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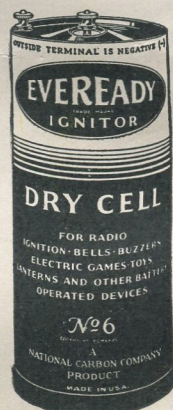
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CAPTAIN FUTURE

WIZARD OF SCIENCE

VOL. 6, NO. 2

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Curtis Newton and the Futuremen

in

a Complete Book-Length Novel

Days of Creation

By BRETT STERLING

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Cover Painting by Earle K. Bergey Illustrates "Days of Creation"

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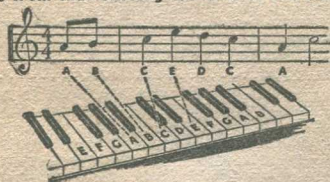
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Where Sergeant Saturn Space-Pilots and Kiwis Meet

THE cargo this voyage is formidable in bulk, and we'd better have at it without a lot of rocket gas from the old sarge. As to the quality of the said cargo—I'll leave to you kiwis and junior pee-lots to weigh and judge.

Let's not start the old space dog's head to throbbing with that old howl about the type of letters you want to see printed here for general observation. Saturn will print a fair cross sample of the communiques that come in, apologizing for not printing more of them—and you space birds who object can just sit down and write in the kind of letter you think would look nice in this department.

Okay, Frog-eyes; dump out the mail sack—no, not through the garbage chute, you dope! Here on the chart table in the astro-gation chamber. *Hmmm*—maybe you had a good idea, at that.

The first flash from the ether pertains to **THE FUTUREMEN Club**.

SIGNING ON

By Karl Kozarsky

Dear Sarge: I am sending the necessary articles, so please accept me as a member of the Futuremen.

The November ish of C.F. was a humdinger, and now, positively convinced, I unhesitatingly say Sterling is as good as or better than Hamilton.

But, the cover: What was that blob of blubber with teeth defacing it? You know, Bergey gets boring after a while.

Next ish, looks like a repeat of the last one. Swell, and with Finlay, too.

The Futuremen was exceptionally good this issue and is a swell department if there is one.—2156 Cruger Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Official dignity restrains the old Sarge from discussing here on the first page in simple language that you will understand, Kiwi Kozarsky, the matter of last issue's cover painting. You will run into a few faint allusions to this matter deeper in this department. For the moment, simply let us welcome you as a new member to **THE FUTUREMEN Club** and wish that you enjoy the association with us.

Anybody else who feels the urge to join our happy family group, just fill out the coupon you will come across further along in this department and mail it in. We'll attend to you later.

Now, before I stitch your ears back with a row of rivets, Kiwi Kozarsky, we will peek at the next communique.

LIVE AND LEARN

By Wallace Whetstone

Dear Sarge: I can't do it any longer! I mean keeping quiet. This time I stick my neck out of my shell and say something about TWS, SS, and (last but not least) CF.

Ah, me, I feel better already. First let me explain about myself. From birth to the age of 16 years I was blind, then through operations, I was given

sight in one eye and I started reading everything I could get hold of (after I learned *how* to read). So far, I think I would rather sit down with a good SF mag, yours in particular, than go dancing with some cute Hep-chick. I mean it and I do like to dance. Also, I am 23 summers on this planet Earth, which still leaves me enough time to live(?) and learn(?)

Using the 10.00 rating, I want to classify the following magazines.

| CAPTAIN FUTURE—Winter Issue | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Cover | 6.75 |
| Magic Moon | 7.70 |
| To Dust Returneth | 8.15 |
| The Companions of Sirius | 5.80 |
| Features | 8.50 |

| STARTLING STORIES—Fall Issue | |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| Cover | 8.35 |
| Pirates of the Time Trail | 9.05 |
| The Monkey and the Typewriter | 4.80 |
| The Space Dwellers | 7.65 |
| Secret Weapon | 5.40 |
| Features | 6.90 |
| Illustrations | 6.35 |

I could rave on and on but I'll save it for some other time. I don't presume to be an authority on Science Fiction, but—I just happen to have every **CAPTAIN FUTURE** and **STARTLING STORIES** from the first issues of both to the above mentioned issues, plus every issue of TWS from the Spring of '38 to TWS Vol. XXV, No. 1, Fall, 1943. Not bad, eh? I want to hear from somebody else with a collection comparable to mine.

Enclosed is my application to the Futuremen. Would like to hear from some of you pee-lots and Kiwis. At present I am employed in the Prop Dept. at Universal Studios.

Pardon my writing, but it isn't bad for just six years, huh?

Gotta go now, my crew is waiting to shove off for a date with some Venusianettes.—4554 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, Calif.

Pee-lot Whetstone, it's kiwis like you who make pioneering and exploration and advance a pleasure. You're spacing under full acceleration, and you're dang tooting your writing and progress in general isn't bad for only six years. More power to you, and I hope you hear from a lot of fellow fans. And keep right on saving copies of our three scientifiction magazines, but make sure you have plenty of storage space—because we are going to keep right on publishing them.

FROM THE FIRST ISSUE

By Al Greninger

Dear Sarge: I've read **CAPTAIN FUTURE** since the first issues, but this is the first time I have written to **UNDER OBSERVATION**.

CF is the best science fiction mag I have read; in fact, it's "good." Hamilton is tops as an SF writer, especially **Captain Future** and stories like "Treasure on Thunder Moon." Sterling is doing a good job and has some swell ideas, but lacks the "Hamilton Touch." I'd like to see a story by both of them when this war is over.

The only real fault with the mag is the cover; even the Sarge's picture on the front would look better. The last issue was awful (The Star of Dread). In the story Joan was wearing space slacks and it makes the mag look crummy to see a half-dressed dame on the cover (not that Joan is a dame).

That's about all for this letter. Don't fall in the Xeno.—26 Orchard Ave., Angola, N. Y.

(Continued on page 8)

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UNDER OBSERVATION

(Continued from page 6)

And don't you fall into the fuel vat, Pee-lot Greninger. Now, go stand in the corner with Kiwi Kozarsky. When I have a full squad lined up—and that won't be long now—we'll engage in a gentle and gentlemanly free-for-all about the cover.

WORLDS OF TOMORROW

By Rodney M. Palmer

Dear Sarge: After this war there will be a development of magazines running along the same lines of CAPTAIN FUTURE, et. al. When writers try to build these stories they will find themselves against a brick wall. This wall is being constructed bit by bit by your feature, WORLDS OF TOMORROW. You seem to be carefully mapping out the entire Solar System for the benefit of readers.

Writers will have two alternatives: They will either study carefully the maps and data published in this feature, and try to adhere as close to them as possible, or they will map out their own idea of the system and follow it! In the former, the result will be the curtailment of imagination and development, and in the latter there will be utter confusion among science-fiction readers. If, in 1945, five books appeared on the stands, one stating that Mars was a dead world, another it had a secret population inside a hollow shell, another that it was covered with a shallow sea through which the sand beneath could be seen from Earth, and so on, the result would be demoralizing. The plausibility of science-fiction would be shattered at a blow. With this situation continuing month after month eventually it would become dull and unbelievable. Readers are a finicky, petty bunch.

Writers of the Black Bat, The Crimson Mask, and the Phantom have a common ground and setting upon which to write their stuff. Science-fiction writers have no such ground.

There will be a trend toward making all the characters on other worlds of human stock. A very good idea. This makes them more likeable and understandable. The motives of other worlds will be appreciated clearer.

By all means relegate WORLDS OF TOMORROW to places unknown to readers (other universes, and specific asteroids) or do away with the deadly thing altogether! Though the thing is interesting and whimsical in itself, it is the psychological aspect of it that has me worried.—226 W. 60th St., Chicago, Ill.

Personally, Pee-lot Palmer, the old Sarge thinks you are full of rocket gas, but there is material for a good bunkroom argument in your letter, and I turn you over to the tender mercies of your fellow junior astrogators. At least, your letter presents a different view from the usual communique, and the old space dog will welcome a little open discussion. Hop to it, you space imps.

THE MAD SCIENTIST

By Monroe Kuttner

Dear Sarge: It's me again, the Mad Scientist. Sarge, I must congratulate you on C.F. It is now the best S.F. mag on the stands.

I have a few ideas for C.F., Sarge. First, publish it oftener. Second, when you can get enough paper, why not have a C.F. annual starting with a reissue of the first 3 issues of C.F. this year, the next 3 issues of C.F. the next year and so on. You could charge 25 or 30 cents. I'm sure there are plenty of S.F. fans that haven't read the first issues of C.F. and would buy it. And there'll always be more new readers to read past issues. Third, if possible, why not put Capt. Future on the radio as a serial? There'll be plenty of S.F. fans and other people besides that will want to listen.

Well, that's all, Sarge, keep C.F. going strong.—41-16 51 St., Woodside, N. Y.

You know, Kiwi Kuttner, you might have dug up a pretty good idea in that trilogy reprint scheme—after the lifting of the paper restrictions, of course. How many of you pee-lots would like some day to see, say, a

couple of such issues per year until all the Captain Future stories have been re-issued? Would you pay as much as a quarter per copy for such a book? And would you like a new cover or a reproduction of one of the original covers? Kick this idea around until blast-off time.

JUST A SPACE WOLF

By Austin Hamel

Dear Sarge: Well, another issue of CF, and another Under Observation full of quips, suggestions, and gripes.

The first thing that I would like to discuss is the cover. Although this was a very good cover considering it was done by Bergey, why doesn't CF take an example from SS or TWS? Their last four covers were simply tops. They all showed a picture of a spaceship, except the Winter SS which showed the inside of a ship with the hero and heroine gazing outward. But speaking of good covers, the Winter CF was not so bad at all, Jane Randall looked better on this cover than she has for a long time. When I first glanced at her I got as hot as Malcolm Jameson's "Giant Atom." Oh, didn't you know? I'm a space wolf. . . .

If you had a contest for the best letters I would choose without hesitation Chad Oliver (the looney lad of Ledgewood). He really gives me a laugh or two, and he knows SF. Speaking of imaginary contests, why not have a real one?

Your inner pics are the best of any SF mags. Did Orban do the novel? If not, who did? Also, how does the artist who drew the pics for "To the Dust Returneth," spell his name, Soklos, Soko, or Solot, or what?

I am not going to complain about trimmed edges or a Bi-monthly, all I will say is that after the war please try and do something about it, okay?

Also, dearest Sarge, I am joining THE FUTUREMEN with this letter, but please do not get sore when I tell you that I am sending the Summer issue cover instead of the Winter, as I found the Winter issue too nice to deface. If it is unacceptable, please tell me and I will send you the right cover.

By the way, whatever happened to the Fall issue of CF, or is it now becoming an annual?—2090 E. Tremont Ave., New York 62, N. Y.

No, Junior, CAPTAIN FUTURE has not become an annual—as you dang well know. It is a quarterly. Sokoli is the name of the artist you are asking about. And Orban did the pix for the Captain Future novel. And after the war we are planning on doing a number of interesting things. Now, go line up with the cover boys in the dark corner, and the old sarge will get around to you shortly.

HAIL THE FUTUREWOMEN

By Martha Mason

Dear Sarge: Enclosed is my application for membership in the "Future Women," and I would like very much to join.

I have just begun to read about Captain Future a few stories back and I think he is grand. The stories are very interesting.

(Continued on page 118)



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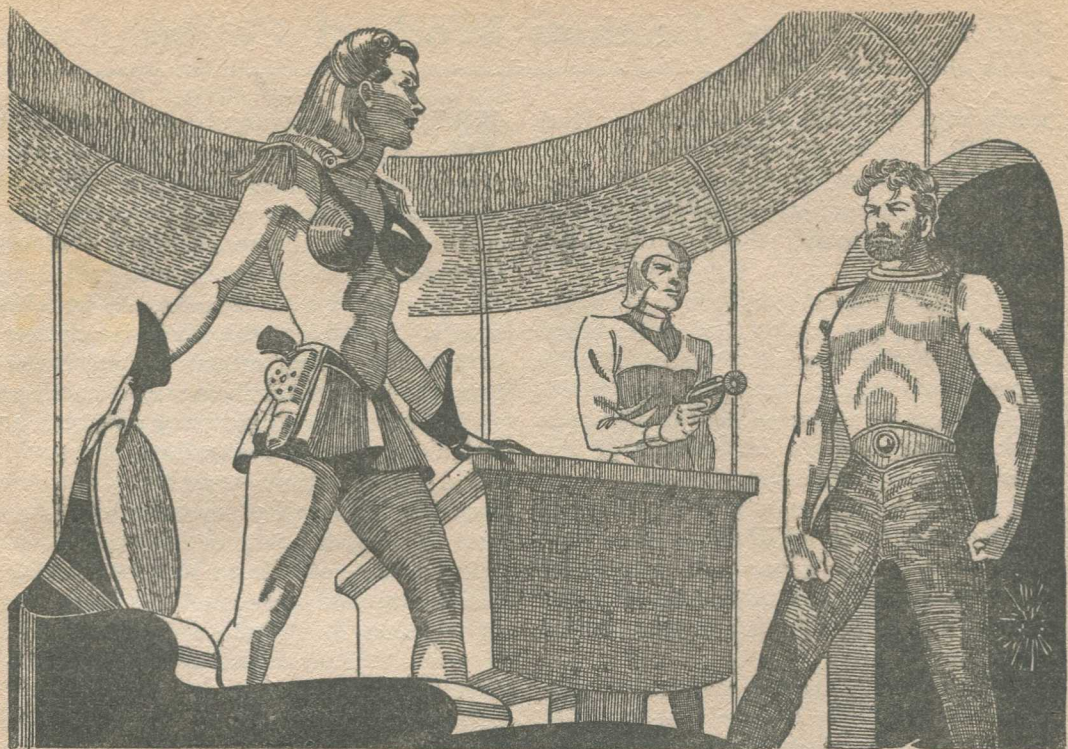
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and I shall read it as directed.

Name:

Address:

City:



Time seemed to stand still as Blackbeard and Joan Randall stared into each other's eyes
(Chapter IV)

DAYS OF CREATION

By BRETT STERLING

*Curtis Newton and His Staunch Comrades Set Out to
Create a Brand New Planet to Add to the Family of the Sun!*

CHAPTER I

The New Planet

HARTLEY BROOKS almost exploded.

"The interfering fool!"

Brooks did not say the words aloud. The anger and rage that were seething within him as he listened to the red-haired young man were near the boiling point, but none the less he managed to smile. His well laid plans might be crumbling about him, the interplanetary empire he had coveted for so long might be escaping his grasp—but his external

appearance was that of a man well pleased with himself and with everyone else.

For Captain Future, whatever Brooks might call him, was in reality far from a fool. And it would not do for Future to suspect all that was at stake in the matter soon coming to a vote.

Brooks, with the fixed smile almost seeming to grow out of his face, glanced casually about him. The Interplanetary Board of Governors, which had been called together in special session to consider the System's greatest problem, was hanging intently on Future's every word. There was no sign of disagree-

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

Four Powerful Factions Work at Cosmic Cross

ment with what he was proposing. And Hartley Brooks, together with the few members who would vote as he directed, dared not attract attention to himself by openly opposing the popular Curt Newton.

"The question of overcrowding," Captain Future was saying, "must be faced frankly. Halfway methods, such as have been tried before, must be discarded. Take a look, gentlemen, at the situation that actually exists on several of the more densely populated planets."

The television screen glowed. One of the hanging cities of Mars appeared before their eyes. Layer after layer of crowded buildings, crowded streets, pallid and unhealthy-looking people, passed in review.

"You see the results of lack of adequate sunlight. It is true that sunlight substitutes exist, but they are expensive, and so long as men in power remain greedy, they will not be supplied in sufficient quantity to maintain what we consider normal health. Consider now the condition here on Earth itself . . ."

The smile on Hartley Brooks' face became sardonic. It was almost as if Future were making a personal attack upon the capitalist. For that hanging city of Mars belonged to Brooks. It was *his* greed that was being damned. Those overcrowded towers on Earth, those swarming underground beehives on Venus, that thin strip on the Twilight Zone of Mercury—all were his. He wondered if Captain Future had any suspicion of that truth. He had covered his trail well, but still one never was sure about Curt Newton.

"As for the outer planets, we have succeeded in establishing colonies on many of them," Future's resonant voice went on, "but they will never absorb the excess population from Earth alone, not to speak of Mars and Venus. Jupiter and Saturn, vast as they are, are for the most part uninhabitable by humanoid types. Neptune, Uranus, and Pluto are almost total losses. There remains but a single possible solution."

BROOKS grew tense. He knew what was coming, but it would not be any more palatable for that. He had worked hard these past few years. Operating behind the concealment of dummy brokers, he had slowly been gathering the threads of a great monopoly into his hands. Railroads, shipping, interplanetary traffic, heavy industry, food manufacture—it was hardly possible to name an important basic industry in which he did not have the controlling share.

He would be the nearest thing to a czar that the System had ever known. And now the entire fabric of his empire was being torn to shreds by this interfering, serious-minded young—he sought for suitable word. "Fool" did not fit Curt Newton, the man who was known as Captain Future.

"I propose, gentlemen, that we build an entire new planet, which will circle the sun between the orbits of Earth and Mars. I have already submitted to your president the preliminary calculations which prove the feasibility of the plan. I need but your approval to go ahead."

There it was, the solution to the System's greatest problem, a solution that would put an end forever to all of Hartley Brooks' dreams. Building the planet would be a government project; no private corporation was large enough to handle the job effectively. Its heavy industry, its space ships, its food factories, everything of any importance would belong to the System Government. Its very existence would smash any threat of private monopoly.

Captain Future had finished speaking, and the applause that now swept the huge hall was spontaneous. Brooks joined in, applauding all the more vigorously as the physical exertion afforded some relief to the emotions he felt. He had just one month in which to act. Except in time of war or special emergency, no construction bill could become law without two readings before the Board of Governors, with at least a month intervening. The bill was sure of passage at the next meeting of the

Purposes in a Game of System-Wide Stakes!

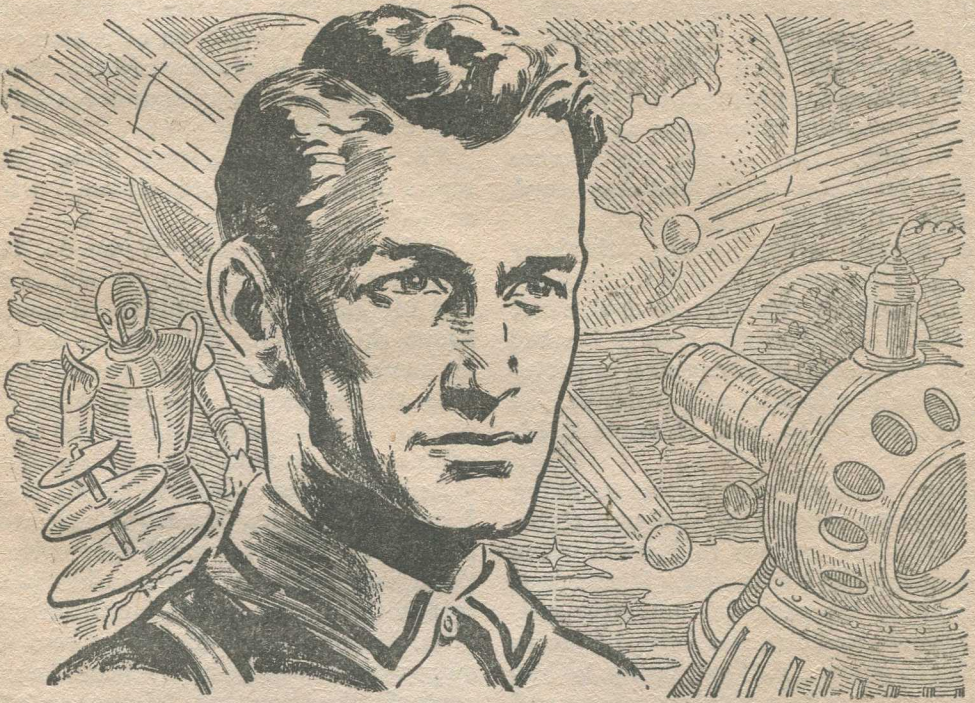
Board, to be held on Mars, but meanwhile that month might come in useful. He was thankful for the red tape which prevented the project from being started at once.

As the president announced that the vote in favor of the bill was unanimous, there was another wave of applause. Brooks arose from his seat and moved slowly toward the exit. He wanted to see Captain Future at closer range.

haired girl. This was Joan Randall. Hartley Brooks paused, listening to the words that came to his ears.

"What it amounts to," Curt Newton was saying, "is that we have a month's vacation. We're going to spend it investigating those ruins on that planetoid, Baldur. Simon thinks the ancient inhabitants achieved a degree of civilization beyond our own."

"Sorry I can't come with you," re-



CAPTAIN FUTURE

At the door of the council hall he stopped suddenly. He had almost collided with something that floated silently in the air, a case whose presence he had not previously noticed. He stared at it—and shuddered as two cold lens-eyes stared back.

This was Simon Wright, the Brain, one of the Futuremen. The lens-eyes seemed to drill into his skull, reading his mind, dragging out into open daylight the thoughts that he had been keeping so carefully hidden. He turned away.

Captain Future, on leaving the hall, had stopped to speak to a pretty, dark-

plied Joan regretfully. "The Planet Patrol wouldn't hear of my taking a vacation at this time."

Hartley Brooks began to fumble in the pockets of his clothes. He found a cigarette, put it in his mouth, then frowned. It had failed to light, quite naturally, as he had chosen a dud that he kept on hand for such purposes. He muttered a curse at the inconvenience of these new-fangled automatic contrivances, and began to search through his pockets again. Then he walked away a few steps. But he was listening more intently than ever. He had switched on

a tiny portable sound-magnifier that he carried with him at all times.

CAPTAIN FUTURE had not apparently noticed him. "We'll leave Eek and Oog at the Moon," he was saying. "Those animals are a little trying on the nerves at times, and I'd rather have them fed automatically than see Otho and Grag waste half a morning petting them and coaxing them to eat."

Joan was smiling. "Poor Otho and Grag! You'd deprive them of the things they love most in this world."

"I'll be depriving myself," replied Curt, and looked deep into her eyes.

The financier grunted to himself. These personal matters were of no concern to him. But at the significance of that first statement he had overheard, his eyes glittered.

He moved along again, thinking rapidly. One reason he had reached his present position was that he had never waited for opportunity's knock. He had always been able to recognize opportunity while it was still at a distance. In Future's words he had recognized his chance.

Fifteen minutes later, he was speaking over his own private Mars-Earth tight-beam televisor system to Kars Virson, his most trusted lieutenant. Virson was the head of his personal detective-and-spy agency, and had been invaluable in his rise to power. Tall and lanky, he had the vacant stare of a helpless moron and the cold, remorseless brain of a murderer. Now his eyes widened as he listened to Brooks' voice.

"Ever hear of Baldur?" asked the financier.

"Sure, Chief! He was a Greek god who got bumped off—"

"He was a Norse god, you idiot. But I don't mean that. I'm referring to the newly discovered planetoid."

Kars Virson hesitated. "Sounds kind of familiar. Isn't that the place where some guys got killed in a landslide?"

"That's it. A party of twenty was wiped out completely. The landslide was precipitated by unpredictable magnetic forces caused by the presence

of unidentified metals."

Over the sensitive receiver, Hartley Brooks could hear the faint sound of Kars Virson scratching his head. The vacant face seemed puzzled.

"I wouldn't know about that, Chief. What's on your mind?"

"I want another landslide to occur."

"Oh—I get it. Dynatomite will do the trick. It'll be a cinch. Who do you want bumped off?"

"Captain Future and his Futuremen."

There was a pause, and in the next second Hartley Brooks heard another peculiar, faint sound, as of a man swallowing hard. When Kars Virson's voice came back to him, it sounded troubled and undecided.

"That won't be so easy, Chief. You see, Future is wise to all such tricks, and—"

"I know that as well as you do. Nevertheless, your job is to get rid of him and his companions. Make no mistake about this, Kars. Either you do this, or some one else does. In the latter case, that some one else will take your place. I don't care to be served by incompetent cowards."

Another pause. Then: "Well, *maybe* I can manage it, Chief. But it won't be easy. Future would get wise if there was anybody else on that planetoid with him, or within a million miles of it. He's got ways of finding out. Our only chance would be by long-distance control. And for that, I'd have to know when he's setting out, and when he'll arrive."

"I imagine he's leaving at once. He intends to investigate some ancient ruins that have aroused his interest."

"Ruins? That makes it easier. I can plant this dynatomite, with a visor set near it, so I can keep an eye on what's going on. When he gets in range, I press a button. Bang, he goes up in the air—if there's any air in the place. And the explosion destroys all the evidence, so nobody can tell what happened."

Virson's voice was becoming actually cheerful. A light sparkled in his watery eyes. "Say, Chief, I think I'm going to



Under the Brain's direction, Grag's eyes emitted a purple glow (Chapter VI)

enjoy doing this. It'll be the neatest job I ever pulled. Only I'll have to work fast. I'll have to find the ruins, plant the stuff, and make a getaway before he shows up."

"That shouldn't be too difficult. You're about a hundred million miles closer to Baldur than he is right now. So, get busy."

As he moved away from the visor set Hartley Brooks smiled. In those few words of Captain Future's no one else would have recognized opportunity. He had. And therefore, within a month, there would be neither Captain Future nor Futuremen. No new planet would be created. And the System of Free Interplanetary Republics would become in reality the private interplanetary empire of Hartley Brooks.

CHAPTER II

The Witness



INSTEAD of slowing down, the teardrop-shaped vessel raced in for a landing, and then a scant mile from disaster, quivered in every riveted seam as the braking rockets burst out in sudden flaming blasts. Within the *Comet*, the metallic voice of

Grag, the robot, roared in dismay.

"Chief! That crazy refugee from a test tube is trying to wreck the ship!"

Otho, the android pilot, grinned in delight. Of Captain Future's three companions, he was the most human in appearance. He might have passed, indeed, for an ordinary man, except that his lithe body had a curiously rubbery, boneless appearance, and his chalk-white face and slanted green eyes held a superhuman devilry and mocking humor. Otho was a man, but a synthetic man. He had been created in the Moon laboratory long years before.

Now he was overjoyed at having startled Grag. "Just practicing quick

stops," he explained with elaborate casualness. "The Chief said it was okay. Too bad it upset your delicate nerves. You probably have some rust spots on the central ganglia."

The *Comet* was dropping slowly now, so slowly that the planetoid beneath seemed to grow imperceptibly. Grag snorted.

He had been created in the same laboratory as Otho, in the long-dead past. But unlike Otho, he had been made of metal. He was a gigantic manlike figure, seven feet high. His metal limbs and torso hinted at colossal strength. But the bulbous metal head, with such strange features as gleaming photoelectric eyes and a mechanical loudspeaker voice-orifice, gave no sign of the intelligence and loyalty that resided in the complex mechanical brain.

Nearby, the Brain, entirely oblivious of the strange behavior of the *Comet*, as well as of the squabble that was now following, was absorbed in a study of film graphs of previously discovered Baldurian inscriptions. By far the strangest of the Futuremen, he was yet the most human.

Once he had been Simon Wright, a brilliant, aging Earth scientist. Dying of an incurable ailment, his living brain had been removed from his human body and transferred into a special serum case in which it still lived, thought, and acted.

The Brain now inhabited a square box of transparent metal. From one face protruded stalked, lens-like eyes, as well as microphonic ears and speech apparatus. Compact generators inside the case emitted magnetic tractor-beams that enabled the Brain to glide swiftly through the air and to handle objects and tools.

THE *Comet* nestled slowly into the landing place that Otho had selected, a rocky hollow between two bleak hills. Captain Future had already slipped into his space suit, his mop of tousled red hair and his keen gray eyes lighting up the handsome space-tanned face within the transparent glassite helmet.

Otho left the controls, and began to don his own suit. Grag, who did not breathe, and needed no protection against the airless cold outside the ship, still rumbled on about the injury to his feelings:

"Chief, maybe you did tell him he could practice quick stops, but I'll bet you didn't tell him he had to pick a spot a mile away from a landing place to try it. Myself, I'm kind of rusty at driving the *Comet*—"

"I'll say that living scrap pile is rusty," jeered Otho. "That hot air of his is oxidizing all his rivets."

Curt Newton smiled absently, and stared at one of the instruments on the ship's control board. "Otho," he said quietly, "while you were busy exchanging compliments with Grag, did you happen to notice that the detector dial is registering five plus?"

"Huh? What's that, Chief?" Otho stared at the dial. "Holy sun-imps, you're right! There's somebody else on this planetoid!"

Curt was busily adjusting the viewfinder of a short-range space-visor. Slowly a face came into sharp focus, a weak, none too attractive human face with shifty eyes, and mobile, uncertain lips. Beyond the face was the old battered hulk of a space ship, built some fifty years before for short-distance freight hauls.

"Wonder what that prospector is doing here, Chief," rumbled Grag. "This place is no bonanza for space miners."

"Looks like a petty crook," suggested Otho. "Maybe we ought to question him, and if he can't explain himself pick him up, and turn him over to the Space Patrol."

"We've got more important things to do," decided Curt. "We'll keep our eyes open to make sure he doesn't try to harm us, and meanwhile, we'll get started digging at those ruins."

A few million miles away, Kars Virson, at the visor screen of a space vessel that was drifting a safe distance off the well-traveled interplanetary lanes, grew tense with expectation. His usu-

ally vacant face now registered intense excitement.

He saw the four Futuremen leave the ship and approach the ruins where deadly charges of dynatomite had been planted. His finger hovered over a button, and then drew reluctantly away. It would be fatal to get three of the Futuremen and leave the fourth alive. He must get *all* of them in one blast. And Grag, the one who would be most difficult of all to destroy, was lagging behind.

