stabbed together to strike the creature's massive,

snouted head as it charged through the deep snow.

They saw the beams burn into the thing's skull, yet it came on as though it did not feel them. Otho was so stupefied by this that he stood gaping at the onrushing monster in ludicrous surprise.

"Its eyes, Otho—aim at its eyes!" Curt yelled, flashing his own beam at that target.

The creature was less than ten yards away and coming like an express train, its horn lowered. Two proton beams flashed out and shattered the unwinking eyes.

Curt grabbed Shiri's arm, and plunged aside with her into the snow. He yelled for the others to do likewise. They did so barely in time to escape that terrible horn as the blinded beast charged past.

It turned and came floundering back through the snow, as though groping to find them. Again, Curt loosed his driving little beam at the eye-sockets. This time, it drilled deep into that massive, bony skull. The lumbering horror collapsed in the snow and lay still.

"Howling devils of space!" cried Otho. "What kind of a bad dream is that thing?"

Curt was examining the lifeless body.

"It's a non-breathing species. It must use that horn to dig up mineral food-elements. Yet I can't quite understand how such a species could evolve naturally here."

"I think I understand, Kaffr!" exclaimed Lacq excitedly. "My ances-

tor Zuur made many experiments with new mutant species, in this place. They were part of the research that preceded the creation of the mutant humans, the Cold Ones. Descendants of those artificially developed beasts must still exist here."

"That," commented the Brain keenly, "would explain just why the Cold Ones shun this gorge. It's because of the fierce creatures which have lurked and bred here ever since then."

"Then there may be a lot more nightmares like that one you killed, or worse hanging around in those caverns," Grag said uneasily.

"We can soon find out if there are," Otho commented acidly. "Just bring Eek here out of the ship. If Eek falls stone dead with fright, we'll know there's danger around."

Captain Future, ignoring the robot and android, was shouldering determinedly through the snow toward the nearest of the doors in the cliff. It was that from which the weird monster had so suddenly charged.

Curt and his companions had their weapons tensely ready for action, as they climbed the rock steps and stepped through the aperture. They found themselves in a square passageway hewn by atomic force out of the cliff's solid rock. It was pitch dark in here.

Captain Future's hand-torch flashed a bright beam along the gloomy passage. It disclosed a maze of squared caverns or chambers that long ago had been blasted out of the cliff's interior. The first room they looked into convinced them that they had reached the end of their quest.

"This is Zuur's laboratory, all right!" cried Lacq eagerly. "See, there are instruments and parts of machines."

The room was the wreck of an ancient chemical laboratory. There had been racks of instruments and receptacles, but during the centuries they had been smashed and scattered by prowling beasts.

They went on from one great cavern to another. Here was a battery of what seemed once to have been a series of big atomic-power generators, which

had been torn apart by beasts seeking certain mineral elements for food. Another chamber held the ruins of apparatus that had been used for oxygenation. Still other chambers seemed to have been living quarters.

"This is the place of creation of the Cold Ones," breathed Lacq. "In these caverns, after everyone else had abandoned this world, my ancestor labored until he had developed his human volunteer subjects into a mutant race of osseous creatures. Then they turned and killed him."

TREMBLING eagerness was in Lacq's bearing as they searched on through the maze of gloomy chambers. And Curt and the others felt a tension hardly less great.

They sensed themselves near the object of their desperate quest. At any moment, they hoped to come upon the records of the ancient scientist where lay the secret of the Cold Ones' hidden vulnerability.

"Look out! More trouble!" yelled Otho suddenly.

Two weird, wolflike animals had darted suddenly out of a chamber whose door the Futuremen were approaching. Curt fired swiftly, but the incredibly swift animals vanished down an intersecting passageway.

"Nice place, this," grunted Grag. "No wonder even the cursed Cold Ones leave it alone."

From Lacq, who had entered the chamber from which the animals had darted, there came an exultant cry.

"Kaffr, come here! I've found the records!"

They hastened into the rock-hewn room. Lacq, by the light of his torch, was kneeling excitedly over a metal chest. The chest contained more than a dozen small books, whose leaves were of imperishable metal foil covered with faded black writing.

"Zuur's records!" Lacq said hoarsely. "Here are the notes of his experiments. Now if I can locate the notations that cover his creation of the Cold Ones—"

He was frenziedly examining the books, one after another. Curt and the others waited in taut silence.

Minutes passed. Lacq was going

through all the books of notes again. Finally he looked up. His face, inside his transparent helmet, wore a dazed expression.

"I can't understand it! These books are numbered, and two of the last books are not here. And they're the ones that cover all Zuur's experiments in creating the Cold Ones!"

"Look again—maybe you overlooked them in your haste," Captain Future urged.

"No, I didn't," Lacq asserted. "They're just not here, Kaffr."

He seemed stupefied by the disastrous realization that the plan of his whole life had met this unexpected, tragic disappointment.

"The devil!" swore Otho. "Those two books have been destroyed by some of those lurking beasts."

"Animals couldn't get into that chest," Curt Newton pointed out sharply. "Animals wouldn't choose books which contain the secret of the Cold Ones' hidden weakness."

Gerdek looked at him, startled.

"You mean that you think the Cold Ones themselves took those two books?"

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Curt countered. "It must have been done when they first rebelled against Zuur and killed him. That first generation of the Cold Ones would know of his records."

Lacq's face was gray and tragic inside his helmet. His voice was a hoarse, hopeless whisper.

"It must be so. The Cold Ones would not leave here a secret which could be used to destroy them."

He stared into their faces, heart-sick.

"I'm sorry that I drew you into this futile quest. It was the dream of my lifetime. But now that there is no hope—"

"What do you mean—no hope?" challenged Captain Future crisply. "The secret isn't here. But that doesn't mean it's beyond reach."

GERDEK stared.

"Surely the Cold Ones who found that dangerous secret would have instantly destroyed it?" he said.

"Would they?" Curt retorted. "I

don't believe they would. Just figure it out for yourself. The individual among the Cold Ones who would have the decision as to the disposal of the secret would be their ruler, wouldn't he? What would their ruler decide to do with it?

"Wouldn't he say to himself, 'Here is a secret that gives me absolute power over the whole Cold One race. If ever my rule is challenged, I can use this secret to destroy the challengers, to crush any rebellion.

"The very fact that my subjects know I possess such a power will keep them from ever getting mutinous. So, I won't destroy this secret but will keep it in a safe place for possible future use.'

"Wouldn't the Cold One ruler reason thus?" Captain Future concluded.

"I believe he would," Gerdek answered slowly. "It fits the whole psychology of that cunning, malign race."

"Then," Curt pointed out, "the records of Zuur which contain the secret were not destroyed. They were passed down as a heritage of power and authority from one Cold One ruler to another, down to the present."

"If that is so," Shiri exclaimed excitedly, "the records must now be in the possession of Mwvr, the present overlord!"

The faint hope that had gleamed on Gerdek's face died.

"Yes, they would be guarded somewhere in Mwvr's citadel, down in the city of Thool. Which means that they might as well be destroyed, as far as we're concerned."

"Don't talk that way," Captain Future said coolly. "If the secret still exists, we've got to get it. The city of Thool isn't so far from here."

Gerdek was aghast.

"You're surely mad if you're thinking of going into Thool after it!"

"Kaffr, we wouldn't have a chance!" Lacq added, appalled. "Hundreds of thousands of Cold Ones swarm in that black metropolis."

"All right, it's too dangerous, so we won't try it," Curt replied with deceptive readiness. "We'll go back home and let Vostol conclude the treaty. That will be the end of the Tarast race, but it'll be the safest course for

ourselves."

That crushing rejoinder impelled the three protesting Tarasts to silence. At last Gerdek spoke.

"You are right," he told Curt. "We must make the attempt, no matter how suicidal it may be. We'll go with you."

"Oh-oh, I saw it coming," muttered Otho. "Grag, do you feel like taking a little stroll into Thool?"

"We're not going to 'stroll' in there like idiots," Curt said sharply. "We wouldn't last a minute if we did. I've an idea that might have some possibilities."

He shot a question at Lacq.

"That biggest square black building we glimpsed in the city—is that the palace of the rulers?"

LACQ nodded.

"That's the palace of Mwvr. I've heard the Cold Ones discuss it more than once. It's a great, guarded citadel."

"It would be," Captain Future admitted. "Still, that's where Zuur's secret records would be kept. We have to get into the city and into that citadel without being seen."

"A mere nothing, Chief," Otho assured him. "I'll do it with my magic wand, in a flash."

"Shut up," Curt told him. "And listen: That citadel stands on the edge of the ancient river bed that runs through the city. The river bed is filled with deep snow, like this gorge of which it's a continuation."

"The snow in it should be almost everywhere over our heads. So I propose that we go down this gorge of the ancient river and right into the city, by walking under the surface of the snow."

"Say, that is an idea," Otho admitted. "But supposing we get into the city that way, what then?"

"We'll take tools to dig our way into the citadel of Mwvr through the foundation walls, beneath the snow," Curt answered. "Once inside the citadel walls, we must somehow search out the secret records."

"I feel that 'somehow' covers a lot of grief for poor old Grag," rumbled the robot forebodingly.

LACQ and Gerdek were enthusiastic. The revulsion from absolute despair to new hope had sent their confidence soaring.

"It's a precarious scheme of action," the Brain commented dourly to Captain Future. "What about the *Comet*?"

"You'll have to stay to guard it, Simon. You couldn't make much progress under the snow, anyway. Shiri will stay with you. I want you to sink the ship in deep snow, so passing Cold One ships won't sight it down here."

The Brain objected acidly to remaining behind, and Shiri was even more strenuous in her resistance. But Curt's firmness prevailed.

Otho and Grag had already taken from the *Comet* the compact atomic tools which Curt judged necessary for their scheme. Now, after a word of farewell, the party started southward through the snow.

The snow everywhere in the gorge was up to Curt's neck, and in long stretches it was completely over his head. And there was nothing soft or yielding about this snow, which was partly composed of crystals of frozen air.

"You lead the way, Grag," Captain Future ordered. "You're the only one with strength enough to break trail for the rest."

"Yes, Grag, put that strong back of yours to work for a change," flipped Otho. "I might even let you carry me when I get tired."

Grag ignored the remark as he started breaking the way. His mighty metal body plowed through the deep white drifts, step after step, like a tireless machine. The four others, in their space-suits, followed.

The snow was soon over even Grag's head, for the ancient river bed became deeper as they moved southward. They now marched weirdly beneath the surface of the white expanse. There was nothing for Captain Future to see except the blank whiteness around and above them, and the broad metal back of Grag ahead.

They were, Curt knew, quite invisible now to any space-sleds that might cross the sky overhead. Hour

after hour, they tramped on through the tunnel forced by the robot leader. Curt's compass guided them, and in any case there was no danger of their losing the way, for the river bed ran right to the distant city.

"This is tough going, Chief," complained Otho when they stopped for the fourth time to rest.

"You think it's tough going?" said Grag wrathfully. "How would you like to lead the way for a while?"

"I think we must be near the city by now," Captain Future cut in thoughtfully. "Grag, lift me up so my head is out of the snow and I'll see."

Grag obeyed, lifting Curt to stand on his metal shoulders. Curt's helmet protruded from the surface of the snow. Instantly he drew his head back down in a sharp recoil. And he muttered a swift warning to the others.

"We're already inside the city!"

Curt raised his head more carefully until his eyes were above the white surface. He looked around with mixed interest and trepidation. They were well within the city of Thool, all right. Its black, square structures loomed on both sides of the deep river bed in whose snow Captain Future and his comrades were concealed.

The alien metropolis was weird in the eternal dusk. The lights that shone in its streets only accentuated the starless gloom. Space-sleds were taking off from a big spaceport nearby. And Curt Newton could descry numbers of the hideous osseous inhabitants as they came and went across black bridges that spanned this deep river of snow.

A HALF mile southward through the city loomed the citadel of the Cold One kings, a titanic black bulk dominating Thool like a thundercloud. Captain Future keenly estimated its distance before lowering himself back down into the snow.

"We're almost to the place," he told them. "Move more slowly now, Grag. We mustn't make any disturbance on the surface that would give away our presence."

They were all strung up with suspense as they followed Grag onward beneath the white blanket. At Curt's direction, the robot veered to the eastern side of the river bed. The palace was on that side.

Curt estimated that they had reached the citadel.

Some minutes later, he advanced gently through the snow, until he was stopped by a solid rock wall. But this was not the rough natural rock side of the bed. This wall was of seamless synthetic black stone.

"The foundation wall of the citadel!" he muttered. "Unlimber those tools, Otho. Here's where we get to work."

Curt cleared out a small cavity in the snow to give them room for labor. In this little burrow in the deep snow, entirely unsuspected by the hordes of Cold Ones so close by, the five comrades began work.

Using the smothered flash of a hand-torch for illumination, Curt Newton attacked the wall with the flame of a compact atomic blaster. The dazzling little white flame cut easily into the black synthestone. Curt's purpose was to cut out a four-foot circle.

"Once through this wall, and we should find ourselves in the lowest levels beneath the palace," he said as he worked. "There shouldn't be many Cold Ones about down there. We'll have to take the chance."

"Maybe their dungeons are down there," Grag grunted pessimistically. "For all we know, we're just breaking into jail."

Then—

"We're through!" Curt exclaimed a moment later. "The wall wasn't nearly as thick as I expected."

He had cut a round hole completely out of the synthestone wall, which appeared to be only moderate in thickness. With his hand-torch in one hand and his proton pistol in the other, Captain Future tautly scrambled through the opening.

He flashed the torch's little beam around, ready for instant action in case they had run into a nest of Cold Ones. But there was nothing to be seen except another stone wall that

exactly paralleled the outer one. There was a space of three feet between the two walls, and Curt was standing in that dark space.

"I get it now!" he said. "This explains why the wall wasn't so thick—it was only the outer half of a *double* wall! They used this construction to combine structural strength with economy of materials."

"So now we have to cut through another wall," grunted Grag.

"No, we're not going to cut through the inner wall yet," Curt said excitedly. "We'll stay inside the wall and explore as much as possible of the citadel, without detection. Bring the tools, Otho."

They were soon all inside the double wall of the great building. Curt and his little band started exploringly along the narrow space.

Gerdek's whisper was heavy with dread.

"Is there really any chance that we can locate the secret records this way? I feel somehow that we are being drawn deeper into a horrible trap."

Captain Future himself could not help feeling that oppressive emotion, as he led the way in indomitable search through the secret ways of this massive fortress, unquestionably the most dreaded spot of a universe.

CHAPTER XVII

In the Citadel



CURT turned presently and spoke to Otho. He had to press close to the android to be heard, for they had cautiously turned down the range of the interphones embodied in their space-suits.

"Hand me that drill, Otho. I'm going to see what's inside the wall here."

He took the slender atomic drill and applied it to the inner wall. It began biting into the black synthestone.

"Probably there's a Cold One sitting right on the other side of that wall,"

Grag predicted pessimistically.

The long, thin drill had soon penetrated completely through the inner wall, which was of less thickness than the outer. Captain Future withdrew the drill and peered through the small aperture.

He saw nothing but a black space. Venturing to flash a tiny beam from his torch through the hole, he described a musty storeroom.

"What do you see, Kaffr?" asked Lacq tensely.

"Nothing worth investigating," Curt replied. "We're too deep down in the citadel. Everything important would be in the upper levels."

"We could climb by means of those trusses between the walls," Otho proposed.

The inner and outer walls, for greater structural strength, were joined at regular intervals by integral trusses of synthestone. Though several feet apart, they formed a possible ladder up inside the walls.

"Come on—we're going up," Curt declared.

He slung the drill over his back by a strap and proceeded to climb up onto the trusses.

Grag muttered his dislike of the whole proceeding as they clambered up after him. Captain Future's hand-torch lit the way. They went upward between the walls, cramped by the narrow space, until Curt judged they were level with the main ground floor of the great palace.

He proceeded to bore another hole through the inner wall. When he withdrew the atomic drill, a ray of white light came through the aperture.

"Quiet, all—there's a lighted room on the other side of this section," Captain Future cautioned.

He applied his eye to the opening. The others saw his space-suited figure stiffen as he looked.

Curt was peering through the little loophole into a startling scene whose meaning and importance he instantly recognized.

"The throne room or audience chamber of the Cold Ones is on the other side of this wall!" he whispered. "For God's sake, don't move—"

He was looking into an oblong hall

of great size. It was lighted by flaring radioactive bulbs, but its somber black walls rose into the shadows. In this hall stood scores of the hideous Cold Ones. The osseous white semi-human creatures were ranged in formal rows, like a nightmare assemblage of ghastly skeletal apparitions.

These creatures were facing a dais at the far end of the hall. Upon that dais in a black stone throne sat a Cold One. The mutant-man's bony body was incongruously hung with jeweled ornaments. Around his fleshless neck he wore a wonderful collar of blazing white gems. His skull-like face and unwinking eyes seemed to be staring straight at Curt Newton. The creature on the throne, Curt knew, could only be the ruler Mwvr.

The Cold One ruler was actually staring at a space-suited man who stood before his throne. That man's pale hair and strong, firm face were recognizable through his glassite helmet. It was Vostol.

"Kaffr, what's going on?" Lacq was asking in an urgent whisper.

"Vostol is apparently conferring with the Cold One king about the treaty," muttered Curt.

No one in that dusky throne room was speaking, he saw. The conference in there was being conducted in an uncanny silence.

For the Cold Ones could not speak. They used telepathic conversation exclusively. Captain Future had not a doubt that it was telepathically that Vostol and the hideous Mwvr were now conferring.

AS CURT watched tensely, Mwvr rose to his feet. The Cold One ruler and Vostol advanced to a table near the throne. Mwvr gestured with his fleshless arm toward a document of metal-foil sheets upon the table.

"Good heavens, Vostol is going to sign the treaty now!" Captain Future exclaimed.

"We've got to stop him from doing that!" Gerdek whispered agonizedly. "You know what it means!"

Curt did know with dreadful clarity what the signing of the treaty would mean. Vostol would return at once to distant Beberos. By the terms of the

treaty, the Tarast people would be obligated immediately to submit themselves to the sterilization which would seal the doom of their race.

He must stop this somehow, Captain Future knew. Desperate, he raised his proton pistol. If he killed Mwrr, it would at least delay the conclusion of the treaty. But it would mean that the five adventurers would soon be captured. Then all hope of securing the lost secret of Zuur would be gone.

Curt had a better idea. He turned up the power of his space-suit interphone, so that it would transmit to a greater distance than the few feet to which he had restricted it. And he spoke in a sharp whisper.

"Vostol!" he whispered urgently. "Vostol, can you hear me?"

He saw Vostol turn startledly in the great hall. His voice was now reaching the Tarast envoy, whose own space-suit had the universal interphone.

"You must not sign that treaty, Vostol!" Captain Future was saying tautly. "Help is at hand—there is a chance that we can save the future of the Tarast race. You must delay, stall for time—"

"Chief, won't the Cold Ones in there hear you?" Grag muttered in alarm.

"How can they, when none of them has helmets or interphones or even ears to hear with?" said Otho excitedly.

There came to them upon the interphone a hoarse, startled whisper from Vostol.

"Who is speaking to me?"

"We're friends—right here in the citadel wall," Captain Future answered tensely. "You must do as we say and make some excuse for not signing. We are after a secret that will make the treaty unnecessary."

Mwrr was glaring at the startled, irresolute Vostol as though made impatient by this delay. The Cold One ruler glanced toward two of his fleshless officers. The two left the hall.

Was Mwrr going to bring pressure on Vostol to make him sign? The Tarast envoy still seemed bewildered. Mwrr was now pointing toward the metal-foil document on the table, in an angry gesture.

"But who is it that's speaking?" Vostol's whisper demanded again.

Curt hesitated. If he answered that it was Kaffr, he would turn Vostol against him at once. The Tarast firmly considered him a fake.

The decision was abruptly taken from his hands. Bright lights flashed inside this cramped space in the wall. Otho yelled a warning.

"Chief, the Cold Ones are coming into the wall! There below us—"

Things happened with explosive rapidity. Dozens of armed Cold One soldiers had poured into the space between walls by some door. Now they were clambering up the trusses all around Curt's little band.

"We're trapped!" Gerdek's thin cry sounded. "They're all around us!"

The Cold Ones were closing in upon them. The osseous creatures carried metal chains and were obviously under orders to capture rather than kill, for they did not use their atom-shell weapons.

CAPTAIN FUTURE and his comrades were so jammed together in the narrow space that they could not use their own weapons without hitting each other. In an instant the Cold Ones were all around them, grasping them with fleshless hands and seeking to fling the chains around them.

A cramped, furious fight ensued. Struggling, wrestling, falling from truss to truss until they were at the bottom of the wall, Curt and his band resisted the horde of attackers. Grag did the most execution, even hampered as his great body was by the narrow space. His metal fists smashed open bony skulls, exposing queer cartilaginous brains.

Curt Newton's pistol butt hampered a devil's tattoo on other hideous skull-faces. But this battle of the trapped adventurers could have but one conclusion. The horde of osseous attackers bore them down, bound their arms to their bodies with the light, tough chains. Then they were hauled roughly along the narrow space to a door in the inner wall.