Actually, Grag was interested in the Earthman they had detected earlier. But Kars Virson, with his space-visor of limited view, saw no Earthman. He believed merely that some natural object had claimed Grag's attention. And he waited in a fever of impatience.

A few moments later his chance came. His finger sought the button so eagerly that for a fraction of a second he fumbled. Then he had made contact, and the scene on his televisor screen went blank as the dynatomite explosion destroyed his pickup equipment on Baldur.

The first victim of the explosion had been the sending part of the visor set. But the Futuremen were dead, he was sure of that. He had killed people with much smaller charges of dynatomite. He licked his lips happily, and put in a call to the waiting Hartley Brooks on their private beam.

ONLY one person actually saw the explosion; Edward Loring, the small, shifty-eyed Earthman. He had noticed the *Comet* while it was still high above Baldur, and had been frightened almost out of his wits by Otho's mischievous handling of the controls. From then on, he had watched the ship and its passengers from a distance, fearful of who they might be. Clever, and occasionally reckless, he now exercised extreme caution. He was wanted on numerous charges of robbery, forgery, and similar crimes, and he was taking no chances of falling into the hands of the Space Patrol.

The sight of the Futuremen had

alarmed him, despite his failure to realize that he himself had been under observation. He had heard, as had every criminal, of the quick-witted Captain Future, of the lithe Otho, of ponderous Grag, and the fearful Brain. Then he realized with a feeling of relief that they were not seeking him.

From then on he had spied on them with less of fear, but with more of curiosity. What did the Futuremen expect to find on this deserted, out-of-the-way planetoid? Gold, platinum, uranium, radium—perhaps some of the newer precious elements? There might be something in this for Edward Loring.

Then came the inexplicable explosion. He saw three bodies buried under an avalanche of rock. He saw the fourth, that of Captain Future himself, thrown high into the air, almost beyond sight, before it began to float slowly down again. The slowness of the descent puzzled him, until he realized that Future's gravity-equalizer must have been torn off his body. And Baldur's natural gravity was extremely low.

Captain Future settled to the ground and did not move. For a moment Edward Loring stared in dazed silence. Then he scrambled eagerly toward the motionless planeteer.

The face was bloody, the body limp. The glassite helmet had been shattered. No breath came from the pinched nostrils. Loring had seen dead men before, and his eyes gleamed. This was one tracker of criminals he need never fear again.

He ripped open the space suit, and eager fingers fumbled through Curt Newton's pockets. His face fell slightly at what he found, for Curt had been in the habit of carrying little ready money. Then his eyes fell on Curt's right hand . . . and a delighted expression spread over his face.

On one finger was a large ring with a gleaming sun-jewel in the center, and nine planet-jewels surrounding it. This was Captain Future's famous signet ring, a design of the Solar System with jewels that moved in the proper order of the

planets, powered by a tiny atomic motor.

Loring removed the ring, which was obviously valuable for its own sake, and slipped it onto one of his own fingers, where it rested loosely. The other Futuremen had been buried by the explosion. Anyway it was unlikely that any of those unhuman creatures had carried objects of value to the ordinary person.

But one master prize Loring did not overlook. No other ship in the Solar System could match the *Comet*. And there was no one to claim it but himself.

Loring easily found the air-lock, and entered the tear-drop-shaped vessel. Most of the instrument board was a bewildering maze of dials and thermometer-like threads of liquid, but he could recognize the atomic starter, the different throttles, the brake-rocket controls—all that was really needed to operate the ship. He gingerly tried the starter.

THE ship rose jerkily, but he soon managed to smooth out its course. He had handled the controls of many ships in his time, and compared to the tubs which were usually the best he could get, this one was a delight. He made up his mind. He was not going back to his own ship.

Then a sudden thought struck him. Future's absence from his usual haunts would be noted soon. There would be an investigation. His body and the bodies of his companions would be found, and not far away from them, Loring's old ship. That must be disposed of.

The task turned out to be easier than he had expected. He simply nosed up to the old tub in the *Comet*, pushed it along until it was free of Baldur's weak gravity, and left it drifting in free space. Some day it would be discovered, like the famous *Marie Celeste* of a few centuries back, empty and undamaged, and offer a puzzle for the Space Patrol to solve. Meanwhile, it could not possibly connect him with what had happened on Baldur.

But the *Comet* itself . . . he shivered. The tear-drop design was unique. The *Comet* would not long go unrecognized. And when it was learned that there was

neither Captain Future nor any of the other Futuromen within it. . . .

He drove on, troubled in mind. It was no longer possible for him to abandon the vessel now, and at any rate, he would have hated to do so. The *Comet* was the kind of ship he had always dreamed of. But it was too characteristically Captain Future's. So for that matter, was the remarkable ring he had taken from Future's finger. Any one, anywhere, would recognize both the ship and the ring.

He had proof of how difficult it would be for the *Comet* to go unnoticed within the next hour. A patrol ship flashed close, and he shuddered, feeling sure that the game was up. Then the ship veered away again, sending out several signal flashes in salute.

"There's no need to be afraid," he muttered to himself. "I can pass as Captain Future. I can pass. . . ."

A light began to grow in his eyes. "No, I can't, but I know some one who can!"

He opened the forward throttle wide, and the *Comet* leaped ahead. As the miles sped by, an idea ripened in his brain. It was startling. It would require almost more courage than he had, but it would work. He was *sure* it would work. And by the time he had reached Earth, it was fully formed.

He landed in a secluded spot, left the *Comet* unguarded in full confidence that no one would dare interfere with it, and sought out Hro Zan, actor at liberty. Hro Zan stared at him stupidly, but impressively.

"You've got something for me to do? I don't understand. You're not a manager, you've got nothing to do with shows."

"I'm offering you the greatest role of your career," promised Loring.

Hro Zan twirled one of his waxed mustaches. He was a tall, powerfully built man, over six feet in height, and the one-quarter Martian blood in him lent an air of gravity and impressiveness to his glance. Still in his thirties, he had the air of a dignified savant . . . and the brains of a bird. And though he himself was not a criminal, his stupidity made him a



A tall, bearded man was dispersing the heavy insects with the force-field of a curiously altered proton pistol (Chapter XVII)

useful tool for the clever man who was.

"You're joking," he said finally.

"I didn't make a trip of over a hundred million miles merely to joke. I've got something good for you."

HRO ZAN drew himself up.

"I have five other offers," he announced. "I've almost decided to accept an engagement for a serious comedy that's going to play the Mars-Earth-Venus circuit. I want you to know, Loring, that you can't just secure my services at the last moment. Two years ago, when I was playing the leading role in 'The Villain of Mars'—you may remember the rave notices I received, by the way—my leading lady was Mona Granis, and she told me it was an honor to act with me. Anyway, a producer came to me, and—"

"Stop raving, you idiot," interrupted Loring impatiently. "I've got a job that will pay you more in the next few months than you can hope to receive in a lifetime."

"You have?"

"Yes, Curt."

"Curt? My name is Hro Zan."

"Not from now on. I'm christening you Curt Newton. Get used to the sound of it. Learn to answer to it. It's a role you're going to play twenty-four hours a day."

"Curt Newton," repeated the actor, with slow dignity. "I seem to have heard the name before. I remember, in Venus City—"

"I'll have to dig up an android and a robot," murmured Loring, almost to himself, "and then I'll have to do something that's practically impossible—I'll have to find you a Brain. But I'll manage somehow."

"Curt Newton," said Hro Zan once more. "Yes, I'm sure I've heard the name. He was a scientist who discovered gravity."

But Edward Loring was paying his newly acquired dupe no further attention. He was dazzled by the golden future his growing idea was opening before him. Why, with care, he could milch people of the Solar System in Future's name for

untold wealth. At his leisure he could concoct schemes that, under the cloak of Curt Newton's fame, would bring in golden revenue in an endless stream.

As for discovery, or for the Planetary Patrol—he shrugged. Under Curt Newton's protection, as long as he shied clear of violent crime, he need have no fear. Already he had forgotten the planetoid Baldur. His next step was the acquisition of the Moon.

CHAPTER III

Blackbeard



IT was the hiss of gas that revived Curt Newton. The man who had been known as Captain Future sat up slowly and stared about. Almost unconsciously he wiped away the blood that was trickling down his face. Then, as he turned his head,

he choked, and at that moment he realized where the hiss of gas had come from.

His glassite helmet had ben shattered, and the air had leaked out. But a small stream of oxygen had been trickling past his face from a pipe that led to the tank strapped to his back. He awoke suddenly to the fact that his life depended on this tiny stream. The trickle of oxygen was due to the fact that there was a break somewhere in the line, and if there was one break there might be another, and the oxygen might be ebbing away into the airless void. Without knowing how they acted, his fingers deftly sought for the unwanted break in the pipe and found it. A quick dab with a plastic repair material from his belt, and the pipe was repaired.

Judging from the pressure of the escaping oxygen, he had a supply sufficient for several hours still remaining. After that—he shrugged. He had a more pressing question to answer.

"What happened?" he whispered to himself.

He frowned painfully. "There was an explosion, and then . . . I seem to remember some other people. . . ."

He stared about him in perplexity. It was at that moment that he realized he did not remember his own name.

At first a feeling of near-panic seized him. It disappeared as he stood up, almost floating into the air with the effort. That reminded him he could use a gravity equalizer. Strange that he should recall that when he couldn't recall his name.

Even more strange that he should recall the principle of the device, that a gravity-equalizer depended for its effect on the formation of a low-energy high potential ponderomagnetic barrier invented by . . .

He frowned again. He could remember facts that had nothing to do with him personally, but he seemed completely to have forgotten names. With an intentness that was almost physically painful, he tried to recall who he was, why he had come here. But the effort was useless. His mind simply would not respond.

He moved slowly in the direction where the explosion had taken place. A heavy mass of rock had fallen here, effectively burying any companions he might have had. There was no doubt about their being dead. He must think of himself. Never mind who he might be. Somehow he must secure food, water—and air.

He studied the instruments in his belt. Only one seemed to offer any hope. It was a proton pistol, that depended for its effectiveness on atomic disintegration. If only he had suitable material to work with, he might set off a self-sustaining, high-energy process that would support an exothermic chemical reaction. And his oxygen could then be drawn from the rocks themselves.

Something seemed to stir in his mind. One of his companions had been carrying a set of tools for some purpose he could not now remember. "I think his name was . . . was. . . ."

The name had been almost on the tip of his tongue. He felt horribly disap-

pointed when it slid away and was buried in the depths of his unconscious mind. He could not even remember now whether it began with a "G" or a "K."

He found the instruments Grag had been carrying, partly buried by the explosion. There were several elements represented in the different alloys, including copper and iron. That settled one problem. He *would* be able to breathe, at least until he starved to death.

SOME hours later, when an ugly, medium-sized space vessel edged in with snorting rockets for a jittery landing, the men who clambered slowly out in awkward space suits stared at him with an amazement they did not attempt to conceal.

"By the Gods of Space, Urg, here's a man who doesn't have to breathe!" cried one of them, a short, squat Martian whose face was as round and good-natured as a Martian doll's.

Then he got a closer glimpse of the man who had been Captain Future, and whistled. Two jagged wounds across the strong space-tanned face had produced a sinister, almost demonic effect. The tousled hair, red no longer, but stained a purplish black by a gust of vapor resulting from the action of dynamite on unfamiliar minerals, added a frightening touch that reminded the Martian of a Uranian devil-giant. All in all, this was no customer he would have wanted to meet in a dark alley in Mars City.

The man had looked up at his exclamation. "Take off your helmets and make yourselves at home," he invited.

"What are we supposed to do for oxygen?" demanded the squat Martian.

"What I'm doing. I'm getting it from these rocks. There's so much of it, I'm letting it escape freely."

By this time Urg had approached. Tall and lanky, he had a calculating look in his eyes that was hardly customary in a Venusian. His eyes took in the scene at a quick glance that left him puzzled.

"What the devil's going on here?" he demanded of the man who was creating o

his own oxygen.

"Nothing much. I've been waiting for you."

Urg and the squat Martian interchanged glances.

"You know who we are?" demanded Urg suspiciously.

"No. I don't even know who I am myself. But I had an idea that some one would notice these atomic flares and cruise in to have a look at what was going on."

Urg's face wore a puzzled frown. "What do you mean by saying you don't know who you are?"

"Exactly that. I awoke after an explosion to find myself apparently alone on this forsaken planetoid. I know I had companions, but all indications are that they're dead. I think we were on a scientific expedition, but I don't remember what we were investigating. I

"You can handle a space ship?" asked Seldor.

"I think so, but I'm not sure. Once I got my hands on the controls, I'd know."

Urg nodded. "You retain a certain muscular memory, even though your brain isn't functioning fully." Urg had received an education in five colleges spread over three planets, and he was not a man to permit his underlings to forget that fact. "And in time you'll probably remember who you are."

"I've been trying so far without success. And I've got a feeling that it's important for me to remember."

"It'll come to you suddenly, maybe in a week, maybe in a half year. The best thing is not to worry about it," advised Seldor. "In the meantime, if you'd like to get off this oversized piece of rock, to some place where you don't have

Curt Newton Battles Against the Sinister Cunning of Resourceful Space-Booter Rab Cain in RED SUN OF DANGER, a Complete Book-Length Novel by Brett Sterling Packed with Interplanetary Surprises — Coming in the Next Issue!

did recall, however, enough about science to rig up this oxygen unit."

He pointed to the rock-disintegrator set-up he had devised, with his proton pistol to start it going.

"A scientist, eh?" mused Urg. "Do you think we could use a scientist, Seldor?"

The short squat Martian seemed puzzled. "I've been used to thinking that we could get along with nothing but a pilot who knew the spaceways, and men who weren't scared of death, and could handle an atom-gun, but all the same—" He scratched his head. "Any man who could rig up something like this is worthy of consideration."

He waved his arm to indicate the rock-disintegrator.

"That was easy. I needed oxygen, and it was a question of working in a hurry or suffocating to death," said Captain Future. "The thing I'm proud of is the way I used the excess energy to construct an atomic flare."

to make the air you breathe, I guess we can accommodate you."

URG'S attitude had become unaccountably tense. The man who had been Captain Future did not know why but he sensed the fact.

"That's why I sent up those flares," he answered quietly. "I'll work my way back to any port you name."

"Our port hasn't got a name," replied Seldor. "Something like you. You see, we're prospectors."

"Yes?"

"We do our prospecting," put in Urg, "in other people's ships."

"I see. Pirates."

"Like to join us?" Urg pursued.

Urg's voice was smooth and unconcerned, but the man who heard his invitation made no mistake about what was going on in his mind. Urg was giving him his choice of staying alive or dying.

"I've been waiting for you to ask that,"

promptly accepted the man who had been Captain Future. "I'm with you."

"Then let's get back to the ship. We don't want to waste any more time here."

As they picked their way over the rocky landscape, one of the men asked essentially the same question that had been troubling the ex-Captain Future.

"What do we call him, Seldor?"

Seldor considered. "His beard's coming in purplish black. And with those scars he's going to have, I don't think he'll do much shaving. Make it Blackbeard."

"Thanks," said the newly christened recruit. "That name will do as well as any. You're Urg's assistant, aren't you?"

Seldor shook his head. "Urg and I are co-captains," he explained briefly. "Some of the men are prejudiced against Venusians and others against Martians. It takes two of us to keep them in line."

Seldor's attitude was casual, like that of the other pirates, but Blackbeard was not fooled. He had joined a group of men whose lives were dedicated to robbery and murder, and he too would have to rob and murder along with them if he expected to stay alive.

The pirate craft was small but sleek, with atomic engines that seemed almost too powerful for the size of the ship. Told that he would be expected to help handle one of the atom-cannon that thrust grimly from the vessel's snout, Blackbeard nodded as if no job could have been more to his liking. He was hoping that the test of his eagerness to aid his new-found companions would not come before he had a chance to plan what to do.

But his hopes were not destined to be fulfilled. Four hours after he had stepped on board, an eager voice resounded through the pirate vessel.

"Freighter ahead of us, sir!"

"All men to battle stations!" roared Urg. His eyes glittered with the lust for battle and loot.

Blackbeard moved silently toward the controls of the gun he had been ordered to handle. Come what may, he knew that he was not going to fire at the other ship.

CHAPTER IV

The Trap



THEY overhauled the other vessel with startling ease. It was obviously old and slow-moving, useless for anything but moving freight.

"Hope they've got a worthwhile cargo aboard," murmured Urg.

"We'll know soon enough," observed Seldor.

One of the gunners spoke nervously. "They're in range now, Captains. Maybe we ought to let them have it."

"No use damaging the cargo," returned Urg. He spoke into a space visor. "Ahoy, there! We've got you under our guns, and you can't get away. Better surrender before we start firing!"

The entire crew waited breathlessly for the freighter's reply. When it came, they stared at each other in bewilderment.

The old tub underwent a sudden transformation. Its sides swung out and back, revealing ugly snouts of atom-guns, aimed straight for the pirate ship. They were heavier and more numerous than the guns of their pursuers. The ship itself suddenly assumed the swift trim outlines of a cruiser of the Planet Patrol. And in the receiving screen of the space-visor, a space-bronzed, somewhat amused face stared at the dumbfounded Urg.

"Sorry, Captain," came an ironic voice. "We're not as helpless as we appeared to be. I think it would be preferable if you were to do the surrendering!"

Urg lost his head completely. "Fire!" he yelled. "We'll fight it out with them! Fire, you blasted space rovers!"

Blackbeard acted quickly. One member of his own gun crew moved to obey and found himself sprawling on the floor. A swift beam from Blackbeard's atom-pistol turned the control panels of the neighboring guns into heaps of useless,

smoldering metal. "There's no sense in committing suicide," he said grimly.

"It's better than being sent to rot away on Cerberus, you space-struck idiot!" snarled Urg, furiously.

He plunged at Blackbeard, his hand clawing for the atom-gun at his own belt. Blackbeard shot first. Urg's gun fell to the floor, a puddle of molten iron. Urg shouted in pain as the beam scorched his hand.

"Any one else prefer suicide to Cerberus?" asked Blackbeard grimly.

No one did.

MOMENTS later, there sounded the clang of the other ship bumping against the pirate vessel. Magnetic grapples held the two ships together, and in a few seconds, the air-locks were in contact. The pirates muttered sullenly to themselves as the members of the Planet Patrol came aboard.

A tall, lean, space-tanned Venusian was in charge.

"We rather expected a struggle," he said in pleased surprise. "Glad to see you had more sense."

"You wouldn't have got us so easily if not for that rat," growled Urg. Hatred for Blackbeard twisted his face into a scowl. "I suppose he's a spy of yours."

"Not that I know of," returned the Venusian, regarding Blackbeard with interest. Then he turned to the others again.

"You will kindly disarm yourselves, gentlemen, and then precede me into the other vessel, where suitable hospitality is awaiting you."

Atom-guns fell into a heap in the center of the ship's floor. Blackbeard retained his to the end.

"You, too," ordered the Venusian politely. "We will investigate your case later."

Reluctantly Blackbeard surrendered his weapon. With dispatch all of the prisoners were herded into the patrol vessel. Cells were waiting for them, and here they were detained, to be removed one at a time for examination. Each was returned minutes later, cursing and uncommunicative.

Only Seldor shed any light on the situation for Blackbeard. He was returned to the cell next to that of the newest pirate recruit.

"Sure, it was a trap for us," he growled in answer to Blackbeard's unspoken question. "The Planet Patrol has been after Urg and me for months. But it wasn't only us. There's a drive on to clear up this area of pirates and outlaws. We were just unlucky enough to be the first to tumble into this clumsy trap. And, by the way, Blackbeard, Urg may be mad as a sun devil for what you did, but I hold you no grudge. You really saved our lives. We'd have been blasted into cosmic dust if we had started fighting."

"What are they going to do with us?" asked Blackbeard a bit helplessly. "I still can't figure out where or how I ought to fit into things—anywhere."

Seldor shrugged philosophically. "The rest of us are going to serve a prison term on Cerberus, of course. As for you, I don't know. I put in a good word for you. Why not? You really did us a favor."

There was nothing to do but wait. Blackbeard sat down on his bunk and fingered the ugly cuts on his face which were roughly scabbing over. He wondered if he would recognize himself as a definite person if he saw his reflection in a mirror. Probably not.

Finally it was his turn to be examined.

A pair of guards took him from his cell and marched him along the main corridor of the disguised patrol ship.

"What happens now?" he asked them.

"You made it possible for us to capture the pirate vessel without firing a shot," replied one of the guards. "You are to be examined by a special officer of the patrol."

Blackbeard strode along between his burly and armed guards in silence. He recognized the interior of this vessel as a space patrol cruiser, and wondered how he knew this fact. Had he ever been a prisoner aboard such a ship before?

A moment later he was presented at

the opaque plastite door of a small office which was definitely not the main office of the commander of this police cruiser. Both guards drew their ray guns and motioned him to open the door and enter.

"This is a special examination," warned one of them, "but don't try any tricks. We have orders to blast you down if you make one false move. Walk in."

Frowning, wondering, Blackbeard did so. He crossed the threshold of the little office, uncomfortably aware that a pair of ray blasters were trained on his back. And then he stopped short in genuine surprise.

From a desk in the room the special patrol officer had arisen and was standing there in an attitude of shock at his villainous appearance.

Blackbeard was conscious of as great a shock. For the officer was a tall and slender, dark-haired and beautiful girl in the abbreviated uniform worn by women members of the Interplanetary Police when off duty.

For a space time seemed to stand still as Blackbeard and the girl stared into each other's eyes. Only vaguely was the man conscious of her feminine allure.

His mind was whirling, spinning, striving to grapple with the illusory idea that he should recognize this woman—that he had seen her before.

One of the guards spoke, explaining the situation.

"This is that fellow who fused the pirates' firing controls, Captain Randall."

CHAPTER V

Bror Ingmann, Terror of Space



ON Baldur, Grag once more stretched his mighty muscles, and heaved. The rocks above him yielded slightly, then held firm. As Grag relaxed in the attempt to free himself, they fell back into place again, locked as securely as ever.

"By all the little devils of Pluto," rumbled Grag. "To think that I, the strongest man in the System—though that animated rubber doll, Otho, would say I'm not a man at all—should be stuck here like a helpless infant Martian in his incubator-nest!"

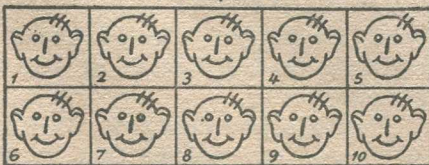
He knew what the trouble was. The weight of rock above, equivalent to many tons on Earth, was little indeed here on Baldur. But several flat slabs must have fallen across the debris that covered him in such a way that their ends made a neat joint. The harder he pushed, the more securely he locked them in place.

Af first he had been merely enraged at realizing his helplessness. But as time passed, and his first fury had been expended in a vain struggle to free himself, he had begun to worry. He knew well enough what had happened. There had been an explosion of dynatomite, judging by the accompanying odor. He could recognize it by means of his artificial

[Turn page]

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

All the same except one . . . which is the odd picture?



ANSWER:
Number Five. He is only "two-holed"

WHAT DO YOU SAY?



sense of smell, even though he did not breathe. The force of it had torn out a huge crater, and then the debris had fallen back and buried him. But where were his companions?

If Curt Newton were alive, why had he not come to the rescue? Grag could think of only one answer. Curt needed air to breathe. The explosion, even if it did him no other harm, had probably torn his oxygen line. And without air Curt Newton would die.

Grag did not put the logical conclusion into words, even mentally, but he saw no way of escaping it. Curt Newton must already be dead. And what went for him went for Otho, too. For Otho also needed air. Only the Brain was a non-breather like Grag, and he needed a continual renewal of the nutrient serums in his case, just as Grag needed an occasional chunk of copper to supply fuel to his atomic power engine.

"Holy sun-imps," said Grag helplessly, using Otho's favorite oath. He was the only one of the Futuremen left alive. He must be. And without his companions, he might as well be dead, too.

He began to repeat to himself all the oaths he knew. To some slight degree, they eased his feelings, and besides that, he enjoyed hearing the sound of a human-type voice again. Even his own. Or as poor Otho, whom Grag had never appreciated enough, would have said, *especially* his own.

Then—just in case—he tried to push the rocks away once more. They held. And time continued its relentless flight.

ABOVE the planetoid, a small space vessel wheezed asthmatically, fell for a time to silence, and then began to cough and spit like a marsh-tiger. The lone voyager inside wiped some of the sweat away from his forehead.

"Durned fools," he muttered. "I said them rocket-feeds weren't working right. I told them. Wait'll I get back and let 'em know they almost cost me my life. 'You blasted idjits,' I'll say, 'whaddya mean tellin' me, Bror Ingmann, you know more about ships than I do? I been a prospector nigh onto fourteen

years, and what I don't know—'"

He spat in triumph, then continued his monologue. The ship dropped down with breathtaking speed, then hovered above the surface motionless, and finally bumped to the ground. Bror Ingmann picked himself up slowly, and began to pull on a space suit.

"Not many men coulda made a landing like that," he mused absently as he stepped out through the airlock. He made a gesture to scratch his head, found the helmet in the way, and let his hand drop frustrated to his side. This was as barren a planetoid as he had ever seen. No air, no water, no nothing. Only rocks and—

He caught himself. There was something. It might be valuable, too. Far off to one side several rocks were glowing like the embers of a logwood fire such as he had once seen back on Earth, red, and orange, and yellow. His eyes brightened. Those rocks might be *extra* valuable. They probably contained—and from supposition he passed at once to certainty — they probably contained radium, uranium, even new elements.

He ran over, like a lumbering bear, to take a look.

The apparatus he found was where Blackbeard had left it.

"Pits of Pluto, it must be worth millions!" he muttered to himself. "This here other feller dug out lots of it." This he decided from the crater left by the rocks Blackbeard had used in creating oxygen. "And he left his tools. That must mean he intends comin' back."

Having checked this reasoning and decided it was valid, Ingmann examined the tools. "Funniest gadgets I ever did see. Maybe they're valuable, too."

He picked up a peculiarly shaped rod whose end had been smeared with disintegration catalyst. "Don't look much good for diggin'," he grumbled deprecatingly, and poked it at one of the glowing rocks.

Then his jaw dropped. But he himself rose, so rapidly that at first he thought he was leaving the planetoid for good.

Beneath him, the ground was heaving. Under the force of an atomic explosion set off by the catalyst, rocks were spouting upward in beautiful long curves, some of them glowing orange and red like the rock he had touched. A cloud of dust had formed suddenly, and was trailing after him, like a comet's tail. But he felt nothing. It was as if he were standing still, or coasting at a terrific speed through space without using his rockets.

"Moons of Mars," he said resentfully, "you can't trust nobody or nothin' in these strange places."

He had reached the top of a long slow parabola, and now, so gradually that at first he wasn't sure it was happening, he began to come down again. He picked up speed as he fell, and for the second time, landed on Baldur with a bump.

Thanks to the planetoid's low gravity, his injuries were chiefly to his feelings. He rose painfully to his feet. And then, once more, his jaw dropped.

The ground near him was heaving again, this time as if being cast up by an explosion in exceedingly slow motion. Rocks flew apart, one or two of them narrowly missing his head. Then Bror Ingmann swallowed hard. A metal man was rising out of the ground.

GRAG had felt the tremor of an explosion vibrating through the ground around him. He had felt the rocks leap up above, then settle down even lower than before. He wondered what was happening. He waited. Suddenly he realized that those slabs which had been locked together before might now be disengaged. He exerted all his strength. Bursting upward from his temporary tomb, he stared at Bror Ingmann.

He saw an Earthman about six feet in height, strong and burly even through the clumsy old space suit. The man had a formidable, square-cut face, with the flaring mustaches of an old Viking, and the fierce old eyes of a veteran space pirate. All the resentment stored up in his long imprisonment underground boiled to the surface. He touched the

Earthman's helmet, so that his voice might carry better than if it had to travel through the ground.

"Who are you?" he roared.

The grim face frowned. "Don't think you kin scare me, iron man. I been prospectin' nigh onto fourteen years, and I seen your kind before. I tear robots apart. They call me Bror Ingmann, Terror of Space. There was a robot I mis-handled once . . ."

Then he swallowed, and the fierceness went out of both voice and expression. "I'm tough, I am. Only I ain't lookin' for trouble."

Grag snorted in disgust. He knew a braggart when he met one. What he would have liked to see right now was a really tough customer, some one who knew how to fight, and was anxious to do so. He had a lot of energy to work off. He wanted to get his steellite fingers on the party responsible for that explosion.

He turned on his heel abruptly, leaving the Earthman gazing after him. Then quickly and systematically he began to dig.

It was a long job, even for Grag. The dynatomite had torn up a wide area, and his companions might be buried anywhere. He noticed the Earthman withdraw after a time, as his oxygen tank began to empty, but he paid no attention.

Finally, after several hours, he uncovered the body of Otho. For a moment he gazed at it, motionless as a metal statue. A wave of emotion overwhelmed him.

"Poor Otho!" A human being would have been tearful, but Grag's eyes could achieve no tears and his voice remained but a deep rumble. "He was a fine companion," he muttered, conscious of the inadequacy of his words. "If only I had treated him better."

There was a frown on Otho's white features, as if he had died fighting. Grag turned his face away. All his life, he thought, the memory of how he had behaved to the android would torture him. With a deep sense of shame, he moved the body aside, and continued digging.

Many hours later, he came across the

Brain. The compact box-home of Simon Wright had been covered by a thick layer of debris, but was apparently uninjured. Nevertheless, Simon gave no sign of life.

Grag could hardly go on. The Brain, his own creator, dead! For once in his life, the robot felt weak and powerless. Finally, he placed the Brain alongside the body of Otho, and continued to dig. But, to his relief and perplexity, nowhere could he find a trace of Curt Newton.

The Earthman had returned by now with a new oxygen supply from his ship and was watching with the curiosity of a child. Grag, intent on his search for Curt Newton's body, heard him speak, without paying too much attention.

"Friend, I—I ain't sayin' I'm s-scared, but they look sort of d-dangerous to me!"

"Quiet!" roared Grag. Then he realized that the Earthman must indeed be badly puzzled at what was going on. He looked up. Bror Ingmann was running toward him. The fierce Viking face was pale with terror. But Ingmann was not referring to Grag's companions.

Some distance away, a group of what appeared to be small furry rodents were approaching, marching forward like an army. No more than a foot or so long, and half that in height, they seemed to be oozing along the ground behind him.

Grag recognized them at once. They were not individual animals at all, but parasitic cell-colonies, such as were occasionally found on several of the less frequented planetoids. It mattered little to them whether the animal they attacked was of metal, silica, or organic matter, for they had the power to digest almost anything. They did not kill at once. Having selected a victim, the colonies would dissolve, their cells penetrating those of the host until they were dispersed through the animal's entire body.

For several days the host might feel nothing. And then as suddenly and completely as the one-hoss shay, the host would collapse. And the parasitic cells, swollen now in size and multiplied in

number, would emerge, to seek new victims.

Ordinary methods of defense were useless against a danger like this. For several valuable seconds Grag simply stared. He might outrun the attackers—and he would not be ashamed to run, either—but Baldur was a small planetoid and eventually they would catch up with him.

Through Ingmann's space-helmet, Grag could see the terrified eyes of the self-named Terror of Space.

"You might try your gun," he rumbled. "What have you got it for?"

Ingmann's atom-pistol lanced a beam at one of the small gray heaps of cells. The thing simply split in two. And each half kept on coming.

The next moment, Grag heard something that froze him in his tracks. "Use your eyes, Grag!"

It was not the words that startled him but the sharp rasping voice in which they were uttered. The Brain's voice! The Brain was alive!

CHAPTER VI

Pygmalion



SIMON CART-WRIGHT'S mind had recovered from its shock.

"Wide pupils, distant focus, and ultraviolet below two thousand Angstroms," directed the Brain coldly. "Quickly, Grag!"

Grag's eyes opened wide. The fear-stricken Bror Ingmann gaped as he saw the lenses change shape and emit a faint violet glow.

That was all he saw—except for the manner in which the approaching cell-colonies disintegrated. It was like magic. Even a proton-pistol never produced as striking results. For a proton-beam was always accompanied by sharply visible light, but the wide circle of ultraviolet Grag had produced was all but invisible

to any eyes but his own.

"You should have thought of that yourself," rasped the Brain reprovingly.

Grag nodded sheepishly. "I'm sorry, Simon. I sometimes forget how my eyes work, just as an ordinary person forgets how *his* work. The idea of using the photo-electric cells to generate certain light, as well as detect it, just didn't occur to me." Then his eyes opened wide again, and this time no ultra-violet came from them. "But I thought you were dead, Simon! You didn't move."

If the Brain had been capable of making the gesture, a shrug would have suited his words perfectly. "I couldn't free myself, and I knew my nutrient serums wouldn't last indefinitely, so I simply suspended animation. It was the only thing to do. Then the vibrations of your voice reached me through the ground, and I awoke again."

The Brain paused, and his stalk-eyes examined Bror Ingmann as if he were some strange specimen of planetoid life. The Terror of Space broke into a cold sweat. He hadn't recognized the metal man, for there were other robots beside Grag. But the Brain's appearance was unmistakable. These were Futuremen. He had heard of them but he hadn't known they'd be so frightening. If only he could get away from here.

The Brain turned to Grag again.

"Where's Curt?"

"I couldn't find him, Simon! The low gravity makes digging easy, and I've turned up all the debris left by the explosion, but there's no sign of him."

"You haven't overlooked the *Comet*?"

"The *Comet* is gone."

The Brain was silent for a moment, pondering. "I can't imagine Curt's taking it without leaving some sign."

"I can't imagine his leaving us at all," declared Grag.

"Under certain circumstances, that is quite possible."

SIMON fell silent again. When next he spoke, it was but to utter a single word. "Otho?"

Grag almost choked as he pointed to-



OTHO

ward the lifeless body of the android.

"He was buried."

"So of course he suffocated." The Brain sounded almost impatient. He addressed Ingmann. "You have a medical kit in your ship?"

"An old one. I don't have any of these new-fangled drugs."

"An old one will do. Go with him, Grag, and get it. He's afraid of us and might be tempted to blast off, so be sure to bring him back. And bring back also a steady-pressure pump and an oxygen tank."

"Now, look here," said Bror Ingmann desperately. "That's my ship, see, and nobody ain't tellin' me what I'm gonna do—hey!"

Grag had picked him up and slung him over his shoulder. The Terror of Space protested so loudly that even after he was more than a dozen yards away, the Brain's audio-receiver vibrated heavily.

When Grag returned, Ingmann was considerably more subdued. His fear

had been supplanted by curiosity. He couldn't imagine what the Brain was planning to do.

Simon's eyes scanned the opened medicine kit rapidly, picked out several items, and swung around toward Grag. The voice-box barked out a curt order, and Grag began to mix the selected chemicals.

A tractor beam from Simon picked up a hypodermic syringe, filled it with nutrient serum from his own case, and injected the liquid into Otho's inanimate body. Bror Ingmann shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. He didn't understand this at all.

The Brain now took the mixture of chemicals which Grag had prepared and sprayed it over Otho's face, and into his mouth and nostrils. Next he connected the steady-pressure pump to one of Otho's arteries and set it going. Blood began to course through the dead android's body once more.

"How about the oxygen, Simon?" asked Grag.

"When I tell you."

They waited in silence. The pump was noiseless, and the needle of the gauge remained absolutely motionless, so that for a long time nothing seemed to happen. Then the needle began to quiver. Its vibrations increased in amplitude until there was a swing of some forty millimeters of mercury.

"His heart's beginning to function," observed the Brain. "Feed him the oxygen, Grag. But don't keep the funnel too close to his nostrils."

Grag obeyed, and Ingmann began to shrink away. This business of bringing a dead man to life smacked of black magic to him. Suppose the dead man came back, but his soul belonged to the devil, as the ancients used to believe?

The Brain was apparently not worried about that. He waited patiently. Then suddenly there was a loud howl, and Ingmann almost fainted. Otho, who a moment before resembled a motionless statue of white marble, leaped high into the air. His voice died away at once as he left the ground, but the sound of it haunted the old prospector

until the android came down again. There was no doubt about it, Otho *did* belong to the devil.

But the devil was apparently not very sure of his victim, for Otho having leapt into airlessness, was choking. "More oxygen," said Simon calmly, and Grag, his metal face expressing none of the emotion of which the robot was capable, hastened to comply.

"Why, you misguided meal for a metal-eater, what's the idea of putting that acid on my face?" yelled Otho. "It almost burned the skin right off!"

"You see, Simon," sighed Grag, "that's the thanks we get. We should have let this piece of worn plastic stay dead. We'd have been a lot better off."

"What? I was dead?" exclaimed Otho, startled.

"Well, of course, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference, Otho. It's so close to your normal state," explained Grag.

"It's no time for joking, Grag," reproved the Brain. He faced the incredulous android. "Without air, you couldn't help dying. But you didn't die as a human being dies. You lack autolytic enzymes to dissolve the tissues of your body. Therefore, all the colloids that had coagulated were reversible. The job of bringing you to life was nothing to that of creating you in the first place. And the time required was infinitely less."

"Why throw good time after bad?" muttered Grag.

BUT the Brain was in no mood to listen to an exchange of compliments between the two synthetic Futuremen. He spoke to Ingmann. "Does your ship have a clock?"

"Earth or Mars reckoning?"

"Either one," returned the Brain impatiently.

"I go by Mars. Last time I looked, and that was about ten hours ago, it was Wednesday, five-fifty-five-twenty."

"Which day of the month, and which month?"

"Well, unless they've changed the calendar again, it's February thirtieth."

"So we've been lying here more than

a month," observed the Brain.

"I could have told you that, Simon," said Grag.

"No, Grag, for all you knew, it might have been a year. When you're living at low energy, your sense of the passage of time is extremely inaccurate."

"The Board of Governors must have finally passed that planetary bill," suggested Otho. And then something seemed to strike him. His slanting green eyes opened wide. "Say, where's the Chief? Last thing I knew he was walking along just ahead of me."

"Being dead hasn't improved your wits any," rumbled Grag gloomily. "The Chief is missing."

"He isn't dead?"

"We haven't found the body. You don't think, Simon, that he could have been blasted off into space, do you?"

Simon considered. "It isn't likely. A dynatomite blast has a powerful brisant effect, but the total energy involved isn't too high. And at any rate, the explosion couldn't have blown the *Comet* away."

"No, it couldn't. I've been trying to think why the blast took place at all. Some prospector, like Bror Ingmann here, must have forgotten where he planted a charge. And we accidentally set it off."

The Brain's pressor beams raised him into the air, where he hovered weirdly. "This was no accident, Grag. Some one deliberately tried to kill us all, then made off with the *Comet*."

"That prospector who looked like a petty crook!" exclaimed Otho. "I'll never forget what he looks like. Wait until I get my hands on him!"

"He may have been more clever than we realized."

"Possibly," agreed the Brain. "That's one thing we must find out." The stalk-eyes swiveled around to stare at Ingmann. "You'll take us to Mars?"

"Aw, now, Mr—er—Brain," Ingmann began, and his voice trailed off helplessly.

"You'll be paid for your trouble more than you could ever earn as a prospector."

"And you'll learn a lot," added Grag.

"Not from you," put in Otho. But his heart was not in the remark. He was worried about Curt. And, like his companions, he was greatly puzzled about many things.

Meekly, the Terror of Space led the way to his ship.

CHAPTER VII

The Terror of Otho



INGMANN'S ship was a slow one, and the trip to Mars required more time than they had anticipated. On the way, however, a radio flash gave them one important bit of news. The Mars meeting of the Board of Governors had *not* been

held on the date scheduled. The inexplicable absence of the Futuremen had led to a postponement of several weeks. The final passage of the bill to create a new planet was to take place when Captain Future appeared.

They landed at Radium City at a small spaceport used mostly for cargo ships. Bror Ingmann turned hopeful eyes to his uninvited guests.

"I got you here okay," he said. "Now maybe you can go away and let me be alone."

"We have no intention of inflicting our company on one who does not desire it," said the Brain coldly. "But we may still need your ship. If you wish, you may remain in some obscure place, out of harm's way, while we investigate."

Ingmann scratched a worried head. "N—no, that don't sound so good to me. Nobody can operate this ship like I can. I better stay around."

"Good idea," grinned Otho. "Your older brother will take care of you."

Grag turned to gaze suspiciously at the white-faced android. There was a gleam of anticipation in Otho's eyes, as if he were enjoying the thought of some

clever trick he had planned.

"What's that about an older brother?" asked the Terror of Space suspiciously.

"Excellent idea, Otho," rasped Simon. "Until we learn who our enemy is, we'd better not appear as ourselves."

"You Futuremen talk in riddles," complained Ingmann crossly. "I ain't got no older brother."

"But you will have," Otho assured him.

The android sat down in front of a gleaming metal plate that could serve him as a mirror. Incredibly rapid white fingers skipped through the medicine chest. And before Ingmann's startled eyes, another Terror of Space began to take shape.

Even Grag was forced to utter a grudging compliment at the final result. For Otho's plastic face had broadened out, grown into a fierce duplicate of the dumb-struck Bror Ingmann's. In a faded suit of the latter's clothes, padded to fit his slighter frame, he could be distinguished from his model only by the fact that he was slightly broader and scowled more frighteningly.

Ingmann swallowed hard. "You ain't aimin' to walk around like that?"

"That's the general idea," returned Otho, and for a moment the scowl was wiped away by a pleased grin. "Come on, pardner. We gotta do a little investigatin'. And, by the way, my name is Snor—Snor Ingmann. We're the Terror Twins."

Bror followed open-mouthed as Otho led the way out of the ship.

A stranger might have noticed one insignificant difference between the two formidable brothers who lumbered across the space port and into the bustling Martian town that lay beyond. The older and more frightening of the two had slanting green eyes that darted everywhere and saw everything in the time his companion required to absorb a single trifling detail. But as it happened, no stranger felt tempted to stare long into the eyes of either man.

WHEN Bror Ingmann showed a tendency to linger among the in-

triguing sights of the pleasure district through which they passed, Otho impatiently urged him on. Bror frowned menacingly. Though he permitted himself to be hurried into moving on, there were some vague threats that he could not help uttering.

"You'll be sorry you done this to me, pardner. Bror Ingmann ain't no man to forget insults."

"I'm not insulting you," explained Otho impatiently. "I'm simply in a hurry."

"Where we goin'?"

"To a space port."

Bror's lower jaw dropped. "But we just came from one!"

"No reason why we can't visit the others," returned Otho acidly. "I'm looking for a ship. It's probably berthed at one of the larger places."

"Pardner, I don't understand—"

"You don't have to understand. Move, you space-blasted hunk of meteor-meat!" roared Otho.

The baffled Terror of Space mumbled to himself more fiercely than ever. But he followed Otho meekly.

Otho found the *Comet* at the space port nearest the council hall where the Board of Governors met.

On the way, he had heard a news report which puzzled him, but this did not stop him from searching. The Board of Governors had met yesterday and finally passed the bill providing for the creation of a new planet. They were supposed to have waited for the return of the Futuremen. He wondered why they had changed their minds.

The *Comet* looked exactly as Otho had last seen it on Baldur. Guards surrounded it, and he did not attempt to get too close, merely staring in bewilderment. Only Captain Future could have brought it here—and Captain Future would never have left his faithful companions. The whole thing didn't make sense.

Then he heard a commotion in the crowd. A small group of people was moving toward the ship, but there were too many spectators in the way for Otho to discern who they were. It was not

until the guards had cleared a path for them that Otho glimpsed their faces.

He gasped. Striding toward the ship was Captain Future himself! And with him was the shifty-eyed Earthman they had seen on Baldur, now very expensively dressed, and looking as dignified as any judge!

Could this Earthman have saved Curt when the dynatomite exploded? That was possible, but it still didn't explain why Curt had gone off, leaving the other Futuremen still buried.

Two other men came into view, and this time Otho's eyes almost popped out of his head.

They were Grag and an android who was the very image of his undisguised self!

Grag was carrying a metal box with stalk eyes!

The rage that was seething within Otho was so furious that he almost strangled. He understood it now. Even if he had not seen the pretended android, the sight of an apparent Brain being carried by a robot would have given the game away.

This Captain Future was an impostor. The robot and the android were impostors likewise. And the pretended Brain could only be an inanimate machine. It was probably nothing but a lifeless box, that must be carried about.

As for the Earthman, he was either the villain himself or an agent of the man who had set off the dynatomite. Otho's brain sought for gaps in his understanding of the unknown enemy's plot, and quickly filled them in. The man must have planned to kill off the Futuremen, steal the *Comet*, substitute his hirelings, and somehow cash in on Captain Future's name. It was the only way of looking at things that made sense to Otho.

SLOWLY, he was mastering his rage. The astonished Bror Ingmann, at his side, was staring back and forth from the pretended android to the real one, as if unable to believe his eyes.

"Stop showing your surprise!" hissed Otho. "Act as if, as if—"

And then his own self-control snapped. For the imitation android had suddenly bent back, twisting his body almost double, to pick off the ground some trifle he could have obtained more easily by simply stretching out an arm. He thought he could impress the crowd, did he?

He thought that little grand-stand tricks like that would make people think him genuine, win their respect? Otho's synthetic teeth gritted alarmingly. He'd show this faker!

An incredible leap took him over the heads of the startled guards. As he landed on the ground again, some of them rushed toward him, but the quickest fist in the Solar System lashed out to strike them aside before they even realized Otho's intentions. Then the maddened android was rushing at his imitator.

The man, whoever he was, seemed both startled and frightened. "'Ware Snor Ingmann, Terror of Space!" roared Otho, and stretched out an avenging hand.

None of the onlookers was ever quite sure of what followed. They saw the two men, apparently Otho and a burly space miner, execute a series of twists and turns that they would later maintain were impossible. Otho twisted the impostor into a knot, untied him, spun him around like a hoop, and leaped through it.

Then he whirled around the man like a Phobos-snake, until he seemed only a blurred spiral.

More guards were coming. Otho tied his howling victim into one last knot, and hurled him at them. Then a final giant leap took him over the *Comet*, into a group of small surface vehicles. Otho dived into one of them, started it racing ahead, and as it reached a corner, leaped out.

He had the satisfaction of seeing the guards pursue the empty vehicle.

He ran a quick hand over his features, molding them into a new shape. On the other side of the *Comet*, people were yelling, as if some new disturbance had arisen. Otho slipped quietly into a side

street. The pursuit behind him had apparently died away.

He reached Ingmann's ship without being molested. The Brain listened to his story with interest.

"I think we're beginning to understand a few things more clearly," he commented at last. "But I'd still like to know where the real Curt is."

"I didn't hear anything about that," admitted Otho.

"You wouldn't," said Grag. But he was evidently not thinking about Curt. He seemed to be trying to stifle a feeling of amusement.

Otho looked at him sharply.

"I THINK we'd better leave, Simon," commented the robot.

"Yes. For the present we may as well permit these gentlemen to think their plans will succeed."

"Wait a minute," put in Otho. "What about Ingmann?"

"You've taken care of Ingmann," explained Grag happily.

"What do you mean?"

"We had a radio report of what happened near the *Comet*." Grag appeared to be licking his lips. "Bror Ingmann, Terror of Space, was captured on the tarmac, and readily admitted his guilt in assaulting one of the Futuremen. 'I git that way every once in a while,' he told the police. 'I'm mild by nature, but now and then somethin' comes over me. I guess it was this sight of this here android showin' off. I don't like show-offs nohow, so I decided to put him in his place.'"

"What?" growled Otho. "He took the credit?"

"He certainly did. And the name of a certain Futureman named Otho is now mud in popular opinion!"

"You should learn to control your temper, Otho," reproved Simon. "Your actions might have led to a search for us and revealed that we were still alive. Fortunately, there is little chance that Ingmann will ever reveal the truth. His story of two androids, two robots and two Brains would sound insane, and I imagine he knows it and doesn't want

to be confined to an institution for the mentally ill.

"Then too, he's been starving for esteem all his life. His self-bestowed title of Terror of Space is sufficient indication of that. And now that in the eyes of the public he is a major hero, he's certainly not going to admit the truth."

"All the same," observed Grag, "we'd better get out of here."

"Where shall we go?" asked Otho.

"To the Moon-home," answered the Brain. "We'll borrow the ship temporarily, and pay Ingmann for it, as well as release him from jail, later. The impostors may try to reach the Moon first. If they do, that will be the end of them. They'll never get past our automatic defenses."

Otho slid into the control chair, mumbling to himself.

As the ship rose slowly, he could hear Grag's voice, lowered to a rumbling monotone.

"I guess it was the sight of this here android showin' off. I don't like show-offs nohow . . . ?"

Otho yanked at the rocket-throttle so furiously that he almost tore it off. Even the Brain looked up at that.

CHAPTER VIII

The Impostors



BEHIND the closed doors of the *Comet*, Edward Loring was raging. "You fools! After all the trouble I've been taken to teach you your roles!"

The man who was impersonating the android stood facing him unhappily. He was Calvin Shane, a perennially unfortunate Earthman who had once been a rubber man in a circus. "Nobody had any suspicions, boss," he protested. "It was just one of those things."

"You mean to say that you weren't recognized?"

"Me own mother couldn't know me. This here Ingmann was crazy. You yourself heard what he told the cops."

"Yes, about your showing off. And he's right. You still seem to think you're in a circus."

"Okay, if you just want me to *look* the part, I'll limit myself to that. But you'll be the first one to complain."

"Shane is perfectly justified," observed Hro Zan importantly.

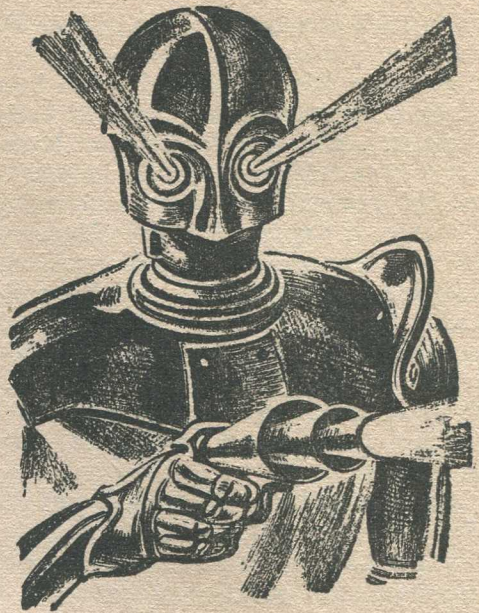
"Oh, he is?" Loring turned in fury to the actor who was such a startling double for Captain Future. "You're a fine one to talk! After the trouble I've taken with you—molding your face, teaching you how to walk like Future, how to speak like him, how to gesture like him—after the hours I've spent before his films, studying each movement, and trying to get it through your thick head that he was a real man, and not a character in some melodrama, that you can play better than the man who created the part. After I've given you the most expensive educational courses on the market, trying to put at least a smattering of science into that numskull of yours—"

"You needn't go on," said Hro Zan with dignity. "I resign."

"You resign? You histrionic moron. Do you think this is one of those polite comedies you always talk about? The only time you resign from this is when we split the swag and drop the whole thing—or else when you resign your life."

"I think you got yourself worked up over nothing, Chief," commented a metallic voice. This came from a Jovian named Vens, who possessed a stolidity and good-nature that nothing had so far shaken. Encased in a metal shell, he was the very image of Grag. "Nobody suspected a thing."

"You think not?" Loring spoke savagely. "I've been trying for weeks to impress upon this—this idiotic tragedian that Future and the Futuremen act naturally, that they don't pose. And the minute we walk into the council hall he strikes an attitude that smells of Mar-



GRAG

tian ham a mile away. The king conferring a sight of himself upon his loyal subjects, no less. There was one fellow who almost fell out of his chair. He must have laughed himself silly."

Calvin Shane nodded. "I noticed him. Financier by the name of Brooks. Some of these rich men have sharp eyes. But most people paid little attention."

LORING bit his lip. "I hope not. Meanwhile, if we're even pretending to go ahead with this planet-building, we'll have to hire some good men. After all, we'll need a little more time to cash in on Future's name, and we'll have to put up a good bluff while we are collecting funds."

"After we finish with the planet, why not try the Moon-laboratories?" put in the hulking Jovian. "I understand there's some valuable stuff there."

"I understand that the place is well guarded."

"We'll go easy. With the real Futuremen dead, we shouldn't have too much trouble. And we can take our own good time. I can break into any place—if I'm not interrupted."

Loring nodded. Shane and the Jovian were good men. Too bad he had been forced to rely for the key imposture

CHAPTER IX

The Pirate and the Lady

upon such a mental lightweight as Hro Zan.

Hro Zan felt insulted. He had heard many unpleasant things from directors, managers, and other actors, but he had never been subjected to such indignities as had been his lot since undertaking the role of Captain Future. Moreover, the part was not one for which he cared greatly. Captain Future, to his mind, hadn't lived. He had gone to strange places, experienced remarkable adventures, fought his way through danger at great odds, but he had never, or so Loring claimed, got drunk on tekeel liquor.

Hro Zan had taken this failing of Curt Newton's very much to heart.

With Loring's mind occupied by the necessity for making a pretense of building a planet—as absurd and uninteresting a project as Hro Zan had ever heard of—the actor had his chance. He slipped out of the *Comet* so quietly that no one noticed his going.

Half an hour later he was seated at a table admiring the floor show of the Radium City Country Club. Several goblets of tekeel had gone swimming down his throat, and the effect was heartening. He had begun to appreciate himself.

"Waiter," he said importantly. The robot waiter stared, but did not move. He was cued to remain motionless until he had actually received a patron's order.

"I'm a great scientist, waiter. First I thought I was Isaac Newton, but now I know I'm Curt. Ever study tekeel liquor? Simon and I did once. It's good for you. Improves the health. Waiter!" he roared suddenly. "Another drink!"

The robot obediently moved off. Around him, Hro Zan could see heads leaning toward each other, lips buzzing. So people knew who he was? *Hm*, somebody must have told them. Or maybe he was so famous they didn't have to be told.

They didn't.

It was not long before all Radium City knew that Captain Future was drunk on tekeel liquor.

BLACKBEARD was staring with so little pretense of politeness or common courtesy that Joan Randall felt a slow blush reddening her cheeks. Her eyes snapped dangerously. She was a member of the Planet Patrol as well as a woman, and it

annoyed her that something about this horribly disfigured ruffian appealed to her in way that was quite outside the matter of duty.

"How long have you been a pirate?" she snapped at him.

"I don't think I've ever been one," Blackbeard replied in a husky voice.

"What were you doing aboard that ship? Vacationing?"

"You might call it that," he agreed coolly.

For a moment sheer anger and surprise at the man's impudence prevented Joan from speaking. Slowly, however, she regained control of herself. She even managed to smile. "And how long did your vacation last?"

Blackbeard stroked his beard, which was now little more than an unpleasant growth of stubble. His wounds imparted a sinister air to the gesture. "Several hours," he answered finally.

"I'm sorry we had to interrupt. And before that?"

"I was stranded accidentally on a planetoid."

"How?"

"My ship left without me."

Joan bit her lip. "How would you like to continue your vacation," she asked pleasantly, "on Cerberus?"

"Not at all." He grinned. "It's rather unfortunate, isn't it, that the decision's up to a court, and not to you alone?"

"Yes, but I can influence the court."

"Not in view of the facts. I don't know what my pirate friends said about

me. But I think you realize how little their evidence is worth. The officer who boarded the ship will testify that I aided the Planet Patrol by keeping Urg under my gun until he and the others had been disarmed. There is no one who can testify that I aided the pirates in any way. No sane court would send me to Cerberus."

As he spoke, he continued to stare at her.

"You've seen me before?" she snapped.

"I think I have. But I don't remember where."

"There's something familiar about you, too," said Joan slowly. "You're sure you haven't been in any patrol line-ups?"

Blackbeard smiled faintly. "Are you asking me to incriminate myself?"

The question was a mocking one, but behind it, Joan detected a certain disquiet. He very definitely did not wish to speak about his past history. Very well, she wouldn't speak about it. But there were fingerprints, Bertillon measurements, eye-retina patterns, all the other marks of identification which aided in the tracking down of criminals. Meanwhile, according to the testimony, this man was entitled to some consideration in this case.

On the other hand, Blackbeard had already considered the possibility that he might have been a criminal, and he had been troubled by the thought. The fact that a member of the Planet Patrol had at first glance struck him as familiar drove home the warning. And when the trim and attractive Captain Randall hinted that she might have seen him in a patrol line-up, Blackbeard began to have serious doubts of himself.

Meanwhile, he found the interview disconcerting for another reason. He had hoped, from the moment he realized he had forgotten his name, that the sight of a familiar face would start a chain of memories that would enable him to recall everything. Well, he had gazed at a face that was undoubtedly familiar—and things hadn't worked out that way. His type of amnesia wasn't going to be cured as simply as that.

The Planet Patrol ship, he learned, was on its way to Mars. And although it was agreed that he was no pirate, it seemed that Captain Randall felt that his testimony would be useful at the Martian court. So, while he would be released at Radium City on his own recognizance, he was to consider himself a System witness.

Blackbeard smiled grimly. He knew what power could be used to enforce this polite request. He agreed to the terms, saluted Captain Randall, and preceded his guards out into the corridor cheerfully.

IN THE days that followed aboard ship, Blackbeard found himself growing to like the girl. He liked the frank open way in which she approached him, believing as she did that he was a criminal. She didn't examine his features furtively, or try to take his fingerprints from the objects he handled. She wanted his identification patterns, and she asked for them.

Blackbeard laughed. "You've got no right to them, you know."

"If I had a right, I wouldn't ask your permission."

He thought over the request. If he were a criminal, he'd be found out sooner or later. The Planet Patrol system was too thorough to have missed him. If he weren't—well, that would be good to know also. He consented.

It was while they were waiting for the report from Planet Patrol Center that the incident with the Plutonian freighter occurred. This particular vessel, the *Space Monarch*, seemed to be headed for Earth at the time the Patrol ship loaded with pirate prisoners encountered it. Blackbeard, overhearing the conversation between Joan and one of her subordinates concerning it, frowned slightly. The *Space Monarch*, it seemed, was a problem that the Planet Patrol had thus far failed to solve.

"There's no doubt that it's somehow involved in the transradite drug-smuggling that's been going on for the past few months," said Joan. "But somehow, we've never been able to obtain proof."

"May I suggest, Captain Randall," observed the respectful officer to whom she spoke, "that we stop the ship and search her with the transradite detector?"

Joan shrugged. "That's been done before, without result. But I suppose it's our duty to do it again."

Shortly afterward, Blackbeard heard their voices die away. The freighter had been duly brought to a halt. When later he heard Joan's voice once more, he could detect both disappointment and bewilderment.

"That freighter's captain sneered at us," she exclaimed. "He knew we wouldn't find anything!"

"It's barely possible the ship wasn't carrying transradite."

Joan shook her head impatiently. "That's the conclusion we've always come to. And yet the stuff continues to be smuggled into Earth. It always makes its appearance shortly after the *Space Monarch* has landed! It's true that the mineral is so transparent it's almost invisible, but it's also radioactive, and our detector would have found it if it had been aboard the ship!"