"Chief, are you all right?" Otho was asking anxiously. "How the devil

did they know we were inside the wall, anyway?"

Lacq answered that.

"Mwvr was concentrating on reading Vostol's thoughts, as the two conferred telepathically. When Vostol whispered to us on his interphone, Mwvr would catch Vostol's *thought*."

"Of course! What a fool I was not to realize that," Captain Future accused himself bitterly.

They were being hauled through the door into a gloomy corridor. Their captors immediately forced them along this toward the big throne room. As the five bound captives were dragged in front of Mwvr's throne, Vostol recognized them and uttered an incredulous exclamation.

"The false Kaffr and his friends!" he exclaimed. "But you were supposed by now to be among the Unbodied, back in Bebemos!"

Mwvr was glaring down at them with his unwinking, expressionless eyes. That the Cold One ruler read Vostol's thoughts was apparent from the gesture of rage he made. Mwvr "spoke" telepathically—projecting a powerful thought which Curt and all of them were able to receive also.

"So these strangers who dared enter our palace are your friends, are they?" the hideous ruler charged.

Vostol's urgent telepathic reply was also clear to the captives.

"No, they're not my friend!" Vostol was denying. "I know nothing of how they came here or why they came."

"You are lying!" came Mwvr's furious thought. "It is all clear to me now. The Tarasts sent you to negotiate the treaty, merely to play for time while their secret emissaries came here with a deadly purpose. You are all in this plot together."

Vostol frantically denied this, but the enemy monarch had turned his attention toward Captain Future.

"I was able to intercept your utterances from inside the wall by telepathic concentration," Mwvr informed him. "You spoke of a secret you were seeking. What secret are you looking for here?"

Curt Newton coolly returned the ruler's unwinking glare.

"That's something you'll never know," he retorted with a clear thought.

"I feel sure that I already know," Mwvr returned ominously. "But I intend to find out how *you* learned of the existence of that secret. You are going to tell me everything you have learned."

His glaring gaze swung back to Vostol.

"And *you*, false ambassador, will pay the penalty for your lies at the same time."

Cold One guards sprang forth. They seized and bound Vostol like the other captives, as he protested his innocence.

Mwvr rose to his feet. Red rage colored the telepathic declaration that he addressed to the throng of Cold One officials and soldiers.

"My people, the Tarasts have been trying to trick us! They have sought to take advantage of the truce which we offered them. When I proposed that we would cease attacking their worlds if they would agree to racial sterilization, I believed they would be glad to accept.

"I thought such a compromise would save us the great losses we would suffer in a final attack upon them, and that within a generation we would inherit their worlds anyway.

"But their attempt to trick us will now bring our vengeance on their heads, no matter what our losses! I order an assault in force upon these last Tarast worlds! Call up every available space-sled and dispatch it to the Tarast cluster to take part in the attack. The attack is to continue until Bebemos and their other cities are utterly destroyed!"

IN OBEDIENCE to this furious order, officials and captains of the osseous throng sped from the hall.

Mwvr turned his attention now to the captives.

"As for these prisoners, take them down to my treasure chamber," he ordered an officer.

"But we cannot take them into the treasure chamber," the guard officer

reminded him telepathically. "You alone possess the key to it, Highness."

"I am coming with you," Mwvr declared. "I intend to find out just how much these men know of my secrets and how they gained the information."

Captain Future and his comrades, and the unlucky Vostol, were hauled out of the great room and down a corridor and stair to the level immediately beneath. Bound tightly, they could offer no resistance.

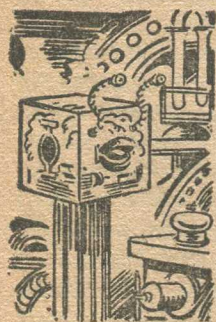
Curt's thoughts were a chaos of tragic realizations. All chance of ever finding Zuur's ancient secret seemed lost now. And worse, their attempt had precipitated an all-out enemy attack upon the Tarast worlds.

Vostol's bitter voice came to deepen Curt's dark depression.

"I hope you are satisfied now, you who call yourself Kaffr. You've brought final destruction on the people you professed to be helping."

CHAPTER XVIII

Escape



THE captives were halted in front of a door that was a single huge slab of synthetic stone. It had no knob or keyhole, but a dull jewel was mounted near its edge.

Mwvr approached and extended his hand toward the gem. Upon his fleshless finger was a ring set with an exactly similar jewel. As the two gems touched, both glowed with fierce red brilliance. A resonance of some kind had been set up which actuated the door lock. For massive metal bolts slid back and the great door swung open.

The treasure chamber into which Curt and his comrades were pushed was a long, windowless stone room lit by white bulbs. It contained nothing that looked like treasure. The only contents were some metal cabinets and several tables upon which sat dusty,

queer-looking pieces of scientific apparatus and receptacles full of assorted chemicals.

"Secure the prisoners to those rings in the far wall," Mwvr's harsh thought directed the guards.

In the farther wall of the chamber were heavy metal rings embedded in the synthestone, for support of some hanging cabinets. The cabinets were removed and Curt and his comrades secured.

They were, Captain Future realized, completely helpless. Even Grag's furious strength could make no impression on the chains which bound their upper bodies to the embedded rings.

Mwvr was now giving telepathic instructions.

"Withdraw and await orders outside the door. But leave me an atom-pistol."

"But Highness," the guard officer objected, "we cannot leave you alone with these enemies."

"Do as I say," Mwvr ordered angrily. "They are safely tied up. And I do not wish you or anyone else to hear the secret things about which I am going to question them."

"Oh-oh!" muttered the irrepressible Otho. "So we're going to talk secrets? I don't much like this little tea party."

The guards had withdrawn, closing the door after them. Its massive inner bolts were shot home by Mwvr. Then he turned to the captives. His glaring gaze ran over them—the mighty figure of Grag and the five space-suited men, Curt, Otho, Gerdek, Lacq and Vostol.

Mwvr appeared to recognize Captain Future as the leader, for he addressed Curt telepathically. The whole exchange that followed was purely telepathic, for the Cold One ruler was able to project his thoughts at will and also seemed perfectly able to receive his prisoners' answering replies.

"You and the metal man do not look like Tarasts, but undoubtedly you're working with them," Mwvr's harsh thought came to Curt. "You came to Thool in search of the secret of Zuur, did you not?"

"If you're so sure of it, why ask

me?" Curt Newton thought back coolly.

"I am sure of it, stranger," Mwvr replied grimly. "You told Vostol you were seeking a secret here. The only secret that could make you dare such perils is the one here in this chamber."

Captain Future stiffened at that information. And the effect of the telepathic statement upon Lacq was galvanic.

"Did you hear, Kaffr?" cried Lacq, in overpowering excitement. "The lost notebooks of Zuur are in this very room!"

Instantly came Mwvr's triumphant thought.

"Ah! So it is Zuur's notebooks for which you are searching!"

The Cold One ruler was no fool, Curt began to realize. He had neatly trapped them into admitting their purpose.

"The question that interests me," Mwvr continued incisively, "is how you came to learn of the existence of this secret. Nobody else, not even among my own people, dreams that we Cold Ones possess a dangerous hidden vulnerability. We rulers have guarded that secret in each generation, ever since the first ruler of our race took it from the dead Zuur who originally created us.

"We have preserved it to use only in case our own people should revolt against our rule.

"But now you strangers appear here, knowing all about its existence!" Mwvr went on with mounting rage. "How could you possibly learn that it exists? Who else knows about it?"

CAPTAIN FUTURE had been thinking with the superhuman clarity and rapidity that characterized his mind in moments of supreme stress. He had assessed the Futuremen's predicament in desperate search of a way out.

There seemed none. The six of them were all quite helpless, their upper bodies chained each to a solidly embedded ring. It was impossible to get their hands free. Yet a shadowy plan began to form in Curt's mind.

He answered the vengeful mon-

arch's telepathic question.

"No one else knows that there is such a secret," said Captain Future.

"Then how did you learn of its existence?" demanded Mwvr.

It was the question for which Captain Future had been waiting. His reply was in line with the tenuous scheme he had formed.

"Lacq, one of my Tarast comrades here, is a remote descendant of Zuur," Curt declared. "He had some of his ancestor's papers, which he showed me. In one of those papers, Zuur had hinted at the secret."

"Where is that paper now?" Mwvr asked instantly.

"I don't have it!" Curt answered hastily. "I destroyed it after I had read it."

He purposely made his denial too hasty and emphatic. As he had hoped, Mwvr immediately disbelieved the too-vehement denial.

"You are trying to deceive me!" charged the enemy king. "You undoubtedly have the paper in your possession. It must be destroyed at once, for not even my own officers may see it."

Gripping his atom-pistol in one bony hand, Mwvr advanced toward Captain Future. Had the Cold One king been able to read the hidden plan in Curt's mind, he would hastily have recoiled.

But he could not read Curt's hidden thoughts. The telepathic faculty of the Cold Ones was only an ability to project concentrated thought-messages or to detect such concentrated mental messages when projected by others.

Mwvr came close to Captain Future and reached toward the helmet of his space-suit.

"I shall have to remove your helmet and thus end your life, before I can search you. But you would never leave this chamber alive anyway—"

Mwvr never finished that coldly cruel thought. The opportunity for which Curt had desperately played had arrived.

Curt's upper body was tightly bound to the wall. But his legs were free. And he lashed out with them now in a carefully calculated kick at

Mwwr's bony shanks.

The Cold One's osseous limbs were kicked from beneath him. He fell, just as Curt had planned he should fall, directly in front of Grag.

"Grag, kill him!" yelled Curt at the same moment.

Grag acted. The mighty robot's upper body was bound, like the rest of them. But his huge metal legs were free also.

He instantly raised one of his massive metal feet, brought it down with all his force upon the head of the sprawling Mwwr. There was a crunching sound. Mwwr's osseous body lay suddenly unmoving.

Grag raised his foot to disclose that the hideous skull-like head had been shattered, laying bare the pulped cartilage-brain.

"Chief, that devil's dead!" cried Otho exultantly. "What an idea! And I thought we were done for!"

Curt Newton felt shaky from reaction.

"The credit is Grag's," he declared. "He acted in the one instant that action was possible. I hadn't dared warn him what was coming, lest Mwwr should pick up my projected thought."

"But what good does it do us?" Gerdek asked hoarsely. "We're still tied up here. We can't get away."

"And Zuur's secret is somewhere right in this room!" raved Lacq.

"Take it easy, now," Curt commanded. "One thing at a time. Grag, can you reach that atom-pistol with your foot?"

The atom-pistol Mwwr had held was still in the Cold One's hand. Grag extended his foot and pulled the bony corpse closer; then with his toe tugged the weapon out of the dead, fleshless hand.

"Good!" Curt approved. "Now kick the pistol over to Otho."

GRAG carefully kicked the weapon and Otho adroitly caught it with his foot, as it slid along the floor. He drew it in with his toe.

"What's the idea, Chief?" the android asked Curt anxiously.

"The idea," Captain Future said, "is to use the atom-pistol to get one

of us free. You'll have to do it with your feet, Otho. I chose you because you're the deftest of us all at such tricks. I want you to try to blow out the wall ring-bolt holding Grag."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Grag protested. "No crazy android is going to let fly with an atom-gun at me, aiming with his feet!"

"Otho will be careful, Grag," reassured Curt. "The shells in these small pistols make a flare of force only a foot across. The flare may scorch your back when it burns out the bolt in the wall, but it won't do you much real damage."

"Why not let somebody else get his back scorched?" Grag cried.

"Because if the space-suit of any of us is burned through, we'd die at once in this airless world," Curt explained.

Grag reluctantly acquiesced. He strained forward as far as he could, as Otho tensely maneuvered the pistol between his two feet.

Otho was unhumanly clever at such tricks of manipulation. But the heavy space-suit that covered his feet hampered him. At last he got the pistol between his toes. Gripping it there, he carefully turned it until it pointed up at the wall behind Grag's back.

Now Grag called a last caution.

"If you don't care anything about my life, Otho, just remember that if you miss the wall you'll probably hit the chief!"

"Be quiet," growled Otho. "You're distracting me."

The android seemed for an endless time to change the aim of the pistol imperceptibly.

"Here goes!" he muttered finally.

He squeezed hard on the pistol gripped between his feet, thus squeezing the firing button on the hilt. From the pistol flew a tiny atom-shell that struck the ring in the wall to which Grag was bound.

The tiny shell exploded in a little flare of dazzling force. Grag plunged face-forward onto the floor. The ring-bolt to which he had been tied had been blasted from the wall by the flare of force.

"Are you all right, Grag?" Captain Future asked sharply.

Grag's metal back was scorched and partly fused in places, but the robot was getting to his feet.

"I guess I'm not much hurt, though it'll take a lot of work to put some new plates in my back," he grumbled. He added more brightly, "Say, I think that flare fused through my chains too."

He expanded his mighty arms. The half-melted chains around him parted beneath the strain. Grag stood free.

CHAPTER XIX

Deadly Secret



IN a few moments, the robot had completely freed Captain Future and Otho and the three Tarasts. At that moment they all became conscious of a vibration from the floor. It was from a sharp knocking outside

the door.

"The Cold One guards out there!" hissed Otho. "That shell going off must have made a tremor that they caught. They're alarmed now."

"They can't get in very easily with those bolts holding the door," Curt declared. "We have a little time, at least."

Vostol, who had remained in stupefied silence during all this tense action, was now staring at Curt Newton with a wild expression.

"I almost believe that you are Kaffr, to have accomplished all this!" he said hoarsely.

But Lacq, the moment he was freed, had sprung excitedly toward the cabinets and apparatus at the other end of the room.

"The notebooks of Zuur!" he exclaimed, panting. "Mwwr said they were in this treasure chamber. If only he wasn't lying—"

Terrific tension held Captain Future and all the others as they searched through the cabinets. They hardly heeded the fact that the alarmed Cold Ones outside the door

had now begun to batter heavily on it. They had reached the crisis of their desperate plan.

It was Lacq himself who cried out with crazy exultation as he feverishly drew three small bound books from one of the cabinets.

"The three missing notebooks!" he choked. "They're here! And in them, the secret of the Cold Ones' vulnerability that my ancestor wrote down—"

Lacq was possessed by such emotion that his shaking hands could not open the notebooks. Curt could not read the Tarast writing. It was Gerdek who took the books and tautly ran through their pages.

"The secret is here!" he cried in a moment. "Listen to this! It's perhaps the last entry that Zuur ever made."

He read the ancient writing.

I have decided to destroy the colony of osseous mutant-humans whose development cost me so many years of labor. My hopes have ended in tragic failure. This osseous race which I evolved can never continue man's civilization into the future, as I dreamed.

They can withstand the cold and airlessness of our dying universe, it is true. My manipulation of the genes evolved a race capable of that, as I hoped. But their psychology is alien to that of ordinary humanity, and they are so coldly cruel and ruthless that I cannot entrust to *them* the future of civilization.

Even if I did so, they would in the future be all destroyed by the vulnerability to inherit them. It is a fatal defect which I entirely overlooked when I planned their evolution. It is a defect which does not harm them in the least, under the present conditions of our dying universe. But it would become lethal to all of them when our universe is reborn, as it will in some future time.

This fatal defect of the Cold Ones is their susceptibility to ultra-violet vibrations. Ultra-violet rays have a terrific damaging effect upon any living tissues not properly conditioned. Human beings, who evolved long ago when our universe was young and its suns poured forth much ultra-violet radiation, naturally developed protection against that radiation in the form of pigmented skin. This makes humans able to withstand a high degree of ultra-violet without harm.

But the Cold Ones have no developed protection against such radiation, for they have been evolved in our present dying universe, in which there is almost no such thing. Dying suns like ours emit hardly

any ultra-violet rays. So it is natural that the Cold Ones have no protection against such rays, for they do not need such protection now.

But when our universe is reborn, as it some day will be, then hot young suns will be pouring out floods of the ultra-violet rays. The Cold Ones would have no protection against those fierce rays. The radiation would almost instantly slay them all, shattering their cartilage-brains and riddling their osseous bodies. They would perish.

So the future of civilization cannot be entrusted to them. And as I have written, their malign and alien natures make that impossible, in any case. Therefore I have decided to destroy them before they try to turn on me and kill me. I shall use ultra-violet rays to exterminate them quickly.

Gerdek looked up from the ancient notebook.

"That's the last entry," he said hoarsely. "It seems that the Cold Ones killed Zuur before he could carry out his plan of extermination."

Captain Future was stunned.

"That's the hidden vulnerability of the Cold Ones, then? *Ultra-violet radiation!*"

CURT'S eyes blazed with excitement.

"Why in the world didn't I think of that? I should have realized that the Cold Ones, having been evolved in this dying universe, would have no inherited resistance to a type of radiation such as hardly exists here now. We humans have developed that resistance, but they lack it utterly."

"Then we can use ultra-violet radiation to smash the Cold Ones forever?" Lacq cried eagerly.

But Otho's thoughts were elsewhere.

"Come back to reality!" he exclaimed. "Feel that pounding on the door? The devils out there will be breaking in, in a few minutes!"

"That's right," muttered Grag. "We've got the secret, but how in the world are we going to get out of here with it?"

Curt Newton was feverishly examining the dusty scientific apparatus that lay upon the tables. It, like the notebooks, seemed to have been brought originally from Zuur's laboratory.

"If we had an ultra-violet genera-

tor, we could cut our way out of Thool with it," Curt was saying tautly. "There's a chance—"

Otho interrupted pessimistically.

"Sure, we could do just that little thing—if we could build a generator. All we need is a lot of assorted materials, and a good workshop, and several hours of time. Instead of which, we've got about two minutes before those devils break in!"

"You don't understand, Otho. There ought to be an ultra-violet generator somewhere here," Curt flashed.

"Who would leave it here—Santa Claus?" Otho countered.

"Mwwr would have one here, if my calculation is right," Captain Future retorted. "Mwwr, like the Cold One rulers before him, kept the secret so that he could use it to quell any possible rebellion against his regime."

"Suppose a rebellion did suddenly break out. Just knowing that ultra-violet was fatal to his people wouldn't do Mwwr any good in an emergency. He'd have to have an ultra-violet generator ready for action."

"Say, maybe there's something in that," Otho admitted. He joined them in a hasty search for the cabinets. In a moment he uttered a cry. "Hey, Chief, look at this!"

"This" was a heavy instrument whose chief feature was a broad quartz lens, mounted on the face of a square lead box around which was a hemispherical lead reflector.

"You've found it!" Curt said eagerly. He examined the instrument. "It has a chemical battery that seems okay. This was designed to throw ultra-violet radiation in a broad beam forward, so that the operator of the thing wouldn't absorb any of it."

He pointed it across the room and depressed its switch. A fan of purple light sprang from the lens.

"Okay, open the door to those guards, Otho," he ordered.

Otho hesitated.

"You sure that'll work, Chief? We've got only Zuur's word on it. Maybe the old guy was wrong."

"I'll stake my scientific reputation that the ultra-violet from this generator will shatter the brain structure of any living creature who has no natural

protection against it," Curt assured him. "Go ahead!"

Otho went to the door, which was vibrating wildly from the battering outside. The android suddenly released the massive bolts.

The door swung sharply open. The horde of Cold One guards outside seemed petrified for a moment by its opening. They stood, their hideous skull-faces peering in as they raised their atom-guns.

Captain Future loosed the purple beam. The ultra-violet radiation and its accompanying light bathed the skeletal figures in the doorway in a weird glow.

And the Cold Ones in that doorway died! It was quicker than the telling. They fell as though struck by lightning, as that fierce radiation cleaved into their unprotected brains.

"Jumping space-imps, it works! And how it works!" Otho exulted.

LACQ'S eyes were shining wildly. "My ancestor's secret—it will save the Tarast race. People will revere Zuur's name now, instead of cursing it."

"They will if we can get back to Bebe-mos in time," Curt rapped. "Remember, Mw-wr ordered an attack on the city in full force. We've got to get out of here and back to the *Comet*."

They emerged into the corridor. Two Cold One officers were hastening along it. The violet beam dropped them in bony heaps.

"Quick! We must find a way into the wall. Then we can escape from the city under the snow in the same way we came!" Curt urged.

It was Grag who found the passage into the wall: one of the doors designed to give entrance into it in case repairs were necessary. The adventurers crowded hastily inside and made their way to the hole they had cut through the outer wall. In a few moments they were emerging from this, beneath the snow of the ancient river bed.

Keeping beneath the concealing snow as before, Captain Future and his comrades pressed back northward along the river bed. The going was

easier now, for they followed the tunnel in the snow they had made in coming.

Curt raised his head above the snow to look back, when they had almost reached the mountains. The distant city of Thool now looked like an aroused hornet's nest. Space-sleds were swarming wildly over it, and lights were moving. Captain Future and his friends pressed on up the gorge.

When they stumbled exhaustedly into the *Comet*, Shiri came running toward them with exaltation on her face.

"You got the secret!" she cried. "I know you did—for you wouldn't have come back without it."

"We got it, but perhaps too late to avert a catastrophe to your capital," Curt Newton said, panting. "The Cold Ones may already be concentrating their forces for a full attack on Bebe-mos. We've got to get there quickly!"