In his cell, Blackbeard chuckled, and called out, "Captain Randall!"

Joan returned along the corridor and confronted him, her face cool and unconcerned.

"Yes, prisoner twenty-four?" she said.

"I couldn't help overhearing your discussion, Captain Randall. I think I can be of some help."

"Indeed?" Her voice was sarcastic. "I suppose you know the exact place inside the ship where the transradite is hidden?"

"I'd say it differently," he replied. "But I prefer to let you see with your own eyes. Suppose you let me out of here—I can't escape, of course—and I'll lead you straight to the drug—if that freighter carries any."

"The freighter's a few thousand miles astern of us by now."

"It will be easy to overtake. Apologize to the captain for the inconvenience you're causing him, and allow me to do the searching."

Joan's eyes studied him curiously. "You seem to have a great deal of confidence in yourself—Blackbeard."

"I have."

Joan hesitated. Then she gave the order to turn the ship about. And soon afterward they overhauled the Earth-bound freighter.

THE captain was surprised to see them, surprised and annoyed—but polite. And he was puzzled to see Joan approach him in the company of a man who was obviously a prisoner, under the muzzle of an atom-pistol carried by a wary patrolman.

"Anything in the ship you think you've overlooked, Captain Randall?"

It was Blackbeard who answered. "No, Captain, nothing in the ship. Just a little transradite outside," he said mockingly.

The freighter captain's face turned pale, and tiny beads of perspiration began to form on his forehead. "I'm sorry, but I—don't understand."

"I think you do. Do you want me to get into a space suit and drag the detector outside, or will you confess quietly now how you've been smuggling transradite?"

For answer, the captain turned away and tried to plunge down a long corridor. Blackbeard hurled himself lithely after him, and the two men crashed to the floor in a swirl of flying fists. A few seconds later, Blackbeard alone arose.

"You might regard that as a confession," he smiled. "Although it really wasn't needed."

"You mean," asked Joan incredulously, "that he's been smuggling the transradite on the *outside* of the ship?"

Blackbeard nodded. "It's just as infusible as the metal hull, so there's no danger from the friction of any atmosphere. The hull, of course, absorbs or reflects all the radiations, which is the reason why your detector showed nothing *inside* the ship. And as transradite is practically invisible, it could be carried in full view without danger of being seen."

"Very clever," said Joan reflectively. "There's only one other man I can think

of who might have guessed the solution—and he's about as different from you as night from day."

"He's probably honest. I guess I have the advantage of the criminal mind. I simply asked myself, if the stuff had to be smuggled, how I would have done it, and the answer was simple. Set a thief to catch a thief, you know."

"I wonder," mused Joan aloud. "I'm beginning to think—well, we'll know in a day or so. And I thank you for your aid, in the name of the Interplanetary Police. This will count in your favor, also."

It was the next day that the radioed report on Blackbeard arrived.

"You're unknown," said Joan impassively. "Either you're honest or you're so skillful a criminal that we have no record of you. Too bad there's no universal System registration to tell us who you really are."

"I'm not sure myself who I am," Blackbeard admitted sadly.

"Looking at your face, I still have trouble believing you're not a pirate."

"Looking at yours—" he began, and broke off as he looked. Then, very deliberately, he put his arms around her and kissed her.

Joan's face was a flaming red. Her hand smacked against his bearded cheek so hard that it tingled. "You—you—"

"I suppose I am something of a pirate after all," he observed. "But the things I steal are well worth taking."

Joan turned on her heel and left him.

In a way, she felt, the blame for what had happened was hers. She had allowed herself to become too familiar with him. She had encouraged him. From now on, she would treat him with the coldness he deserved.

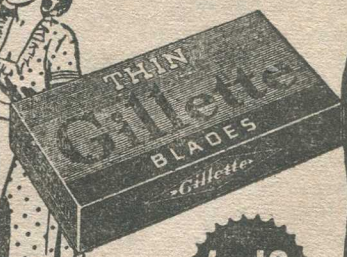
And yet, the kiss had been not unpleasant. Alone, she blushed again, this time unhappily. Where was her loyalty to Curt Newton, if an ordinary none-too-attractive stranger could give her a thrill, and make her forget, even momentarily, his existence?

For the rest of the trip, she avoided Blackbeard. For his part, Blackbeard [Turn page]

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had found another puzzle to solve.

"I've kissed that girl before," he told himself in bewilderment. "What reason—or rather, what right—did I have to kiss her?"

HIS question remained unsolved by the time they landed on Mars. Blackbeard tried to put it out of his mind as he viewed the bustling activity of the red planet. Soon he would be faced with more important problems to solve—the problem, for instance, of where his next meal was coming from. For, once the Planet Patrol had decided it didn't want him, he was on his own.

Mars was familiar to him. The rust-covered deserts, the hanging cities, with their unhealthy-looking population, the wonderful sky-piercing palaces of the rich in the suburbs—all stirred memories which remained beneath the surface, and confused him without giving him a clue to the truth about himself. Even the space ports, which he seemed to know like the palm of his own hand, failed to touch off a train of thought that might reveal his past.

There was a tear-drop-shaped vessel, the *Comet*, berthed at one of the space fields, and while he was still some distance away, he could hear the uproar that came from a crowd nearby.

In response to his question, a grinning Martian explained eagerly what had happened. The *Comet's* passengers, it seemed, had undergone an unpleasant experience.

"These Futuremen are supposed to be unbeatable," said the Martian. "But, friend, I've never seen anything like this Ingmann lad in action. He took Otho and twisted him into knobs."

The *Comet*, the Futuremen, Otho—all were familiar names that somehow failed to elicit the proper response from his own mind.

He listened to the Martian's explanation somewhat absently. What had occurred was after all nothing but an ordinary brawl, and he was not interested in brawls. He would have liked, however, to meet this Captain Future, possibly to enlist his scientific help.

CHAPTER X

The New Planet



AN hour later, still prowling near the space field, Blackbeard had his wish. A door in the *Comet* opened quietly, and a man stepped out with furtive haste. The tall space-tanned figure and the unruly red hair indicated that here was un-

doubtedly the famous Curt Newton.

The man hurried away before Blackbeard could speak to him, to reappear a few moments later out of the shadow of a space liner. Blackbeard followed, somewhat puzzled. The furtive manner did not tally with what he heard of Captain Future.

Outside the space port Blackbeard ran into Joan Randall again. She was accompanied by a keen-eyed, white-haired veteran in the uniform of a marshal of the planet patrol. She had only a quick word or two to spare for him as she hurried on. Both she and her elderly companion appeared worried.

Blackbeard had an idea they were going to visit the *Comet*, and instead of hastening after the red-haired figure, he waited. A few minutes later, he saw them returning. Joan's face was white, the old marshal's red with anger.

"If you're looking for Curt Newton, Captain Randall," observed Blackbeard, "I think I know where he's gone."

"So he *isn't* in the ship!" roared the marshal. "I knew they were lying!"

Joan seemed uneasy and at a loss. "I don't understand why, Ezra. It's almost as if they wanted to avoid us. Both Grag and Otho were cold and distant, and Simon didn't even come over to say a word."

"Pretends to be working at his experiments," grunted her companion. "And sends that fellow Loring over to make apologies. I wonder where they picked him up. The Futuremen ordinarily

wouldn't tolerate such a man for a minute."

Blackbeard waited silently. The marshal, he now realized, must be Ezra Gurney, of whom Joan had spoken on the trip to Mars. But somehow he was sure that he had met him before.

Joan was biting her lip. "They all seem different," she said. "Even Curt must have changed, or he wouldn't be associating with Loring. And, Ezra, I can't believe that story Loring gave us of unusual radiations in space having had a temporary effect on their minds."

"Sounds fishy to me." The sharp old eyes turned critically upon the tall bearded man who stood waiting. "You say you know where Captain Future has gone? Who are you, anyway?"

Joan hastened to explain, and the irate old marshal at once became almost friendly.

"He was headed for Radium City," said Blackbeard.

"We'll have a talk with him. Come on, Joan," said Gurney.

They evidently expected him to follow, so Blackbeard went along. Captain Future not being a man who could long remain unrecognized in Radium City, they had no difficulty in picking up his trail. As they entered the Country Club, they were almost overwhelmed by the laughter that swept the place.

Blackbeard could hear Joan's gasp of incredulity.

"It's Curt they're laughing at! He's drunk!" she murmured unbelievably.

Ezra's eyes were steely. "You stay here, Joan. I'll have a talk with that lad."

But the unsteady red-haired figure did not wait for Ezra. He had already caught sight of them, and came wavering to greet them.

"You're Joan Randall," he said. "Recognish you from your picture. Nish girl, nish girl."

Blackbeard, staring at her with sympathy, could see not only the painful embarrassment in her face, but other emotions—fear, wonder, curiosity. This was not the Captain Future she had known.

"Steady, Curt," snapped the old mar-

shal. "We'll have to get you out of here."

"Whaffor? Nish plashe here." He folded Joan's arm under his, patted it affectionately. "They told me shtay away from you, said you would know shomething wrong." He winked at her. "Nothing wrong. Noshirree!"

He straightened up with an effort, and with Joan on his arm began to stride across the polished plastine floor with a pompous dignity that struck Blackbeard as curiously affected. The bearded man's brow wrinkled. The famous Captain Future had all the professional tricks of an actor in some cheap melodrama.

Then suddenly, a voice spoke from the doorway, a voice that was trying to appear calm, and yet could not conceal the rage that lay underneath. "Curt!"

The man who spoke was small and shiftily-eyed. His face was pasty with fear. He was accompanied by an android and a great robot.

Captain Future's face darkened. "Loring!"

The little man hastened across the floor to meet him. "Excuse me, Miss Randall," he said as, without spoken instructions, the android and the robot each seized one of the drunken man's arms. "I wanted to spare you this. That's why I told you he was on the ship, but couldn't see you."

Everyone was staring curiously. Blackbeard, taking in the strange scene, remained unobtrusively in the background. Neither Loring nor his companions noticed him. If the situation had called for technical skill or physical strength, he would have come to Joan's aid, but as it was, he felt that she must handle the matter herself.

"Since when has Curt taken to drink?" Joan asked bitterly.

Loring shrugged. "Since his return from that expedition. I told you that those radiations had a very unfortunate result. Simon is working on something to overcome their effects, but I'm afraid that his experiments will take a little time."

He turned to the staggering figure

again. "Come along now, Curt," he said mildly. But beneath the gentleness of his tone, Blackbeard could still detect the undercurrent of rage.

The tears were coming to Joan's eyes as she watched the tall, handsome figure being led across the floor. Ezra touched her arm.

"No use staying here any longer, lass."

They left the establishment, Blackbeard trailing behind. Outside, the girl turned to the old marshal.

"Ezra, we'll have to watch over him!"

"I'd like to, Joan," said Gurney, and his grizzled head bowed helplessly, "but we both have our duties, and I don't see how we can."

"I think I know a way," Blackbeard was speaking thoughtfully. "Captain Future will be needing technical assistants soon for that plant-building project and I need a job."

"That would be perfect," returned Joan, "if we only knew who you really were, and could trust you."

"I could have one of my men apply," said Ezra. "We're rather short-handed at the moment, but it could be arranged."

Blackbeard was staring straight at Joan, waiting for her decision. Her eyes rose to meet his, then dropped.

"I think we'd better accept Blackbeard's offer," she observed at last. Her eyes rose again to those of the ugly bearded man. "You'll watch over Curt Newton carefully, for my sake. He's—everything—to me."

Blackbeard nodded, feeling at the same time a growing resentment against the man to whom he was going to play nursemaid, as he watched the girl and the old marshal walk away.

Apparently neither Joan nor Ezra Gurney had thought of it, and he was too proud to mention the fact that he had no money. He preferred wandering hungrily about the gaily lit city, trying to recall when he had last seen it before—and who he had been at the time. In the morning, shortly after a bright sun rose over the horizon, he made his way toward the space port where the *Comet*

was berthed. He was going to bluff his way into a job.

It was Loring, he discovered, who was doing the hiring of men, not Captain Future. His temper was a bit more under control than it had been the previous evening, but at the same time Loring was distinctly uneasy. Blackbeard gained the impression that he was afraid of something.

Loring's shifty eyes ran quickly over Blackbeard's figure.

"You're a scientist?" he demanded.

"That's putting it mildly."

Loring's eyebrows went up. "Any one else beside yourself think well of you?"

Blackbeard decided to make his bluff a good one. "The President of the Space Institute on Venus, the Director of the Terrestrial Geophysical Laboratory, practically all the professors in the Martian Academy of Pure and Applied Sciences, and a couple of thousand others besides," rattled off Blackbeard.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Loring. "You must be loaded down with references. I'd like to see, say, a dozen of them."

"No references. You'll have to take my word."

Loring gazed at him sharply. "I could contact some of these people."

"It wouldn't do any good. You see, you wouldn't know by what name to refer to me."

"You've been in jail?"

"Not at all," explained Blackbeard easily. He had prepared in advance a story he figured might appeal to Loring. Now he let it slip out, almost casually. "Nobody has proved anything against me. But certain people *did* have suspicions, which I don't care to dignify by discussing. So, obviously, I cannot give you my right name."

Loring's fingers drummed against a desk top. Blackbeard smiled to himself. He had an idea of what was going on in the man's mind. Loring seemed to be engaged in some project that he did not want known. He was probably taking advantage of Curt Newton's temporary illness which meant that if anything dishonest was involved, the last

thing he wanted was a group of assistants who were themselves honest. Only men who were none too scrupulous could be induced to keep their mouths shut about whatever shady things they saw.

On the other hand, without definite information about the men he was hiring, it was difficult to be sure about their scientific attainments. It was a real dilemma, and for his own sake Blackbeard decided to give Loring a hint as to the solution.

"Why not hire me temporarily?" he suggested. "Try me out for, say, a week, and if at the end of that time you don't like the way I work, you can fire me—without wages."

"You are confident of yourself."

"Once you see what a help I am, you won't be able to get along without me."

pletely hidden, Grag and Otho hardly spoke except to each other, and the tall, red-haired Captain Future was watched over as carefully as if he had been a prisoner. Only Loring paid any considerable attention to his technical assistant.

It was during the second week out from Mars that they sighted the new world that science was creating.

Their first glimpse of it was simple enough. A string of space-freighters was dumping metal ore upon an asteroid that had been towed in from some place between Earth and Mars. The asteroid was a way station. Beyond it, no more than a pinpoint in space, was another, and beyond that still another. More than a thousand asteroids, Blackbeard learned, were being utilized.

This was the outer shell, a sort of

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And you won't need any other assistants," replied Blackbeard boldly.

"I'm not so sure of that. But consider yourself hired. And bring your stuff into the ship. We're blasting off soon."

A few moments later, Blackbeard was inside the *Comet*. Once again he had that haunting sensation of familiarity. As he wandered about the ship, several more technical applicants came aboard, went through a session of questioning, and were rejected. The Futuremen themselves, as if unwilling to associate with the common herd, remained hidden.

About midday, they blasted off. Loring himself was at the controls, and Blackbeard noticed that although he was heading the ship toward the inner part of the System, Earth itself was not on their path. There could be only one conclusion. They were traveling toward the planet that was now in process of construction.

The days aboard ship were placid and monotonous. The Brain remained com-

scaffolding of the new planet. A hundred or so miles beyond was a second ring of asteroids. Upon these had been built the matter-creating machines constructed by the World Government according to the specifications of the Futuremen. This herculean but preliminary work was being done by dozens of contracting engineers. The most important work to be handled by Captain Future and his personal staff, came later.

They could watch the various crews in operation as they cruised slowly by. Each matter-creating machine was a vast oblong mechanism, at the top of which were banks of small keys. From the face protruded dozens of nozzle-like spouts.

As they watched they could see clouds of shining particles spurting from the nozzles. Some of the clouds disappeared before their eyes. Others coagulated into differently colored lumps of ore. The non-metals and the lighter metals themselves were being manufactured here, for the new world.

CHAPTER XI

Catastrophe Averted

THE *Comet* slowed down, and cruised at a leisurely pace toward this second ring of asteroids. It stopped finally near a matter-creating machine that was turning out huge clouds of sodium chloride. The plans for these machines, brought

back to Earth by Captain Future from his successful search for the birthplace of matter, had been submitted to the Board of Governors along with other details by Curt Newton.

Jackson, the engineer in charge, seemed flattered at their visit. He came aboard at Loring's invitation somewhat hesitantly, but soon showed an overwhelming desire to talk.

"This, of course, is old stuff to you gentlemen," he said apologetically. "But it's new to me, and I still can't get over my luck at being placed in charge here."

The engineer was staring respectfully at the imitation Captain Future. Hro Zan smiled, as he had been taught, and observed casually, "Yes, yes, I can imagine," and excused himself, leaving the engineer alone with Blackbeard and Loring.

"I'm no scientist myself," remarked Loring. "I'm just Captain Future's business manager. All I can see is that you're creating something out of nothing. It looks pretty mysterious to me."

"Remarkable, but not mysterious. We're creating the lighter elements from the cosmic energy being radiated through our portion of space. The cosmic potential being rather low, we have no choice but to import the heavier metals." Jackson indicated the several dozen nozzles. "In the original mechanism, these numbered hundreds. But Captain Future himself devised this simplified form for our present purpose."

"Each nozzle, I imagine, emits a different element," Loring remarked.

"A different isotope of each element. You'll have noticed that each machine is creating just one or two elements, the isotopes being approximately in the same proportion as in the elements found on Earth. That simplifies operations exceedingly. That, in fact, is one of the reasons the Interplanetary Government has been willing to take charge of preliminary operations, leaving to the Futuremen only the task of fitting in the final core."

Blackbeard, who had been watching and listening intently, now interrupted. "I see half a dozen of the machines are creating only oxygen. I don't like it."

The engineer stared at the offending machines, and laughed. "I suppose you're afraid the oxygen will go off into space. But you needn't fear. It's being held in place near each ship by artificial gravity."

LORING regarded Blackbeard distrustfully. "How did you know they were making oxygen?"

"By watching which nozzles the clouds came from. The oxygen is formed as a fine mist, which, immediately vaporizes."

The engineer nodded. "I was wondering myself how you knew, but of course, that's the answer. Future has published several scientific articles about the device, and you appear to have read them carefully. Incidentally, this question of oxygen is the only one on which Captain Future and the Interplanetary authorities disagreed. I hope he's not angry at the change in his original plans."

"He's not angry," replied Loring dryly.

"I'm glad of that. You see, he suggested that the manufacture of oxygen be left to the last, so that the gas might be held by the natural gravity of the new planet. He had some objection, which I don't remember, to the use of the gravity machines. But that would have meant that in the latter stages of construction, our workmen would be

forced to use space suits, delaying things considerably. So, quite wisely, it seems to me—"

Blackbeard interrupted harshly. "You think so? Take a look at that!"

One of the asteroids which he had indicated a moment or two before had suddenly erupted into flames. The matter-creating machine, the men who had been operating it, the space-ship in which they had come, all had disappeared. They were now glowing gas and incandescent cinders in a sea of dazzling fire.

As Loring and Jackson gaped, Blackbeard rushed for the controls of the *Comet*. The ship was speeding toward the scene of the disaster before they had recovered their wits. Loring's face became white.

"Stop, you space-blasted fool, you're heading right for the fire!"

He threw himself hysterically at Blackbeard, who brushed him away impatiently with one hand. The tear-drop-shaped vessel skirted the flames so closely that it seemed the very plates would have buckled under the heat. Then it was past, racing for the next oxygen-producing asteroid. That one blazed up unexpectedly ahead of them, and again Blackbeard missed it by the narrowest of margins.

The imitation android and robot were rushing forward to learn what was happening. Loring screamed at them almost hysterically.

"Stop him! He's trying to wreck the ship! He's trying to get us burned alive!"

The fake robot lumbered forward, then stopped at sight of the weapon in Blackbeard's free hand.

"Get back or I'll drill your brain-box. Sorry, Grag, but there's no time to explain."

The Jovian inside the robot's shell was a prudent man. He halted, uncertainly. The next moment, Blackbeard had brought the *Comet* to a landing on a third asteroid. Jackson was shouting orders over his short-wave radio set. In space suits they rushed out of the *Comet*.

The clouds of newly formed oxygen had stopped rushing from the nozzles. Instead, another gas was now hissing out into the void, then collecting around them,

"That'll stop it," announced the engineer in charge. "Nothing like a nitrogen blanket to head off an explosive wave." He looked up to see Blackbeard racing toward him. "Take your time, Mister. We've got her under control."

Blackbeard's eyes were blazing like one of the stricken asteroid. He looked more than ever like an ancient pirate. "Cut off your nitrogen, and cut it off in a hurry! Shoot on your oxygen again."

"What, man, you must be crazy! That would be sure suicide!"

Blackbeard's fist caught him on the jaw, and he went down. Two men nearby started for him, but Blackbeard ducked quickly, and plunged for the bank of control keys. Next moment, enormous clouds of oxygen rolled out, at ten times the previous rate.

Two men caught up with him then, and hit him together. Blackbeard went over backward, and they threw themselves at him. The chief engineer, following closely behind Blackbeard, was staggering toward the control back.

"The man's crazy," he was muttering. "If the explosion doesn't get us this will. Ten times the normal rate!"

BLACKEARD'S arm shot out of a tangled mass of arms and legs just as the engineer was about to bring his fist down on the control keys, and closed about Jackson's ankle. The engineer tumbled down, his head landing in the stomach of one of his own men. The man exclaimed painfully, "Ouff!" and relaxed.

Blackbeard's fist smashed into the solar plexus of his other still dangerous opponent. The man gasped, clawed feebly at him, then sank back. Blackbeard rose to his feet.

Off in the distance, several other asteroids were ablaze. Loring, not waiting to see what would happen, had

taken off in the *Comet*, and was now hovering in space, watching fearfully. But the asteroid upon which Blackbeard had been battling so fiercely was still apparently untouched.

A dazed victim of Blackbeard's fists was lifting himself to his feet, grunting with pain.

"Quick man!" Blackbeard spoke fiercely. "Where's the space-radio?"

"You think I'll tell you?" snarled the assistant engineer. He shouted suddenly to a fourth man, who stood some distance away, watching the scene open-mouthed. "Quick, Jan, radio for help! This man's crazy!"

Blackbeard caught Jan just as he reached the radio, hurled him away.

"Calling all remaining asteroids!" he began. A guttural reply reached his ears. "I don't care if that isn't the proper signal! This is a matter of life and death—*your* life and death! Cut off your nitrogen, and switch on your oxygen again, full force! Yes, I know it isn't safe, but it's safer than being caught in that explosive wave! And it's kept *us* untouched so far! Hurry up, men!"

Another asteroid sprang into sudden brilliance. And then, on its neighbor, the nitrogen stopped rolling out, gave way to high-pressure oxygen again. Slowly, the flames on the ill-fated asteroids died away, leaving only a mass of glowing rocks that would take months and perhaps years to radiate their heat into space once more.

The men he had fought so fiercely a few moments before approached cautiously now. There was no longer any fight in them. They stared at Blackbeard in sheer admiration. They knew that he had saved their lives, but they still couldn't figure out how.

Half an hour later, aboard the *Comet* once more, Blackbeard apologized.

"Sorry I had to be so rough, but as you can see for yourselves, I had little time."

Loring growled angrily. The chief engineer who had returned aboard their ship nodded.

"So that's why Captain Future ob-

jected to the use of the artificial gravity. A pity his advice was disregarded."

"He must have known the danger of this happening," agreed Blackbeard. "Artificial gravity is produced by electro-gravitational waves, which don't ordinarily interfere with the operation of the cosmic ray condenser. But occasionally, some of the partially spent rays, consisting mostly of high-speed particles, are emitted together with the created matter. The atoms of the excited matter are partially energized, and become exceedingly reactive chemically under the influence of the electro-gravitational waves."

"And when they happen to be oxygen, just aching for a chance to combine with whatever's around, there's all space to pay," added Jackson. "But what I don't quite understand is how you stopped the explosions."

"The first explosive wave was limited to its own asteroid. But the radiations emitted by the explosion had no trouble leaping the gap, and setting off another explosion on the neighboring one. Nitrogen was of no use in trying to damp the explosion because under the conditions that existed it would have combined with the oxygen to form nitric oxide. The one way to prevent the explosions from spreading was to absorb the emitted radiations harmlessly . . . and the most effective absorbing agent was high-pressure oxygen."

THE chief engineer grinned slowly. "Why, of course! I remember that even in the early Twentieth Century chemists knew that explosions had both lower and upper limits. Many gas reactions wouldn't begin until the oxygen was increased beyond a certain minimum amount, and would stop again when it passed a maximum. I should have thought of that myself."

Loring growled again, and studied Blackbeard's face curiously. He had certainly made no mistake in hiring this man. His knowledge of science seemed almost equal to that which the real Captain Future had possessed.

The engineer was shaking hands with

Blackbeard. "We are certainly in your debt," he commented. "If not for you, these explosions would have wrecked everything so far done—probably have meant the end of the project. It's a pity," he added, "that Future is so busy with his experiments that he didn't notice what was happening."

After they had returned Jackson to his main base, Loring and Blackbeard interchanged glances.

"No use letting him know that Future's mind has weakened," observed Loring.

"Perhaps not. But he was certainly curious."

Loring shrugged. "Let him make what he can of Future's pre-occupation. Meanwhile, seeing as the whole thing is at present being run by the Interplanetary Government, we're not really necessary. We'd better get out of here."

A few hours later, they were beyond the outer asteroid ring, headed for the Moon. Loring himself was at the controls again. Although he maneuvered the ship with reasonable skill, Blackbeard knew from his previous handling of the controls, that he himself could do better. He waited until Loring had twisted out of a particularly knotty traffic tangle, and was drying his forehead. Then he stepped over to the control panel.

"Mind if I try my hand?" he asked.

"You're a little more polite than you were before. Sure you're used to ships as complicated as this one?"

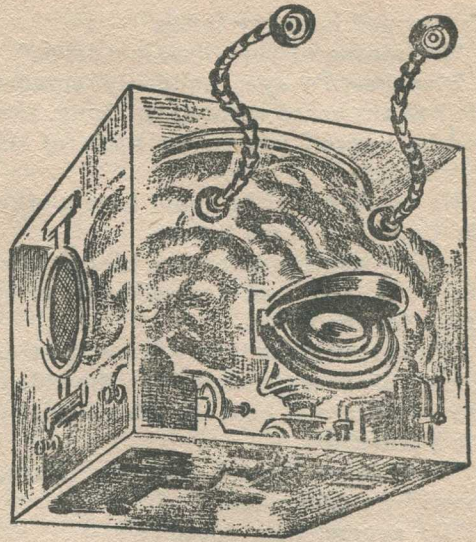
"You'll see, Mr. Loring."

Half unwillingly, Loring made way for him. Blackbeard's strong fingers slid over the controls as if they were old friends. Loring's eyes narrowed as he watched Blackbeard handle levers and instruments whose use he himself did not know.

"The *Comet* has several pieces of mechanism not found in any other ship. How do you happen to understand about them?"

Blackbeard laughed. "Don't let Captain Future kid you, Loring. Some of these things aren't as exclusive as he pretends."

There was clear space ahead of them,



THE BRAIN

and without warning, the *Comet* leaped ahead. Hurling backward by the sudden acceleration, Loring rebounded as if from a cushion of force in the air. Then the effects of the acceleration died away, and Loring's hair stood on end. For suddenly, though they were not more than four hours out of Mars, they were approaching Earth.

A HOWL of terror rose in Loring's throat, to be choked off by his frightened lips. They would crash! At that speed they couldn't help it!

The force cushion surrounding him was suddenly removed, and he fell to the floor. The *Comet* was proceeding at its normal pace again, heading for the Moon. Loring bounded to his feet in fury.

Blackbeard grinned at him. "How do you like the way I handle the ship?"

"You blasted space-devil, you almost wrecked us!"

"Do you have any idea of how many million miles we've covered in as many seconds?"

Loring gained control of himself. Time was important to him, and he owed something to Blackbeard for that. All the same, he resented the way in which the man had taken control of the *Comet*. Loring watched Blackbeard's fingers for a moment without speaking. Then:

"How did you get that extra speed?"

he snapped in angry tones.

"By means of the vibration drive."

Blackbeard's eyes suddenly clouded. He had answered without thinking. How had he himself known the name of this mechanism?

He wondered if he could have worked for Captain Future before.

Loring continued to eye him suspiciously as the tear-drop-shaped vessel drove for the Moon.

His eyes widened, as without instructions, Blackbeard headed for the side of the satellite that held the laboratories of the Futuremen.

"You know where Captain Future lives?" he demanded.

"Of course, who doesn't?"

There were plenty of people who didn't.

Loring made no further comment as the ship braked, began to settle down smoothly.

Blackbeard's hands flashed rapidly over the instrument panel. The *Comet* came to rest peacefully in a moon crater that might have been hollowed out for her.

Loring breathed a sigh of relief. There had been no difficulty at all in landing. Which meant that all he had heard about the automatic defenses of the Moon-home was a lot of nonsense.

Probably nothing more than rumors that Captain Future had spread for his own purposes.

He did not notice that Blackbeard's brow was wrinkled. The bearded man was wondering at himself. Why had his fingers moved over the instrument panel as they did? Certainly not for the purpose of braking the ship.

It was almost as if his hands retained a special memory of this place that his mind did not, as if in his hands lay the secret of his past.

But he had long since decided not to try to force a solution. He put the problem out of his mind once more, slipped into a space suit, and led the hesitating Loring out upon the Moon's surface.

The next moment a small three-headed monster leaped at them with rows of glistening teeth bared.