The *Comet* rose a few moments later from the snowy gorge. It climbed rapidly through the somber darkness of frozen Thool, and arrowed out into space.

Captain Future built the velocity of the little ship to its utmost limits as they flew out through the graveyard of dead suns. Far across the universe lay the Tarast worlds, which might already be fighting an invasion.

The Futuremen were racing against time. The dragging hours of their homeward flight were an agony of torment to all of them. As they flashed through the gloom of the dying universe, they were not challenged by Cold One patrols. But that added to their anxiety rather than allayed it.

"It means that all their patrol forces have been gathered to take part in the attack on Bebe-mos," said Gerdek fearfully.

Curt nodded without answering. He and Otho and the Brain, while Grag piloted, were busy upon a tense labor. They were building a powerful ultra-violet generator, which would operate from the ship's power supply and give off a powerful radiation in all directions.

The hours seemed endless, as the *Comet* dashed like a thunderbolt

across the waning universe. To the anguished Tarasts, even their incredible present speed seemed slow. The Futuremen labored on at their task. They did not finish the big new ultra-violet generator until the dying star-cluster of the Tarasts loomed large across the sky ahead.

Captain Future took the controls as they rushed into the cluster toward the capital planet of the Tarasts. He decelerated expertly.

"Not a Cold One ship in sight," he muttered. "That doesn't look hopeful."

Again he cut speed, and again. Now at last they were sweeping down toward the central red sun and the capital world.

"Look!" yelled Gerdek in agony. "They're breaking into Bebemos!"

Down there upon the planet, the hothouse city seemed to be in its death throes. An armada of hundreds of enemy space-sleds was hovering vultuously over the capital, wrecking section after section of the great dome with atom-shells.

THE turret guns of the Tarasts were making valiant reply. But many turrets had already been smashed, and others had been overwhelmed by parties of Cold Ones who had landed on the dome.

"What are you stopping for?" cried Lacq wildly to Curt. The *Comet* had slowed down, high above the battle. "We must strike, Kaffr!"

Curt ignored the frantic Tarast's cry.

"Get into those ray-proofed space-suits, all of you," he ordered crisply.

He and the Futuremen had prepared garments scientifically proofed against even the most powerful radiation. They hastily donned them now.

"Now the generator, Otho," Curt directed.

The big ultra-violet generator began to hum as the power of the ship's cyclotrons was largely channelled into it. The radiating sphere of metal mounted on the generator blazed with blinding purple light.

From the *Comet* there pulsed outward a spherical nimbus of pale violet radiance. It swelled bigger and big-

ger until it formed a half-mile halo of powerful ultra-violet radiation, completely enclosing the ship.

Those in the *Comet* felt nothing, in their ray-proofed garments. Without that protection, even they could not have withstood the damaging effect of that terrific ultra-violet barrage.

"Now," said Captain Future grimly, "we are going down."

Gently as though in peaceful summer skies, the *Comet* glided down toward that desperate battle that raged over Bebemos.

Captain Future's comrades were sighted. Space-sleds came rushing savagely up toward them, with enemy crews leveling their atom-guns. Those space-sleds of osseous attackers entered the gigantic violet nimbus around the *Comet*—

"Gods!" whispered Vostol shakenly, a moment later.

The space-sleds were veering, falling, tumbling away! The Cold Ones on them had died instantly when they entered the violet nimbus!

Curt Newton's lean face was hard and set as he guided his ship on downward. He deliberately sent it into the thick of the enemy armada.

All around the *Comet*, space-sleds fell and crashed as their crews perished from the withering clutch of a lethal radiation their bodies could not resist. It was as though the *Comet* was the center of a great, invisible sphere of death as it moved back and forth amid the swarming space-sleds.

It was not a battle—it was a grim execution. Half the Cold Ones were gone already. Three-quarters of them were gone before the survivors ceased their vain attempts to reach the *Comet*, and broke wildly for space.

"They are shattered," said Gerdek slowly and unbelievably in the thick silence that followed. "The Cold Ones' power is smashed."

He repeated it as though he still could not believe his eyes.

"So softly, so swiftly—smashed forever!" Gerdek marveled. "We can drive them from every world they have conquered. We can insure the future of our race—"

Tears began to trickle down his cheeks. Shiri was sobbing with hap-

piness in Lacq's arms. Vostol was staring with awe at Curt Newton's drawn, tired face.

"I know now that I was wrong, no matter what the evidence," Vostol choked. "You are Kaffr. Only he could have done this thing!"

When they landed outside Beberos and entered city, they found its people still dazed by the incredible miracle that had snatched them from the very shadow of doom. But a swelling roar mounted as Curt and his band went through the crazily rejoicing throngs.

"Kaffr!" echoed the mad cry, over and over.

Curt spoke troubledly to Gerdek.

"Can't I tell them the truth about my identity now?"

"No, do not tell them," begged Gerdek. "The tale of how Kaffr returned to champion his people will be an inspiration to my race for all time to come. Do not destroy that inspiration."

Even beyond the Solar System, Captain Future was now a legend.

IN THE terrace before the Hall of Suns, beneath the shadow of the gigantic statue of Kaffr, old Igr greeted Curt Newton hoarsely.

"Can you forgive us of the Council for doubting you, Kaffr? It was only we—the people did not doubt."

The people—tens of thousands of them gathered in front of the great building—were shouting their faith and pride at this great moment. They hushed as Curt Newton began to address them.

"Tarasts, you have now a weapon that will enable you to drive back the Cold Ones and reestablish your domain over this universe. But you must not think that your tribulations are over. Many generations must still pass before this universe will be reborn to new life and youth. You must struggle and toil and endure until that time arrives.

"But that golden era will come, finally. And when it does, the days of your former glory will return. Again the stars and worlds of an entire universe will be ruled from this Hall of Suns."

Captain Future paused, and then concluded simply.

"My comrades and I are leaving you. We are going back to the realms from whence we came. But you will not need us. You have men among you who can guide your future, and without whose help we could have done nothing. So this is—farewell."

There was a long, hushed pause of absolute silence, a stillness in which there seemed no slightest movement in the whole vast throng. Then up to Curt Newton crashed a rolling, deafening shout, a thundering tribute such as kings might have been proud to receive.

"Hail, Kaffr!"

Shaken by it, Curt looked up at the giant stone figure and face of the real Kaffr.

"I did the best I could, in your name," he whispered.

CHAPTER XX

Revelation



THE Comet lay inside the big ovoid chamber in Tarasia's matter-transmitter, ready to hurtle back across the dimensional abyss to its own universe. Outside, Curt Newton and the Futuremen made their fare-

wells.

Shiri was crying. And Gerdek and Lacq seemed under the stress of equal emotion as they wrung Curt's hand. Otho looked uncomfortable.

"Let's get going," he said. "I never did like good-bys."

"That's because you don't have a sentimental nature like us humans," Grag remarked.

"Must you go now?" Lacq was asking Curt earnestly.

"There's nothing more for us to do here," Captain Future answered. "And—we're homesick for our own universe."

Shiri's violet eyes were understanding.

"The dark-haired girl back there—she will be waiting."

With a last wave, Curt followed the Futuremen into the ship. He paused as the Brain pointed to a new, square apparatus in the cabin.

"I've been fitting up this automatic recorder during the last few days," Simon Wright explained. "It will record certain data on the coordinates of our flight back across dimensions, even though we ourselves are too overcome to take notes."

Otho laughed.

"Stubborn old Simon!" he chuckled. "He's still trying to prove that the fourth dimension isn't spatial, even after we've flown across it."

"I still don't believe that all the principles of relativity in physics are wrong, if that's what you mean," Simon retorted sourly.

"You can pore over the theory of it after we get back," Captain Future told him impatiently. "It's time to start now."

They watched from the control-room window as Gerdek threw the switches of the great matter-transmitter.

Again, the Futuremen seemed to feel a stunning shock of unleashed energy that hurled them into a bottomless abyss. Again, there stretched around them that nightmare vista of unreal, super-geometrical space.

Sickness shook them all as the *Comet* seemed to hurtle amid foaming spherical universes in a complicated course. Once more their eyes were baffled by the impossible perspectives of alien dimensions around them.

Then a sharp shock of impact, a roaring in their ears. And they found the *Comet* inside the matter-receiver on the sunlit surface of Deimos.

"Curt!" The silvery cry was tremulous as Joan Randall came running with old Tiko Thrin across the garden toward them. "Oh, Curt!"

He held her in his arms.

"Joan, we've been through a lot. But it's worth it all, just to come back to you."

Tiko Thrin was tugging at his arm. The old Martian scientist's withered face was eager with excitement.

"You found a way to help the peo-

ple of that universe? Tell me all about it!"

"That'll take more than a minute," Curt answered. "Come on into the house. Coming, Simon?"

"No, lad. I want to study the data that was transcribed by my mechanical recorders during our return journey," the Brain replied.

It was late night, with the pink planet-glow of Mars shafting softly into the windows of Tiko Thrin's little house, before Captain Future finished the tale to which Tiko and Joan had listened breathlessly.

Not until then did the Brain join them. And there was something about the speed of his gliding entry and the sharpness of his rasping voice that betokened excitement. It startled them, for none of them had ever seen Simon Wright show excitement before.

"I've been studying the data in my recorder," said Simon, his lenslike eyes fixed queerly intent on Curt's face. "I've found out that the principles of relativity in physics are not wrong. The fourth dimension across which we flew is not a spatial dimension at all."

"But that's impossible!" Curt Newton protested. "We could see that we flew a tremendous distance through that dimensional abyss."

"That was merely illusion born of the ungeometrical perspectives of alien dimensions," the Brain contradicted. "The coordinates recorded in my apparatus show that we did not move even one mile in space!"

ITHO was incredulous.

"I don't get this," he said. "That other universe was supposed to be twenty billion light-years away from ours. We went to it and came back. Yet you say now we didn't move in space at all!"

"That other universe," Simon said trenchantly, "is not twenty billion light-years away. It is twenty billion years away. The fourth dimension is not a space dimension—it is, as relativity asserts, the dimension of *time*."

"Good heavens!" Captain Future was shaken mentally as never before by the implication. "You mean that

we were really hurled far forward across the time-dimension? That that other universe—"

"Yes!" exclaimed the Brain. "That other universe is our own universe, as it will be twenty billion years in the future! And those Tarasts are the descendants of our own human race. Language and names would change, in that time. 'Terrestrial' could easily become 'Tarast'."

A great awe held them all in silence as the astounding revelation of their epic adventure was brought home.

Then Captain Future spoke bewilderedly.

"But in that case, the Tarast legends of their remote past refer to our own present time. According to those legends, the great hero Kaffr who first led them in conquest of other worlds

should be living right now. But there's no great hero of that name in this age of ours."

"You're wrong," replied the Brain. "There is such a great hero of space-conquest living right now, one whose fame will go down in future legend. His name, like other names, would be corrupted by the passing of ages. 'Captain Future' would be corrupted in time to 'Kaffr'."

Curt Newton jumped to his feet as though he had received a galvanic shock. His eyes were dilated by a wild surmise.

"You mean that I—"

"Yes, *you* are the real Kaffr of legend!" cried the Brain. "You went twenty billion years into the future of our universe in order to impersonate—*yourself!*"

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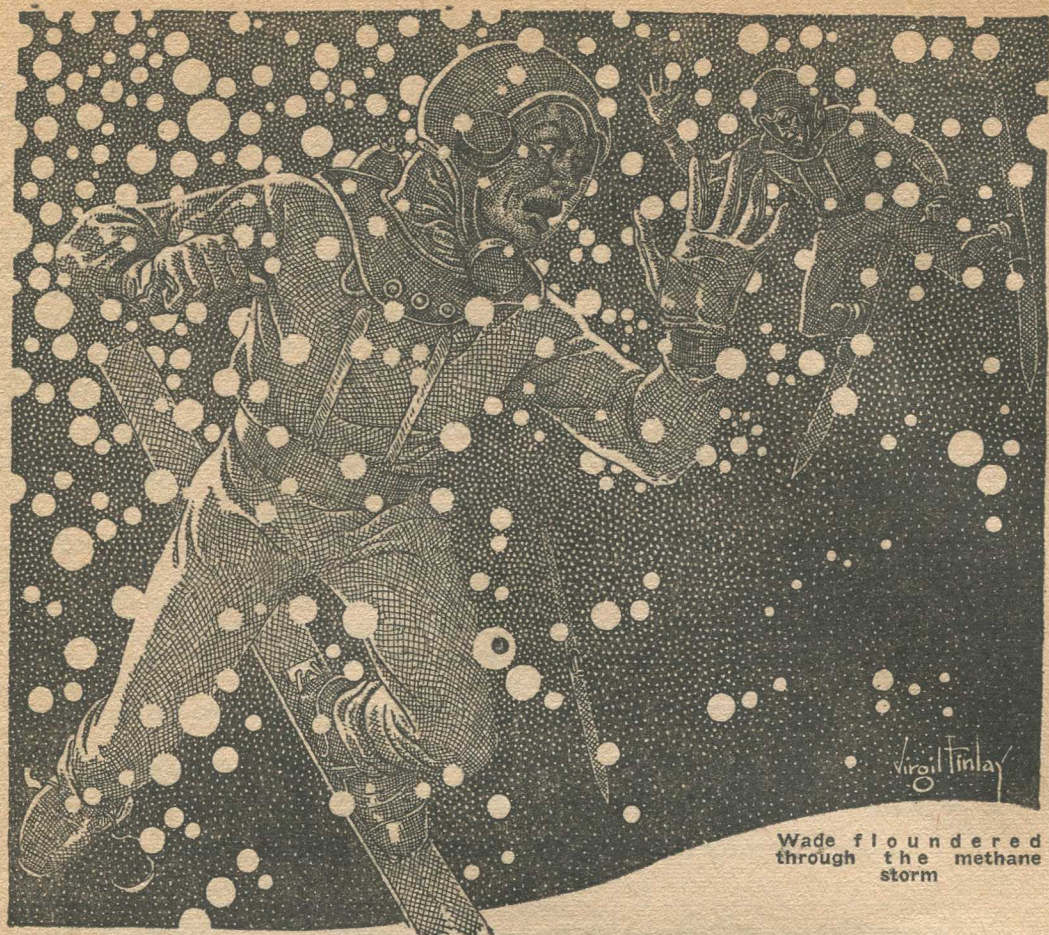
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Wade floundered
through the methane
storm

THE FRUITS OF PREJUDICE

By NATHANIEL NITKIN

*At Long Last, the Hatred which Gary Wade Held for the
Brave Martian Was Surpassed Only by His Remorse!*

"IT'S only thirty miles to the base," Gary Wade protested vehemently.

He sat down in the wrecked atomic sledge's wicker. The sledge was the only means of transportation on Uranus' frozen methane crust.

"Thirty miles of torture!" Pokelava retorted.

The Martian was a huge man with a muscle-bound face that looked as

though it were hacked from copper-colored stone. Tremendous arms ended in hairy fists, hard and heavy as steel mauls. A double fold of leathery flesh cushioned his head on massive shoulders.

Wade had heard rumors about the Martian's past. Pokelava was the offspring of convicts born in the Third Martian Penal Colony. Almost at birth, he had been snatched from his

mother's arms and sent to an orphanage in the High Sierras. They were considerate of him, fed and clothed him well. But he never forgot his parents were Martian convicts, and that he was a Martian himself.

Pokelava escaped from the orphanage and somehow found his way to Ganymede. It was whispered that he was a member of Blackie Norton's cut-throat pirate gang before the Space Guard broke up the Red Skull Banner Fleet.

"An Earthman can laugh at your thirty miles of torture!" Wade growled.

"You Earthmen think you can do everything." Pokelava burst into a derisive laugh. "Listen! This sector can't be duplicated on Terra. I've seen a whole Space Guard patrol wiped out five hundred feet from here. Blackie Norton lost half his pirate gang. And that isn't all. You'll see methane storms. Think it over before they come for us."

Wade trembled with anger.

"Who are you to tell me what I can't do?" he shouted.

Pokelava burst into another thunderous laugh.

"You're like your father, Senator Wade. No, and I don't care if you tell that to that old stuffed shirt, either. You think it beneath your dignity to take advice from Martian scum, don't you? Oh, you're so proud—so full of prejudice! You hate me for telling you that."

Wade did not reply, indirectly admitting Pokelava's accusation.

During his years with interplanetary services, Gary Wade had found he was *persona non grata* to old space-hounds. His Space Guard superiors treated him brusquely, though correctly enough. He could not understand it. A blue-blood, he proudly traced his genealogy to ancient times. No, he could not understand it, especially since his father was the powerful Senator Wade.

CAFÉS and mess halls still discussed an extremely annoying incident in the Space Guard. They spoke of negligence under fire and incompetence in maintaining authority. Gary

Wade would not acknowledge it was his fault. His father had blocked the story from newscasters and sent his son to accompany the renowned Dr. Parsons on the Fifth Uranian Expedition.

Pokelava walked over to a locker and opened it. He tossed a heavy space suit at Gary Wade and donned one himself.

"Mister Wade, if you want to reach the base camp afoot, put on your space suit."

"But you don't have to be my body-guard!" Wade sputtered.

"It's no pleasure, I'll admit." Pokelava shrugged. "I'm going with you, not for your worthless self, but for Dr. Parsons' sake."

It was daylight by Uranian standards when the two men opened the sledge's airlock. They laid a course to base camp by interstellar compass, an invention of Dr. Parsons that had won the Lehman prize. Rapidly the two men set off on skis away from the wrecked sledge.

Half an hour later they paused. Young Wade was breathless. Pokelava adjusted his oxygen-indicator flow with his gloved hand and smiled placidly at his arrogant charge. The Earthman's eyes clouded with blind fury.

"How far have we come?" Wade asked in a tone he would use to a rocket cabbie.

"Two miles," responded Pokelava curtly.

There was no sun or hint of sun, though there was not one methane cloud in the sky. Stars twinkled merrily, and the Milky Way laid a glittering band across the purplish black heavens. But Pokelava did not trust the weather's appearance.

All this—the unseen trail that the interstellar compass cut to base camp, the absence of sunlight, unbelievable cold, the weirdness of the terrain—made no outward impression on Pokelava. But Gary Wade was pale with fright. All his former space travels had ended at Mars. He had never seen such terrifying atmosphere.

They resumed their silent pace. All was quiet except for the crackle of snow that crumbled under heat of fric-

tion, to give off tiny clouds of gaseous methane behind the skis. The gas froze in two seconds with a whiplike snap. At last Wade could stand it no longer.

"What do you think made the eccentric drive of the atomic engine fail?" he asked, attempting to open conversation.

"You're the engineer." He saw Pokelava's shrug. "How would I know?"

"Stupid!" Wade muttered under his breath. "You're like all the Martian riff-raff in our spaceports. Bullheaded, too."

Pokelava turned to Wade.

"Thanks for the compliment, my friend, but you're wrong. I'm bullheaded, but not stupid."

Wade bit his lip and cursed for his failure to remember the portable radion mike whose cosmic waves had carried his low voice to Pokelava. Some day, Wade thought, he would show this Martian upstart his proper place in society—behind bars. . . .

The oppressive sameness of undulating methane crust that disappeared into dark void wore down the remnants of Wade's patience. There was nothing to catch the eye except an occasional knoll, and the further the two men went, the flatter the landscape became. Gary Wade recalled one of his father's remarks.

"Why do men have to go to other planets when there's still so much on Terra?" the senior Wade had said.

Senator Wade was a member of the Legion of Earthmen, the Federated World Temperance League, and the Terra First Committee. That was young Wade's heritage, his background.

Suddenly the Martian stopped. He dug his ski poles into the snow.

"We can't go any further," Pokelava said as he turned to his unwilling companion. "We'll have to dig in here. There—see that cloud."

IT WAS a low, black cloud that advanced toward them with increasing speed. It obscured the stars and cast a deathly pall wherever its shadow fell. They made out its high, purple column, lit by the Milky Way, the thunderhead that promised a terrifying storm.

On the other hand, it might be only an insignificant snow flurry. All methane clouds had the same general appearance.

A steady flicker of light shone like a lone candle out of the sepulchral darkness of the cloud's shadow. It was Dr. Parsons' base camp beacon. Gary Wade stared at the light and turned to Pokelava. Shrugging, the Martian unhooked his emergency shovel from his belt.

He began to dig a hole, a retreat for stormshelter.

Desperately Wade gave his skis a rapid motion that cleared clogging methane from the runners. He pushed on his ski poles and slid on toward the base camp. But Pokelava's strong hand caught him and held him back. Wade tried unsuccessfully to shake free.

"Nobody can live in a methane storm," Pokelava hissed. "The camp will still be there after the storm."

Wade ceased struggling. He stared at the flicker of light with a longing that was almost uncontrollable. It had a hypnotic grip over him. He shivered.

"Let me go!" he demanded, glaring bitterly at Pokelava.

The Martian did not relax his grip. Wearily Wade slumped into Pokelava's arms. The Martian sat him down on the crispy, frozen methane and turned to dig a shelter. Like a jackrabbit, Wade bounded to his feet. Giving his skis a quick shove, he raced toward the beacon.

"Come back, you fool!" Pokelava shouted.

He chased the crazed Wade, whose only thought was to cross the flat snowfield toward the base. The light beckoned him like a fire draws a moth.

Then the methane storm struck.

It began with a sudden lowering of darkness, falling before the two men's vision like something palpable. It was as if the masked lights of the universe had been shut off. This was the first warning of the approaching storm. Wade, heedless, raced across the methane fields.

"The fool! The colossal young fool!" Pokelava cursed.

The storm broke over their heads. It

was something swift and formidable. It exploded all around the two men with an overpowering concussion. In an instant, the two men lost sight of each other.

Wade was driven from his course. He fancied himself whirled a great distance through the air. Everything disappeared, even his power of thinking. Heavy white balls pounded at his thick space suit.

He blanched with terror. He remembered he had not adjusted his oxygen tanks. They were on his back, exposed to the storm's caprices. He fancied himself dying a slow death of asphyxiation.

In a revolt of misery and despair, Wade made the desperate resolution to escape the fruits of his own folly. He began to thresh with his arms and legs. But the wind was a solid wall which his puny strength could not overcome.

He tumbled over and over in the air. He had long lost his ski poles. Where he was going, he had no idea.

Suddenly the wind crashed him explosively into a knoll. Bruised, dazed, he tried to get up, unsuccessfully. He was breathing in short gasps now. Poisonous fumes of methane entered his space suit. The hint that his oxygen tanks were smashed froze him with terror. Before he could do anything about it, unconsciousness reached out and gripped him.

GARY WADE'S head throbbed madly. His brain seemed to be clogged and inert. A heavy weight pinned his chest, his muscles and his body, rendering him incapable of any movement.

He opened his eyes and moaned weakly. The mere physical effort drained his energy and he sank back into unconsciousness.

His head was better when he revived, although the pain was almost intolerable. Slowly his memory returned and his plight lay bare with its fatal significance. He was alone, crushed into a knoll, away from all help. The heater of his space suit would sizzle for lack of fuel. He would freeze into a chunk of flesh that once was a man.

Desperately Wade groped about

him. He found that he could scarcely move. The reason was made clear to him by the little oxygen meter at the base of his globular helmet. His oxygen flow was set for basal metabolism. Should he move vigorously, he would faint for lack of oxygen.

An upsurge of despair took hold of him. For one long moment, he threshed madly, but he was helpless against circumstances which trapped him. Tired and exhausted, he sank back. He bit his lip to stave off a tendency to burst into tears.

He wondered what had set his oxygen meter to basal metabolism. It could not have been the storm, for Dr. Parsons had cleverly designed the meter so that only human hands would change it.

Wade turned his head. He saw the campfire then.

It was only a tongue of flame, but it was utterly incongruous. It burned in the methane atmosphere without causing a sky fire, the greatest peril on Uranus. There was just enough oxygen in the air mixture to make the flame dangerous. But the campfire was chemically impossible. Wade could not understand it.

Then he saw Pokelava. The Martian sat in front of the fire. He watched it carefully as though he were feeding it, yet he prevented the flames from igniting the explosive atmosphere.

Wade reddened with sudden fury. Pokelava had set his oxygen meter to basal metabolism so the Martian would not be bothered with his crazy antics. Well—that would be straightened out too, Gary Wade mused darkly.

There was something in the fire meanwhile that surprised him. Pokelava hardly touched it. It burned steadily as though it had an automatic regulator to keep its flame from passing the danger point. The structure of the fire was simple enough. There were a few blocks of frozen methane, and a dome of glowing meshed wire that seemed to have a luminosity of its own was placed over the flame.

Gary Wade could not understand why the fire did not ignite the inflammable air. There was something eerie and mysterious here. Wade tried not to think of it, but it seemed so familiar

and the thought uncomfortably intrigued him. Gradually it dawned upon him that the structure resembled a Davy lamp he had seen in the Museum of Ancient Science.

The meshed wire kept the fire from igniting the atmosphere. No modern scientist could have thought of it, so old and forgotten it was.

Wade frowned. The Space Guard Pirate Manual never mentioned such a campfire: Ah—that was it! There was a passage about a pirate flare, but no man who was not a pirate had ever seen it at close range. It was a long forgotten principle. Only a poetic pirate like Blackie Norton would read ancient science and invent such a campfire.

Gary Wade realized suddenly that he was looking at a pirate flare; more, that he knew the secret of its operation. He knew now for certain that Pokelava was an ex-pirate—and the man he was seeking!

Now he watched Pokelava with a fixed grin. The Martian sat so still, like death. But he retained the fierce glow of his eyes, which was not possible in death.

Wade yawned. He was sleepy, and he could wait. He shifted his body and closed his eyes.

DR. PARSONS had seen Wade and Pokelava's atomic sledge recede into the cold darkness of Uranus. He had sent it to the meteorological outpost to bring back weather records that busy robots kept. Only the bluish flicker of the atomic engine's rear distributor pipes prevented complete oblivion in the dull glow that the sun barely lit.

The leader of the Fifth Uranian Expedition felt an uneasiness that was oppressive. He sought comfort in his men: strong Earthmen and tall, hardened Martians. But the men's grim faces were not reassuring.

"That Gary Wade!" Dr. Parsons muttered.

"Pokelava will bring him back," ventured an associate.

Dr. Parsons had smiled wordlessly.

But the sledge did not return on schedule. A sled a few hours overdue was normal enough in Uranus. It had taken full twenty years of Dr. Parsons'

life to wrest secrets out of Uranus, and he knew this was the most unstable planet in the Solar System.

"Pokelava knows more about staying alive on this confounded planet than all of us. He's a Martian," boasted a fellow associate from Mars.

"Pokelava's a good man," Dr. Parsons admitted readily. "He's been with me since my first expedition. He's an old spacehound." The scientist shrugged and turned back to his instruments. "But you know Gary Wade!"

In a way, Pokelava had been inseparable from Dr. Parsons since the scientist had recruited the tough Martian for his initial venture. It was Pokelava who suggested a certain type of shelter to combat Uranian methane storms and had shown the men how to build it. There were other incidents that had made Pokelava indispensable to Dr. Parsons. Pokelava administered the camp, and the scientist had time for research.

Dr. Parsons' associates wondered why he never took Pokelava with him to Terra. The scientist had hired the Martian to pilot his first expedition to Uranus, though he knew Pokelava was a member of the Red Skull Banner Fleet, a fugitive from the Space Guard.

Pokelava was candid enough. The expedition was an excellent hideout, and he would not be betrayed, because he was the only one who could bring Dr. Parsons back to civilization. Dr. Parsons treated Pokelava as a friend, not as an outlaw.

That brought about a great change in the tough, hard-boiled pirate. The Martian confessed that, for the first time, he felt he had a decent place in society. Sympathy and understanding changed him from a ruthless pirate into a man with deep concern for his comrades.

Dr. Parsons looked anxiously now at the "neutronometer," the barometer of Uranus. Its quivering needle rose, indicating the imminence of a methane blizzard. Cold sweat of anxiety dampened the scientist's brow.

The blizzard exploded over the hut. Small, hard balls of frozen methane drummed against its thick buna surface. Then with the force of a space sandblast, there followed a raging

storm of materions, sub-atomic matter encountered only in the Outer Interplanetary Region.

For all their invisible size, a bombardment of materions could peel off a space battleship's tough hide and send her limping ingloriously to the safer Inner Region.

The blizzard died as suddenly as it began. Hours passed slowly—and Gary Wade's sledge did not return.

"Time's up," Dr. Parsons said at long last. "We'll look for them in the plow ambulance."

But his voice was weary with doubt.

It was a flicker of light against the dark horizon that first attracted the scientist's attention. He adjusted the ambulance's television periscope lens

sons walked toward the gathering ring of men.

Gary Wade lay in a trench. His eyes were closed; his face was waxen as though he had already descended into mortal death. But the oxygen meter told a story. Wade's gently dilating and contracting nostrils confirmed it.

Presently young Wade stirred slightly. Dr. Parsons nodded at his men.

* * * * *

Gary Wade stared at the white walls of the sick bay. How he had been found and carried to the base camp, he had no idea. It was warm, full of life-giving oxygen. On Terra, oxygen was common. Now he appreciated the simple gas.

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until the flame was sharply outlined on the screen. The crew looked at their leader with perplexed frowns.

"It's a pirate flare," Dr. Parsons muttered and mentally crossed his fingers.

THEY found Pokelava. Seated in front of the pirate flare, he was rigid and immobile in his space suit. His chin rested on the globular headshield's base. His dead eyes were open, but not glazed as they should be in death. They were fixed on the fire with a vitality that had refused to be conquered.

"There's young Wade!" one of the men shouted.

With the reluctance of fear, Dr. Par-

The door opened. Wade frowned. He was comfortable in his hospital cot and he resented the newcomers. He grinned slyly and closed his eyes. But his ears were open.

He heard two men talking as they entered.

"Wade's still unconscious."

"He's lucky, but he doesn't deserve it."

"Yes. If only Pokelava, not this fool, had survived the blizzard."

"To think that Pokelava sacrificed his life for *him*! Why did he do it?" the second man demanded.

"I don't know. It might have been that decent streak in the old pirate which made him insert his oxygen

tubes into Wade's suit when he found Wade's tubes were cracked."

"Incredible how he retained the strength to make young Wade comfortable," the other said. "Pokelava adjusted Wade's oxygen tubes and meter to basal metabolism, while he himself died for lack of oxygen. 'It doesn't make sense!'"

"Don't forget that he also built a pirate flare afterward."

"Gosh, Pokelava's eyes! Even in death!" the second fellow recalled.

"Dr. Parsons says it takes a lot to kill a tough Martian spacehound."

Gary Wade bit his lips. A tear ran unashamed down his cheek.

"Why did Pokelava give up his life for me?" he muttered aloud, discarding all pretense of unconsciousness. "I am not worth it. I—I came here to trap and arrest him," he said miserably.

The memory of the assignment hit Wade with sudden, stunning remorse. His father and resentful Space Guard brass hats had gathered there in the Commandant's office. Proudly Senator Wade told Gary to make a sacrifice and be "expelled" from the Space Guard, in order to allay Pokelava's suspicions. The Senator would see that the right parties spread rumors. Then Gary would enlist with Dr. Parsons.

There were rumors that a pirate, whose black dossier in the Guard files was still incomplete, always accompanied the scientist. In the end, Gary Wade would bring back the pirate, a prisoner. He would be a credit to the family. (And an indirect help to his father's reelection campaign.) A credit . . .

Young Wade was bitter now. He knew it was empty pride that had made him an unbearable fool. Pokelava had proved himself a better man than his pursuer. Pokelava could not have been such a ruthless pirate as his dossier pictured. This Martian offspring of convicts had sacrificed his life for a man whom he hated. Wade, a top-notch blue-blood, knew in his heart

that he himself would have been incapable of such a deed.

He would make amends, though. Yes, he would tell newscasters that Pokelava had reformed, that he had given up his life for a man who treated him miserably.

But even such an admission as that did not now satisfy Gary Wade. Pokelava's death burned into his conscience like a white-hot poker.

"Why did Pokelava give up his life for me?" he screamed aloud.

The two visitors in the sick bay—they were hospital assistants—stared at Gary Wade as though he was out of his mind.

But shrewd Dr. Parsons knew. Pacing his room, he began dictating his version of the tragedy.

"Pokelava died for me," said Dr. Parsons. "Write that down so that future generations will know when my memoirs are finally published after my death."

With an unsteady hand, disturbed by strong emotions, a Martian secretary took down the words.

"Pokelava knew that if anything should happen to Gary Wade, his father would block further exploration of Uranus. Senator Wade has that much power. Such an action would break my heart. For if we discover the secret of Uranus' strange behavior in relation to distribution of materions, we can predict the frequency of space sandblasts.

"That will open the Outer Region to transports, and perhaps we shall explore the void beyond the Solar System. That is my ambition, and Pokelava knew it. That is why he gave up his life for Gary Wade."

Dr. Parsons paused and cleared his throat.

"But Pokelava did not die in vain. We shall stay here until we solve our problem. The first transport to reach the Outer Region will carry Pokelava's name. Future generations will know about him!"





CAPTAIN FUTURE TRAILS THE CHAMELEON

*How the World's Greatest Space-farer Met Defeat
in His Battle of Wits With a Wily Space Thief!*

WHENEVER men of the System talk of Captain Future's brilliant exploits, someone sooner or later is sure to say:

"Well, after all, Captain Future met his match once. The Chameleon beat him."

The whole System knows that as the one major defeat on the record of the Futuremen. But the System does not know all the story of that famous occasion when Captain Future was bested by the Chameleon.

An Interplanetary Robber

The Chameleon was the most daring and notorious interplanetary robber in the System. He was not one of the space-pirates who infested the wild moons of the outer worlds. He preferred almost always to work alone, and his depredations were carried out with a smoothness and skill and lack of bloodshed far removed from the vicious raids of the brutal corsairs.

He was not a killer—he was a thief of genius.

It was the Chameleon who single-handed held up a space-liner, by gaining mastery of its control-room and then forcing the passengers to deposit their valuables in a life-rocket in which he later vanished.

MEET THE FUTUREMEN!

In this department, which is a regular feature of CAPTAIN FUTURE, we acquaint you further with the companions of CAPTAIN FUTURE whom you have met in our complete book-length novel. Here you are told the off-the-record stories of their lives and anecdotes plucked from their careers. Follow this department closely, for it contains many interesting and fascinating facts to supplement those you read in our featured novels.

It was the Chameleon who stole the fire-emerald eyes of the Venusian swampmen's god, though that idol was at the center of a cage of ferocious marsh-tigers.

It was the Chameleon who impersonated an Earth official come to Mars to collect the Government revenues, and walked coolly off with the immense sum.

The Chameleon Laughs

The Chameleon seemed to laugh at the attempts of the Planet Patrol to catch him. Always, when they were hottest on his trail, his little, swift black cruiser would vanish as though space had swallowed it up.

It always vanished in a certain section—Sector 16—of the asteroidal zone. The implication was clear that the Chameleon's base was somewhere in that sector, but the Patrol searched for it in vain. So great became the Chameleon's reputation, that merchant-ships plying through the zone made long detours to avoid that sector.

It was this development which caused Halk Anders, commander of the Patrol, to swallow his pride and ask for Captain Future's help in catching the arch-thief of the System.

"He's got us stumped!" swore the commander. "And ships are having to make that long detour around Sector 16, just because of one criminal. We're becoming the laughing-stock of the System."

A Subtle Trap

Captain Future, who wanted to get back to his Moon home, was not interested in chasing slippery thieves and said so.

"It's your job, Halk," he grinned. "You'll have to search Sector 16 until you find out where the fellow has his hidden base."

"I tell you, we've been over every inch of that sector a hundred times!" exclaimed

the frustrated commander. "There's some dangerous meteor-swarms in it, and there's Mazzatarra and Ferronia, a couple of small, airless asteroids. But there's no place where a man *could* have a base. Yet the Chameleon has one there, somewhere."

Curt Newton became more interested. "The fellow must be clever. But why waste more time hunting for his base. Why not make him walk right into your arms?"

"You mean, set a trap for him?" asked Halk Anders. "It wouldn't work. We've tried it, and the Chameleon's too smart for that."

"You haven't set a subtle enough trap," Captain Future told him. "The Chameleon would be clever enough to investigate before making his play. I'll set a trap for him that he can back-trail without having his suspicions aroused—and he'll come walking into it."

Prospector's Luck

A short time later, the telenews headlined the sensational discovery of an Earth prospector on Mercury. The prospector, John Willison, had found a dozen sun-stones, the most valuable gem in the System, near the edge of the Hot Side.

Captain Future was the lucky prospector, of course. He had gone to Mercury and, well-disguised, had actually unearthed the rare sun-stones from a deposit which the Futuremen had long known about.

As Willison, the lucky, newly-rich prospector, Curt came to Earth. He was televised by the news-services, showing his jewels to the System, bragging of his good fortune, playing his part to the hilt.

"Aren't you worried over the safety of your jewels, Mr. Willison?" the interviewer asked him smilingly.

"Not *me*!" Curt answered boastfully. "I'm an old hand on the interplanetary frontier, and I know how to look after what's mine. I've sold one of the stones, and the rest are safe with me, from any thief."

Curt had really sold one of the jewels. With the money thus derived, he set up as a newly-rich millionaire in an elaborate mansion near New York. Otho, in appropriate disguise, was his butler. The trap was now ready, and they waited for the Chameleon to enter it.

At Last—a Visitor!

Weeks passed, but nothing happened. Curt was not impatient. He had known the Chameleon was clever, and he guessed that the notorious thief was carefully checking the trail of those jewels before acting.

Then one night, Otho came gravely into the library and told Curt, "A caller to see you, Mr. Willison. It is a Mr. Norman Thaine."

Under his breath, Otho hissed, "It's him! The X-Ray alarm at the door showed that he's carrying an atom-pistol."

"All right, show him in," Curt said

loudly to his "butler."

Mr. Norman Thaine was a well-dressed, studious looking young Earthman of quite ordinary appearance. He came to the point at once.

"Mr. Willison, like everyone else I've heard of your sun-stones. I'm very much interested in them."

"What do you mean—interested?" barked the disguised Captain Future, pretending to scowl suspiciously.

"Let me explain," said Norman Thaine earnestly. "I am a jewel-collector. I can afford to pay a good price for your stones, since a space-ship invention of mine a few years ago made me fairly wealthy. You can check my references, if you wish. I'd like to see the jewels."

Curt looked over the documents Thaine handed him. They seemed authentic. Yet he was certain that this man was the Chameleon.

A Surprise Attack

He nevertheless went to a secret cupboard and took from it the little casket in which were the eleven blazing yellow sun-stones.

"There they are, Mr. Thaine," he drawled. "Beauties, aren't they? You sure you can afford to buy one?"

"Yes, of course," said Thaine. As he stepped forward, his hand went into his jacket-pocket.

"No you don't, Chameleon!" exclaimed Curt, and plunged forward before the man could draw the gun in his pocket.

Captain Future's surprise attack caught the other before he could resist. Curt's swift ju-jitsu onslaught had the man overpowered in a moment.

Ten minutes later, Commander Halk Anders of the Patrol came in answer to Curt's call.

"There's your Chameleon, Halk," grinned Curt, pointing to the prisoner.

"You must be crazy!" said Norman Thaine. "I'm not the Chameleon."

"Then why," Curt asked him dryly, "were you reaching for the atom-pistol in your pocket?"

"I wasn't reaching for that—I was reaching to show you the money in my pocket, to convince you I could buy one of the jewels," Thaine retorted. "I carried the gun, for protection of my money."

"He did have a big sum of money in that pocket," Otho reported.

"Sure stolen money," grunted Halk Anders. "He's the Chameleon all right."

"But I'm not!" Thaine insisted. "Those identity-papers—"

"All forged, without doubt," the Commander snorted. "Captain Future, you've done the Patrol a big service getting this fellow. I'm glad that I can tell those scary shipping companies now that it's safe to go through Sector 16, since the Chameleon's caught now."

Thaine Proves His Identity!

The telenews blazoned the news to the whole System in the following hour. The

Chameleon captured at last—by Captain Future!

People remarked, "Well, he was slick enough to fool the Patrol a long while, but the Futuremen were a different matter."

But, up in headquarters of the Patrol in Government Tower, Commander Anders was not feeling as triumphant as he had felt at first.

"I can't understand this!" the commander told Captain Future. "We checked that fellow's papers, just as a matter of routine—never doubting they were forged. But they're *not* forged. Apparently, this man has a solidly-established identity as Norman Thaine, Earth inventor."

"Of course, I'm Norman Thaine!" insisted the prisoner. "This is all nonsense about me being the Chameleon."

Curt was unconvinced. "You're the Chameleon, and we both know it," he asserted. "And I'm going to prove it."

But, in the following days, Curt found that he could not shake the identity of Norman Thaine. Thaine was identified by several people, in particular, by the president of the space-ship factory to whom he had sold an invention a few years before.

"Yet he is the Chameleon, beyond doubt!" Captain Future declared. "I see it all now. He's been clever enough to establish two or three different identities, through the past years, in preparation for just such a situation as this."

Release!

"But we can't prove he's the Chameleon," Halk Anders said helplessly. "None of the Chameleon's former victims can positively identify him. Yet he's not using make-up or disguise—apparently the only disguise he uses is cunning alterations of expression, and posture. We can't prove he's the Chameleon, or even that he intended to rob you of the sun-stones that night. And he *can* prove he's Norman Thaine."

"And he's hired a lawyer who's demanding his release under the habeas corpus clause of interplanetary law," put in an official.

"We'll have to release him, then," groaned Halk Anders. "By law, we can't hold him longer when we have no proof of his guilt."

"But we *know* he's the Chameleon!" Curt Newton exclaimed.

"Sure we do, but we'll have to let him go anyway, and admit to the System that we didn't catch him after all," Halk said unhappily.

Norman Thaine was brought into the Commander's office, and handed his release. Not by an iota, did he display any exultation.

"I'm going to charge you all with false arrest," he declared indignantly.

The Doomed Space-Liner

Curt Newton knew that even as he spoke, the master-thief was laughing to himself behind that indignant mask.