CHAPTER XII

Moon-Home, Sweet Home



LORING started back in terror, his hands seeking the atom pistol at his side. The three-headed monster that had frightened him now began to shrink into the ground. It oozed into a crevice, became a harmless gray rock

from which the sunlight glistened. As two timid eyes peeked out from one side, Blackbeard shook with silent laughter.

The three pretended Futuremen, strangely ill at ease and subdued in what was supposedly their own home, had followed Loring and Blackbeard out of the ship. The tiny wireless set inside Blackbeard's helmet brought him the android's words.

"Why, it's Oog!"

Every one in the System had heard of the Futuremen's famous pets—Oog, the meteor-mimic, treasured by Otho, and Eek, the moon-pup which had won Grag's metal heart. As Blackbeard watched, the little meteor-mimic, which could imitate every object it had ever seen, changed to a fat little white lump, its natural form. It stared at Otho as if puzzled, then moved slowly away.

Eek, a small gray bear-like animal, came suddenly upon the scene, galloping toward Grag—and stopped just as suddenly. Grag, as if chagrined, rumbled angrily.

"The stupid beast! Every time we're away for more than a few weeks, he doesn't recognize me! He's got a memory as short as his appetite is long!"

The two animals huddled together, as if for protection. They circled warily about the group of men and approached Blackbeard. But when he leaned over as if to pet them, they retreated hurriedly.

"You've got a way with the beasts," said Loring.

"It's a way that doesn't go very far," replied Blackbeard. He stared in wonderment at the moon-pup. And the small, sharp-snouted animal stared back in bewilderment, its telepathic sense telling it that here was a familiar figure, and its eyes assuring it that the figure was a completely strange one.

Loring started toward the glassite windows of the dome that indicated the Moon-laboratory. Struck by a sudden thought, he turned to Blackbeard.

"Get back to the ship," he ordered. "The entrance to the laboratory is a secret, and Captain Future wants it to remain one."

Blackbeard nodded agreeably. "You're the boss," he said.

THEY watched the airlock of the ship close behind his stalwart figure. Then the pretended android faced the man who had hired him.

"How do we get into this place, anyway? Most of it seems to be underground. And there's no sign of a doorway."

"That's what we'll have to look for," admitted Loring. I didn't want Blackbeard around to watch us and realize our ignorance."

Hro Zan, his head at this moment as clear as it ever would be, growled aloud. "So now you admit that *you're* ignorant. You're always talking about *me*."

"Quiet, fool." Loring spoke absently. "There may be a door on the other side. We'll try that."

But the other side of the laboratory was a bleak wall of rock, with no sign of an opening visible anywhere. Loring stared at it with rising resentment.

"There has to be a way in," he said at last.

"It may be underground," suggested the Jovian.

"That's possible. Seeing as practically none of the laboratory itself is above ground, with little more than these windows showing, Future may have arranged to enter by a short tunnel. We'll scatter, and look for the opening."

Half an hour later, while the two wondering pets stared, they assembled

again. The Jovian spoke first.

"Any luck, boss?"

"None at all."

"The only sign I've seen of anything interesting," said Shane, the gloomy pretender to Otho's identity, "is a moon-wolf. And I don't want to tangle with that."

"We'll have to break a glassite window," decided Loring. "Letting the air out may ruin the works, but there's no need to be too worried about that angle. We'll take what there is worth taking and run."

The Jovian lifted a large rock and brought it down with all his great strength on the nearest section of glassite. The rock rebounded, but the glassite showed not a scratch.

"What now?" he demanded. "This seems to be special stuff."

"We'll blast it with explosives," decided Loring angrily.

"Do you know how to set off a blast?"

"No. I thought you or Shane could do it?"

Shane shook his head. "We'll have to call on Blackbeard. And a fine impression it'll make on him if we can't get into our own house without tearing it apart."

"Devils of space!" muttered Loring.

"And you call *me* stupid," sneered Hro Zan. "Can't even find the door to your own house."

They ignored him.

"If only," mused the Jovian aloud, "the stuff weren't specially made—probably to resist meteors—I'd be able to cut through it."

"There's an idea," said Loring eagerly. "I'll have Blackbeard make up a sharp cutting tool, without telling him exactly what it's for. He ought to be able to do the job." His eyes glinted in approval of the Jovian. "You can use your head, Vens. It didn't take you a second to think up an explanation of why that animal didn't recognize you, and now you've got the answer to this problem."

Somewhat later, however, they were not so sure. Blackbeard, when he learned of what they wanted done, was more than a little doubtful.

"Some of this special glassite isn't easy

to cut. Not that it's so hard, but that it's monocohesive, like a liquid. It flows back when the cutting instrument has passed on, and you've achieved nothing."

"It's like rock," growled Loring. "I don't see how it can flow back."

Blackbeard shrugged. "You might ask Future."

"That wouldn't do any good. Ever since he was subjected to those radiations out in space, his brain has been rather foggy."

HRO ZAN glowered. Blackbeard, however, was paying no attention to him.

"I have an idea of a method that might work. You might freeze the glassite with a retarding ray, so that the molecules don't flow back too readily. Then use your cutting device."

"I still don't see why you can't use an explosive," put in Hro Zan.

Blackbeard glanced inquiringly at Loring. "Where is this glassite, anyway?"

"Never mind. How long will it take you to prepare a retarding ray, and make a cutting device?"

"Several days."

"Start work at once," ordered Loring. Mentally, he cursed the delay. All this time wasted getting into a place that the real Future would have penetrated in a few seconds!

It was four days before both devices were ready. And on the fourth day they saw the sun blotted out.

They were out of the ship at the time. Blackbeard was instructing the bogus Grag in the use of the cutting device, and the pretended Otho in the manner of operation of the retarding ray. Loring was watching them, when Hro Zan suddenly looked up in alarm.

"It's getting dark!" he cried.

They all looked up at that. The slim crescent of Earth, shining with blue-green light, had gradually approached the Sun. Now the continent of Asia seemed to be taking a huge bite out of the solar rim.

"You must have seen this plenty of times before," commented Blackbeard.

"He has, but I haven't," returned Loring quickly. "What's happening?"

"An eclipse of the Sun. Of course, the people on Earth would consider it an eclipse of the *Moon*. It's much more effective as seen from here. Watch."

Darkness had spread over Asia. Now it edged toward the ends of the crescent, gradually enveloping them. And at the same time, the Earth advanced steadily, gnawing at the Sun's surface. Those continents of Earth which had previously been in darkness, now glowed with a faint ruddy effulgence, from the combination of light reflected from the Moon and whatever direct sunlight had been refracted around Earth's edges by its own atmosphere.

Loring was gazing upward, as if hardly daring to believe his eyes. Soon the Sun disappeared altogether, and all they could see was a shadowy Earth, the continents of one hemisphere visible as lighter shadows against the gloomy background of the oceans.

"I've never seen anything like it," he admitted huskily.

"I have," observed Blackbeard casually.

The robot looked up, his metal face shell weird in the dim light. "Where?"

"I don't remember exactly. It couldn't have been any closer to the Sun than Earth, as the inner planets don't have satellites. And it could hardly have been much further away, or most of the effect would be lost."

"I've seen plenty of eclipses from Jupiter," observed the robot. "They don't amount to much."

Blackbeard nodded. "I don't suppose I've been on the Moon before, or you fellows would have known it. It's possible I saw something like this from a ship out in space."

"You've seen everything," muttered Loring. Despite himself, he was impressed with his assistant's knowledge. He had thought Blackbeard a braggart, but he was forced to admit that the man had claimed for himself nothing more than the truth. "How long does this thing last?"

"About another quarter of an hour, as

far as totality is concerned. The Earth's disk is so much bigger than the Moon's that solar eclipses are of longer duration here than on Earth."

The bogus Otho was staring upward with an intensity that could not be explained by his interest in the eclipse alone. "What are those patches of light moving off to one side of the Earth?" he demanded.

Blackbeard's eyes narrowed. A dozen ships were speeding toward the Moon, a few hundred miles beyond the edge of the Earth's penumbra. And the Moon, he knew, was no haven for either passenger liners or freighters. Those ships spelled danger!

CHAPTER XIII

The Moon Fights Back



ON the leading ship, Kars Virson sat at a private space-visor set. He stared at the frowning face of Hartley Brooks and replied respectfully.

"Yes, sir."

In his Earth home, Brooks' face twisted into what in a less suave man would

have been a snarl. "Don't 'yes' me, Kars. You thought you had finished Future before this."

"I still don't see how I failed."

"You wouldn't. But your failure warned him, and I'm sure he suspects me. When he stalked into that meeting of the Interplanetary Board of Governors, he caught my eye. He had never looked at me before like that. He has no proof, but he knows."

"He won't know much longer." Virson promised vindictively. "We've got enough atom cannon along to blast the Moon itself out of existence, let alone Captain Future. Don't worry about him any longer."

"You fool!" Brooks almost groaned the words. "After what happened last time, you're still overconfident."

Virson shrugged. "It doesn't look like overconfidence to me. We've got a thousand men against four. We've got a dozen space ships with enough armament on them to blast the Planet Patrol out of the skies. And we'll be coasting in under cover of this eclipse, so that we can catch them by surprise. What more do you want, Chief? In a couple of minutes Earth's shadow will reach us, just as we're ready to open our attack. If you can think of anything else—"

"You know the details of your business better than I do," replied Brooks impatiently. "But remember, Captain Future is still the greatest scientific mind in this System, or anywhere else that I know of. I don't believe that story of vibrations affecting his mind, and you'd better not believe it, either. It's just intended to blind us to the truth, and throw us off our guard."

"He's not fooling me, Chief," declared Virson. "I'll be careful."

"You'd better be, if you value your own skin. Good luck, Kars. I'm signing off."

Virson stood up. His lean, shrewd face, with no trace of its usual vacant expression, was grim with determination as he strode toward the ship's gun-control room.

"The ships are synchronized?" he asked.

"Yes, sir." The ship's commander spoke respectfully. "We're ready to blast them with a total of a hundred and thirty-eight guns, all the rays striking within five seconds of each other."

"Pass the word."

The commander touched a button, nodded.

"Fire!" ordered Virson coldly.

THROUGH the glassite window of the Moon-laboratory came a sudden fierce red glow. Somewhere, too, an enormous vibrator was in motion, making the Moon tremble under the uneasy feet that trod its bleak surface.

"It's the alarm!" gasped the robot. "Somebody's attacking us!"

"Back to the ship!" yelled Loring, panic mottling his face. "We may be able

to take off and outrun them! Quick!"

Blackbeard found himself running, but not toward the *Comet*. Several times before his hands had retained a memory his brain had forgotten. Now the knowledge of what to do seemed to have passed to his feet. As he ran, he kicked at a curiously shaped rock that resembled in rough outline the head of a moon-wolf. An opening appeared in a small moon-crater, and he plunged in. A second later, the bright glow from within the opening was cut off from the airless void outside by the clang of metal doors, cunningly shaped and coated to resemble the landscape into which they had blended.

He passed from the airlock into the Moon-laboratory itself. Power was already surging through the automatic force-barriers that the Futuremen had created to shield themselves from any attackers outside. The rays from a hundred and thirty-eight atom-cannon, hurled with full force at the barriers, rebounded into space. Shattered beams struck back at the ships which had fired them, and though weakened by dispersion, tossed the vessels about in the dark shadow that came from Earth.

The ships scattered, to offer a less vulnerable target for rebounding energy, and fired again. Blackbeard could feel the impact inside the laboratory. So far the barrier was holding well, a testimony to the skill and science of the Futuremen. But it had been meant to ward off a surprise attack, not a siege. It would not stand against a long-continued assault.

The laboratory was a maze of apparatus and control boards that would have baffled a skilled engineer for days. Blackbeard never hesitated. Feet and hands combined their memories, and he rushed from one control board to another, manning the defenses that should have been manned by all the Futuremen.

Three-dimensional space-visor globes gleamed along one wall, the images within giving the exact location of the attackers. In front of the globes, panels sprang alive with figures which told the position and velocity coordinates of each ship. Gravity-scanning devices regis-

tered the gross tonnage and the metal tonnage of the different vessels, along with their probable complement of men and guns.

"A dozen ships, all about the same size and fire power," muttered Blackbeard to himself. "I'd better start with the nearest."

The Moon-landscape suddenly changed its appearance. Proton-cannon yawned out of artificial craters, began to flash silently. Above each weapon, the force-barrier thinned automatically, then closed again as the proton-ray sped forth.

The dozen ships had been charging downward at full speed, attempting to bring the maximum force of their weapons to bear. As the first of them disappeared in a blaze of glowing vapor, the rest veered sharply. Blackbeard hit a second one before they raced out of range.

He knew they would come back, and they did, only a few moments later, sweeping in at an altitude of no more than a mile, in the belief that his cannon would be ineffective at low angles.

"They'll learn better," he told himself grimly.

He let them come close, knowing that the sharper the angle, the less chance of their own weapons penetrating the barrier, and the greater the probability that their atom-beams would ricochet. But as they came within range, he fired an entire bank of guns simultaneously. Five of the ships disappeared together. Two of the others, twisting feverishly to avoid his next volley, crashed together with a burst of orange flame, and came hurtling to the Moon's surface.

The rest had had enough. They swept across the horizon, to disappear from sight. The warning glow through the glassite, the warning vibration of the ground, both died away. The three survivors were not coming back.

AT HIS space-vision set on Earth, Hartley Brooks was trying frantically to contact Kars Virson. An hour sped by before he heard an answering voice.

"Kars!"

The face of one of Virson's commanders showed in the screen.

"Mr. Virson's unable to answer, sir. He had given me orders previously to tune in to your wave-length in case anything happened to him, but my generator system has been out of commission up till the present."

The financier's face was gray. "What's happened? Where is Kars?"

"Our attack failed, sir. We didn't stand the ghost of a chance. Mr. Virson's ship crashed into a neighboring vessel, and blew up. There were no survivors. He's dead, sir."

So Virson had failed again. And this time he had paid for his failure with his life.

Brooks breathed heavily. If Captain Future had lacked proof before that some one had tried to kill him, he would not lack it now. An investigating committee would have no trouble picking up the fragments of the wrecked ships, tracing them to their home ports, and thence to Brooks. The situation was growing desperate. He must act fast, and without Kars to aid him.

He must act fast, he repeated to himself. But for several hours he remained without moving, lost in thought.

CHAPTER XIV

An Affair of Weight



IN the Moon-laboratory, Blackbeard watched the images in the three-dimensional globes die away, he felt the ground grow quiet again. Not until then did he stop to wonder at himself.

A conclusion toward which he had already been tending, now rushed to meet him, inescapable. The familiar manner in which his fingers had handled the *Comet* had convinced him that he had piloted the ship before. His intuitive knowledge of what was within the

Moon-laboratory left no doubt that here too he had been on intimate terms with every weapon, every bit of apparatus. It was obvious then that no matter what his previous name, he had been a close friend of the Futuremen.

He could deduce a little more than that. The Futuremen, he knew, were wary of inviting visitors to the Moon. Ezra Gurney, Joan Randall, on rare occasions a man by the name of Halk Anders, possibly a few others—these had been the only ones to win their confidence. All of them had been either members of the Planet Patrol, or somehow connected with it. It would seem then that Blackbeard himself had been a member of the Planet Patrol.

That would account, too, for the fact that Joan had thought him familiar. The fact that she had not identified him could be ascribed to the disguising effect of his beard and his scars.

He was sorry now that he had not tried to make himself known to her. The next time they met, he would correct that mistake.

There was something of a more startling nature he could deduce now. As the Futuremen had not rushed to the shelter of the laboratory and its death-dealing defenses, that could mean only that they knew nothing of what was inside it. Which in turn meant that they were not really the Futuremen!

All that had happened confirmed him in this belief. Captain Future was ill, possibly, as Loring claimed, because of exposure to strange radiations in space. He had no idea how it had happened, but there could be little doubt that Loring had taken advantage of this illness to substitute impostors he himself had chosen in place of the genuine android and robot. The Brain had not really made an appearance on either Mars or the Moon. No doubt, the real Simon Wright was likewise among those missing.

Blackbeard knew now why they had wanted him to arrange a glassite-cutting device. Because they did not know how else to enter the laboratory, and hoped

to break in by main force!

Dials on the walls of the laboratory were registering the vibrations of feet outside. So they had left the safety of the *Comet*, and were cautiously looking around again. He thought rapidly. He had to have a story to tell them, and he must make it good.

A FEW seconds later he seemed to pop up out of the ground to face a gaping Loring.

"Wha—what—where did you come from?"

Blackbeard grinned genially. "I never thought I'd come out of that alive. I hid between two rocks, expecting those atom-rays to burn me to a crisp."

"I was plenty scared myself." Loring glanced at the imitation android and Robot. "But Grag and Otho here assured me that there was no danger."

"We knew that the automatic defenses would account for any would-be invaders," put in the phoney Grag in his rasping voice.

"They certainly did." Blackbeard emphasized the point.

Apparently they did not suspect his own role in what had happened, and he did not want them to. He had already puzzled Loring a little too often with some of the scientific knowledge that seemed to rise to the surface through the clouds in his mind, and he had no desire to have the man too curious about him.

Loring and the others appeared strangely uninterested in the identity of the murderous attackers. He himself had no way of knowing who they were, and it would be wise, he decided, not to bring up the subject at all. Best for him to pretend interest right now only in the scientific problems the little man would bring him.

Actually, Loring and the pretended Futuremen had not the slightest idea of who was behind the attack. They had discussed the question feverishly, and come to the conclusion only that Captain Future had made enemies unsuspected by the general public. Evidently, they had stepped into a more

perilous situation than they had suspected when Loring had first planned to take Future's place. And the realization that the unknown enemy might make other, perhaps more successful, attacks later, set the little man's teeth chattering.

Blackbeard appeared to be musing absently. "It's a pity that this rumpus had to occur. Now there'll be an investigating committee, and we'll have to waste days in giving testimony."

As he had expected, the very thought of this made Loring perspire within his space suit.

"We can't afford to do that. We have to get on with our planet-building," Loring said hastily.

"If we leave now," suggested Blackbeard slowly, "and there's no evidence that we've been here, it will be clear, even to an investigating committee, that the automatic defenses destroyed the invading ships, and that we ourselves had nothing to do with the whole affair."

"Where do we go to?" asked Loring helplessly. Without realizing it, he had come, as Blackbeard had predicted, to rely more and more on his new assistant.

"You have an outline of plans for the new planet?"

Loring nodded. "Curt, here, drew them up before his mind went bad, and handed them in to the Board of Governors, in the form of a technical memorandum. Most of the work is to be done by the government itself. The Futuremen themselves were to undertake the task of supplying a heavy core. But the Brain—" Loring hesitated perceptibly—"the Brain thinks a heavy core isn't necessary."

Blackbeard's eyebrows went up. "That's surprising. I'm beginning to think that those radiations affected the Brain as well as Curt. Any expert on geophysics knows that you can't build a stable planet with light elements alone."

"I'm no expert," returned Loring sullenly. "But I'll take Simon Wright's word on scientific matters."

"So will I. But possibly you didn't

understand him. Suppose you let me speak to him for a few moments."

"He doesn't care to speak to strangers," replied Loring, in obvious haste.

BLACKBEARD repressed a smile. As he had guessed, the real Simon Wright was not in the ship, and Loring was in deadly fear of the fact being discovered.

The pretended robot interposed. "Suppose you try to explain to us why a heavy core is necessary."

"I think I can. From what I've heard of Captain Future's methods, he was probably intending to create the lighter elements, those with atomic weights up to 30 or 40, by means of a matter-creating device he himself invented."

"You mean that he brought back from his search for the birthplace of matter," corrected the false Otho. "I was with him when he discovered it."

"Well, you would know." Evidently, the impostors had studied as much of Captain Future's history as was available to the general public. They seemed to know more about it than he did.

Blackbeard went on. "However, because of the low energy-potential throughout the System, it's very difficult to create the heavier elements. I imagine that Future intended to import whatever amounts were needed."

He could see that Loring was impressed and puzzled. At times Blackbeard seemed to be more clever than any man had a right to be.

"That's what Future states in his memorandum," admitted Loring.

"The net result would be that a planet with a diameter about that of Earth would have a density between one and two. Its gravitational pull would be so low that the atmosphere and water would be continually escaping, and would need constant renewal. That in itself would be reason enough for a heavy core.

"In addition, the settling down process, caused by the gradual contraction of the planet's mass, would be drawn out immeasurably in the case of so light a body. Earthquakes would go

on for years, making normal life on the surface impossible. The whole purpose of building the planet would be defeated."

"You might have been reading Future's memorandum," admitted Loring. "He suggested as the solution to the problem the use of the recently discovered planetoid Thor."

"And I agree with him. I suppose you know that Thor is a small body, not much larger than Phobos or Deimos, but it's incredibly compressed. It appears to be made of such atoms as may be on the companion of Sirius, with a density of close to a ton per cubic inch. Use that as the core for the new planet, and the problem's solved."

Otho spoke slowly, his eyes searching Loring's face. "Of course, Grag and I have worked with Curt and the Brain for many years, and we know their scientific methods, but we're not really capable of judging a question of this sort. Perhaps if Mr. Loring would remind Simon of some of these things—"

"You might remind him, too," added Blackbeard with subtlety, "that on Thor we won't be bothered by an investigating committee, and will be able to conduct whatever scientific experiments are necessary without being disturbed."

"I'll see," replied Loring curtly. He disappeared, to return a few moments later. "Simon advised us to go ahead. He himself isn't interested. He's too busy trying to overcome the effect of those radiations on Curt's mind."

Hro Zan growled to himself. More and more he was growing to resent these slurs on his intelligence. Loring was always pretending that there was no difference between his normal behavior and the behavior of a Captain Future who suffered from softening of the brain. Well, he'd show everybody. And soon, too!

Meanwhile, Blackbeard was considering the situation somberly. Loring, the master of puppets, had himself become, without knowing it, little more than a puppet in the hands of his supposed

assistant. Blackbeard had persuaded him to leave the Moon-laboratory untouched and go to Thor with little more difficulty than if he had been dealing with a child.

Nevertheless, Blackbeard knew that the situation was not completely under his control. These men had undertaken to perform a serious scientific job, knowing that they would botch it. It was up to him to see that the job was completed as it should be. And in addition, he had the task of protecting the unfortunate Curt Newton, who was so helpless and pitiable a mental wreck that his very presence seemed to embarrass the pretended Futuremen.

Loring led the way back to the *Comet*. A few moments later, the vessel rose slowly, and headed for the asteroid belt. Blackbeard, at the controls, made no attempt to use the vibration drive. The ship rocketed forward at a moderate pace as he considered solemnly what he could do.

CHAPTER XV

Council of War



IN the disreputable tub which once had been the home of the Terror of Space, the three genuine Futuremen turned away from the space visors that Simon had constructed.

"Holy sun imps!" gasped Otho. "That was some battle!"

"Lucky we didn't get to the Moon any earlier," rumbled Grag, "or we'd have been in the middle of it. There wouldn't have been much left of Ingmann's ship."

They watched the *Comet* dwindle and disappear in space. Then both the robot and the android turned toward the Brain.

"What next, Simon? Do you still want to land on the Moon?"

"Aye." The stalk-eyes lowered, as if

the bodiless Brain were nodding. "I've improved this ancient craft somewhat, but it could stand being improved still more. The laboratory contains apparatus I should have."

"What about these fake Futuremen and the *Comet*? Do we let them get away with their act any longer?" demanded the android indignantly. "I've got a reputation to fix up!"

"I think I know where the *Comet* is headed," rasped the Brain. "But we shall discuss that later. First we land on the Moon."

Otho, at the controls, amused himself by landing the ship with the use of only a single hand. As they emerged upon the Moon itself, they were almost overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught of two overjoyed small animals.

"So you've missed me!" grinned the android, as the doughy little meteor-mimic cuddled close. "That second-class imitation of a real man might fool a lot of human beings, but he couldn't fool you."

Grag was making what he fondly imagined were crooning noises at Eek. Simon impatiently cut short his bellowing.

"To the laboratory, quickly. We have no time to waste."

LATER, the disappointed pets regretfully left behind, the three Futuremen were headed out in space once more.

"Where to, Simon?" asked Otho. "Do we follow the *Comet*?"

"Not yet. I'd like to get a look at one of those destroyed space ships."

Otho nodded. He cruised slowly above the Moon's surface, in the direction in which the ships had crashed. After about an hour, he located the parts of what had been one of the smashed ships, scattered over a large lunar crater. He landed again, and hastily donning a space suit, accompanied Grag and Simon toward the scene of devastation.

The inside of the ship had obviously burst into flame on being hit, but the crash had released the oxygen into

space, thus extinguishing the blaze before a great deal of damage had been done. The clothes on several of the men had been little more than scorched. Grag searched their bodies methodically, coming finally across a certificate of appointment, which the ship's captain had borne. He passed it silently to Simon.

The Brain held the sheet of parchment in his tractor beams, while his stalked lens-eyes took in the contents. "The dead captain was appointed to command a ship owned by Hartley Brooks," he rasped finally.

"Then Brooks is the one who instigated this attack?" demanded Otho.

"Apparently. But we had better make sure. Let us find another wrecked ship."

Several hours later, there could no longer be any doubt. Metal food con-

low the *Comet* on to Thor."

"Thor?" rumbled Grag incredulously. "Why, in the name of Saturn would those fakers be interested in that?"

"Because one of them is not a faker. It isn't clear to me yet, but Hartley Brooks would not hire a poor tool."

Grag shook his metal head helplessly. "I don't get it."

"I hate to go along with Grag, but neither do I," admitted Otho.

There was a touch of impatience in the Brain's voice. "You saw what happened to the attacking ships. How do you think they were blasted?"

"With the defenses you and Curt contrived. A child could have done it," said Otho. "You just get them in the space visor globes, swivel the cannon around until the images of the ships are centered in the cross-hairs, and press a button."

Coming Next Issue: CAPTAIN FUTURE in RED SUN OF DANGER

tainers that bore the name of one of the financier's enterprises made it clear that the unfortunate space fleet had been owned and controlled by Hartley Brooks.

"I don't understand!" exclaimed Grag in bewilderment. "Why should Brooks want to harm the Futuremen?"

To Simon's mind there came an image—Curt Newton speaking to Joan, and Hartley Brooks pausing nearby to fumble uncertainly in his pockets. He must have been listening to their conversation. The financier had been interested in Curt's activity at that time, and the one thing then uppermost in Curt's mind had been the building of the new planet.

The Brain explained his thoughts briefly to the others. "Brooks must have been the one responsible for that explosion on Baldur," he added. "And doubtless there'll be other attacks later."

"We ought to stop them," declared Grag anxiously. "Or before they're finished, they'll ruin the *Comet*."

"Excellent idea, Grag. As the first move toward stopping them, we'll fol-

"Very simple," agreed the Brain ironically. "And who tells you which button to press? And why would Hartley Brooks' tools fire on their own confederates?"

OTHO looked a little more thoughtful. "I see what you mean, Simon. But after all, these fakers must have studied us carefully before they attempted their imposture. They might have visited the Moon-laboratory previously."

"Possibly. But a year's time would have been insufficient for the average stranger to learn how to enter the laboratory without destroying it, and how to operate the different mechanisms. There's more to all this than meets the eye. Remember, you were there but a few moments ago. Did you see any signs of damage?"

"By the Great Dipper, no!" roared Grag. "Simon, you're right!"

"If one of that bunch isn't a faker, he must be Curt," observed Otho. "And if he could handle the defenses, then his mind can't have been affected." The

slanting green eyes narrowed suddenly. "Little space-devils, I think I've got it! Listen, Simon. Suppose, after that explosion on Baldur, Curt is hurt but still conscious. He knows that some one has tried to kill the Futuremen, and, except for him, has apparently succeeded. And off in the distance, he sees a space-ship heading toward Baldur to check up.

"He stumbles toward the *Comet*, hoping to fight off the men Brooks has sent. On the way he runs into Loring, who's been attracted by the noise of the explosion, and has no objection to earning the gratitude of the famous Captain Future. The *Comet* takes off—but Curt isn't in condition to conduct a battle alone, and Loring doesn't know how to handle the ship properly. So the *Comet* puts on speed and escapes.

"Curt thinks we're dead. But it'll be a terrific blow to Brooks if he makes the latter believe we're still alive. So he rigs up these fakers—and Brooks falls for the bait, tries to attack, and is beaten off, this time leaving evidence that will eventually convict him."

Grag's photoelectric eyes seemed to gleam. "You've got it, Otho! Next thing, Curt heads for Thor because he knows that the interplanetary government is already at work on the new planet, and he wants to get the heavy core ready."

"All of which means," said Otho, "that we've been misjudging those fakers. They've merely been doing as Curt wanted them to do. We'll go up to him, and make ourselves known—"

"We shall land on Thor unobserved," rasped the Brain coldly. "Your theory is a pretty one, Otho, but it goes far beyond the evidence, and there are many flaws in it. The one fact of which we can be certain is that the real Captain Future must be with Loring. We do not know who he is. And I do not intend to put myself in Loring's hands on the basis of your guesswork."

The chastened android smiled sheepishly. "All right, Simon, we'll do as you say. But I thought I had a wonderful theory!"

"You stretched it a little too far, my rubbery friend," rumbled Grag. "Stick to the facts—in case you ever learn any!"

"Why, you refugee from a scrap heap, you were the first one to agree I was right! And talking about sticking to facts, who figured out why Curt was heading for Thor? You did! As if you could ever hope to understand what was going on in his mind!"

"It was really Simon who figured that out," said Grag modestly. "I just put into words what he was thinking."

The Brain had moved on silent tractor beams away from them. He knew that the problem of handling the false Futuremen, of making use of them to deceive Brooks, and yet of not letting them carry the deception too far, would be a difficult one. But if Curt were really with them, there was a powerful ally in the enemy's camp.