"Get out of here, before I lose control

of myself!" Halk Anders blazed at Thaine. "If there was just one shadow of proof—"

At that moment, there came an interruption. The captain of the Mars station of the Patrol appeared, in the televisorscreen nearby.

"Calling GHQ!" he was exclaiming. Then as Halk Anders snapped a switch, the officer continued hastily, "Just picked up SOS from the liner *Starmaid*! She was running through Sector 16 of the asteroid zone when an uncharted meteor-swarm caught her."

"The devil!" groaned Halk Anders. "I told the shipping companies not to start going through Sector 16 again until it had been freshly charted!"

"The *Starmaid* was hard hit, sir," the other reported tautly. "She telaudioed information that the ship was completely crippled, that its passengers and crew were abandoning her in the life-rockets, but that they had only four life-rockets—the rest were smashed. Crowded in like that, they haven't air enough for more than twenty hours."

"Good God!" muttered the Commander, appalled. "They're doomed, then. We can't get a relief cruiser from Mars station to that sector in less than ninety hours."

"Isn't there any habitable 'toid in that sector where they can land?" asked the Martian officer tensely. "I could advise them—"

"You know there isn't—nothing but those meteors and a couple of airless asteroids," groaned Anders. "Not a place in that whole sector with air enough to keep them alive that long—"

The Secret Base

He stopped suddenly, as he saw that Captain Future was looking at Norman Thaine, quietly and steadily.

"You have a secret base in that sector, Chameleon," Curt was saying. "There'd be air enough there to keep those people alive. They could get to it—if you told us where the base is."

"How can I tell you that?" Thaine retorted. "I'm not the Chameleon—I don't know where his base is."

"There'll be women and children in those life-rockets," Curt went on quietly. "Women and children who will die of suffocation twenty hours from now, unless they reach a place with air."

Sweat stood out on Norman Thaine's forehead. His face took on a gray pallor, and he clenched his fists.

When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. "All right, Captain Future. Tell those life-rockets to make for the asteroid Ferronia. There's a crater-peak near its northern pole. Down in that crater they'll find an air-lock, and beneath it is my cavern-base. It has oxygen-generators enough to keep them all alive until help comes."

When Halk Anders had repeated that information to be relayed by telaudio to the life-rockets, Captain Future looked fixedly at their prisoner.

"You realize, of course," Curt said to

Norman Thaine, "that you have just convicted yourself of being the Chameleon?"

The Chameleon laughed harshly. "Sure, I know. And just when I was free to walk out of here. I'm the prize idiot of all time, eh?"

Pluto Prison for Life!

Anders said, movedly, "I wish I could tell you that this would cancel out your record, Chameleon. But it won't—the courts will have to send you out to Pluto Prison for life in spite of what you did."

"Well, I was bound to go there sooner or later," shrugged the Chameleon.

Curt told the Commander, "I'll watch him while you call the guards back to take him, Halk."

Looking at Curt a little puzzledly, Halk Anders went out. Left alone, with the prisoner, Curt sat quietly balancing his proton-pistol on his knee. He spoke casually.

"The little rocket-flier I came here in tonight is up on the landing-deck atop this Tower, Chameleon," he remarked.

"What about it? I'm not going anywhere, said the Chameleon half-bitterly.

"I don't know," drawled Captain Future. "A smart, active fellow like you might be able to duck out of this office before I had time to shoot, and make it to the top-deck and get away in that flier."

A Straight Space-Trail

The Chameleon became rigid, staring at Captain Future.

Curt spoke on casually, looking absently at the ceiling.

"A fellow as smart as that," he said, "ought to be smart enough to stop all this business of robbery and blaze a straight space-trail from now on."

The Chameleon's eyes shone. "Thanks,

Captain Future," he whispered.

"Thanks for what?" Curt repeated. "I don't know what you're talking about. I—"

He grinned, then. For the Chameleon was already gone, like a shadow. Curt waited a moment, then fired a crashing blast from his gun into a blank wall. He heard a rocket-flier roaring away, overhead.

Halk Anders and other Patrol officers came running in a moment later. They found Curt Newton the picture of chagrin.

"He tricked me and got away!" Curt swore. "He was gone before I even fired in his direction!"

Captain Future Can Take It!

A few minutes later, when the Commander was alone with Curt, he favored Captain Future with an understanding grin.

"I knew why you sent me out on that fool's errand, Future. And I'm glad you did. A fellow who did what the Chameleon did tonight deserves to have a few rules broken for him."

Curt nodded. "Somehow, I think we've heard the last of the Chameleon, Halk. I don't think he'll ever bother the Patrol again."

Halk Anders pointed out, "You realize this is going to make you look awful foolish? I'll have to admit that the Chameleon tricked Captain Future to get away."

Curt shrugged. "Go ahead and admit it, Halk. I can take it."

* * * * *

The Chameleon never resumed depredations again. But he has never been forgotten by the System.

For he was, as everybody knows, the one outlaw who was smart enough to beat Captain Future!

TIME AND SPACE MEAN NOTHING TO THE MYSTERIOUS
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SECRET WEAPON

By
HENRY S. LEWIS

*Mild Little Professor Karl
Gives the Scientists of the
Third Reich Atomic Power!*

FROM all over Europe, word had somehow leaked out.

"The Reich is desperate! The Reich needs more men, more food, more raw materials, but cannot get them! The Reich will do *anything* to insure victory!"

And in a small Bavarian college town, a lean and sallow faced man heard the cry. He was not a very important person, this Dr. Otto Karl. He had a ridiculous little beard and horn-rimmed glasses which just about hid the upper part of his face.

Dr. Karl heard the cry, and he knew what he had to do. At his physics class one morning, he stopped abruptly in the midst of his lecture, and apologetically faced his students.

They were quite young students, and there were not many of them. They had never been particularly respectful, for an unconfirmed rumor had been about for years that Dr. Karl was a renegade Russian exile who had fled five steps ahead of his coattails.

"Gentlemen," Dr. Karl began, "I have an announcement to make. Tomorrow I leave for the capital of the Reich. I am appointing Willy Muenster to conduct the class in my absence. I trust I shall find nothing amiss when I return."

"You are going to the Eastern Front to supervise our strategy, Herr Doktor Karl?" one of the boys smirked.

The physics professor looked at him with his mild blue eyes.

"It will take strategy to win this war," he said slowly. "Yes, indeed. Great strategy."

And that was all there was to it. Dr. Karl went to Berlin.



Before he returned a new instructor arrived to take over the class.

That was the last his students saw of Dr. Karl. But though they did not meet with him personally, they saw soon enough the square brick building that Labor Corps workers put up next to his house, on the city's outskirts.

IT was a funny little house, this home of Dr. Karl's. It was said that before the war, scientists from every country in Europe were likely to turn up there.

What had been the object of their visits was not disclosed. There had been rumors that Dr. Karl was working on a great secret invention, whose disclosure would startle the world.

But when the war broke out the professor had retired into his shell, emerging only to teach his classes and help his students with their first attempts at laboratory experiment.

Now it seemed that a new phase in Dr. Karl's career had come to life. For one whole day, trucks loaded with expensive apparatus drove up to the just-completed little brick laboratory.

Presently transport planes landed at the city's airport, to disgorge important-looking specialists who disappeared immediately into taxicabs and made for Dr. Karl's place. Rumors flew thick and fast.

Then came the day of demonstration. At least, that was the word that went around. Of course, none of the

citizens were allowed to witness it. But some managed to conceal themselves behind boulders on the hilltop, and others brought out binoculars they were not supposed to own.

Dr. Karl faced the tense group of experts come to aid him and to report back his success or failure.

"U-two-thirty-five, gentlemen," he said. "The isotope of uranium. The most powerful element ever known. Atomic power! Watch!"

He strode quickly behind a compact, deadly apparatus that resembled in certain respects a machine-gun. Carefully he sighted the weapon at a goat tied to the post a hundred yards away.

"Now!" said Dr. Karl.

His finger depressed a sort of trigger. To the eye and the ear, nothing happened.

Then the fascinated specialists focused their eyes on the tethered goat—and they gasped.

There was no animal now, only a flurry of wool, with little chips of horn and hoof floating to earth.

"*Mein Gott!*" welled out the experts' exultant cry. "We have our secret weapon at last! On to victory!"

And that was the last the townsfolk actually saw.

But Dr. Karl, it was now reported, had the Reich's scientific brains at his disposal. Then, one hot summer morning, the real higher-ups began to arrive. Their planes swooped down at the airport, and important figures hustled out. Army staff cars drove up briskly and whisked the arrivals off to Dr. Karl's.

"The main demonstration!" the word went around. "Now is the crucial test. Our little Bavarian city will become famous!"

WITHIN the new brick building, Dr. Otto Karl greeted his distinguished visitors. The lean, sallow physics professor had not changed much since the day when he had gone to Berlin, months before.

Except that a new and purposeful light seemed to shine in his ordinarily mild blue eyes, and from time to time a dull flush spread across his pale features.

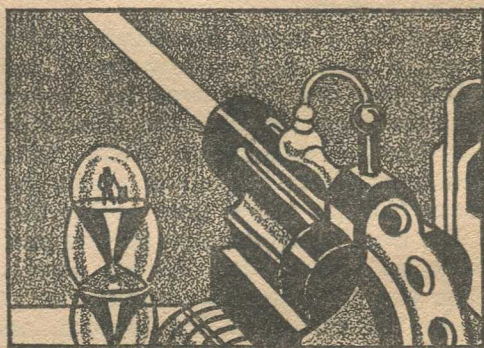
"Gentlemen," Dr. Karl began when

his guests had seated themselves, "today, gentlemen, you are about to witness the supreme tests."

He motioned with his hand, and black curtains at the far end of the room were drawn apart. The high officials leaned forward in cruel anticipation. Behind a thick partition of leaded glass sat a row of hopeless men.

"These men were trouble-makers, as you know," Dr. Karl explained. "They were brought here from every corner of Occupied Europe. Saboteurs, guerrilla leaders, spies. It is fitting they should witness this demonstration."

A cynical smirk went around. All eyes now turned to the evil-looking instrument which Dr. Karl was about



to operate. It was a lethal, finely built gun with several muzzles, stouter and more durable than the original demonstration piece.

"Now," said the physics professor. His voice was suddenly grim, harsh. "Now is the time."

HE SWUNG about to face his audience.

"When I press this button here"—he pointed—"the devil himself will break loose. But not at those miserable prisoners, gentlemen. It is you the devil will embrace!"

The high Reich officials stared at Dr. Karl in horror-struck fascination.

"Nearly fifteen years have I waited for this moment!" the professor's voice rang out. "I am really a British agent. That long ago, British Intelligence knew that Germany was rearming, contrary to the stated policy of

her foreign ministry and the government itself.

"So I came to Bavaria and settled down. It was not at all difficult in those days. Germany was a republic, and there was no Gestapo. And so, gentlemen, I bided my time. I taught at the little college here, and I continued my experiments with uranium.

"Then," Dr. Karl said grimly, "Germany under Hitler went mad. I waited until the Reich itself was desperate. Then I announced my discovery of a great new secret weapon. And, like the fools you are, in your desperation you agreed to help me.

"You have ruined this nation, gentlemen. You have ruined all of Europe. Germany is a stench in the nostrils of civilization. But your unholy depredation must stop sometime."

The room was frozen with terror.

"My own contribution to a better world is small enough. Atomic power, gentlemen. I have seen to it that my notes will be transmitted to the British War Cabinet. Atomic power, you despicable *Herrenvolk*, you make-shift overlords of a master race! I give you the greatest power in the world!"

One of the horrified experts half rose from his seat. He lunged frantically at "Dr. Karl," mouth drooling with terror. Out of the corner of his eye, the professor saw him come.

He pushed the button . . .

Minutes later, men were seen emerging from the shambles. The terrified townsfolk never bothered their heads as to who they were. The men just came from the rear of the shattered laboratory, to vanish into the surrounding countryside.

"Ah!" said one Serbian guerrilla leader to his comrade. He had been a chemist before the war. "We were to be destroyed by atomic power, so our guards sneered at us. I tell you, there was something strange about that Professor Karl. We could not hear him speak, but I know now that he was on our side.

"Water mixed with U-two-thirty-five!" exclaimed the former chemist. "That was how he did it. The most deadly explosion conceivable! Come, fellow Chetnik," he urged his comrade. "All Europe waits to hear!"

Keep Faith with Them



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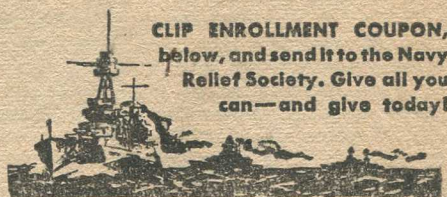
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THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW

THE MOONS OF MARS

Phobos and Deimos, Tiny Satellites of the Red Planet, May Hold the Secret of the Solar System's Past!

THE two moons of the planet Mars are among the smallest satellites in the whole Solar System, yet they are also among the most interesting.

Deimos, the inner and smaller of the two moons, is little more than ten miles in diameter. But this little moonlet travels so swiftly that it revolves around Mars in seven and a half hours. Thus it races around the planet three times a day! And, for that reason, from the surface of Mars it seems that Deimos rises in the west and sets in the east.

Originally Asteroids

Phobos is more than three times larger than Deimos, and travels at a less giddy speed. It is believed that both of these moons were originally asteroids, which wandered into the gravitational field of Mars and became satellites of the red planet.

Deimos is now known as the Garden Moon of Mars. That is because the tiny satellite is now covered with carefully cultivated parks and gardens. The tiny moon would be too small, of course, to hold an atmosphere by its own gravity. But long ago the Martians fitted it with big atmosphere and water generators which keep it a green, parklike little world.

A Martian Paradise

It is for this reason covered with the estates of wealthy Martians. Individual gravitation-equalizers and other artificial gravitation devices solve the problem of the weak gravity. After the endless, burning red deserts of Mars, this little green moon seems like a paradise to those who come to it.

Because of its small size, it was possible to bore a tunnel right down into Deimos to its center of gravity. A large cavern was excavated there.

This place, which is called "Moonheart," is a noted health resort, for those people who are stricken by certain ill effects of too-great or too-weak gravitations. For there is no gravity at all in Moonheart. A man there weighs nothing. This condition is invaluable for the treatment of certain interplanetary ailments.

Phobos, the outer moon, is much different from its companion. It is very much wilder, being covered with forests of giant grasses interspersed with low, rocky hills.

It has a tenuous natural atmosphere and hydrosphere, but cannot support the luxuriant vegetation that blossoms in the artificial atmosphere of Deimos.

Robot Kings

The biggest rocky hills, in the northern part of Phobos, are called the Mountains of the Machine Kings. It will be remembered that during the long history of Martian civilization, there was a time when the ancient Martians came to depend on robot-brains for impartial analysis and advice.

These robot-brains, becoming ever more complicated and efficient, finally evolved to complete individuality and assumed rule over all the human Martians.

These so-called Machine Kings, who form the Twentieth Dynasty in the chronology of Martian rulers, ruled their human subjects with cold, efficient justice but with such alien ideas that finally the humans staged a successful revolt against them.

The Machine Kings were attacked and destroyed, except for a few of the mechanical super-minds who escaped to Phobos. Those few surviving Machine Kings were hunted down in the rocky hills of Phobos.

But legend persists that one or two of the ancient Machine Kings still lurk in the wild recesses of those hills, immortally. This legend has given the hills their name.

The Valley of Memory

In other hills to the westward there lies a narrow defile which is famous throughout the System as the Valley of Memory. It is filled with a curious gas that seeps from the interior of Phobos—a combination of certain halogens with unfamiliar radioactive qualities.

This gas, when breathed by a human being, has the odd pathologic effect of slowly erasing the memory-patterns of the cortex of the human brain.

It always operates on the brain in reverse chronological order. That is, it wipes away the most recent memories first, then the next most recent, and so on right back through the whole memory-life of the victim until his brain has been erased of all memories.

Then, of course, the victim is left a mere mindless blank.

Living Backward

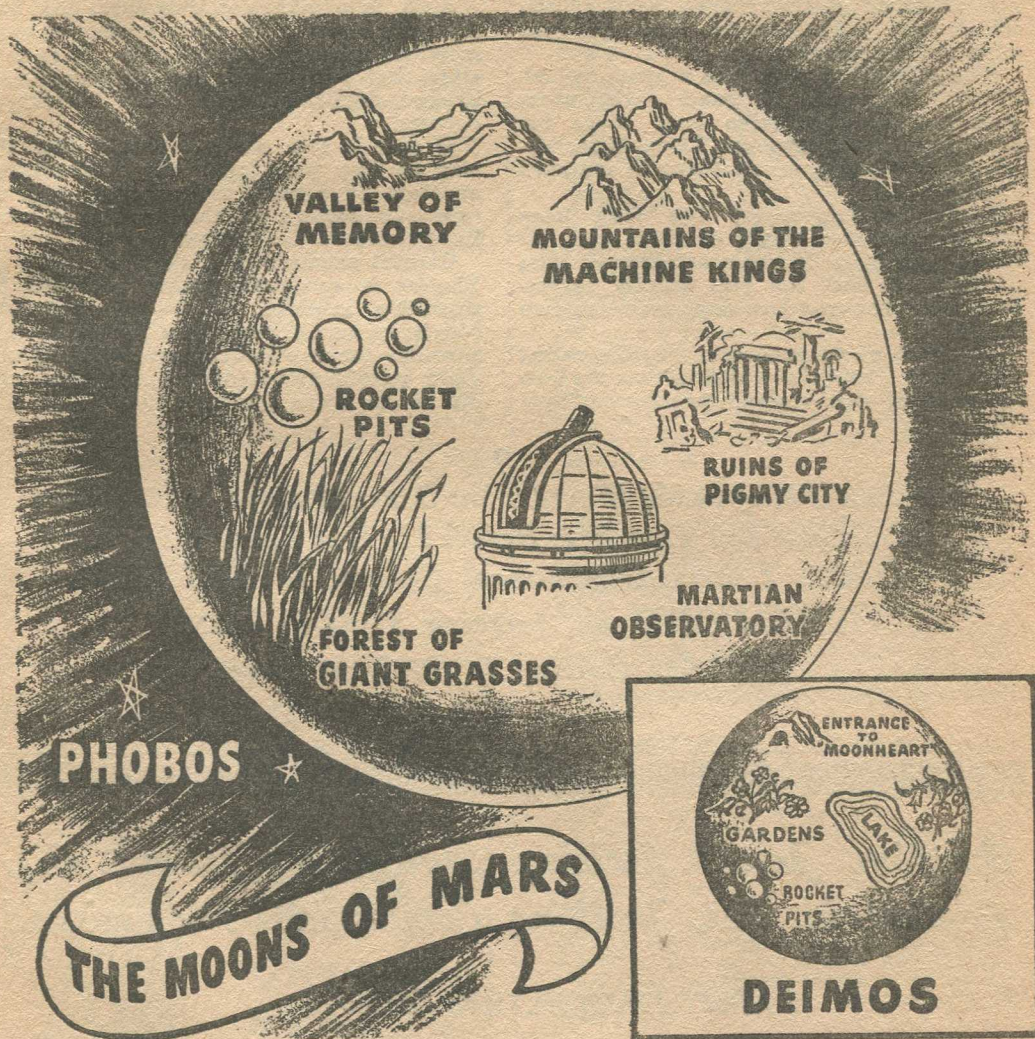
In the Valley of Memory, therefore, a man seems to himself to be living his

they are willing to accept death just to relive those times over again in their minds.

Such people make suicidal attempts to enter the Valley of Memory, and the Martian authorities keep a guard posted to prevent them from doing so. But more than one succeeds in entering, despite the guards.

The Pigmy City

Another curious feature of Phobos, and one that has been the subject of much interest, is the so-called Pigmy City. This is a ruined city that was discovered in the



whole life *backward*. He first seems to be doing what, in fact, he did yesterday—then the day before, and so on right back through his youth and childhood.

He will lie prostrate in the gas of that valley, going back and back in his own mind, reliving his whole life in reverse order.

Most people, of course, shun the Valley of Memory as a deadly peril. But there are always a few desperate souls who look back so longingly to past events of their lives, to loved ones who have perished or moments of glory they have outlived, that

giant grasses of the southeast. Its architecture is not unusually striking.

The sensational thing about it is that the city is inconceivably tiny. Its minute buildings are no more than ten inches in height, and the whole metropolis of some thousands of tiny buildings only covers a space fifty feet across.

It is quite obvious that this ruined city was built by a race smaller in size than any planetary people of the present System. Many scientists believe that such a race once evolved on Phobos, and was swept away by some catastrophe long ago.

Others contend that evolutionary conditions of the moon could not produce so diminutive a people, and that it is more probable that the pigmy builders of the city were visitants from somewhere outside the Solar System, who eventually departed after a long stay on Phobos.

Moon of Mysteries

This riddle is not the only puzzle presented by Phobos, which might indeed be called the moon of mysteries. Almost upon the equator of the satellite there is a well-known group of deep, vertical pits which have perplexed the Martians ever since their discovery.

The pits are grouped in a symmetrical, circular formation so exact as to seem quite certainly to have been made for some intelligent purpose. There is a similar group of deep, vertical pits in southern Deimos.

A lively controversy has long been waged about the origin of these pits. It was begun by a Martian astronomer who pointed out that the pits exactly resembled giant rocket-tubes sunk into the two moons.

He went on to propound what is called the "Tube Theory"—which is that the two moons were once steered through our Sys-

tem like cosmic ships, by use of these great rocket-tubes, and that they did not attach themselves to Mars by mere chance, but were directed by design toward the red planet. The theory supposes that this was done by a pre-human race of the System.

Riddle of the Past

Needless to say, more conservative astronomers scoff at this daring hypothesis and assert that the so-called Rocket Pits are really only the result of meteor-swarms striking the two moons.

Such an explanation, however, does not logically explain the quite unnatural symmetrical grouping of the pits. It is possible that someday it will be established beyond doubt that the Tube Theory is correct.

If that is ever done, it should open the way to new light upon the most vexing problem of System archaeology—the nature and history of the pre-human civilized races of the System.

Careful excavation of the rocket-pits on Phobos is constantly being advanced by scientists attached to the Martian Observatory on the moon, and it may be that someday the two little moons of Mars will yield enlightenment upon the greatest riddle of the Solar System's past.

●

*The Last Thing in the World That Bruce Wanted to Be Was a
Wrestler—But That Was Before He Got Tangled in His
Uncle's Fourth Dimensional Scheme in BETTER
THAN ONE, an Amazing Story by HENRY
KUTTNER Coming in the Next Issue!*

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The

CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

Alien Intelligence

By JACK WILLIAMSON

*Dr. Austen Rises to Confront a Supreme Crisis as
Winfield Fowler Meets the Krimlu Face to Face!*



For answer, the man himself appeared in the rude doorway of the hut. His clothing was tattered beyond description, and he looked very worn and thin. There were lines of age and care about his wrinkled face. But his hair was neatly brushed, and he had just been shaving, for his safety razor was in his hand. A smile of astonishment and incredulous joy sprang over his face. For a moment he was speechless. Then the old familiar voice called out uncertainly, almost sobbing with joy.

"Winfield! Melvar! Naro! Can it really be you? At last!"

Then, as if he were a little ashamed of the feeling he had shown, he pulled out his pipe and began to try to fill it, his fingers trembling with emotion. But Melvar sprang to him and threw her arms about him in a way that gave me a momentary pang of jealousy. He stuck the pipe back in his pocket, grinning awkwardly in a way that tightened the strings of my heart.

"I forgot," he said. "My tobacco was all gone a week ago."

I shook his hand. Then Naro placed his palm upon Austen's shoulder in the customary greeting of Astran.

"I'd almost given up," the old man said. "Our world is so far away that it seems unreal. After I had sent the wireless call a few times the devilish rustling in the sky got too close for comfort. Realizing that the hissing red lights, whatever they are, were about to locate me by the signals, I quit that. Tell me how you got here."

I told him briefly about the red ship.

"Yes, I knew that the things were ships of some kind," he said when I had finished. "I have been working on the quicksilver stuff, and making a few exploring trips. I have discovered several things. I had to work endlessly to keep from going mad.



Horace Austen

Then I would shave, and try to clean up like a civilized man. And I kept repeating all the poetry I knew. That helped a lot. You've no idea how glad I am to see you. Did you bring the spectroscope and tubes?"

BY THE way of reply I took off the pack that contained them. Austen began to open it with as much enthusiasm

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*See Page 111 for the Synopsis of Previous Installments of
this Great Sciencefiction Serial Reprinted by Popular Request*

as a small boy investigating a Christmas present. Suddenly he paused and looked at us. "But you don't look like you've had any holiday yourselves."

"It hasn't been a holiday at all," I answered. "Do you happen to have any coffee left? I left mine in the tent outside the cliffs."

"How about a little hot Mulligan stew to go with it?" he grinned, beckoning the way inside.

We entered the cabin. Most of the room was devoted to Austen's crude laboratory equipment. On one of his benches were several roughly modeled pottery jars filled with the liquid from the Silver Sea. His bunk was in a screened-off corner.

In a few minutes he had the coffee-pot boiling over a charcoal brazier. While he prepared a meal consisting of a pot of steaming soup made of the yellow fruits cooked with the tender roots of the red plant we gave him an account of our adventures. When we had eaten, Melvar retired to Austen's bunk, and Naro and I lay down on a blanket on the laboratory floor. I went to sleep at once. Austen assured me later that I slept for thirty-seven hours.

At any rate, when I got up I felt like a new man. Austen had set up the apparatus we had brought. He had a test tube full of the silver liquid set up in a beam of X-rays, the spectroscope in position to examine the dense purple gas that was rising from the stuff.

"How is it coming?" I asked him.

He shook his head sadly. "I don't know," he said. "I have a theory, but it doesn't seem to work out right. The key is in sight, but it always eludes me. There is vast energy stored in the silver liquid. It may be that that amazing thing in the sky stores the energy of sunlight in the stuff, something over one horsepower for each square yard on which it falls. Or perhaps the atomic energy of the gases in the air is released. If I had the key I could make the silver stuff go off like ten times its weight of T.N.T."

"Do you think," I asked him eagerly, "that you could set off some of it and wipe out the Krimlu?"

"Winfield," the old scientist soberly replied, "even if you could, would you wipe out a whole civilization with a science great enough to make the Silver Lake—a culture equal to, if not above, that of our own world?"

"Yes," I cried. "If you had seen those purple things—men and women who are old and hideous and fearfully strong and malignant—you couldn't move too quickly to blot them off the earth."

"I have seen," he said seriously. "And the purple monsters are terrible enough. But they are not the masters. They are but the servants, or perhaps I should say the machines, of a higher power. I told you that I had been exploring a bit. I have seen some strange things."

"There is another form of intelligence here, Winfield—a form of life unrelated to humanity, without any sympathy for man-

kind, with no share of human feelings. Perhaps it is a danger to the human race. The things would not hesitate, I suppose, to use all humanity as they have used the people of Astran. But that does not solve the problem.

"Would it be right to wipe them out? Perhaps it would be better for mankind to go under. Perhaps they are superior to us. The purposes of the creation of intelligent life might be better met by these things than by man. I have given it a great deal of thought, and I can't decide."

He fell silent.

"You say there is another form of life here. What is it like?" I asked.

"You will know soon enough. I wish I had never seen. It is not a good thing to talk about."

HE WOULD tell me no more. Presently I left him and went down to bathe in the stream of water that flowed back of the camp. The water was sluggish and tepid, certainly not invigorating, but it was cleansing. When I got back Melvar and Naro were up.

The girl was very glad to see Austen again. She was talking with him vivaciously. When I saw her I loved her, if possible, more than ever.

As soon as we had eaten, Austen began to dismount the spectrometer and other equipment to pack them.

"I can go no further with the experiments here," he said. "I am going to take the outfit to a place where we can see one of the engines of the Krimlu where the silver liquid is broken up. There I may be able to get the clue I need."

In an hour we were ready to depart. Austen led the way, silent and preoccupied with the details of his work. We went down a narrow trail through the stagnating marshes, in the eldritch gloom of the weird red jungle, under the dull purple mist. For many hours we were on the way, until the purple dusk began to thicken, and a distant sighing whistle told us that night had fallen. The evil masters were abroad again.

Austen called out in a guarded tone for us to halt. We all crept forward cautiously until we could see over the brink of a vast, circular chasm. Sheer black walls, ringed by the red jungle, fell for a thousand feet. The round floor was a half-mile across. Upon it was the most gigantic and amazing mechanical device I have ever seen. The thing was incredibly huge, and throbbing with strange energy. It made little sound, but the space about us seemed vibrant with power.

In the center of the pit was a titanic, shining green cylinder, perhaps a hundred feet in diameter and five hundred in length. A river of gleaming silver fluid ran from an opening in the rock, through a great open aqueduct to pour into the cylinder in the middle of the upperside. At each end of the colossal cylinder rose a metal tower. At the top of each tower was a fifty-foot globe of blue crystal, slowly turning. Be-

What Has Happened Before

DR. WINFIELD FOWLER, young American physician, sets out in response to an urgent radio message in search of his friend, Dr. Horace Austen, who has disappeared in the hinterland of Australia. Fowler reaches a weird mesa in the heart of the desert which is really a hollowed-out mountain.

He crosses over and finds a crystal city inhabited by men in shining armor. He meets a girl, Melvar, and her brother, Naro, who have a letter for him from Dr. Austen.

Austen has left the crystal city to penetrate deeper into the mysterious region beyond a silver lake from whence come flashing lights, rushing comets and whistling sounds. He wants to understand the Purple Ones, human-like ghouls that roam the wilds and are apparently indestructible.

Austen ends his letter by stating that he thinks the supernatural manifestations result from natural forces in the control of an intelligent power that might not be

too far beyond mankind's own state of advancement.

With Melvar and Naro, Dr. Fowler follows in his elderly friend's footsteps. After incredible adventure and hardship in which they see phenomena they cannot understand, have a battle with Purple Ones, and discover that the rushing comets are really some sort of rocket ship belonging to the Krimlu, they encounter a metallic being emerging from a landed ship and by a lucky shot destroy it by an explosion.

They gain the ship, learn to operate it, and fly deeper into the danger zone, to make a crash landing in the heart of a carboniferous forest.

Leaving the strange craft, they find evidences of human labor in building a forge and crudely smelting ore, and they follow the trail until they reach the camp that Dr. Austen has set up in the wilderness.

They advance on the apparently deserted site, and Fowler shouts fearfully, "Dr. Austen, are you here?"

Now Go on with the Story!

tween and above the spheres arched a high-flung span of white fire, a great pulsing sheet of milky opalescent light that roared and crackled like a powerful electric discharge, lighting the chasm with an unearthly radiance.

Toward the farther side of the floor was a second enormous machine, apparently unconnected with the first, resembling a vast telescope. The white metal tube was a full two hundred feet in length and mounted on massive metal supports. It did not seem to be in action. The barrel of it pointed at the sky like a cannon.

I saw a row of openings low down in the side of the vast green cylinder, with shafts of bright green light pouring from them. Tiny human figures working feverishly about them. They had escaped my observation at first, so far away was the floor of the pit. Now I saw that they were taking great blocks of a luminous green substance from the doors in the cylinder and carrying them to the tube that was pointing at the sky.

The bodies of the toilers were purple. There was something in their motion that reminded me of ants. I was amazed at their strength and agility, at their ceaseless, machinelike activity. They never looked about, never paused, never rested. They were like machines, or animated corpses, driven to endless toil by some strange force.

I remembered the time I had splashed the white fluid on my arm, turning it purple, and the strange excitement of my nerves. At once I linked up the raids on Astran, the bracelet that Naro had found on the dead purple beast, and what Austen had told me of superior beings who enslaved the purple things. I knew that I looked upon the captured men and women of Astran! They were simply man-machines in this strange place!

Perhaps they were already dead. Certainly they moved, not by their own volition, but by a stronger mechanical power. They must have been under the absolute

hypnotic control of the higher intelligences, who treated their unfortunate captives, perhaps with the argent liquid, to convert them into unearthly machines of super-human strength.

WE TURNED away into the night that had fallen on the red jungle while we watched. I was sick with horror. Austen's face was white and his hands were trembling. There was a stern, fierce light in his eye.

Now I knew, in spite of what he had said, that were the opportunity given him, he would not hesitate to wipe out the masters of the purple slaves. He said nothing, but his hands worked spasmodically. He muttered under his breath, and his dark eyes snapped with angry determination.

In a few minutes we set about preparing our apparatus for the work of the night. The spectroscope was set up with telescopic condensers to collect and analyze the radiation of the arch of crackling, milky flame. We took care to screen ourselves in the jungle fringe, to expose no more of the equipment to the sight of the beings below than was necessary. Austen set up his drawing board in a convenient place behind our shelter, and he alternately peered through the telescope at the spectrum and turned to make intricate calculation in the light of a shaded flashlight. We sat up all night at work.

All night long the white flame played between the spinning blue crystal spheres above the vast green cylinder, filling the air with its ghostly crackle and whisper. All night long the tireless purple human-machines toiled in the pit, carrying the great green blocks and stacking them in the vast cannonlike tube at the side. Whenever Austen did not need me with the analysis I spent the time searching that amazing scene, but not once did I catch a glimpse of anything that might have been the directing intelligence of all that marvelous activity.

Melvar being very tired, I had contrived

a hammock for her from a great sheet of fibrous bark torn from the trunk of one of the red trees. She spent the night asleep there while Austen and I carried on the work. Naro, not having scientific inclinations, contented himself with a couch composed of a few feathery branches torn from the undergrowth.

CHAPTER XI

What the Analysis Showed



Just before daylight Austen completed his calculations and stated the result. He was weary and his eyes were red. He had worked for a day and two nights since we had found him. He gave his conclusion in a colorless monotone.

"You know," he said, "that there are several rare gases in

the air, in addition to oxygen and nitrogen. The inert gas, argon, comprises nearly one percent of the atmosphere. There are, in addition, smaller quantities of helium, neon, xenon, and krypton, not to mention carbon dioxide and water vapor. Those gases are monatomic and do not ordinarily enter into any compounds at all.

"Lightning in the air causes a union of nitrogen and oxygen, forming nitrous and nitric acids which may later release their energy in the explosion of gun-powder or nitroglycerin. In much the same way the force that forms the silver fluid utilizes the photo-chemical effect of sunlight to build up a complex molecule containing oxygen, nitrogen, and the inert gases of the helium group.

"It is very unstable, and may be disrupted with the release of a great amount of energy. I was able to detect the characteristic lines of most of the gases in the luminous spectrum of the purple gas, but not until I had analyzed the light of the opalescent flame and made my deductions from that, was I able to derive the equations and arrive at the precise structural formula, and at the exact wave length necessary to break down the molecule."

He proceeded to launch into a detailed technical discussion of the process of analysis he had used, and of the methods of inductive reasoning by which he had arrived at his conclusion. It was rather deep for me. Something more important was on my mind.

"Have you found out enough?" I asked. "Can you blow up the stuff? Can you wipe out the Krimlu?"

"I am not sure," he said gravely, "but I think, if I could get at that machine with a little of my equipment I could detonate the thing like a thousand tons of dynamite. The silver stuff runs into the cylinder and is converted into pure, vibrant energy. If I could just speed up the process a bit!

"The Krimlu seem to live underground like ants. A month ago I found an opening into their world near the cliffs, south of the fall. There are the shafts where their ships come out, their ventilator tubes and funnels for the purple smoke from their engines. I will go down one of the shafts and see what can be done."

"You mean we will go," I told him.

"There is no need for you to risk your life," he said in a voice purposely brusque to hide his emotion. "I can do as well by myself. Then there is Melvar. We must get her out of here if we can. I think a great deal of her. If we both should go—and not come back—. No, I want you to stay on top. I know I can trust you to treat her fairly. If I can blast down the earth on their underground world, we may all be able to make it back around the Silver Sea, and eventually to the outside."

"You can trust me, sir, to care for her to the best of my ability," I told him, looking at the sandal on my right foot and trying without notable success to keep my voice even and casual.

"Really," he cried, looking at me intensely, "do you love her?"

Startled, I admitted that I did, simply and frankly.

"I had hoped so," Austen said. "She and you are the dearest ones to me in the world. If you were out and safe, I could go—if I must—in peace."

THE rude hammock in which Melvar had been lying sprang into violent motion. The girl's slender, beautiful figure came running toward me.

"I am sorry," she gasped. "No, I mean I am glad. I was awake, Winfield. I heard you—"

Her further statements were not particularly coherent, since she was kissing me, and I was holding her in my arms and returning the caress. Some minutes later, when I came back to earth, I observed that Austen was taking the equipment down. Naro was standing and looking at us with an expression of extreme and comical disgust on his frank and boyish face.

By that time it was light. Soon, by the brightening of the purple haze above, we knew that the sun was rising. Austen went to look into the pit. Melvar and I walked to the edge. The great metal tube which the purple beings had been all night loading with the green bars was being swung slowly about its mounting. Presently it was pointing at the sky above the Silver Sea.

For a moment nothing happened. Then a low, deep, humming drone reached our ears, coming apparently from the complex machinery at the base of the tube. Steadily the sound rose in pitch until it was an intolerably high and painful scream. When the high rhythm of it had become unsupportable, we simply ceased to hear it. It had passed up the scale beyond the range of our ears, and was sounding still.

Abruptly the colossal tube flashed into green incandescence and a broad beam of yellow light, blindly brilliant and pulsing

with strange energy, poured up into the dusky purple sky. Then I knew that it was this machine that made the amazing electrical display above the Silver Sea, from which the white liquid fell.

As we watched, bright patches of red and green shot up the beam. Slowly the bright yellow faded from the ray, but still the green luminosity clung about the tube, and still I felt that the flood of radiant, purposeful energy was flowing up into the sky. It was not long before I heard, far above us, in the distant west beyond the red-clad hill, the splash of the first great drop of silver into the argent lake. Below us the white torrent was still pouring into the vast green cylinder; the white fire was still arching between the crystal globes; and the purple slaves were still rushing about the pit with feverish and machinelike energy.

We turned away from the place and walked back into the semi-darkness of the scarlet jungle, still beneath the shadow of the evil intelligence that ruled the crater. I had the knowledge of Melvar's love to sustain me, but I felt the unholy power of the jungle already closing about to crush us.

We reached the camp long before night, and Austen and I went to sleep. The old scientist was up again at daylight. I was amazed at his energy and vitality. He got ready the equipment he intended to take, and we were soon ready to set out for the entrance to the underworld.

Austen insisted that we leave Melvar and Naro behind. There was no use, he said, to expose them to the hardships and dangers of the journey, and it wasn't likely that harm would come to them at the cabin. I did not like to leave Melvar, but she was very courageous about it, smiling through her tears.

Melvar walked with me to the edge of the clearing. And there we left her, taking a dim trail that led through the dense jungle to the south. Austen was lost in meditation. But I knew that when the time came for action he would waste no time in thought. But how could I guess the noble thoughts that were passing in his mind? How could I realize that he was marching willingly to his doom?

After several hours Austen stopped.

"It is not a half-mile to the shafts," he said. "We shall have to make a rope. I have made cords from the tough bark of the red trees which does very well. I want to reach the bottom of the pit before night. But I have reason to think that the masters are active in their underworld at all hours of the day, emerging only at night because the magnetic vibration of sunlight interferes with the operation of the delicate machinery of their bodies."

OBEDIENTLY I helped weave a rope of strips of the leatherish bark torn from the mighty red trees. We worked until we had many hundred feet of the tough strands. As we worked Austen began to talk a little, his voice low and a little husky, of his boyhood on a western

farm, and of the bright spots of his life. He told a few stories of his college days, spoke of the girl he had loved and lost. But when the rope was finished and coiled he fell silent again and grimly examined his automatic. He adjusted his pack, got out his pipe and filled it with my tobacco, and grinned.

"We are here," he said soberly. "We are ready to play our hand, win or to lose. And if we lose—"

He thrust out his hand. I shook it and we walked on silently. We had gone more than a hundred yards when the scarlet forest thinned, and we walked out on a level stretch of bare, white sand. Along the western side rose a dark, precipitous cliff, like that over which the silver fall plunged a line of red brush ran along the top. At the foot was a great sloping bank of talus, scattered with gigantic boulders. The cliff and the lofty crimson forest that rimmed the open space on the other three sides, seemed to reach into the dusky purple obscurity of the low-hanging sky.

Spaced irregularly about the center of the flat were perhaps a dozen low, circular metal structures—evidently the mouths of great white metal tubes projecting from the earth. From five of them dense clouds of purple vapor were pouring.

We left the shelter of the jungle and quickly approached the nearest of the wells. The metal curbing was about four feet high around a circular pit some twenty feet in diameter. We leaned over and looked into it. The tube was lit faintly for a few feet down the walls, but we saw no light toward the bottom of the tube. A faint humming sound came up out of the darkness, and I felt a strong current of air flowing down the tube. It was altogether stranger and more terrible than I had anticipated.

"Is the rope long enough?" I whispered.

"Yes," he replied in a cautious undertone. "On the day I discovered the place I dropped a pebble in the well and timed its fall with my watch. The depth is just over five hundred feet."

I put the end of the cord over the metal rim and paid it out until only enough was left to hitch around my body. With a smile of forced cheerfulness, Austen looked to his pack, knocked out his pipe, and put it in his pocket.

"Winfield, my boy, I hope to see you again," he said. "It may take only an hour or two to lay my mine and return to the shaft. But, of course, I know nothing of what I am to encounter. You wait and hold the rope, and if I need to send you any message I will jerk it three times, and you can pull it up. The note will tell when to put it down again for me to climb out. Good-by, my boy."

He started to say something more, but his voice broke, and he turned abruptly to the well. I braced myself against the curbing, and he climbed over and started down. I looked over and watched him. In a few moments his head and shoulders had shrunk to a little blot against the darkness of the well. Soon he was out of my sight, al-

though for a long time I felt the tugging of the rope.