A few moments later, they were back in the ship once more. The *Comet* might reach Thor ahead of them, but unless Curt made use of the vibration-drive, the pursuers would not be far behind.

With the aid of a new fuel mixture that Simon had secured from the laboratory, they could count on attaining twice the maximum acceleration the ship had ever reached previously.

Otho was at the controls once more, the vessel heading for Thor, when suddenly the brake rockets roared. The Brain's stalk-eyes turned inquiringly to Otho.

"Planet Patrol ship coming toward us, Simon," exclaimed the android. "Probably heard news of what took place, and happened to be close enough to investigate."

Less than an hour later they lay alongside the Planet Patrol vessel and waited while two officers come aboard. Otho's green eyes almost popped out of his head. "By all the sun-imps!" he gasped. "It's Joan and Ezra!"

Otho at least could speak. Joan and Ezra, as the Futuremen quickly observed, were so astounded they were unable to utter a word.

CHAPTER XVI

The Butterflies Who Chased Men

THE *Comet* had felt the grip of Thor's gravity many thousands of miles away, just as if the tiny planetoid were one of the Sun's larger satellites. Blackbeard brought the teardrop-shaped vessel down for a landing, and without bother-

ing to slip into a space-suit, stepped out upon its surface. Loring and the latter's companions followed him uneasily.

"There's good air here!" exclaimed Loring. "I didn't know that."

Blackbeard nodded. "Thor is only ten miles in diameter, but it has no trouble holding the atmosphere it stole."

"Stole?" It was the pretended robot who asked the question.

"From some other stellar body. The oxygen is of the ordinary type, or else we wouldn't be able to breathe it. But the molecules of the planetoid itself are of the heavy kind, totally alien to our physical make-up. You obviously didn't read the scientific reports made public upon the discovery of Thor."

The surface of the planetoid was surprisingly flat, as if the great weight of each particle of ground had furthered the process of leveling off. Like Phobos and Deimos, satellites of Mars, Thor had a curvature so great that the eye

could easily detect it. With no clouds to hamper them, they could see the horizon, less than a mile away in each direction. Numerous small gray bushes were the only break in the monotony of the reddish landscape.

A hundred yards or so away from them, a tiny object sprang into the air, and settled rapidly down again.

"Animal life," remarked the gloomy, white-faced pseudo-android.

Several others of the tiny objects leaped up closer at hand.

"They're butterflies!" exclaimed Loring.

"I've seen their kind on Jupiter," observed the Jovian.

Blackbeard was staring at the insect-like creatures uneasily.

"I wasn't expecting this," he said. "We'd better return to the ship."

The pretended robot looked at him with puzzled eyes. "Why? They're no more than a couple of inches long. They can't be dangerous!"

"They have wings, but despite the presence of an atmosphere, they can't fly. That means that they're too heavy to be supported by matter of any ordinary kind. And if their bodies are of heavy matter, we don't want to tangle with them."

ONE of the peculiar insects sprang up unexpectedly a few feet away from them, reached the top of its leap, and then fell toward Blackbeard. He ducked quickly, but not before one of the wings had brushed his shoulder. He sprawled

[Turn page]

Now She Shops

"Cash and Carry"

Without Painful Backache

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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to the ground as if hurled by a giant hand.

The others were running in panic back toward the *Comet*, with the dangerous insects hurtling after them. Blackbeard picked his bruised body off from the ground, which was as hard and resistant as the finest tempered stellite. He swept around the cloud of butterflies, which seemed to have increased with each step, and cut into the group of fleeing men close to Loring. A second after the door clanged behind them, they could hear the thud of a heavy body against the hull of the *Comet*.

Loring was pale. "Why did we ever come to this God-forsaken place, anyway?" he growled savagely.

"To make a spectroscopic examination of its matter," returned Blackbeard coolly. "If we're going to make use of the stuff, we'll have to learn its internal structure."

Outside, the butterflies were continuing to beat against the vessel, and they could feel the slight vibration of the hull at each blow. "They'll break through," muttered Loring.

Blackbeard shook his head. "The *Comet* was built to withstand the impact of hundred-ton projectiles. We're safe so long as we stay inside. But we'll have to figure out a way of defending ourselves."

"What about our proton-pistols?" demanded the Jovian.

"Try hitting a butterfly with a proton-ray," countered the pretended android, "and see how far you get."

Blackbeard nodded. "I think the answer lies in a wide-angled force ray that won't kill, but will have enough power to knock them backward. I can build one that works on the same principle as the force barrier that protected the Moon-laboratory."

"That'll mean that we stay in here for another week?"

"No more than a day. I can adapt a proton-pistol."

Actually, it was no more than a few hours before Blackbeard finished his work. The tall, bearded man held up a proton pistol whose muzzle now flared

curiously outward. Into the butt had been fitted several tiny transformers and rectifiers needed to change the energy of a thin current of excited protons into the broad band of a force buffer.

"That should do the job. Want to come along with me and try it?"

Loring shook his head. "One experience with those insects is enough."

"I suppose there's no use asking Grag or Otho. But it *would* be convenient if one of them were to come along and handle the spectroscope, while I used the gun."

"They're busy. You'd better go alone."

PRESENTLY Blackbeard was outside the ship. There were none of the leaping insects nearby, but nevertheless he set up his instruments and worked cautiously, not knowing when they might spring into sight. It was strange to feel a strong breeze against his face, to see fleecy clouds scudding past overhead, and yet to detect not the slightest sign of motion in the small bushes that covered the ground. Composed of the incredibly dense matter of Thor, they were immovable by the force of an ordinary hurricane.

Small shadows crept through the bushes near at hand, and Blackbeard realized that there were other forms of life present beside the butterflies.

After a time, as he had just about finished his observations, one of the butterfly-creatures leaped up, off to one side. As though this were a signal, others began to spring up near him. But they did not come too close for comfort, and at a rustling from the bushes, seemed to flee.

The rustling sound, he noticed, came from what appeared at first to be a lizard about a foot long. Closer investigation, however, revealed that the creature was more like an insect, with six jointed legs, and compound many-faceted eyes that sparkled like jewels. It was ludicrously like a giant grasshopper.

It was creeping toward him, and Blackbeard, making a rough calculation of the weight of the creature—somewhere in the neighborhood of a thou-

sand tons—gave it a wide berth. But his very avoidance of it had the effect of arousing its curiosity. It pursued him with short, rapid leaps, barely skimming the ground.

Blackbeard raised his doctored proton-gun, and pulled the trigger. The small body turned a somersault in the air as the powerful force-field drove it back, then came to rest, and stared at him as before. He fired again, and this time, though still unharmed, the creature had had enough. It turned, and fled.

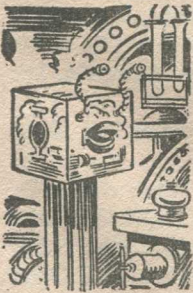
Blackbeard began to assemble the instruments with which he had been working. As he turned his head, however, he had a shock that sent his hand groping again for the weapon he had just used. A few feet away, regarding him with curiosity, was another and much larger hopper insect. Almost three feet in height, its twisted legs made it resemble one of the bushes dotting the planetoid's surface. Only the brilliant compound eyes revealed that it was no plant.

The two forelegs rubbed against each other so rapidly that they seemed to blur. A high voice, so shrill that it was almost inaudible, reached Blackbeard's ears.

"Hello, hello!"

CHAPTER XVII

Reunion on Baldur



ABOARD the ship which they had borrowed from the Terror of Space, the Futuremen faced Joan and Ezra. After the first shock of the meeting, the two members of the Planet Patrol had recovered rapidly from their surprise,

and quick explanations had ensued.

"So the others are impostors," murmured Ezra. "That makes clear a great deal that was puzzling me. But what about Curt himself?"

"Simon thinks that Curt is actually aboard the *Comet*," said Grag.

"The disaster to the attacking ships leaves no doubt," rasped the Brain.

"If he retains his scientific knowledge, then it can't be the man who calls himself Captain Future. He must be an impostor, too," said Joan. "That leaves only one person—Blackbeard. That's who it is, and I should have known it!"

She described briefly how she had met him aboard the pirate ship. As he listened to the story of what had happened then and later, Simon's lens-eyes seemed to glitter. He did not notice Joan's flush.

"There can be no doubt about it, lass. That would explain why he appeared familiar. As for the change in him, there's an obvious explanation for that—he's lost his memory. Remember, that same explosion killed Otho, and pinned Grag down so that he couldn't move. When Curt awoke, his mind dazed, there was no one to remind him of who he really was. Later, when he had partially recovered his wits, your suspicions of him might have made him fear he was really a criminal. Hence his refusal to talk about himself."

"Can he be brought back to his old self?" demanded Ezra.

"I think so. But first we must remove him from the *Comet*. It may be difficult. Remember that he is working for Loring, and with his memory of his past life gone, probably thinks he owes his loyalty to the man."

Grag moved his mighty metal limbs. "I don't see why there should be any difficulty. We'll follow the *Comet* to Thor, Simon, wait till we get him alone, and I'll grab him. He won't be expecting trouble. Even if he did, there isn't a man alive who could break out of my grip."

Otho grinned. "Curt did it once. Remember, you big hunk of junkyard on wheels?"

"That," replied Grag, "was when he pretended to be a Sverd, that time we went after Gorma Hass, and he used atomic motors. This time, he'll be just an ordinary man. I can handle him."

"You should be able to," agreed Simon. He turned to Joan and Ezra. "You had better come along with us. Those impostors will undoubtedly see us as we land on Thor, and there's less chance of our frightening them if we're not with a Patrol vessel."

Joan and Ezra nodded. A few moments later, they had radioed their decision to their own ship, and were heading for Thor.

THEY saw the *Comet* for a brief moment before Otho brought their vessel down on the planetoid of heavy matter. The Brain was busy in his make-shift laboratory. Beyond suggesting to the others that they had better not stir from the ship until he permitted them, he took no immediate interest in his surroundings.

The android and the robot objected restlessly. They had been confined for long periods of time on previous occasions, but not because of fear. The atmosphere here was breathable, large animals were absent, and they had proton-guns. Moreover, they were not as susceptible to danger as Joan and Ezra. Grag had superhuman strength, Otho had unmatched speed and agility. What harm could there be in stepping outside for a moment?

Shortly afterward, they were outside.

"We'll be careful," observed Otho. "We'll show Simon we're not reckless fools."

Grag nodded ponderously. "And we may learn something useful. After all, the way to find out things is to look for them, not just remain cooped up waiting for information to come to you."

A small insect leaped into the air ahead of them. Grag's eyes passed over it carelessly. "A butterfly. I don't suppose Simon was afraid of danger from that."

"I'm not sure. Remember, if all these creatures are of heavy matter—"

"A butterfly may be something for you to worry over, Otho, but not for a man who's constructed of steel instead of rubber. Some day, my plastic friend, I'll tell you exactly how I compare in mus-

cular strength with the ordinary person. And then you'll understand—"

One of Grag's metal legs brushed against a low bush, and he halted, to stare at it in bewilderment. The bush had remained immovable, but his leg rebounded, and there was a visible scratch in the metal.

The next moment one of the flitting insects struck him full on the chest.

Grag went over backward and landed on the ground with a loud metallic clang. Otho ducked lithely as one of the insects leaped at him. From hiding places on the ground and in the bushes a veritable cloud of the tiny creatures sprang into the air. A dazed look on his face, Grag rose slowly as Otho shouted to him.

"Get up and run, you bragging junk-heap!"

"But they've cut off our way back to the ship!"

"Then run away from the ship! We can't stay here!"

Grag obeyed sullenly, and soon the cloud was strung out behind them. "How far do you think we'll have to go?" he demanded.

"Maybe all around this little world, and thus back to the ship. It wouldn't take us long," yelled Otho. "And you can keep me entertained by telling me how strong you are—before you get yourself knocked over by another butterfly!"

After that, they ran for a time in silence. Some of the insects lost interest and dropped out of the race, but others joined in to take their places. The robot groaned. "I've bumped my leg again. It's twisted this time."

"You can always get another leg. Keep on going."

Leaping unexpectedly from one side, one of the insects sailed past the lithe Otho and crashed into Grag. The robot struck the ground once more, and Otho paused angrily.

"I'll give you a hand. Quick!"

"My leg is ruined this time, Otho. I can't run. But you can. Save yourself."

"We're sticking together," returned the android. He reached down with a strong hand to help pull the robot to

his feet. At that moment the cloud of insects began to disappear.

Otho's quick eyes saw most of them vanish together, as if a giant invisible hand had stretched through the air to push them away. The hand hurled back a pair here, a trio there, and finally the few scattered creatures that still remained.

A TALL bearded man was approaching them, a curiously altered proton-pistol in his hand. Walking beside him was an insect almost three feet in height, a grasshopper thing that was weirdly human in its attitude. The giant compound eyes took in the two synthetic creatures, and twiglike forelegs rubbed together.

"Hello, hello!"

"By the sea-monsters of Saturn!" gasped Otho. "That grasshopper is talking!"

Grag got slowly to his feet again. He was in a bad temper. He had disregarded the Brain's warning and had a badly twisted leg to show for it, while Otho, despite his inferior strength, was unharmed. He could imagine the android's jeers as he straightened the bent leg into a properly functioning piece once more.

He limped forward belligerently. "Hello, yourself," he rumbled. "And if you try any more tricks I'll use my proton-pistol. Unlike those butterflies, you aren't too small to hit."

He was reaching for the proton-pistol when Otho put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Wait a minute, Grag. Don't you recognize the man we came here to get? This is Curt."

"Little fishes of Venus!" rumbled the robot. "I had forgotten how different he'd look!"

"We're lucky to run into him alone." Otho turned to face Blackbeard. "You'd better come with us, Chief. We know you've forgotten who you are, but Simon will fix that."

Blackbeard gazed quizzically at the eager pair. "I suppose you two pretend to be genuine Futuremen," he remarked.

"Those other fellows," declared Grag, "are a couple of frauds."

"I'm sure of that. But I'm still a little doubtful as to whether you are."

"Holy sun-imps," exclaimed Otho, "they don't really resemble us, do they, Chief? You ought to be able to tell us apart at a glance."

"Even if you don't remember that you're Curt Newton," added Grag, "you've seen us enough not to mistake us for those phonies."

Blackbeard's face wore a blank look. "I'm Curt Newton?"

"I know you've forgotten about it, but as Otho said, Simon will fix that." The robot glanced uneasily at another butterfly that sprang into the air not far away, and turned to Otho. "We should be getting back to the ship, Otho, instead of talking so much."

"Well, take him, and let's go."

Grag reached forward. A second later the same invisible hand which had brushed away the butterflies hurled him to the ground. Otho started for Curt, then thought better of it, and drew back.

Grag tried to rise to his feet, his bad leg twisting under him. Otho was grinning.

"I thought you were stronger than he was," the android jeered.

"Perhaps we had better discuss this a little more before I accompany you," suggested Blackbeard mildly. "You two are acting exactly like those impostors. So far you've given no evidence that you're the genuine Futuremen."

"Then perhaps this will convince you," rasped an unexpected voice.

They all looked up to see the new figure that had made its appearance. Overhead, the Brain was gliding along noiselessly on his traction beams. He reached them as Grag got back on his feet.

"This is getting monotonous," Grag complained.

"So you overruled my suggestion about remaining in the ship," grated Simon at the shamefaced robot and android.

"I'm sorry, Simon," said Otho meekly. "We thought—"

"I know exactly what you thought."

The Brain faced Blackbeard once more. "Curt, lad, you don't know how happy we are to find you! You'll come with us to our ship?"

"I'm still waiting for this creature that calls itself Grag to persuade me," returned Blackbeard dryly.

"Very well," agreed Simon. "Grag, pick him up."

THE next moment Grag disappeared. Then Blackbeard felt himself lifted into the air by invisible metal hands, the proton-pistol removed from his hand.

"By the devils of space," he gasped, "what's going on?"

"This should convince you that we are the genuine Futuremen," observed Simon. "I've used a device which you yourself invented to screen Grag from view. Come peaceably now, Curt. Jean and Ezra are waiting to talk to you."

"Your argument is irresistible," capitulated Blackbeard. "I'll go with you."

A brief time later Blackbeard was inside their ship. Joan kissed him warmly, and then blushed. Ezra shook his hand warmly, and slapped his back to hide the emotion that was overpowering him. Through it all, the puzzled look on Curt's face did not disappear.

"Now, lad, we're going to bring back your past," said Simon.

Curt looked dubious. "I'm beginning to wonder whether that's possible. Ever since I awoke on Baldur to find my oxygen trickling away and my memory gone, I've been trying to find out who I am. I thought for a time that the memory of my previous life would come back to me of itself."

He laughed harshly. "Well, it hasn't. I don't remember anything that happened to me as Captain Future. So far as I know, I'm still Blackbeard."

"But the *Comet*, the Moon-laboratory! Weren't those familiar to you?"

Blackbeard nodded. "They were, but the knowledge didn't seem part of me. I knew them as I'd know the distance from the Sun to the Earth, as I'd know the diameter of the Moon—as objective scientific facts that had no personal relation to myself."

The Brain spoke slowly. "I can change that, lad. And I think I had better do it before you return to the *Comet*, so that you'll be able to meet those scoundrels with all your wits about you. It will require a delicate operation."

"But, Simon!" protested Joan. "It would take Curt weeks to recover! He'd be unable to return to the *Comet*, and they'd miss him."

"No, Joan, it will take but a few moments for the operation itself, and no period of recovery will be necessary." Simon's stalk-eyes swivelled around to face Blackbeard. "Do you trust my skill, lad?"

The bearded man smiled. "I may have forgotten who I am, but I remember a few things I've heard about what the Brain can do. I'm ready if you are."

It was at this moment that there came from outside the ship a shrill piping sound. "Hello, hello!"

"Jumping Jovians!" exclaimed Otho. "It must be that insect-man! He's followed us here."

"Hello, hello!"

"That appears to be the only word he knows," muttered Grag.

"It isn't," replied Curt. "I think he has a fairly good grasp of English."

Grag stared. "That grasshopper? What does he say?"

"I don't know. I think that you, Grag, should be able to understand him better than any one else. Let's go outside and have a little conversation."

"No harm in that," agreed Simon. "Meanwhile, I'll collect the instruments I need."

OUTSIDE the ship, the insect-man was rubbing his forelegs together again, this time without seeming to produce any sound. But a look of alertness and close attention became apparent in Grag.

"Don't tell me," cried Otho, "that you've got better ears than we have!"

"Undoubtedly," rumbled Grag. "I don't know why, but I can get every word!"

"Our friend here," explained Blackbeard, "produces sounds in the ultra-

sonic range. By dint of considerable effort, he can manage to say, 'Hello,' in a sufficiently low tone for us to hear him. But he can't carry on much of a conversation that way."

"Simon and your father built Grag," added Ezra, "so that he could detect sounds above the usual audible frequency."

"Just a minute," said Grag. "This is interesting."

The role of translator was something new for the robot, and he was making the most of it. He listened carefully for a time, interposed a few words, waited for the reply, and then turned to the others.

"His name is Arnn, and he is of a race called Ormi. All the insect-like creatures on this little world are related,

language, although the strangers could never understand them too well.

"One of the men was a scientist who was more interested in studying the matter of which Thor was made than in saving his own life."

"That would have been Cass himself," interposed Ezra.

"From him," went on Grag, "they learned that Thor and all the creatures living upon it were doomed. A study of its orbit revealed it to be not the usual ellipse, but a slowly narrowing spiral. Thor is gradually approaching the Sun. Eventually, for some reason that Arnn did not understand, this will cause the entire planetoid to disintegrate or plunge into the sun."

Blackbeard nodded.

"Arnn wants to know if we strangers

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having evolved from the same original animals. That indicates that they've had no contact with other worlds throughout their history—until recently. Arnn says that a short time ago a space ship landed on Thor."

"Not so short a time by our standards," observed Ezra. "Thor was discovered by Glenn Cass ten years ago."

"The men on the ship," continued Grag, "were the first creatures made of light matter that the Ormi had ever seen. Several were killed by the small insects, which also made their way into the ship itself, and accidentally ruined the engines. The ship could no longer take off."

The old marshal's voice trembled with eagerness. "So that's what happened to Cass! He radioed the news of his discovery into space, and it was picked up by a passenger liner. But nothing more was ever heard of him, even though the Planet Patrol kept up the search for a year."

"Arnn says that he and his race protected the men when they learned how ill-adapted the visitors were to this world. And by contact with the newcomers, they gradually learned the

have come to save him and his race," concluded Grag.

"In a way, we have," replied Blackbeard slowly. "The oxygen on Thor is of light matter, so it would seem that the Ormi are not oxygen breathers. How are they affected by heat and cold?"

Grag listened to the reply, then translated. "Arnn recognizes the words but doesn't know what these things are."

"Good enough. That indicates they are not affected."

"What became of Cass and the others?" demanded Joan.

Arnn spoke rapidly. They could hear only a syllable or two of his shrill reply. Grag explained.

"Eventually they used up the food they had brought with them and they starved. In the course of time their ship was crushed by the lizard-creatures, and few traces of it remain."

"It was the inevitable end," mused Blackbeard.

HE LOOKED up to see Simon approaching eagerly.

"Ready now, lad. We'd better get into the ship again."

Arnn's terrific weight would have tak-

CHAPTER XVIII

Plans for Failure

en him through the bottom of their vessel, and he seemed to understand that fact, for he made no attempt to join them inside. Otho was the last one to enter, and as he moved forward, he looked up, drawn by a whistling sound in the air. A bright streak was flashing across the sky, to disappear behind the horizon. Another spaceship! At this rate the tiny planetoid would soon be well populated.

The Brain was not surprised to hear the news. "It was to be expected, Otho, that Brooks would make another attempt to kill Curt and the people he thinks are the Futuremen. There are two factions to this mystery. I do not know what Brooks intends to do now, although I think I shall soon. But first we must restore Curt's memory."

The others were tense. Ezra's hand trembled as he raised it to his mouth with a chew of *batab*, the Venusian substitute for tobacco. Joan's eyes were moist. Even Grag and Otho showed by their silence and the unusual solemnity of their manner how greatly they were affected. Only Curt himself seemed to be unconcerned.

"We'll have to save those Ormi, Simon," he observed, "as well as the new planet. I think the simplest thing would be to remove them to Pluto, where the Sun's ultra-violet would have little effect. We could remove a small part of Thor along with them, so that they'd have an island of their own matter, which we must anchor firmly to the surface."

"That sounds like the way out," agreed Simon. "But never mind them now, lad. The one I'm concerned with is yourself. Sit here."

Curt lay back in the chair which Simon designated. The next moment, the low humming of a hypnotic projector became audible. Curt's eyes closed slowly, a faint trace of a smile appeared on his face, then vanished. He was asleep.

The others watched breathlessly as the Brain hovered in the air above him.

"Cut off the machine, Otho. Hand me my first instruments, Grag."

The two comrades moved wordlessly in swift, silent obedience.

IT was the first time in his life that Hartley Brooks could remember being desperate. His plans to rid himself of the Futuremen had failed, his most trusted lieutenant was dead, and soon the Planet Patrol would be on his trail. He had re-

peated to himself again and again that he must act rapidly—without being able to decide what action he should take. Only his inability to think of anything better had led him to follow the Futuremen to Thor.

It had been easy enough to trail the *Comet*, and to learn that still another ship was interested in the doings of the Futuremen. These newcomers into the picture puzzled Brooks, but he did not allow them to divert him from his objective. He must get rid of Captain Future! Now that strong-arm methods had failed, he would try his one other resource.

He had brought along with him both money and weapons. He knew there was no hope of bribing or intimidating either Curt Newton or the Futuremen, but he was not so sure about their companion. From what he had heard of Loring, the latter had an eye that glistened at the sight of money. A strange companion for the Futuremen, but it was not for Brooks to marvel at the fact. His business was to take advantage of it.

If, in the end, Loring should prove to be unexpectedly honest, then—Brooks shrugged—he would be forced to use his atom-pistol. He must take the Futuremen by surprise, and get away after killing them. If he failed in this final desperate attempt it made no difference what would happen to him. He was ruined either way.

As his fleet space yacht closed in on Thor he could see the glistening hull

of the *Comet*. He spoke to his pilot, and the latter braked, and began to prepare for landing.

The Futuremen were waiting for him. Brooks approached the *Comet* stiffly, rigid with an inner tenseness that his manner did not show. Both the robot and the android were staring as if doubting their eyes, and the shifty-eyed Loring was open-mouthed.

They were even more dumbfounded than he would have expected, and for a moment the shadow of doubt flitted through the financier's mind. From all that he had heard of them, the Futuremen, should have been more difficult to surprise. He would have thought they were overrated, if he had not remembered the fate of Kars Virson, and those ten ships.

"I am Hartley Brooks," he announced unnecessarily. "I'd like to speak to Captain Future."

Loring swallowed hard. "You can't. Curt and the Brain are busy with an important experiment."

"Future busy with an experiment? Excellent. So you're dropping that pretense about his mind being affected. All the more reason why he'd be willing to talk to me."

Loring shook his head stubbornly. "He isn't leaving the *Comet*. And you are not permitted to enter it."

Brooks shrugged. "I've made a long journey just to see him, but if he isn't anxious to talk, there's no help for it. Perhaps, however, I could speak to you instead?"

"Not alone." There was fear in Loring's eyes. "Grag and Otho accompany me everywhere. You'll have to speak in front of them."

THE financier's expression became puzzled. Of all the things he might have expected from the two synthetic Futuremen, the last was that they would be degraded to the position of bodyguards for the worthless Loring. Something in this setup was wrong, all wrong.

He shrugged again. "You leave me no choice. I came here to discuss a mat-

ter of vital importance—the building of this new planet. My position is simple. I don't want the job completed."

From the landing port of the *Comet* a husky red-haired figure emerged.

"Captain Future!" exclaimed Brooks. "What a surprise! I was told you weren't anxious to receive visitors!"

"Curt!" Loring's voice was choking with repressed rage. If not for the presence of the financier, he would have overwhelmed the unfortunate actor with his anger. "You can't leave your experiments now."

"What experiments?" asked Hro Zan. "I'm tired of just sitting inside that ship. Even if there's danger out here, I want some fresh air for a change."

Brooks was gazing at him intently. "So it's true after all," he reflected. "He is mentally ill. And yet from the way he operated those defenses on the Moon—"

"Mr. Brooks, perhaps you'll take my word for it that Captain Future doesn't want to see visitors," growled Loring anxiously. "He isn't well."

Brooks was silent. As Loring watched him uneasily, he turned to gaze at the android and the robot, then back to the tall red-haired figure. He recalled what the miner named Ingmann had done to Otho on Mars. A strange light of understanding began to grow in the financier's eyes.

"By the demon of Neptune!" he rasped out. "So that explains it! You're impostors, every one of you."

The Jovian clanked forward menacingly at a signal from Loring.

"You're not going to leave Thor with that story," he growled, his voice no longer resembling that of Grag.

A sardonic smile twisted the financier's face. "We've been fools, all of us. If you'd come to me long before, I'd have made a lucrative deal with you. And I'd have saved myself plenty of trouble. Kars Virson would be alive, and ten of my best spaceships would not have been blasted out of existence. And if I had guessed—as I should have—I'd have come to you first."

He stared at Loring again, and shook

his head regretfully. "You fooled me too well for your own good, Loring. I wouldn't have remained blind if I'd had the opportunity before of studying you at close quarters. Your Captain Future looks imposing, but even a Curt Newton out of his mind would display more intelligence than this man does."

Hro Zan glowered. "I don't have to take insults from you," he muttered.

"And your robot and android, upon close examination, are a little too human—and a little too much devoted to the interests of Edward Loring instead of Captain Future. I should have known when you entered the council hall, at the time the Board of Governors met on Mars."

Brooks began to pace up and down. "Poor Kars! He did his job well, after all, destroying the Futuremen as I ordered him to, but he failed to destroy the *Comet*."

Loring nodded. "I found the *Comet* on Baldur, not far from Future's body. That gave me the idea of the whole masquerade."

"And a very unfortunate idea it was for me." Brooks said, smiling coldly. Now that he had learned the Futuremen were really dead, he could appreciate the joke on himself. "However, I think I may yet turn it to my advantage. But how did you fakers manage to destroy my ships on the Moon?"

"Those defenses were automatic," Loring said.

"I told you before," growled the Jovian, "that you're not leaving this place."

"I think I can change your minds on that point," said Hartley Brooks.

The small butterfly-insects were beginning to leap into the air again, and Loring suggested nervously:

"Perhaps we had better talk inside. These small creatures are dangerous."

LORING led the way. Once inside the *Comet*, with the doors locked, the financier gazed about with interest. "You've inherited an excellent ship, Loring. I have none the equal of it. I rather envy you."

"Never mind that. What's your proposition?"

Brooks smiled. "Ah, yes. Well, I may as well start off by telling you that I can reward you with more money than you can ever pick up playing a lone hand—provided you play the game as I direct. I want you to go ahead with that planet-building project."

"You know that we can't finish the job as Future would have done."

"Precisely. But act as if you could. Continue to fool the public about the identity of your assistants, but somewhat better than you've fooled me. And take over the direction of the work, with technical assistance if necessary, so as not to reveal your own ignorance."

That would be a job for Blackbeard. Loring nodded absently.

"At the critical moment, of course, I want you to botch things up. I want this project to be so resounding a failure, that the echoes of it will last for years."

"That will be easy. I'll simply put my imitation Captain Future in charge." Loring indicated Hro Zan.

"You will receive the first installment on our contract when we reach Mars. The second will come after the project has failed. If you do a good job, we may be able to get together on a lot of things later."

The eyes of Loring and the two pretended Futuremen were glittering with greed. Only the false Captain Future was sullen and uninterested. His pride had been hurt again. Some day he would show these contemptuous people that he was not to be sneered at.