Suddenly the tension relaxed. He had reached the bottom, or—fearful thought!—he had lost his grip on the rope and was hurtling down through the darkness. I listened in an agony of suspense. It was several minutes before I was reassured to feel three twitches of the cord. I pulled it up. On the end was tied a piece of paper, with these words penciled upon it:

Dear Winfield, I hate to leave thus without telling you as I intended to do. But I could not tell you. Go back, get Melvar, and travel as far as you can from this accursed place. May you and she survive to lead a happy life together—in Astran, if you cannot reach the world beyond.

I will give you twenty hours. In that time you can go far north of the silver fall. I am sure, with the equipment I have with me, I can explode one of the engines and send all this part of the valley skyward—if I live long enough to carry out my plan. Good-by.

Austen.

Then I saw that he had been planning all along to sacrifice his life. The note had been written some time before he left. I cursed the stupidity that had kept me from perceiving his intention. If I had but thought, I would have known it was impossible for the aged scientist to climb the rope from the bottom of the pit. Dear old man that he was, he had taken all decision out of my power. The truest friend I ever had! His wrinkled, smiling face, his kind, blue eyes, his low, familiar voice, were gone forever!

CHAPTER XII

The Forest Aflame



I have a very confused recollection of what happened immediately afterward. My own actions seem a vague, disordered dream. My bitter grief at Austen's self-sacrifice was the only thing real to me. I started to carry rocks from the boulder-strewn slope at the foot of the cliff, with

the idea of securing the rope to them so I could go down in search for him. But my memory of that is very faint.

The first thing I remember clearly is that I was staggering back to the shaft with a heavy rock in my arms when I caught a whiff of acrid smoke and awoke to the realization that the purple sky was darkened with drifting clouds, and the air was already heavy with the suffocating pungent odor of the burning red vegetation. My instinctive alarm at the thought of fire served to bring me to myself, and I was suddenly fearful for the safety of Melvar.

I knew that, had the red-hot rocket ship

in which we had crossed the Silver Sea chanced to fall in the jungle instead of on the barren hilltop, a conflagration would have spread from it at once. Abruptly I remembered that the glowing fragments of the one we had wrecked had fallen in the northern forest. Austen's cabin lay in that direction! I knew that the red vegetation was peculiarly inflammable and that the fire, feeding on the oxygen of the heavy atmosphere, would advance with terrible speed.

From the north came the crackling roar of a mighty conflagration. Any attempt to find Austen and induce him to give up his plan of self-sacrifice would be terribly uncertain. Melvar was in immediate danger, and I knew that Austen valued her life above his own. Even now I might be too late. Fire was a pitiless and remorseless enemy.

At a dead run I started up the trail by which we had entered the clearing. Ever the smoke became thicker and more acrid, while the crackling roar of the fire rang ever louder in my ears. I ran on through the ghastly gloom of the scarlet jungle until the hot suffocating breath of the flames was choking me, until the bright lurid curtain of the fire was spread before my eyes, and the intense heat radiation blistered my skin. The vast wall of flame swept forward like a voracious demoniac thing of crimson, implacable, irresistible, overwhelming. It plunged forward like a rushing tidal wave of red. Already the fire had passed the site of the cabin!

I was suddenly hopeless and despairing. The flames rushed forward faster by far than a human being could force a way through the jungle. With the knowledge that I had just lost the only two beings in all the world who mattered to me, it hardly seemed worth while to try to save my own life. For a moment I stood there, about to cast myself into the flames. But it is not the nature of an animal to die willingly, no matter how slight the promise of life may be.

I turned and ran back toward the clearing. Behind me, the flames roared like a lightning express. The fernlike fronds burned explosively, like gun cotton. My nostrils and lungs were seared and smarting. The hot wind dried my skin and left it scorched and cracked. I was blinded by the smoke. I longed to throw myself down and seek the temporary ecstasy of a breath of clear air from near the ground. The red jungle reeled about me, but I fought my way on, like a man in a dream.

At last I staggered into the open space. The last of the giant trees exploded into flames not a score of yards behind me. Sparks rained upon me. My clothing caught fire. I ran on, fighting at it with my hands. The jungle back of me roared deafeningly, an angry, surging sea of lurid red flames, awful, overwhelming, fantastically terrible.

HEAT radiation poured across the white sand away from the flames until I reached the shelter of a great boulder on the slope below the cliff.

I flung myself down behind the rock, gulping down the cool air and rubbing out the fire in my clothing with my blackened hands. For hours I lay there, tortured by thirst and pain. At last I fell into a stupor.

I was awakened after a time by a cool wind that had sprung up from the north. For a moment my mind was lost in blank wonder. Then came the desolate memory that Melvar and Austen were lost. In hopeless misery I got weakly to my feet and walked unsteadily around the boulder until I could look across the clearing.

As I leaned against the rock, gazing eastward, it was a strangely altered and desolate scene that lay before my eyes. The red forest was gone. Below me was a region of low, rolling hills, black and grim beneath the lowering, smoky purple sky. The white sand about me stood out in sharp contrast to the charred and gloomy waste beyond, from which a few slender wisps of dark smoke were still rising. All life was gone. It was a dead world. But still the dense, purple clouds poured calmly out of the shafts of the underworld, adding their weight to the dismal sky.

A great homesickness for my world and my fellow men came over me. Then I heard a strange humming behind me, a slight metallic clatter. I turned around in apathetic curiosity. And I came face to face with a monster so utterly strange and weird that the very shock of it almost unseated my wandering reason.

But so completely had my interests and hopes in life been severed, so near was I to the great divide of death, that I was past emotion of any kind. At first I looked on the thing with a curious lack of interest, as the soul of one newly dead might look with numbed faculties on his new habitation. But as I looked an icy current of fear stole over me like the creeping cold of the north, clasping me to its frozen breast. I had met so many horrors that I had begun to think myself immune to terror. But I had met no such thing as this.

I knew it was an intelligent, a sentient being. But it was not human, not a thing of flesh and blood at all. It was a machine! Rather, it was an entity encased in a machine. I felt far more of it than I saw—the will of a cold and alien intellect, a being malefic, inhuman, inscrutable. It was a thing that belonged, not in the present earth, but in the tomb of the unthinkable past, or beyond the wastes of interstellar space amid the inconceivably horrors of unknown spheres.

There was a bright, gleaming globe, three feet in diameter, lit with vivid flowing fires of violet and green. A strange swirling mist of brilliant points of many-colored lights danced madly about it—a coruscating fog of iridescent fire that flicked in an incredible rhythm.

That unearthly thing rested upon a frame of metal, the head of a metallic monster protruding from an oblong box of white metal to which were attached six long-jointed metal limbs. The being stood nine feet high, at least. It was standing on three of the limbs, holding my rifle which I had

left where I had been lying, turning it and feeling of it with a cluster of slender, fingerlike tentacles on the end of the metal arm. It was working the mechanism of the gun apparently looking at it, though it had no eyes that I could see.

SUDDENLY the gun went off, throwing up the sand between me and the monster. With a grotesquely half-human attitude of alarmed surprise, the being dropped the gun and sprang back like a gigantic spider. The motion freed me from my paralysis of horror. I started backing cautiously around the boulder, afraid to run. As I moved it sprang forward, and a slender tube of white metal in one of the tentacled hands was suddenly pointed toward me. As the monster moved, there was a humming sound from it, and little jets of purple gas hissed from holes in the sides of the box-like body.

I drew my automatic and fired at the metal tube. The object was knocked from the metal grasp and fell spinning to the sand. On the instant I turned and ran toward another great boulder that lay fifty yards to the north. As I ran I heard the clatter and whirring of the mechanical being. I paused at the edge of the rock for a last glimpse back.

The monster was holding the little tube in one of its limbs, apparently adjusting it with another. Then it suddenly extended the thing toward me. I dived behind the rock just as a bright ray of orange light shot past the boulder—a beam like that which had come from the being in the door of the rocket ship. Then I knew that here was an entity of the same kind as the one I had destroyed that night—one of the ruling intelligence of the crater. The Krimlu!

For several minutes I crouched behind the boulder, expecting the terrible being to come striding around after me at any instant. But it did not come, so presently I began to think. Perhaps the things were not so powerful or so extremely intelligent after all. I had killed one, even if it was just by a chance shot in the dark. This one had seemed surprised and alarmed when the rifle went off. A being so intelligent as I had at first thought it to be might have inferred the nature and use of the weapon from its appearance. Could it be afraid of me, after my pistol bullet had knocked its own weapon out of its grip? Why didn't it follow me around the boulder. I began to wonder what it was going to do.

It evidently intended to strike me with the disintegrator ray weapon. Not only did it respect me, but it knew that I stood in deathly fear of it. It knew that I was trying to escape, so it might reasonably expect me to leave the unscalable cliff and attempt a break across the open country. If I were to do that, I would naturally keep in the shelter of my own boulder as long as possible.

If the monster thought in that way, the logical thing for it to do would be to creep out of the upper side of its rock,

where I would inevitably come into its sight by whatever direction I left my breastwork.

Of course there was a frightful risk in taking any action on such a hypothesis, a greater risk than I realized at the time, but I had to do something. If the monster were less intelligent than I supposed, I might blunder on it. If it were more intelligent, it might have anticipated my plan—might be waiting to trap me.

But I crawled out along the upper side of my boulder and peered over a smaller rock which would serve me as a breastwork, my automatic ready. I expected to see the creature in my range, and itself intent upon my other lines of retreat. But it was not there. For a moment I thought I was doomed, but the orange ray did not strike, and I was forced to the conclusion that the monster was not in a position for action at all.

FOR a moment I was tempted to break into flight across the clearing, but I knew that such a move would surely put me at the mercy of the ray. It might not yet be too late to carry out my original plan. I lay flat, my gun trained on the spot where I expected the thing to appear.

For perhaps fifteen minutes nothing happened. Then my hypothesis was justified. The weird being suddenly sprang into view, the strange weapon grasped in its glittering arm. It seemed to be looking beyond my boulder. I was lying ready, with the automatic leveled. It was a matter of the merest instant to aim at the green sphere and pull the trigger.

The globe was shattered as if it had been made of glass. The glittering fragments showered off the metal box, while the whole mechanical body suddenly became very rigid, and fell heavily to the side. A puff of coruscating green mist floated out of the globe as it broke, and swiftly dissipated, and the sparkling lights were about the thing no more. The monster was evidently dead.

For a moment I hesitated, but I was sure the thing had been killed, and my curiosity got the better of my fear. I cautiously approached it, marveling at the wonderful workmanship of the machine and the cleverness of its design. Then I saw something that made me forget all else. Something beside the crystal shell had fallen.

The tissue of it was very delicate, and it had been broken by the fall, so that the body juices were running from it. The brain cavity of it was very large—perhaps larger than that of a man—and covered only with a thin chitinous shell. The limbs were but thin tentacles, almost altogether atrophied. In fact, the brain seemed three-fourths of the total bulk. The body was so badly smashed that I could tell little about it, but the tiny limbs were covered with chitin, and there were the rudimentary stumps of fine, tissuelike wings. There were no visible traces of digestive organs or mandibles.

But the thing was plainly an insect. From just what species it had sprung in

the long process of evolution in this Australian crater it would be difficult to say. For several reasons, I believe it was an ant. At any rate, it had reached about the ultimate stage of evolution. Machines had altogether replaced bodies of flesh. The thing had been nourished by the sparkling green vapor which must have circulated like blood through the protecting crystal sphere.

It seems incredible to find great intelligence in any form of life other than human, but science thinks that life and intelligence must rise and fall in recurring cycles. The earth has probably been ruled by many different forms of life, each which has been blotted out by some cataclysm. The Krimlu were a surviving remnant of archaic insect life!

CHAPTER XIII

When Austen Struck



I lost little time in examination of the dead creature. The shaft from which it had come was but a few hundred yards below, and the purple gas was still rolling out of the funnel. I did not know when a second monster might follow the first.

My mind was too much upset by grief and terror to be capa-

ble of intelligent planning, but I knew I had better get away from here. I considered reaching the northern pass, of getting back to an unburned growth of the red vegetation, for I was weak with thirst and hunger.

I walked around the wells, keeping at a distance, and struck out for the east as fast as my wearied limbs could carry me. At last the cliff was out of sight. All about was the desolate, rolling black landscape, with the gloomy purple sky overhead. My thoughts were as dark and sere as the world. Memories of dear old Austen and of lovely Melvar were always with me, even when I tried to banish them and to think rationally of my position.

When I had gone perhaps three hours from the cliff, and had almost lost my fear of pursuit, I saw a great cigar-shaped object of gleaming white on a low hill before me. So dulled were my perceptions that it was many minutes before I realized that it was the rocket-ship in which we had come over the Silver Sea. Then bringing a faint thrill of hope, the thought came to me that it might possibly be in a condition to fly. If so, and I could succeed in controlling it, it offered an avenue of escape from the crater.

I walked up to the thick metal walls. They were undamaged by the fire, of course, being used to withstanding the far higher temperatures developed during flight. Rounding the ship, I was surprised

to see that the heavy metal door which we had left open had been swung shut. Lying against it was the charred skeleton of a man. About the bones were woven metal garments and crystal armor. With a shock I recognized the accoutrements of Naro.

For a moment I stared grimly at the remains. Then, animated by a sudden ray of hope, I sprang to the door, pulled it open, and leaped into the ship. There, lying on the floor, was the lovely form of Melvar!

Her clothing was tattered and smeared with stains of red and black from the burning forest, but she was unharmed. It was almost incredible to me to find her restored. I was half-afraid that my mind had failed at last, and that she was but an illusion. I dropped on my knees beside her, and kissed her warm red lips. She stirred a little and, still but half-awake, put a trustful arm about my shoulder.

"Winfield, I knew you would come," she whispered at last. "But where are Naro and Austen?"

"They will never come," I said gently.

She drew me fiercely toward her, as if to use me for a shield against the awful truth. It was some time before she was able to talk, but presently she told me how Naro had seen the smoke, and how she had thought of seeking shelter from the fire in the rocket ship. They had run down the trail we had made in leaving the ship. The fire had overtaken them just as they reached it. The boy had carried her the last few yards, lifted her through the door, and then had been unable to enter himself.

But, a hero to the last, a worthy warrior of old Astran, he had swung the door shut with his dying motion.

Presently I turned my attention to the ship. The marvelous periscope still gave the illusion that the bow was transparent. When I moved the little control lever, the jets of purple gas rushed out again. After a time I had the vessel worked loose from its place in the earth. Then, once again, I pulled up the little metal knob and pushed it forward.

We were in flight.

THE blackened terrain was colored by the purple mist. It dimmed, blurred, blotted out. We shot through the purple cloud and abruptly plunged into clear air and blessed sunshine. Melvar stood by me, her arm upon my shoulder. She cried out gladly as we came into the light. It was not quite noon and the sun was shining very brightly into the crater. The crescent Silver Lake was still gleaming with the same argent luster, and Astran shone like a great gem set in the dark red upland beyond.

Suddenly the clouds of purple mist below were thrown up and scattered in a thousand ragged streamers. A great blaze of opalescence burst out where it had been. A flood of fire ran over the Silver Sea. It was a white, milky light like that we had seen between the blue crystal globes of the great machine in the chasm.

In a moment the whole crater was a torn and angry ocean of iridescent flame. The red upland was blotted out, and Astran vanished forever.

White flames that were like the tongues of burning hydrogen from exploding suns flared up behind us.

Then we heard the sound of the cataclysm—a crashing roar like the thunder of a thousand falling mountains, as deep and vast and awful as the crash of colliding worlds. At the same instant we felt the force of the greatest explosion that had ever occurred on earth. The rocket was flung upward as though shot out of a mighty cannon. The blue sky darkened about us, and the stars flamed into being like a million scintillating gems, gleaming cold and hard against the infinite empty blackness.

We had been hurled out of the atmosphere and into interplanetary space!

Austen had struck. The world of the Krimlu was no more! The whole Silver Sea had detonated in a colossal explosion. From our ever-rising craft we could see the desert spread out around the mountain like a vast yellow sea, rimmed on the south by a steely blue line that was the ocean. The white fire dulled, faded, and was gone as quickly as it had flashed up. The crater of the Mountain of the Moon was left a wild black ruin of jagged, scattered masses of smoking stone. Of the Silver Lake, of the red vegetation upon the upland, of brilliant Astran, not a trace was left!

The crater was left far behind in the long arching flight of the rocket. The white frozen brilliance of the stars faded out, the untold glories of the solar corona were dimmed, and blue was restored to the midnight sky. We were plunging toward the desert in the direction of Kanowna. I pulled back the lever and used the full force of the rockets to check our meteor-like flight until the fuel was exhausted.

A moment afterward we struck the earth.

We climbed out and left the vessel there on the sand. Just as the stars were coming out that night we arrived at the headquarters of a great sheep ranch. People were very much excited over the earthquake. I learned later that the shock of the explosion of the Silver Lake had been registered at every seismographic station in the world.

The rancher and his wife cared for us with great hospitality, if ill-controlled curiosity. After we had a week of rest, they took us by automobile to Kanowna. There I astounded them by rewarding their generosity with a magnificent emerald—I still had in my pack a half-pound or so of the jewels that Naro had brought me for analysis in Astran.

Melvar continued to surprise me with her innocent beauty, her grace and poise, the ease with which she learned to face new situations, and to meet people. I believe that no one ever suspected that she had not had a lifetime of training in the best of society. We were married at Kanowna, and reached Perth a few days later.

THE END



Where Sergeant Saturn, Space-Pilots and Kiwis Meet

WELL, plug my rocket sleeves and call me fizzle, but this time the old Sarge figures he has a grand opening letter and closing letter for this issue's department. Usually I grab them all as they come from the ethergram spindle, but for some reason—maybe I was musing upon my stock of Xeno—I glanced through the mail before starting to stuff the squawks indiscriminately through the mill for general observation.

And I deliberately selected a certain letter to start with and one to finish off with. The rest of those I can cram in here will fall as they may. And if you don't think this first letter is a swell opening for this department, you don't know what the old Sarge thinks about the men in the service of our country.

This flash comes from a private in the medical corps in our Pacific fleet. Sure, the letter's been censored, and I'm printing it as it came to me. Grab an eyeful.

YOURS FOR DEMOCRACY

By Private George N. Raybin

Dear Sarge: This is the second time I have written to CAPTAIN FUTURE Magazine. I haven't missed an issue since its beginning. Last time I wrote I was a civilian. Now, I am a medical soldier in the United States Army on board the _____ Rumor on board says _____, but our officers do not confirm or deny it. They have given us an address for mail which is:

A.P.O. 916, Care Postmaster,
San Francisco, Calif.

From here our mail will be forwarded. I would appreciate any letters from other science and future fiction fans, as well as any magazines they might be able to send me. The other men here at our unit would sure appreciate the mags.

I was a member of the Futuremen when my residence was Bronx, New York. I would appreciate your sending me a new card. On board the ship, they had the Winter issue (QUEST BEYOND THE STARS). Although I had already read it, I bought it and re-read it. I liked it just as much the second time.

I'm afraid that the next time I see CAPTAIN FUTURE will be when I get back to the States (if ever).

Yours for democracy—ASN—12035917, 4th General Hospital.

And there was a nice circular stamp at the bottom of the letter which read, PASSED BY NAVAL CENSOR.

Bully for you, Private Raybin. You can bet your last cigarette that the old Sarge is rooting for you with tears of pride in his eyes at this very minute. And that's no maudlin sentiment.

We're counting on you getting back soon, George!

As for the rest of you space monkeys, are you writing to the boys in service? Are you turning in your old books to the Victory Book Campaign? Well, see that you keep up the good work, or I won't let you watch my Adam's apple bob as I tilt the Xeno jug.

CURT NEWTON IS IMPROVING

By Robert Foster

Sergeant Saturn: Surprise! I'm not going to make any remarks on "Outlaws of the Moon." I haven't read it yet. I have made it my habit when I buy your magazine (as I did this morning) to first read the Under Observation Dept. and then the novel. And so it was that I came across Mr. Brown's letter. I was so overjoyed that at last someone agreed with me that I felt I could not postpone writing to you any longer—not even until I had finished the novel. I'd like to let Mr. Brown know that I agree with his criticisms, too.

In general, I think your magazine is steadily improving, and I for one am willing to stand by and let nature take its course.

I don't know anything about illustrations and covers and such. I'm no art critic. It seems to me that the stories contained in the magazine are what really count; not the pictures. I can't help but agree with the majority of your readers on one point, however. Why scare away potential readers with a cover which is not truly representative of the novel it is supposed to illustrate? Why don't you have your artists read the story before they try to picture it? That goes for STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES as well.

As for CAPTAIN FUTURE, Curt's doing a lot better than he used to. The last two novels were grand. I don't see how Hamilton does it! He must write a novel or two a month. How does he keep up with himself? I guess it would be asking too much to want CAPTAIN FUTURE bi-monthly, but I can't help it.

Thanks for reestablishing my faith in your magazine.—9 Perryridge Rd., Greenwich, Conn.

I don't remember what Kiwi Brown said, but I'm afraid it was something nasty. However, Peelot Foster, you think we're improving, and that entitles you to a trick at the control panel. Don't get tangled up in the Asteroidal Belt, or I'll have to fit you with a complete new set of gears.

Comes now a flash from the parish state.

A NEW FAN

By James Russell Oliver

Dear Sergeant Saturn:

Just recently I happened to be in my favorite newsstand and saw a magazine which I thought might be interesting. I bought it and I found that it exceeded my expectations. You're right if you guessed the magazine to

be CAPTAIN FUTURE. It was the Spring, 1942, issue which featured OUTLAWS OF THE MOON.

But let me get down to what I wanted to say, or rather, ask. As I am a new reader, I would like to know: (1) When will the next issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE be on sale? (2) What is the possibility of having CAPTAIN FUTURE appear as a bi-monthly magazine or even a monthly mag? (3) Do you have any back issues of said magazine on hand for sale? As I've said before, I'm a new reader and have only one issue. If you have, I would appreciate very much if you would send me a list of the back issues and their prices. (4) Could I please join THE FUTUREMEN without tearing the cover of the magazine? I like to keep my magazines in good condition and would hate to tear the covers.

I hope I haven't taken too much of your valuable time. If this letter is printed in your magazine I know you will answer my questions, but I am enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope just in case you don't. Please answer as soon as possible.—Egan, Louisiana.

Okay, Kiwi Oliver, welcome to the astrogation chamber, but breathe carefully at first, or some of these space monkeys will gas you before you know it. We don't have cargo space for back numbers of CAPTAIN FUTURE, so we can't help you out on that problem. CAPTAIN FUTURE is published quarterly at present. Have your newsdealer reserve your next copy for you in advance.

So far there's no alternative to sending in the name-strip of the magazine along with the coupon to join The Futuremen Club. I suggest that you use a pair of scissors and trim off the name neatly. Meanwhile, when the old Sarge can get

around to designing an emblem for the club, we may work out a method such as we use for the Science Fiction League. Honest Injun, Saturn had no idea how popular The Futuremen Club is getting to be.

KEEP ALL FEATURES

By E. Andrew Cooke

Dear Sarge: I have just finished reading "Outlaws of the Moon," your latest Captain Future novel, again. I am looking forward to "The Comet Kings." I have in my bookcase every CF mag that has been published, and I think every one was "super." What I want to know is, can you get old copies of CF? My volume I, number 1 is all worn out from reading.

Most of your covers are good, and Orban's illustrations for this issue were better than at first. He is better on adventure mags rather than sf though. What happened to Wesso?

I thought Grag was supposed to be a dumb, faithful servant. It seems to me that he's becoming a "regular fellow." I liked him as before. Otho's disguise ability and his looks being inhuman, each are being neglected. If you make the smoke rings coming out of the proton pistols more like flame they would be passable.

"Quest Beyond the Stars" sure took in a large scope. Let's have more like it. For good fighting, adventuring, with science as a base, CAPTAIN FUTURE is unequalled. Keep all the special features in the mag. That's an order, you Xeno guzzler! The Worlds of Tomorrow is unbeatable.

I always keep coming back to the novels. Ed Hamilton must be or could be a poet. The descriptions he gives of the settings sure are an improvement over the usually neglected ones in stories by other authors.

Well, Sarge, thanks for the rial cigarette,

[Turn page]

PROVES MAN IS GOD

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

This startling method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized by a false idea of what we really are.

Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power—unlimited knowledge and infinite power—is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that—a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.



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and don't clog your jets with Xeno. What in space is Xeno?—3030 Otis Street, N.E., Washington, D. C.

You know, peegot, when the Nazis and the Japs were buzzing like a disturbed viper pit on Venus about where those planes came from that bombed Tokyo, and President Roosevelt suggested that they probably came from Shangri La, the Jap- anazi took that information seriously and put it out over the radio.

Well, just between you and me, there's a Shangri La on Pluto where my Xeno is double-distilled for me. And that's as much as I'll tell you until you're a senior astrologer.

While you figure that one out we'll contemplate this rocket spurt from the domain of the Little Flower.

WHERE'S WESSO?

By Joseph Scire

Dear Sarge: Your last issue was great although I think Future should stick to roving the far reaches of the system. That stuff about the atomic disrupter was imaginative but impossible.

The novel was great, but to me it seemed short. Where's Wesso? I liked his pics better. "The Worlds of Tomorrow" was okay but why not feature the satellites next? I liked Otho's wisecracks and that idea of statues pointing the way down into the cavern.

The pic of "Future" in "The Futuremen"

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City State

made him look like a pug. This is my first letter to any magazine and I hope you will print it. Say! What's happened to Stanley Kovan? Was that last repello-charge too much for him? Well, here's hoping C.F. goes bi-monthly. Your 'til Grag rusts—275 Madison St., New York, N. Y.

Okay, so here's another kiwi prodding the old Sarge about Wesso. The last time I saw him he was donning a pink space helmet and taking off for Jupiter. However, I'll dig up the dope on him by ether-wave and give you the low-down. About Stanley Kovan, I'll have to get his manifest from the art director, too. I'll pass the word along that they're being asked about.

Meanwhile, keep your weather eyes peeled. Here comes a junior astrogator who wants to shove the old Sarge out of his seat.

WHAT A COVER!

By Frank Shaney

Dear Sarge: You can move over and let me take the controls, now, so go get a drink of Xeno while I proceed to tear you apart.

When I picked up the summer issue, I thought "Boy, oh boy." What a cover! No BEMs or fish-faced Plutonians. Just a couple of humans fighting a flying squirrel. I didn't even object to the technicolor rings from the gun, because, since they have appeared on every issue so far, I'm used to seeing them. And then, after reading the mag twice just to make sure, can I find anything the cover is supposed to illustrate? No.

Really, Sarge, you can do better than that. I hate to keep harping on the art work, but I, for one, would prefer something that at least hinted at one of the stories.

Although the plot of "The Comet Kings" was the same old stuff about Captain Future saving a civilization from an alien menace, I thoroughly enjoyed the novel. That is because I prefer my adventure and romance

[Turn page]

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straight, without spoiling it too much with pages and pages of scientific facts.

"The Lion Hearted," deserves three stars. It hits the spot.

"Hole in the Sky," is another bell ringer.

I can't say as much for the serial. Somehow, "The Alien Intelligence" leaves me cold. I'm not even speculating on the outcome.

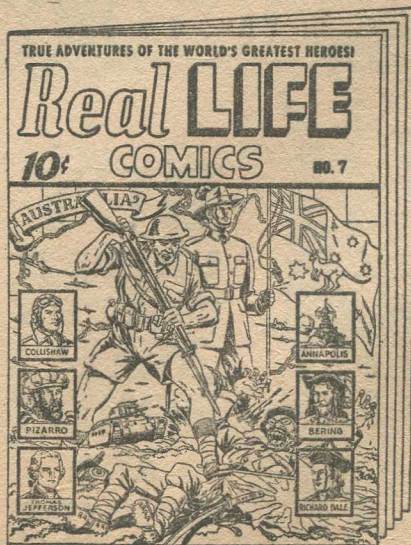
"Under Observation" is getting better. Now you've started answering questions instead of beating around the bush with space lingo and never actually saying anything. I'd like to see some more of the "Man Who Awoke" series, and hope to see them soon. By the way, what is a Kiwi?

Well, that's about all. I guess you can have the pilot's chair back now, so just pass me that jug and I'll be on my way. After that trip, I guess I'm just about a full-fledged pilot, don't you think? Or don't you think? See you next issue, if I think it's worth wasting a three-cent stamp on you—**905 Elm Street, New Albany, Indiana.**

So now you pipe up with a bellyache about covers, eh? If it isn't one yipe it's another. Okay, so the cover didn't illustrate **THE COMET KINGS**. And those flying mammals were not squirrels, so don't act nutty. They were giant bats from the caves of Argu-Ailu on Neptune, and—but I'm not going to write a scene in here to fit. Once in a while can't you accept a piece of artwork for art's sake? No? Okay, pass me the Xeno jug there behind the instrument panel and sit back and take a good squint at the cover on this issue. It nails the scene in the chamber of the Unbodied smack on the nose. And no back talk from you space apes, either.

Wait a minute! I may have to knock your bulbous dome against this next kiwi's. Oh, yes, didn't one of you squirts ask a page or two back what is a kiwi? Well, it's a fledging peegot what ain't took off in a space ship's control-room yet. A

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kiwi, originally, is a wingless bird. But to get on with the grief.

GAS RATIONING

By George Ebey

Dear Sarge: You will be pleased to learn, I'm sure, that it took only two shots of bicarb to overcome my violent nausea after perusal of the latest CAPTAIN FUTURE. Just present the genius with a hefty helping of Venusian smell weed and let's rip into the cover.

YOW!! (gasp). More, more bicarb... ahhh... thash better... phew... This monstrosity is no doubt the poorest cover since the very first one. I note that the artist's name is not announced. Which should make that gentleman a great deal happier. Need I comment on the fact that the cover portrays no scene from the story?

Need I ask why Belarski (yeah, I see him through the whiskers) is still using the same sickening face on his cover gals, the same machine-gun nozzle on his ray guns? And please, Sargums, what in the name of the overworked ice devils of Pluto is that awful doofjigger the Captain grasps?

Ah, well, on to the better parts of the mag. And now that we have finished with the better parts of the mag, let's direct a few parting salvos at Morrison's worst to date, well remembering such fizzles as "Plastic Pigskin Daze." I wonder why all those unnecessary departments are retained, and why so much drivl ooze into "Under Observation."

Oh, before I close: in "The Future of Captain Future," it states that he saves the universe.

Now don't get me wrong, Sarge, but hasn't he saved several of 'em already? Careful there, Mr. Hamilton. Don't overwork the Captain, now. He might go on strike—4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland, Calif.

You may note, Wart-ears, that the Sarge has censored your report somewhat, cleaning it up so it would be safe for you and the Sarge for it to appear in print. And before I crown you with a rocket wrench, [Turn page]

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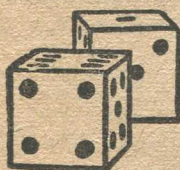
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let me point out that it is better to write a straight-forward serious letter than to try to be funny and merely succeed in an excruciation of vituperation. In other words, kiwi, you're all wet on certain deleted remarks, and you need gas rationing. That sodium bicarbonate is swelling you up like a poisoned pup.

Go ahead and pile on the wisecracks and the casual gripes, but lay off the ugly remarks. Catch wise? Now, get to polishing up your brass-work for your next astrogation quiz.

I have next here a flash from Peelot Thomas R. Daniel, 176 W. 2nd St., Pomona, Calif. He says:

All Science Fiction and Fantasy fans living in or around Pomona, California, please get in touch with me at once. I have a complete Science Fiction library and many new ideas for a live wire organization. Don't hesitate!

Well, you Pomona birds unscramble that one. The old Sarge is getting a blinker signal from a southern space port.

HALL OF FAME VOTE

By Cecil Purdy

Dear Editor: I have read **CAPTAIN FUTURE** since the very first copy, and I think it's the best SF magazine out. "Outlaws of the Moon" was a good story. I am sending a stamped envelope for my membership in The Futuramen Club. When the present Hall of Fame serial is out I would like for you to run "The Green Man of Graypec," by Festus Pragnell. I think it was one of the best stories I ever read.

Please, Mr. Editor, kick that darned Sergeant Saturn out of your magazine. The letter columns in all three of your mags are not as good as they were before he took over.

Well, so long until I get "The Comet Kings."—Cullman, Ala.

Ha! Another junior astrogator getting insubordinate to the Sarge, eh. What we need is a first-class shake-down cruise with some of you kiwis in the cook's galley peeling meteorites. Just wait until you get lost in the Babbie Belt of space, peelot, and you'll be glad the old Sarge is at the control panel. I'll pass along your request for the Hall of Fame story to the proper editor. Maybe it will come along after "The Radium Pool."

Right now I got trouble in Chicago.

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

By Rodney Palmer

Dear Sarge: Perhaps I shouldn't have headed my letter "Sergeant Saturn (The Old

You Help Someone You Know



When You Give to the USO

Space Rat)." After all, you **did** print two of my letters. Yet sometimes you get me sore. In the first place, why don't you control your temper? At the slightest question (I just **know** you hate to answer them) you blow up. You're too touchy. Don't be so cruel to us junior astrogators!

Now we'll get down to business. I have before me the current issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE which happens to be the Summer Issue. I am not much interested in the cover because I know it is drawn to sell the magazine. But I like the insides, anyway. So far I've read the two shorts, how Curt Newton became CAPTAIN FUTURE, "The Future of Captain Future," and "Worlds of Tomorrow." I have perused two chapters of "The Comet Kings" and will undoubtedly read the other fourteen.

So here are some opinions. You may like a few. If you don't like the rest you can—skip it!

Wellman's story was a flop. Don't keep feeding us such hack. Tell your authors to think up a few plots once in a while just to exercise their brains. The only thing exciting about Wellman's yarn was its title, "Hole in the Sky." "The Lion Hearted," by William Morrison was good, withal. But I don't think a continual trend toward that kind of story will help the magazine any. Keep that type down to once in a while.

Articles were all pretty fair except "The Futuremen." I'd substitute either another very short yarn or tag that space onto "Under Observation." How about a meet-the-authors column like we have in STARTLING STORIES? Steer clear of articles; you can find them in any science magazine.

By far the most interesting part of the mag is "Under Observation." Even though the Sarge is a little tough at times, I imagine he's a pretty good guy—226 W. 60th St., Chicago, Ill.

The most pertinent observation I can make on your ethergram, Kiwi Palmer, is that all you junior space monkeys prove the old adage that difference of opinion takes all kinds of people to make the mare go—as Gracie Allen would put it. And you're not supposed to "peruse" Captain Future novels; you're supposed to read 'em. And like 'em!

Hey, wait a minute! Did I say something about you *junior* space monkeys? That was certainly a slip of the typewriter. By inference, it occurs to the old Sarge that I have just called myself a senior ape. Here, here—cut out that whistling and stamping of feet.

Maybe you have something there, peelot, in your meet-the-author suggestion. And now for that concluding salvo I promised you. Sure, it's a blast from one of our gal astrogators, and is the old Sarge tickled pink!

CAPTAIN FUTURE IN PASTELS

By Patricia Venuto

Dear Sarge: I was very happy when I read "Under Observation" in the last issue and saw how you acknowledged and pleasantly commented on us "female astrogators." I was afraid we might be put in the same class as those of our sex who drive the lowly automobile. After all, everyone knows that women have been plotting the courses and driving the train of life on to desired ends. If it weren't for our vain desires, men would still be happily clubbing their game and running around in its furs. But it's our silly wishes that make you go out and invent some nice and convenient machine so we'll have more time to look pretty for you.

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[Turn page]

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You could use one of those lurid ones for fuel—and you'd be blasted off to Mars in record time.

I really hope you will make CAPTAIN FUTURE a bi-monthly, or I'd even be satisfied if you put it out every other day. I can read every page of it in one sitting. You can see how I "detest" the book.

Well, good-by for now, and I hope I haven't interrupted your Xeno tipping.—1628 Hobart St., N.W., Washington, D. C.

Well, honey, I'll tell you why the covers seem so loud to you. You see, most of these space harpies are color-blind and it takes a splash of the primary colors to register on their faded spectrums. Why, we'd spoil half the fun of this department if we took away the big cover scenes and left these mad junior peelots nothing to holler about. They'd be exactly like a crew of peelots lost in space without an astrograph map.

And never mind your pert observation about the Xeno business. We have to put fuel in the rocket chambers, don't we? But thank 'ee kindly for your ethergram, gal. The old Sarge dotes on girl astrographers.

As for the rest of you frog-faced rocketeers, bear down and give us some good, lively and sparkling letters for our cargo next issue. The old Sarge is spoiling for a real work-out. No fooling, the old space dog would like to hear from space ports new as well as old. Come on, open up the jets!

Until I get the next batch of space-ograms, happy voyaging to you all, and don't bump your elbows on the asteroids. It wears out the seams of your space suits. (And wouldn't that let all the air out of you!)

—SERGEANT SATURN,
The Old Space Dog.

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2-42

THE FUTURE OF CAPTAIN FUTURE

A Forecast for Next Issue



HOW long has it been since you space birds have read the first chapter of the Book of Genesis? How long since you've read **THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND**, by Jules Verne—or **ROBINSON CRUSOE**, by Daniel Defoe?

Sure, there's a point to these questions, and we're certainly getting at something. What is

the point? The next voyage of Captain Future, that's what!

For the first time in his illustrious and amazing career Curt Newton is completely and irrevocably thrown upon the sole resources of his scientific knowledge and his bare hands.

For the first time in his life, Captain Future and the Futuremen are caught in a cosmic trap from which there is no escape unless they can build everything they require from nothing but the native elements of a raw and weird planet of the void. They don't have so much as a pocket screwdriver for a tool.

A Fight for Survival

How did they get into such a predicament? That, spaceteers, is the beginning of as absorbing a **CAPTAIN FUTURE** novel as you will have ever read. Wrecked on a nameless and uncharted speck of matter in the stellar deep, thrown utterly on their naked hands and intelligence, they must fight first for survival and then for final victory and achievement.

And all the time they are confronted with personal problems, a bitterly opposed and unrelenting strange planet, and—just to complicate matters for them—a company of space-wrecked people from a space liner bound from Earth to Neptune show up to require Curt Newton's aid and protection.

Aboard the wrecked space liner there were Joan Randall and Ezra Gurney, bound on a secret interplanetary police mission; an escaped convict from the Martian penal colony; a mad scientist who has flashes of sheer genius; a chief engineer who is crazy about stewed prunes; and—

but why spoil things for you?

To go back to the first questions I asked you: Captain Future, without being at all

[Turn page]

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profane, has to create everything out of nothing but chaos and pandemonium.

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You'll go into laugh convulsions over Grag's adventure with the tangle tree. And there'll be some mighty tense moments, too, when Otho overreaches even his great ability in the Canyon of Chaos, when the mad scientist becomes too deadly sane, when the escaped Martian convict goes berserk, and when the stolid and comical prune-loving engineer makes a supreme sacrifice.

A Cosmic Feast

Before I tell you too much, I'll just taper off with this tip—according to popular request, the **CAPTAIN FUTURE** novel will be longer! Author Hamilton ties down the safety valve and cuts loose with a full head of steam in **THE FACE OF THE DEEP**.

How's that for cosmic feasting?

Of course, there'll be as many sparkling short stories as we can crowd into the issue. It'll be a fat plum, indeed—or should I say, in honor of Engineer McClin-ton, a fat prune?

Happy spacings to you, and don't forget to seal the airlock and set the gravinometer for normal gravity.

Spatially yours,

—THE EDITOR.

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He must be in reasonably good condition—though the bars are a bit lower than for the regular Air Forces—reasonably well educated and intelligent and must be up to general Army requirements. He will be given training, first at a CAA school on light planes with emphasis on dead stick landings, then get down to intensive training with gliders themselves.

Those who graduate successfully, be they civilians or Army men, will be given at least staff sergeant's rating with full flight pay. And, as it is a new service, commissions are going to come more easily than in other services at least until officer ranks are filled.

As we just said, it's a man's job and a great privilege—a chance to get in the first whacks at the Axis—and the rewards are great. Let's go, fellows. Keep 'em gliding!



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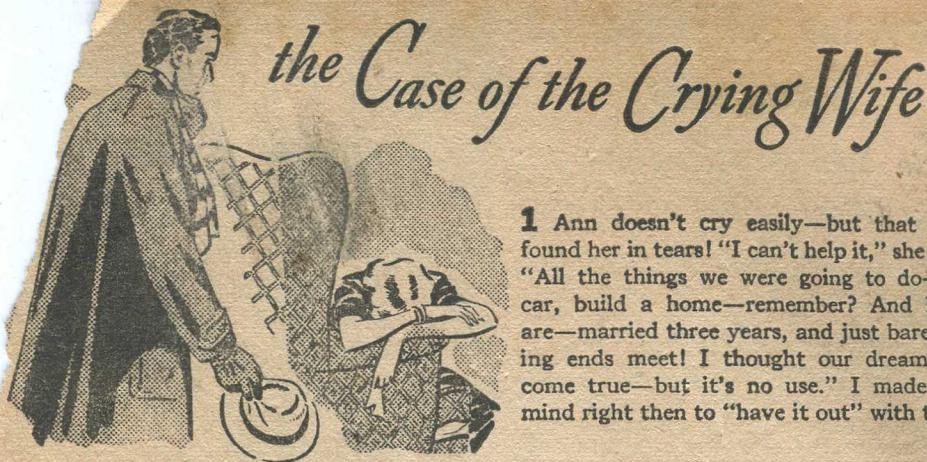
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1 Ann doesn't cry easily—but that night I found her in tears! "I can't help it," she sobbed. "All the things we were going to do—buy a car, build a home—remember? And here we are—married three years, and just barely making ends meet! I thought our dreams might come true—but it's no use." I made up my mind right then to "have it out" with the boss.



2 "Look here!" he said. "I can't pay you more unless you're worth more! And frankly, John, you lack the training a bigger job needs. Ever hear of the International Correspondence Schools?"



3 When I learned the boss was a former I.C.S. student, I signed up quick! And what a difference it made in my work! I'd never realized until then how little I knew about the business.



4 I'm happy, and Ann's happy, and I guess the boss is happy. (At least I've had two "raises" in the last year!) And here's the very same coupon that I mailed, staring you in the face!

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