Loring glanced at the intelligent mask of a face that hid so much stupidity behind it.

"Once his usefulness is finished, the fool will have to be put out of the way," he thought. "He's dangerous. He's just stupid enough to talk."

He had no suspicion that Brooks, too, was thinking identically the same thing about him. On the impostors, Brooks wasted little thought. They would cause him no trouble whatever.

As for his own looming difficulties with the Planet Patrol, his mind was

already turning over various plans that offered a way out. In the first place, of course, the Planet Patrol would be faced with the very real difficulty of proving that he had been personally responsible for the attack on the Moon.

If matters should reach such a state suppose he were to make known the fact that the passengers on the *Comet* were impostors. Suppose he were to claim that he had suspected this fact long before, had sent his men to the Moon to investigate, had been painfully surprised on learning that the impostors had opened fire, and his own men, against his orders, returned the fire. Yes, there was little doubt that things were shaping up beautifully for Hartley Brooks.

There was a pleased smile on his face as he shook hands with Loring to seal their bargain.

CHAPTER XIX

And Plans for Success



THE Brain was hovering in the air above Curt's unconscious body. As Grag and Otho handed him the instruments he called for, he seized them with invisible tractor beams, so that they too seemed to float above Curt with a will of their own.

A small metal rod glowed dully, with the faintest of reddish lights. Simon directed its beams downward, and Curt's skull gradually became transparent, every vein and artery, every section of the brain standing out as clearly as if this were an anatomist's model instead of a living human being. They could see the arteries throbbing as the blood pulsed through them.

"Next, Otho."

Otho handed up a small sphere with a pointed knob projecting from its surface. The Brain's tractor beams held it a few inches above Curt's skull. A thin shower of sparks sprang from the pro-

jecting point, and penetrated beneath the skull. Curt's brain seemed to be on fire. But the placid expression of his face remained unchanged.

Otho handed over still another instrument. And now Simon began to trace a slow path through the cerebral hemisphere, a path so fine and narrow, that only the robot and the android among the watchers could perceive it. No human hand could have possessed the necessary steadiness, no normal human brain could have possessed the knowledge to guide the hand.

But Simon, of whom nothing remained of humanness but the brain itself, had been unequalled in his knowledge of the brains of others. It was he who had first sketched the enormously complicated synthetic brains of Otho and Grag. Only his deep understanding of the nature of mental processes had enabled him to do so. And he had lost nothing of this understanding.

Ever so slowly, he followed the gray twisting paths that determined the life and understanding of a human being. So carefully did he move that before long both Joan and Ezra felt exhausted from the sheer effort of concentrating on what he was doing. But Simon, no longer affected by the weaknesses of ordinary human beings, was beyond fatigue.

He was reknitting mental connections that had been snapped by the shock Curt Newton had suffered on Baldur. If gaps were not to remain in Curt's memory, he must overlook nothing. The stalked lens-eyes followed the thin glowing path he was tracing with an intensity that not even he had ever shown previously.

Eventually, this process too came to an end. From Simon's manner, the others could tell that he was now relaxing. He spoke again to Otho. "The bulb."

Otho passed over a narrow bulb with a metal filament inside. The filament gleamed with a fierce white incandescence that had the effect of seeming to extinguish the fire in Curt's brain. Now the skull became opaque again, and the brain faded slowly from view.

Simon switched the hypnotic ray on

again, this time in reverse. Curt sat up slowly after a moment, opening his eyes.

He blinked. "Hello, I seem to have been asleep!" Then he grinned. "I remember now! Simon, you're a wonder! I even remember all that has happened since I became Blackbeard."

"Curt, you're yourself again!" Joan threw her arms about him delightedly, and he responded.

"Tell us what happened, chief," urged Grag.

"Sure. Back on Baldur, I noticed this fellow, Loring, in the space visors. . . ."

They all listened to Captain Future's story intently.

MARSHAL Ezra Gurney had been staring in delight. "It's marvelous, Simon, even for you! I was wondering how you were going to avoid a slow period of recovery. You avoided all physical operation by not piercing the skull."

"There's no time for congratulating ourselves," rasped Simon sharply, his old unemotional self once more. "I won't restore Curt's physical appearance yet, although eventually there'll be no difficulty about that. For the present, he must return to the *Comet* as Blackbeard."

"I think it would be advisable," decided Curt, "to substitute Grag, Otho and yourself for the impostors."

"That may be rather difficult," murmured Ezra doubtfully. "Loring isn't a fool, and you'll have trouble trying to make the substitution under his nose."

"Not if I have your help and Joan's," returned Curt. "Here's what I plan to do. . . ."

Not long afterward Loring, inside the *Comet*, looked out to see Blackbeard returning with his spectroscopic apparatus. So the man's altered proton-gun had really been able to protect him. Loring was impressed despite himself.

Brooks had blasted off some time before in his own ship, and Loring, absorbed in what he and the financier had agreed to do, was not conscious of the length of time that had elapsed since Blackbeard had set out.

"So your weapon was effective?" he greeted Blackbeard.

"It was against those insects. I don't think it will be against the Planet Patrol."

Loring's eyebrows went up.

"They're here on the other side, in a disguised ship," added Blackbeard. "They're a little suspicious about what happened on the Moon. I'm just warning you to be ready for them."

"Thanks. We've got nothing to hide."

Inside the ship, Blackbeard looked about. Hro Zan, bored as usual, was snoring in his bunk. The two pretended Futuremen were playing cards. Blackbeard's lip curled. To think that these two should consider themselves passable imitations of Grag and Otho!

He put a whistle to his lips, and blew a shrill ultra-sonic note that only the genuine Grag's ears could detect. A few moments later, as Joan and Ezra made their appearance, he heard Loring's amazed voice.

"The Planet Patrol! This is an unexpected honor!"

"I'd like to speak to Curt Newton," began Joan abruptly.

As she had expected, Loring shook his head. "I'm sorry, but you know his condition, Captain Randall."

"I know that the Futuremen have always spoken for themselves, and need no interpreter to explain their thoughts," she snapped. "You have no status here, Mr. Loring, that gives you the right to interfere."

Loring swallowed hard. An angry retort trembled on his lips, but he repressed it. It was better to have no trouble with the Planet Patrol. Let her speak to that fool, Hro Zan, and much good it would do her.

Joan entered the *Comet*, to find the man who posed as Curt Newton already aroused at the sound of a woman's voice.

"Curt, darling!" exclaimed Joan.

Hro Zan blinked. This was the one person who appreciated him, and he was not slow to take advantage of the fact. He kissed Joan before she could avoid him.

"Curt, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing much." Hro Zan sought for a suitable answer, failed to find it. Loring had not expected this interview, and had therefore been unable to rehearse him for it. Hro Zan let his own impulses guide him. "I'm just not being treated right," he complained.

"You poor dear!"

From then on, Hro Zan would have paid no attention to an earthquake. At last, some one who sympathized with him!

MEANWHILE Ezra was arguing hotly with Loring at the entrance port about what had happened on the Moon, with Loring denying that he or the pretended Futuremen had been present. Loring scarcely noticed the genuine Grag and Otho as they stepped by him.

"I didn't know you two were outside," was all he said.

"You were busy talking and didn't notice us step out, boss," came Grag's rumble. "Some of the planets here reminded me of Jupiter, and I wanted to make sure."

"I thought I'd go with him," said Otho, in his character as the *pretended* Otho, alias Shane.

Inside the *Comet*, the two imposters looked up in amazement at hearing what seemed to be their own voices. As they rose to their feet, Blackbeard faced them.

"Just a minute, boys."

"What? Say," growled the Jovian, "do you see what I see, Shane?"

At sight of the genuine Grag and Otho the jaws of their doubles dropped.

The struggle was over before it really started. Otho's fist landed on Shane's jaw, and the man was unconscious before he hit the ground. And Grag's metal hand quickly covered his imitator's mouth to choke off any cry for help. Hro Zan, pouring out his troubles to Joan, noticed nothing.

"Now I'll help Ezra keep Loring busy," said Blackbeard. "Carry these two characters out, and deliver them to Simon. He'll show you where to stow them away. Then, when Joan and Ezra return to the Ingmann ship, you two

come back here, and bring Simon with you."

Thus, it was that when the *Comet* blasted off, leaving the planetoid of heavy matter behind, once more the real Futuremen manned the tear-drop-shaped ship, fitting into their accustomed places. And Loring, as Blackbeard knew, had no suspicion of what had happened.

CHAPTER XX

Showdown at Planet's Core



WEEKS had passed, and the new planet, Futuria, was near completion. A hollow space ten miles in diameter had been left at the very center for Thor to occupy, but only a small tubular corridor leading from the surface had been preserved.

Now, as the *Comet* descended slowly down this corridor, Hro Zan spoke uneasily.

"I hope this thing isn't dangerous."

It was a remark as much out of character as possible for a man who was pretending to be Captain Future. Joan, who heard it, raised an eyebrow. Brooks, who stood some distance away, shrugged. It no longer mattered whether Hro Zan gave the show away or not. Joan and Ezra, whom the Planet Patrol had for reasons of its own insisted on sending along, were in no position to force any change in his plans. For once, thought the financier, he was in absolute control of the situation. And any fool could see that nobody was going to get a ten-mile-thick planetoid through this small shaft.

Blackbeard approached the financier respectfully. Not a muscle of his face betrayed how thoroughly he understood what was going on.

"If you'd care to listen, Mr. Brooks, I'm ready to explain what we intend to do."

Grag, passing nearby, was saved by the expressionless metal of his face from the need of repressing a grin. Mr. Brooks would receive a scientific explanation. He would have no idea of *all* the Futuremen intended to do.

Brooks nodded curtly. "Go ahead."

"The outer surface of the planet has been built up," explained Blackbeard, "of light elements formed from the energy of space by the machine the Futuremen brought back from their quest beyond the System, and from a small amount of imported heavier elements. The core is to be filled with the heavy matter of Thor."

There was an air of quiet authority about the man that impressed Hartley Brooks despite himself. He was actually talking as if the plan were going to be carried out.

"However," went on Blackbeard, "there is a difficulty. If Thor were to be brought here directly, its gravitational attraction would tear Futuria apart. We sought another method of transporting it, and finally found one.

"Our studies on the planetoid revealed that this heavy matter, ordinarily stable, can be transformed explosively, under suitable conditions, into vast amounts of energy."

"By means of illumination with ultra-violet light," put in Brooks.

"Yes, Mr. Brooks. The transformation can be slowed down somewhat, and brought under control by the proper choice of wave-lengths, but it remains nevertheless potentially dangerous."

The financier nodded. He was counting on that danger, as he was also counting on the dozen extra men he had forced Loring into taking along on the *Comet*, just to make sure that nothing went wrong.

"However, I think that everything will take place smoothly here. Government officials, working under our instructions, have erected suitable apparatus on Thor, and will transform the entire planetoid into energy as we have directed, on receipt of our signal. The more difficult part of the process, the recreation of matter from the energy, we shall handle

ourselves. You see that we have prepared the apparatus."

BROOKS gazed at a small squat tower built into the center of the *Comet*, baffling by its apparent simplicity. This was no maze of tubes and electrical apparatus such as he had expected. The tower was transparent, apparently constructed of some plastic material that Blackbeard himself had invented. From the very top, a flexible glass-like tube ended in a flaring nozzle.

"The energy will be retransformed into heavy matter at an incredible rate as it flows from that nozzle. The order of potentials involved is much higher than in the case of cosmic rays, and curiously enough, with this increased potential, the penetrating power of the energy is lost, so that we need not fear stray radiations. The heavy matter will be deposited on the inside of the ordinary matter of Futuria, and the core built up quickly. We shall leave the corridor open until the last, to assure ourselves of a safe exit."

Blackbeard spoke so confidently that Brooks was shaken.

"What of the living creatures on Thor?" he asked.

"They have already been transported unharmed to Pluto. Preliminary experiments on that point with the butterfly-type insects have reassured us. The Interplanetary Government, as you know, is insistent that no harm be done to the fauna of the different System bodies, and we were able to convince them rather easily. Shielded from the Sun's light, the Thorians will be safer than ever."

As the *Comet* approached the center of the new-built planet, the gravity had been slowly diminishing. Now, as they reached the hollow centre, it disappeared altogether, to be replaced, at a nod from Blackbeard to Otho, by the artificial gravity of the *Comet*.

They traveled slowly across the dark void, lit only by the illumination from the tear-drop-shaped vessel. The *Comet* nosed into the opposite side, started to drift back.

"Steady."

A tiny rocket blast held the ship in position. The tower that would spray the heavy energy of Thor into place swung on a specially built platform to the outside of the ship. Blackbeard studied a chronometer, then spoke to Otho. "Signal the men outside. Make sure we're synchronized."

Otho touched a button, and a red light glowed on the panel board. Ten seconds later another red light glowed. Five more seconds, and he threw a lever.

Heavy matter began to spray out upon the inner side of the planet. It shot out, as Blackbeard had predicted, at an incredible rate, thousands of times more rapidly than water could have flowed.

Brooks and Loring stared through special visors, constructed for the purpose of enabling those within the ship to see what was happening. The whole interior of the planet had suddenly burst into brilliant illumination. But strangely enough, except for a slight hiss from the nozzle, the entire process was silent.

They could see the beam of light from the nozzle strike against the curving wall and deposit the huge masses of new matter. As the core grew rapidly larger, the walls began to buckle from the terrific gravitational effect. But wherever there was a sign of weakening, another deposit of heavy matter was skillfully built up at the right spot to correct the strain.

"We're reaching the critical stage," spoke Blackbeard slowly. "As I have told Mr. Loring previously, from the time the hollow is one-tenth filled, the matter, if reconverted suddenly into energy, would suffice to blow the entire planet to pieces. It is possible that the fragments would travel with sufficient force to affect Mars or Earth. But because there would be an interval of warning, of some ten or fifteen seconds, during which the reaction would auto-accelerate, we ourselves, who appear to be in the greatest danger, would be unaffected. In those few seconds, we could attain a speed that would enable us to streak out through the corridor as rapid-

ly as the explosion wave. We might be tossed around slightly, but I am sure that we would withstand the shock.

"However, unless Grag and Otho slip up, as I do not expect them to do, the contingency I have mentioned will not occur. And at present, everything is going well."

LORING and Brooks interchanged glances. They had discussed this possibility beforehand. Let the planet blow up just as it was nearing completion, and Captain Future's reputation would be ruined forever. The disastrous loss of life involved, the terrific expenditure of time and money wasted, would never be forgotten in the history of the System.

And the Futuremen had their orders. Given the signal from Loring, both Shane and Vens would slip up. The *Comet* would streak for the outside of the planet, and the great venture of Futuria would be a thing of the past.

Despite himself, the financier was tense.

He licked his lips nervously. "It looks past the tenth-full stage to me."

"Just about," replied Blackbeard non-committally.

Brooks caught Loring's eye and nodded slowly. The shifty-eyed man swallowed hard. Despite Blackbeard's explanation, he still felt that he would be in danger during the explosion to follow. But there was no help for it now. He raised a trembling forefinger, so that neither Otho nor Grag could miss the gesture.

Blackbeard smiled and did not move.

The seconds ticked by. Brooks' eyebrows went up angrily.

"Well, Loring?" he demanded.

"Otho!" snapped Loring.

"Yes, Mr. Loring?"

"You remember what I told you! Act!"

Blackbeard chuckled. "There's no use building up Mr. Brooks' hopes any longer. You may as well let him know that there will be no explosion." He laughed as he saw the growing confusion and alarm in the eyes of the two men.

"You idiot—" Brooks spoke savagely

to Loring. "You assured me this man would fail!"

Loring shrank back with a cry of terror. The Brain had risen from the deserted portion of the ship, where he had lain apparently motionless for so long. Now he hovered in the air, his stalk-eyes coldly examining both the terrified little man and the enraged financier.

"We happen to be the genuine Futuremen, Mr. Brooks," said Blackbeard quietly. "Loring's confederates are in prison—all but this actor named Hro Zan. My real name, by the way, is Curt Newton."

The financier's face went deathly pale. So Loring, after all, had played him for a fool! His mind a welter of confused and desperate thoughts, he found it impossible to grasp clearly what had happened. He knew only that now was the critical moment, the moment he had so long awaited—and that failure, disgrace and ruin stared him in the face if he did not act.

He saw his empire crashing about him, saw himself standing trial before a grim Interplanetary jury, saw himself condemned to Cerberus and the society of the System's worst criminals for life.

"You double-crosser," he said hoarsely, and his atom-beam caught Loring full in the chest.

The little man's scream died away in a choking gurgle as Brooks turned quickly to the Futuremen, who had been prepared for any move against themselves, but not for this.

Otho plunged forward and threw the murderous financier against the wall of the ship so hard that he lay in stunned silence.

It was at this moment that the dozen men Brooks had planted on board, summoned by Loring's shriek, came plunging into the center of the ship.

Blackbeard, about to relinquish the controls he had been handling, suddenly went pale, as a voice rang out of the radio communicator nearby him.

"Calling the *Comet*! Power out of control! Voltage rising rapidly, and danger of an explosion inside! Prepare for quick escape!"

AT THE sound of the voice, Brooks' men stopped momentarily.

"We've got to get out of here," one of them cried.

Blackbeard was working rapidly at the controls of the matter-transformer. Flight he knew was out of the question. It would mean a giving up of the project, a defeat just as certain as if Brooks had had things his own way.

He spoke rapidly into his own communicator.

"You must have got a few beams of ultra-violet of the wrong wave-length into your reaction rays. Cut out your ultra-violet altogether! Switch on your light absorbers and keep them on!"

The heavy matter which had been building up outside the vessel had ceased to form. Then that which had been deposited began to disappear.

A bewildered voice spoke from the communicator. "Voltage decreasing out here! We don't know how you did it, but thanks anyway, *Comet*!"

"I simply sent a reverse current back to you! Next time be more careful!"

Brooks was rising slowly to his feet. He saw the Futuremen waiting tensely on one side of the ship, saw Hro Zan along with Joan and Ezra standing near Blackbeard, saw his own men waiting like frightened children to learn what would happen.

"Get them now!" he shouted. "Here's your chance!"

The men surged forward once more. Atom-beams lanced forward toward Joan, Ezra and Blackbeard.

But the expected victims did not fall. "We've been ready for you, Mr. Brooks," said Blackbeard grimly. "We are wearing invisible atom-shields."

At that Brooks lost his head finally and completely. He threw himself straight at the apparatus Blackbeard had been handling. He knew that death was certain for him, but if he could wreck the apparatus death would come to Blackbeard, to the other Futuremen, to every one aboard the ship.

Both Grag and Otho were too far away to stop him, and Blackbeard, not

daring to relinquish the controls, felt his heart pound suddenly against his chest. This looked like the end, after all. He had guarded against any direct attack against himself or the others, but he had not counted on an insane suicidal attempt.

A fraction of a second later, Brooks was reeling aside, a cry of despair on his lips. It was Hro Zan who had unexpectedly stopped him. He had hurled himself into the financier's path, and been thrown to one side, to have his chest seared by an atom-gun triggered by one of Brooks' bewildered men. But he had stopped the madman.

Blackbeard noticed the Brain gliding toward him, and knew that they had won. Even as he left the apparatus he had been handling, the Brain's tractor beams took over.

Blackbeard plunged low, caught Brooks around the knees, and threw him back. An atom-ray from one of the financier's own men passed across his face, cutting off his scream of pain and terror.

The man who had killed him threw his gun forward. "If you're really Captain Future, and you've got a shield against this gun, we may just as well surrender. Come on, boys. No use keeping up the fight, especially after the rat who brought us into this tried to kill us all."

"Pick up the guns, Otho," ordered Blackbeard briefly. Then he turned to Hro Zan.

The actor was not yet dead, but he was going rapidly.

"They always said I didn't know how to play the role," he gasped. "They said I was a fool. But I wasn't so bad, was I?" His glazed eyes sought Joan's.

She shook her head, biting her lips. "You were wonderful!"

"I did as well as Future himself would have done. Strange that he should have been aboard all the time . . . I'd have

used him as a model if I'd known. Now all there's left for me is an exit . . . and I always knew . . . how . . . to make . . . them . . ."

His head dropped forward.

Otho had gathered the discarded weapons. Now he herded the men into the rear of the ship again, this time as prisoners.

With Blackbeard once more at the controls, the planet's core continued to grow. They watched in awe as Thor took shape once more inside the new planet. Hours later, the task completed without further incident, and only a small empty space left near the corridor, the *Comet* streaked for the surface.

TWO days—and Curt Newton was himself again. The Brain's uncanny surgery had removed the ugly scars from his face. Only his hair remained black, and under the influence of an antidote which the Brain had applied to counteract the effect of dynatomite gases, that too would soon resume its natural red color.

Joan gazed at him and marveled. "I prefer you this way," she asserted. "Not that you weren't handsome before, in an ugly sort of way—but I do like a clean-shaven face!"

Curt kissed her. "In that case," he said sternly, "you have a great deal of explaining to do. I hear, from reliable witnesses, that you were practically in love with this man Blackbeard!"

"Not exactly." Joan's face was demure. "But there were certain things about him that pleased me."

"Such as?"

Joan began to explain, and Grag snorted. For once, Otho, squirming in sympathy, shared his feelings. There were times when human beings indulged in queer conversations. And for their part, the two synthetic comrades would rather face the dangers of Thor over again, than listen to them!

*Further Exploits of Curt Newton in RED SUN OF DANGER,
Next Issue's Complete Book-Length Novel by BRETT STERLING*



THE AMAZING CREATION OF OTHO

From Bubbling Test-Tubes, Great Scientists Roger Newton and Simon Wright Create a New Being Who Attains Full Mental Growth Within an Astonishingly Short Time!

SIMON WRIGHT emitted a loud call. "Grag, here, quickly!" he cried.

In response, the giant robot ran as rapidly as his metal legs would take him. In all his brief span of life, he had never seen such excitement in the Moon-Laboratory. The aging scientist, his eyes shining, was warming a bubbling fluorescent mass of serum with a burner held in one hand, while with the other he measured a yellowish liquid into a graduate.

Beside him, his face flushed as with fever, Roger Newton was vigorously bending back and forth the lifeless rubbery arms of what appeared to be a great white doll that swam uncertainly in a huge tank in the center of the laboratory.

"Start the thermostat," yelled Simon Wright.

Serum Is Injected

Grag hastened to obey. Moments later, when the tank had risen once more to the proper temperature, and the serum had been injected into the white doll's unresisting arms, the two men relaxed.

Simon Wright dropped wearily into a chair.

"That was close," he sighed. "Too close for comfort."

"A half year's work almost thrown away," agreed Roger Newton. He gestured toward the robot. "Grag's body was much less

trouble. I sometimes wonder why we decided to make this android of colloid, instead of metal."

"Because it was a challenge to our skill," replied Simon thoughtfully. "The search for the proper sort of plastic alone required months. . . . Remember how we made the mistake of attempting to use protein-like condensation products?"

"Only to discover eventually that a simple hydro-sillicane polymer was easier to make and more satisfactory."

Brain Proves Troublesome

"And then the brain." Simon Wright shook his head ruefully. "It took us another month to realize that a terrifically complicated system of synthetic cerebral paths, such as Grag has, not only wasn't necessary—it wouldn't do. A plastic android requires a much less differentiated mass of combined carbon-silicon condensation product. The cerebral paths must be formed after life has begun, and not before."

Grag interposed. "Does that mean, Master, that this new thing will be born with no more sense than a baby—like little Curt?" he inquired.

No Prophets Here!

No more sense than "little Curt." Years later, the robot was to recall this remark, and think of it in wonder. Neither he nor any of the others dreamed of the Curt Newton of the future—the tall, sturdy keen-eyed figure that would be the terror of criminals throughout the System, the brilliant scientist whose mind would absorb all that the Brain could impart, and even surpass his teacher in the magnificence of his achievements. "Little Curt" indeed!

"That's right," answered Simon Wright. "He'll be born without knowledge of any kind."

"He'll make a nice pet," boomed the great robot.

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.

Roger Newton smiled, and left the laboratory. Grag, it seemed, had delusions.

In the part of the Moon-home set aside for the daily routine of living, Roger Newton found his young wife. She was staring out of one of the glassite windows at the bleak lunar landscape. In the distance, a moon-wolf was snarling soundlessly at some unseen rival cowering in a crater.

Moonscape Is Fantastic

No land on Earth, no matter how wild and craggy, could possess the fascinating horror of the fantastic hills and mountains of the Moon. It was a horror that, for strangers, was to persist even long after the Futuremen had built their improved laboratory, and come to regard the forbidding spot as their permanent home. For a young girl, accustomed to the comforts of Earth civilization, and forced to flee for life from powerful and evil enemies, its desolation was almost unendurable.

As Roger Newton joined her, the moon-wolf sprang with bared teeth into the crater. The girl shuddered.

"Now they're tearing each other apart, as happens every day. Oh, Roger, it's so frightening."

"I know." The scientist stroked her hair. "We've been here for more than a year now, and after the novelty wore off, it can't have been pleasant for you. The loneliness, the lack of amusements, the lack of companionship. . . . Simon and I are so busy in the laboratory that for most of the day we might just as well not be here. But it's necessary to stay on the Moon, dear. We have no choice."

"I'm not complaining, Roger."

Seek for Companions

"As a matter of fact," went on her husband thoughtfully, "I've felt the loneliness here almost as much as you have. Simon, of course, is so wrapped up in the work that it matters little to him where he is. But I had hoped, when he created Grag, that he might seem almost like a companion."

She shook her head.

"His appearance is too frightening. No matter how human he is inside, I can't accustom myself to him."

"I think you'll find the android looks human enough. And I believe that you'll like him."

A few days later, Otho was finally born. In contrast to the dramatic and almost terrifying awakening of the robot, Otho's entry into the world was placid, and almost unimpressive. At the proper time, Simon Wright's skillful hand injected a trace of piniferalone, a hormonal extract from the pineal gland, into the serum that circulated through the doll's body.

Doll Begins to Move

Some hours later, Grag, who was observing, noticed the white doll's arms and legs begin to kick spasmodically.

"He's alive, Master," boomed the robot.

Roger Newton and Simon Wright hurried toward the android. They lifted his head out of the thermostat into the artificial air of the Moon-Laboratory. Otho gasped deeply for breath. The next moment his arms and legs flew about in a spasm of excitement.

Otho was already as well-grown physically as he would ever be, and it was only his mental powers that needed to develop. It was necessary for him to learn how to use his arms and legs, how to adjust himself to his environment. He picked this up with a speed that amazed the huge robot.

Otho Stands Erect

The day after he was born, he stood up unsteadily.

"Say, he's doing better already than I expected," exclaimed the robot.

"Naturally," said Simon Wright dryly. "Otho is physically mature, and is growing mentally at the rate of a year a day."

"By all the Moon-devils!" gasped Grag. "How long will it take him to grow up?"

"He won't maintain the same pace for long. But I think that the end of a month should see him a mature android."

The next day, Otho exhibited his delight in the discovery of his own agility, bouncing around the laboratory like a great rubber ball until Grag finally secured him and put him out of harm's way. The day after found him mixing half a dozen chemicals and creating an explosion that blew away a section of the laboratory. The day after that found him holding out some of his own food to the robot and snatching it away in delight as Grag pretended to reach for it.

Shows Love of Mischief

"Why, the green-eyed little devil is trying to tease me," declared Grag.

Roger and Simon Wright smiled. Roger's wife laughed as Otho impishly snatched at one of her own hats and, putting it on his own head, strutted proudly about.

"He likes to dress up," she exclaimed. "From now on, none of our clothes will be safe around here!"

"I don't think we need worry," asserted Roger. "Otho's intelligent. And it won't take him long to learn discipline."

He was right. The android was mischievous, but entirely without malice, and he learned quickly what sort of actions were permitted him and which were forbidden. By the end of the month following his birth, Otho was as quick and alert mentally as the average man, despite the great gaps in his knowledge. And when those were filled, predicted Simon, he would be a better laboratory assistant than Grag or any human being could possibly be.

Otho's First Big Joke

It was then that there occurred the incident that Grag was ever after to think of as the "great double-cross."

It began one day when the robot returned to the laboratory after a short trip over the

surface of the Moon, where he had been digging at a deposit of ore Simon had discovered. The grizzled figure of Simon Wright greeted him.

"You've been gone a long time, Grag. What have you brought back?"

Grag stared in bewilderment. "Why, nothing, Master. You asked me to loosen the ore so that—"

"I ordered you to bring it with you!" The voice that shrieked at Grag was shrill with indignation. "You stupid, clumsy metal imitation of a man, you haven't the brains of a moon-pup!"

"But I distinctly remember—" Grag began again helplessly.

"Don't tell me what I said, you imitation junk-heap. You go right back and bring a ton of that ore with you."

"Yes, Master."

"Just a moment," came the stern order. "I'm taking no more chances with that feeble brain of yours. I'm going to write everything down so that even you can't make a mistake."

Orders Are Canceled

The figure of Simon Wright disappeared into the next room. A moment later Grag heard other footsteps. "I'm waiting—oh, I thought you were Simon, Master."

"What's wrong, Grag?"

"Simon says he ordered me to get a ton of that ore. Now I have to go back for it."

"Nonsense. I distinctly heard him tell you to do nothing but dig it up. And you can't go back because I have something else for you to do."

"But he said—" began the robot.

"Never mind what he said," roared the figure of Roger Newton. "I'm the one that's giving you orders. I want you to take off your right arm and dissolve it in an acid mixture."

"What?"

True Simon Wright Appears

It was at this moment that Simon Wright stepped into the room. Grag turned toward him pathetically.

"He wants me to dissolve my right arm in acid," he complained. "But you told me to go back after that ore. What am I supposed to do?"

"Quite a problem, isn't it?" observed Simon Wright. And just then Roger Newton,

accompanied by his wife, stepped into the room.

The dazed robot's eyes shifted from one Roger Newton to the other. The newcomer caught Simon Wright's glance, and smiled.

"So, Otho, you still retain your childhood passion for disguises?"

The false Roger Newton grinned in delight. "You should have heard the way I fooled him, Master—first as Simon, then as yourself. He didn't know what to do."

Grag Sees Big Light

A light of understanding was dawning in the robot's photoelectric eyes.

"Why, it's that rubbery son of a test tube," he roared. "That mess of colloid, that white-faced imitation of a man!"

"Imitation yourself," returned Otho. "You're nothing but a collection of rusty rivets, a refugee from a scrap yard. You have a muddled brain to go with your metal body. You're—"

Otho's flow of insults was cut short as Grag roared and lunged at him. But almost as the robot's fingers reached him, the android had slipped aside and flashed into the next room. With a bellow of rage, Grag followed.

Roger Newton's wife was laughing so hard that tears were starting from her eyes.

Stay Friends Despite Jokes

Suddenly she stopped short.

"But suppose Grag catches him?"

"He'll give Otho a walloping that he well deserves. But he won't harm him."

Simon Wright nodded. "They insult each other like deadly enemies, but in actuality, there's a great deal of affection between them. They're going to be the best comrades in the world."

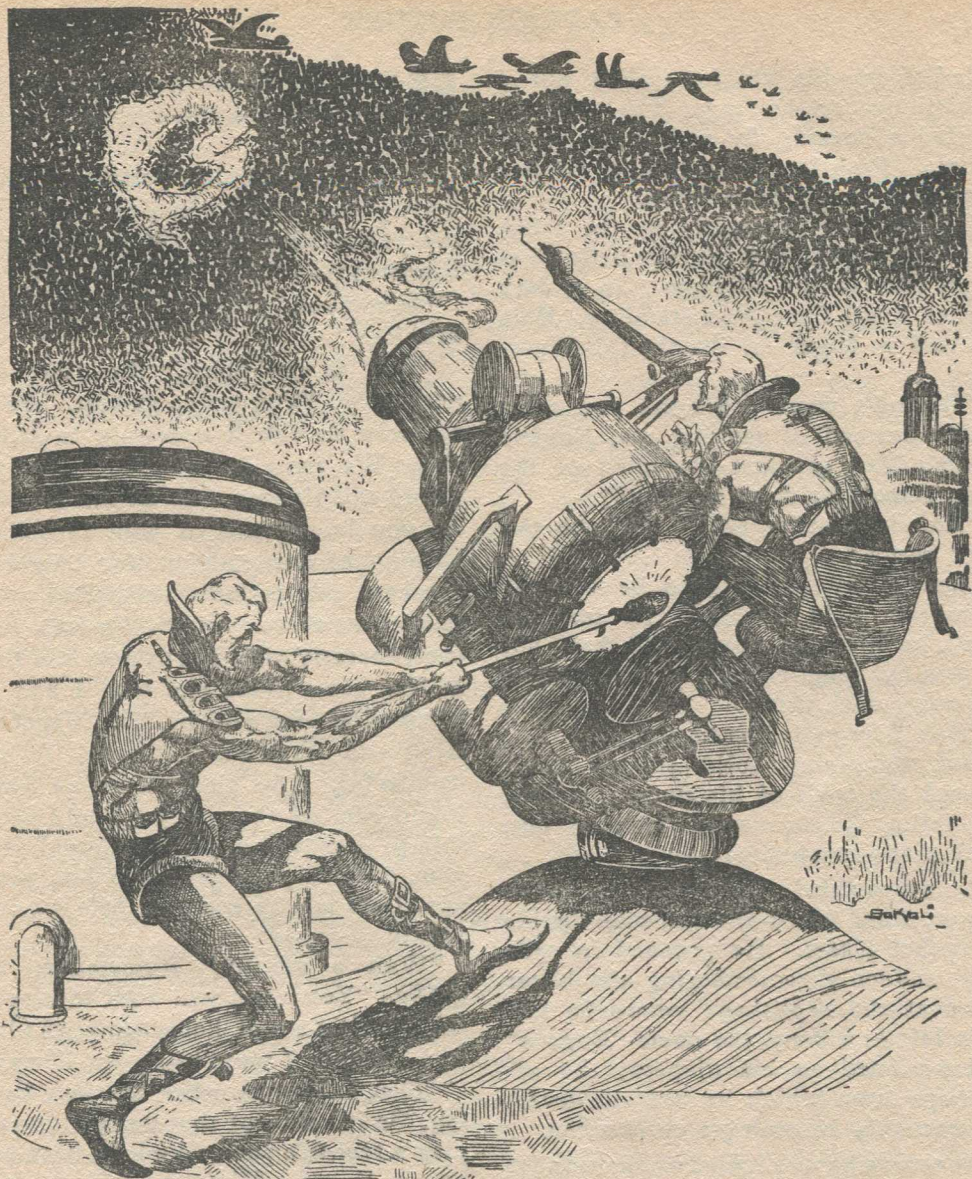
"I'm so pleased," She smiled. "I don't think I'm going to be lonely from now on. Now that Otho's here, even Grag seems more human. And when they start to insult each other—it's as good as being back on Earth watching a show."

"I thought Otho would please you. I'm glad, for your sake, if for nothing else, that we decided to make him differently from Grag. And I think," he added, "that none of us will ever regret making either of them."

Years later, Simon Wright was to remember those prophetic words.



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As Araka pounded the drum and Rumstedder aimed a ring of poison gas sailed toward the plane

VICTORY DRUMS

By **ROSS ROCKLYNNE**

*Broken-down Actor Rumstedder Suddenly Finds Himself
Battling a Horde of Ruthless Invaders on Pluto!*

WITH a yell the bartender turned to the blond young man who sat at a rear table of the smoke-infested, roaring Venusian Jim-Jam bar.

"Hey, Rum," he bellowed. "A couple

of gents outside want a look-see. Pronto!"

"Rum" looked up, scowling. Who would want him at this hour, and what about? He returned his attention to his fourth drink, gulped it down. He in-

hailed from his stogie, puffed out a voluminous smoke-ring. The ring encircled a buzzing fly and threw it off course. Rum laughed nastily. He had been thrown off course, too.

He grabbed unsteadily at the table, and staggered tipsily into the little ante-room outside the barroom. In a dark corner, a tall figure was standing. Rum pointed a finger in drunken belligerency.

"Whatcha want? Whyn't you come inside instead of making me, Eugene Rumstedder, greatest tragedian of the ages, come outside to see you?"

"Remain ka-wite still," said the tall dark figure.

Rumstedder stiffened as he saw the accurately held pyrogun. A holdup? Well, he might be a vaudeville ham, but he was not good enough to let someone get away with this.

"Hah!" he yelled as he jumped.

But something solid shaped itself around the back of his uncut hairline. He fell. Consciousness blanked out. And that—conclusively—was that . . .

A space-ship! Through his half-stupor, Rum heard the tell-tale rumble of rocket blasts. He groaned in self-pity, suddenly remembering the bitter years at the orphanage where he had been left as a baby, the name "Eugene" safety-pinned to his diapers; the orphanage from which he had run away, subsequently becoming a child-actor.

At eleven he was hailed as the wonder of the stage. At twenty-three he played his greatest role. At twenty-six—

At twenty-six he was a vaudeville ham billing himself as the Smoke Ring King. Drink and dissipation taking him further down the scale. A theater-rat whose bad blood was beginning to tell.

Rumstedder groggily opened his eyes. Two men, their trappings a blaze of criss-crossing leather and jewels, stood over him. He gasped.

"We do naught speak the English well," the foremost of the men began haltingly, his fine blue eyes somewhat worried. "But we thought it well to kidnap you."

RUMSTEDDER now saw he was fastened to a silk-covered bed with silver chains.

"Kidnap me?" he yelled. "Why—why, you— Don't you know that when the police hear that the great Eugene Rumstedder—"

He stopped, wanly. He was no longer drunk.

"That is the point," the other said nervously. "You are so ga-reat. We are so sorry we felt it necessary to kidnap you. We come from that pa-lanet you would call Pa-luto, Mis-tar Rumstedder. As you know, men of your race know nothing of our pa-lanet, for they have not been able to build ships that would take them there. We of Pa-luto, however, secretly visit Earth now and then. It was some years ago that I and my companion saw you in 'The Vagabond King'—as Fran-saw Villyah. It was wonderful. This time, when we finally found you, we thought we would not be able to persuade you. We thought that your duty to your ga-reat public would not allow you to accept a part we wish you to pa-lay—"

"Wait a minute," Rumstedder was giddy. "You mean you want to hire me for a part in a real, honest-to-gosh play? You thought I wasn't—ah—at liberty?"

"That," said the other, his face lighting, "is it. Except that we wish you to play a real-life part. We have been sent by our Pa-rime Minister to find a great actor, one who could impersonate our poor King Arako." He dropped his eyes sadly.

Impersonate a king. A real-life part. Until now Rum had forgotten the applause of thousands on which he had been fed. These two were applauding him differently—but tangibly.

"Let's talk this over with a bottle of wine," he suggested hoarsely. "You have some, I hope?"

While they talked, Rumstedder proceeded to get rosily drunk. A sky-full of stars showed through the port of the lounge. The ship was driving at full speed through space. Rumstedder lis-

tened and drank.

And afterwards, when they led him back to luxuriously appointed quarters, he felt like a new man. He was to be a king indefinitely. The present king, staggering under the burdens of royalty, had become insane. And Rumstedder because with make-up skillfully applied he would pass as the king's own double, and because he was a great actor, had been honored with the job.

The transformation, he was told, would be simple. He would be given a knowledge of the Plutonian language, the king's mannerisms, his associates, his personality by means of a machine which, Rumstedder decided, was the same as the hypnobioscope discovered in the Twentieth Century.

The trip across the frightful emptiness between Pluto and Venus took two weeks. An hour out from the planet, Rumstedder stood in front of a mirror, and approvingly surveyed a strikingly handsome man with blond hair, blond mustache, dressed in handtooled, jeweled leather harness. But he was frowning.

No changes had been made in his appearance save clipping his hair, and the addition of a mustache. It did not seem as if he could look like the king. But Rumstedder had long since learned that he was to ask no questions. He shrugged. Who was he to look a gift horse in the mouth?

Not much later, the ship was plowing through Pluto's cold atmosphere. Below were frozen lands. Ahead, a sparkling city shone through the night.

On the roof-top of a towering edifice, the small ship landed. And muffled with a heavy cloak, "King Arako" was taken into the interior of the building, shown into the royal suite, and left to himself.

"We shall send the Prime Minister in the morning," his two captors promised, and departed; which was the last Rumstedder ever saw of them.

Rumstedder looked around the suite. He could not find the bed, the suite was so big. But he did find a bottle of wine. He lapsed into a vaguely discontented sleep on a pillow-covered davenport.

When he awoke, he knew someone had come into the room. His senses swam when he found himself staring up into the face of a girl.

"Huh!" he exploded, at which the girl started back. Her midnight hair was piled in great waves back from her forehead. She was dressed in a lustrous green gown.

HER full lips parted in a delicious "o" of surprise as he lurched to his feet.

She thrust a sheaf of papers at him.

"Y-your morning mail, your majesty!" she stammered.

Rumstedder took an unconscious step toward her. His intentions were to kiss her, and she knew it. But he stopped. Here he was, forgetting himself and his role already. This was the Lady Iya, his private secretary.

"Ah, yes, Iya!" he managed. He extended a well-kept hand. But before he could take the mail, there was the jingle of tiny bells behind him.

"Your majesty will hardly find anything of interest in the mail," a subtly insulting voice spoke. "Iya, return to your office."

Rumstedder turned and was face to face with the Prime Minister. He knew it was he by the sharp nose, the smoke-film eyes, the shoulder-scraping hair, the black, bell-hemmed cape. Rumstedder disconsolately felt his kingship slip away from him, at least in part.

But he had to play his role.

"Good day, Pintor," he said. "Ah, yes, Iya, best to let the Prime Minister handle the mail today. Then leave us alone."

The Lady Iya dipped in a curtsy. She thrust the mail into Pintor's hands and with a strange look at Rumstedder hurried from the room.

Pintor's eyes lidded. He made no pretense at friendship. "You are to remember that you are no king, merely an actor," he said. "Furthermore, please understand that the Lady Iya can be none of your concern, particularly since after this crisis, we are to marry." His smoky eyes flicked sardonically. "Please

to sit down, your majesty."

Rumstedder sat down without saying a word.

Pintor stood over him, cold contempt in his expression.

"There is no time to be lost, your majesty," he said. "Please let me explain the complete situation. You already know the general structure of civilization on this planet. Pluto is no lush, fertile world. It doesn't support a great population. We have no appreciable day and night. The Sun is too far away to make much difference. The whole population of Pluto is gathered in two great cities—Dargantala to the north, our traditional enemies; and this city, Presmotigo, of which you are—ah—the king. You know of our vast farmlands, electrically heated under the soil. Also, you understand the contention that has existed between the two cities over these vast areas.

"Now," and he pointed a jeweled finger at Rumstedder, "it is your job to save Presmotigo."

"My job to save Presmotigo," Rumstedder echoed faintly.

"And not to save it from Dargantala, but from itself. Presmotigoans are now imbued with a patriotic war fever. General Kanig had impressed upon the people the insane desire to acquire Dargantala's farmlands. I have been unable to counteract General Kanig's war fever, and the—man you have succeeded was mentally incompetent to do so. Therefore, your first act as king will be to address the people from the balcony of your palace. It has been circulated that you have recovered from a siege of illness."

"What do I tell 'em?"

"The speech will be prepared. In the morning, you will learn it. In the afternoon, you will deliver it as only a great actor can deliver it."

Rumstedder felt a warm glow of pride.

"I'll have them throwing down their arms after the first ten minutes," he said confidently.

"See that they do." Pintor's narrowed eyes surveyed him for a moment. He turned sharply toward the door. "In the

meantime you will remain in your suite. Your meals will be served here. You will ask questions of nobody."

The door closed with a click. Rumstedder scowled. What kind of a king was it that did not have the run of his own country?

But the next afternoon came along to bolster him. Pintor had come in the morning, handing him his speech. And now, outside the balcony, wave upon wave of cheers were sounding. Pintor ushered Rumstedder onto the balcony. Rumstedder was stricken with stage-fright. There were thousands of Presmotigoans going mad at the sight of him. He trembled. He gagged, but then, as always before the bright lights, he recovered. He raised his hands for silence.

SOMETHING happened to him during that speech. He started as an actor. He ended up a king!

He spoke with emotion, with fine histrionic shadings. "The Dargantalans are friendly. In a personal talk with the Dargantalan minister, we, your king, were assured of friendliness. We in turn promised our everlasting friendship to the Dargantalans. And yet, rumor has reached our ears that as the result of an unscrupulous man's activities, as a result of his lying propaganda, the people are being inflamed with a ravaging war fever.

"Subjects, it is our wish—"

The change from actor to king was subtle. He merely forgot that he was acting. From his subconscious came a consciousness of true royalty. He was talking to his people. They were wrong to make war on the friendly Dargantalans.

The applause was beyond anything he had been accorded in his acting days. His pulse did not thrum with the pride of that applause, but with the certainty that he had convinced them to lay down their arms.

He stumbled back from the balcony. Pintor regarded him with awe.

"You were magnificent. You have shown them the futility of remaining

armed. Whatever we do now, the Presmotigoans will be behind us."

And such Rumstedder discovered was the truth. The next day, Pintor rushed in waving sheafs of papers. These were petitions demanding that the army be disbanded, the anti-aircraft positron guns be deprived of power, and that General Kanig be jailed.

All of Pintor's cold dignity was forgotten. Excitement glittered in his smoky eyes.

"Do you see what it means?" he cried. "The people have empowered you, their king, to turn off the power of the positron guns. That will be your next job. In the meantime, General Kanig has already been thrown into the palace dungeons."

There was a faraway look in Rumstedder's eyes. He jerked himself back to the present.

"Turn off the power of the positron guns?" he repeated, staring at Pintor.

Pintor was impatient. "Certainly. The positron guns, a full thousand of them, are spotted throughout the city. But they receive their power broadcast from a central station. By tradition, and by an innate ability, you only, the king, can turn off the power."

"How?" demanded Rumstedder.

Pintor's eyes were hostile. "By a telepathic command which you alone possess." He added softly, "Remember. You have done a magnificent job of saving Presmotigo from its folly, but only by following my directions. I'm producing the show, in a manner of speaking—you'll recite the lines. The ceremony takes place tomorrow."

He launched into a torrent of instructions and left abruptly.

Rumstedder stood where he was, shaken with his own thoughts. A strong feeling of royalty pulsed through his mind. Where had it come from? Had Pintor hypnotically inducted it into him?—hypnotically given him the telepathic power to turn off the power station? Such must be the truth.

For the first time since the speech, Rumstedder's erect shoulders fell. One could not feel himself a king and at the

same time know the humiliation of ignominious beginnings. . . .

Contrary to Pintor's instructions, and from a grim sense of rebellion, Rumstedder made plans to explore the city. The lackey who brought his steaming meal that evening disrobed at Rumstedder's stern command. Rumstedder put the cured leather clothing over his own regal harness. As a lackey, he passed from his suite, out the rear of the palace. A vagabond king!

He strode along the street with shoulders squared. The night was chill. The Sun was down. The stars were snow on the sky. Vehicles with one wheel moved magically along narrow streets. Store windows blinked. Citizens brushed by without realization of who he was.

He turned a corner, ran full tilt into a heavily veiled figure. A woman. He heard her slight gasp. Then she was on her knees before him. It was the Lady Iya.

"Your majesty!" Her great blue eyes were fastened on his in amazement.

"Iya," he exclaimed.

He acted quickly, and drew her down a dark side street. He managed a smile, though that was hard when his heart was beating so unaccountably fast.

"Iya, what are you doing here on the streets?" he inquired.

"I might ask the same of you, your majesty," was her awed answer.

THEN she bit her lips, realizing the full extent of her impudence.

Timidly she placed a hand on his arm.

"Today—the speech, sire—you were magnificent," she ventured. "I also was caught up in General Kanig's propaganda. I, too, had been led to believe the Dargantalans were anxious to enslave us. But how wrong we have been. To think that General Kanig made us believe his story of the hundred winged craft the Dargantalans have prepared to level our city to the ground. Had it not been for you, we might soon be engaged in another bloody war."

"Our people have been told the truth," Rumstedder said graciously.

She then told him she often walked alone in the deep night. She stood motionless, wordless; then, as if awaiting his command.

"You are beautiful, Iya," said Rumstedder.

She curtsied quickly. "Thank you, your majesty."

"You may take your walk with me."

"Oh, thank you, your majesty," she said gladly.

She fell into step, walking lightly but without conversation. Rumstedder contrived for her to lead the way, though she did not know it.

By covert questioning, he discovered that the city was three miles in diameter, that it supported a fleet of thirty airplanes which were constructed of extremely light and fragile vegetable substances. There was little metal on Pluto. Since the gravitation was small, their method of locomotion, flapping wings, was entirely feasible.

What interested him more than anything else were giant "bass drums" set on pedestals at various points through the city. Cautiously, he questioned Iya, as they halted beside the mounting of one.

"But your majesty," she cried, in surprise. "Was it not you who condemned them as obsolete in warfare?"

Rumstedder colored. "At the advice of the prime minister, however. But how they work—"

"It is quite simple, your majesty. The tank next to the drum contains a terrible phosphorescent poison gas. The operator swings the drum on its giant screw, fills the drum with gas, and spews it out of a nozzle at attacking planes."

Both drum faces were made of a vegetable substance which boomed when Rumstedder struck them. He saw a detachable nozzle in the front drum face.

"They have not yet emptied the tanks nor dismantled the projectors," Iya explained. "There are about a hundred. They are useless because wind resistance turns the streams of gas into great clouds which drop back to the city streets and kill our own people."

Rumstedder smiled. "I could bring a

plane down with one of these," he mused.

Iya's eyes were big. "Could you really? But the gas would not go high enough. Well, it does not matter. Now that we are at peace, we will need no weapons at all."

When Rumstedder took his leave of her near the palace, she looked at him strangely.

"Sometimes—it is so queer—I feel you are not Arako at all, your majesty. But that is silly. Your illness may have changed you."

She was standing close to him. There was something about Iya, her slim, royal carriage, that awoke in him a hunger. But he dare not ask if she were in love with Pintor. He took his leave of her with a gruff, kindly word, and was gone.

Back in his suite, he released the lackey, and then sat in the dark, trying to untangle his thoughts.

What was it about this whole situation that struck the wrong note? Why did he look so much like King Arako that even Iya couldn't tell the difference?

Rumstedder remembered little of the ceremony of the following day, but he was destined to remember vividly the events that occurred afterward. Pintor arrived, laboring under a taut, unexplained excitement. He gave Rumstedder last minute instructions.

Glittering robes were draped on Rumstedder's shoulders. He was led from the palace in a series of parades. Then into a carriage, riding between roaring thousands of waving Presmotigoans. Music sounded, as Rumstedder ascended in grandeur the great, milk-white stairs of a mighty, colonnaded building. He walked between rows of nobles, his eyes resting with unkingly interest on those of the Lady Iya at the end of the line. She flushed and lowered her eyes.

WHAT he considered a quite impossible moment had come. Here were doors, buttressed, physically impregnable, and by mere mental command, by a power which he alone possessed, they were to swing open.

Rumstedder gulped and hoped that

the show would not be spoiled at the last minute. He whispered the command.

"Doors, open!"

And so the doors opened. And the crowd cheered and roared. Other impossible things happened. Other doors opened and Rumstedder found himself facing the mighty complex of machinery which automatically supplied power to the positron guns. He walked between banks of softy glowing tubes. He hurled his mental command. The tubes went out.

He turned and left the building. The doors were left open. Only a corps of technicians could start that mighty atomic-power plant to working again.

The great peace-gesture was finished.

Back in his suite, Rumstedder expected to see the prime minister waiting for him. There was no one. Rumstedder waited—and waited. He began to walk up and down, biting at his nether lip. Something was troubling him.

He was uneasy. A vast quiet had settled on the palace. An ominous quiet. Rumstedder knew his imagination was getting him. He was worried simply because his duties were done and Pintor would now send him back where he came from. He would never see the Lady Iya again.

And yet was he worrying about that? He found himself listening, waiting, for something. His spirits drooped lower and lower, as an hour, two hours passed, and still Pinton did not show up. He gave a savage curse. Thoughts of his former existence, his shadowed beginnings, the humiliation of being a nobody, came back to plague him. He sank into a chair, lost in utter dejection.

And then came the smell of smoke.

Rumstedder sprang up in alarm. He whirled. A blood-red sheet of flame shot up past the windows. Choking smoke bellowed in. Then there were cries in the hall, running feet. Came a tremendous clattering at the door. It burst inward. A guard stood on the threshold, framed in smoke.

"Your majesty," he shouted. "The palace is in flames. Shall I lead the way for your escape?"

Rumstedder's first thought was Iya. He stood as if frozen. His lips finally moved.

"Save yourself, guard," he said. "Your king will work his own salvation."

The guard disappeared. Rumstedder leaped for the door, only to see Iya come running through. Her face was tear-stained. She was choking from the smoke.

"Your majesty, I have discovered a plot," she said. "Pintor forced me into the plane on the palace roof. He told me that Presmotigo was doomed. The entire enemy air fleet is about to attack us."

Rumstedder grabbed her.

"You don't know what you're saying," he cried.

But even as he denied it, the truth was smashing at his brain with blinding clarity. The sight of Pintor, standing in the doorway with a pyrogun, completed Rumstedder's education.

The truth, as Rumstedder saw it then, was sickening. So he was an actor. They had hired him because he was an actor. Hah! Rumstedder gagged at his own thoughts, and on his own opinion of himself. They had hired him because he was a gullible fool.

He knew he would squirm in self-disgust at the truth, until the moment of his death, which, probably, was not far distant.

He took the only chance that remained open to him, though. He thrust Iya to one side, and with the same motion picked up and threw an empty wine bottle. The wine bottle struck Pintor's arm, and the pyrogun flew from his hand.

Rumstedder leaped toward Pintor. He wrapped his long fingers around the man's neck. Pintor made a gurgling sound. His knee came up with agonizing forces. Rumstedder sailed back, landed against the wall in a sitting position. By the time he was cognizant of events, he saw the wine bottle coming back at him. It ricocheted off his head. His muscles turned into wet, sodden ropes as needles of pain shot through his head. He went down remembering with clarity the

flames that licked in from the open corridor.

A racking cough shook him back to consciousness. He crawled to hands and knees, choking in smoky blackness. His eyes opened, and flames rolled around him.

THE doorway was blocked. He looked toward the window and in another half dozen seconds, had reached it and was squirming along the ledge outside. Soon he managed to dart into another window, beyond which no flame showed. He pounded down a stairs.

Flame gushed. He hugged the wall as he descended. He reached the floor below, and screamed as the whole floor gave way beneath his feet. Miraculously, he found himself erect, beating at smoldering places on his clothing. Three more flights to go.

He took advantage of every break in the flames.

But when he reached ground level and easy escape, he went in another direction, toward the rear of the palace, where he knew the dungeons were located. He pounded down the steep, musty stairs, one thought uppermost in his mind—General Kanig. He was in the dungeons, the one man who could wield the power to help Rumstedder with the plan that had occurred to him. An enemy airfleet was on its way. The positron guns were useless. There was only one way to repair that inconceivable blunder.

Rumstedder grabbed up the heavy pike a guard had left behind, smashed at the massive lock on the door to the cell block. The lock cracked in two. The door's own weight swung it open.

Rumstedder plunged into the river of smoke that came rolling out.

A voice blasted from the tunnel, roaring. Kanig, perhaps, the only man who could gather men for Rumstedder's plan? Rumstedder roared back.

"Ho, there." Rumstedder stopped in his tracks as the weary, amused voice spoke from a near cell. "We think you had best take time out to free your own king, shouter," said the voice.

Rumstedder stumbled forward, stupidly.

"King Arako," he cried.

A bearded face looked from the cell, swept Rumstedder's face with sharp eyes.

"Well," Arako said unsteadily. "Perhaps we both but look into a mirror? Or are we both mad?"

The mad king, Rumstedder thought. Mad? No, this was another facet of Pinto's treachery. Refusing to close down the power station, Arako had been thrown into a cell, and Pintor had looked around for a substitute.

"We do look alike," said Rumstedder.

He brought the pike down crushingly. Arako stepped out, bearded, his lips tense. His hand grasped Rumstedder's shoulder, his blue eyes held a piercing light.

"'Look alike' is inadequate to describe the situation," he muttered. "However, the time for explanations could be best used to keep our general calmed down." He smiled gravely at Rumstedder, then turned and went loping down a leftward tunnel. General Kanig was shaking the dungeon with his howls.

They found his cell, and Rumstedder used his pike again. Kanig came bursting out, his granite-bearded jaws moving in outraged profanity. He stopped stock-still when he saw the two rescuers. His heavy face went pale as death.

"What does this mean?" he began in a strangled voice.

"We look alike," said Arako, gravely.

Rumstedder was too excited to appreciate the grim humor. "I'm an imposter. To blazes with it though. There's bigger battles to fight. We have a city to save."

He rushed through a resume of the story. Kanig made a motion toward him.

"You fool," he howled. "You're not a double. The explanation is different."

Rumstedder howled back at him.

"There's an air fleet on the way. We have to beat them off."

Kanig was panting in a tempest of rage. "And how will we beat them off? Even in my cell I heard about this mad policy to reduce the city to helplessness.

There are no defenses. We might as well die here as perish in the ruins of a toppling city."

"Says you," a voice dripped with scorn. "If you'll listen to me—"

He began to talk.

ARAKO laughed shortly when he had finished.

"I doubt whether the plan is workable," was his objections.

"Workable?" Rumstedder blew up. "I've done it myself on a smaller scale. You must give this thing at least a try."

He stopped in a rage. Arako and Kanig looked at each other.

As they fought their way out of that raging furnace, Rumstedder thought miserably of the Lady Iya. It was an apparent fact that Pintor intended to take her with him to Dargantala in the royal airplane on the palace roof. Pintor, he or his henchman, had set fire to the palace, hoping thus to get rid of Rumstedder, King Arako, and General Kanig. Rumstedder groaned.

They made ground level, and dashed their way into a panic-stricken crowd, the general beating at his flaming beard. When Rumstedder looked around, he saw that Kanig had left. He had gone to gather his men together. The projectors, the whole kit and kaboodle of them, should soon be at work.

All thought of kingly distinction was gone as Rumstedder and Arako ran through cold, windless streets, the burning palace bathed the city in a crimson glare. They reached the first of the poison gas projectors.

Together, the two men detached the nozzle from the front face of the giant drum. There was now only a dark, eight-inch hole, with an opening and closing valve operatable from the control chair.

"The drum stick, now," Rumstedder panted. He and Arako tore most of the clothing from their bodies. Rumstedder wrapped this around the spear-point of the pike, securing it with his sandal thongs. He thrust the long "drum-stick" at Arako.

Arako grinned and swung the stick in practice.

Boooooom!

Rumstedder bounded into the control chair, wincing at the metal on his bare flesh. He put his eye to the periscopic eye-piece. When a plane was centered on the cross-hairs. . . .

The control board was complex. Arako shouted instructions. Within minutes Rumstedder had the drum under control, swinging it in all conceivable upward angles. A horizontal plunger controlled the entrance of the phosphorescent poison gas into the drum. He pushed in the power, and then slumped back with a sigh.

"Ready," he told Arako. Arako nodded grimly, his eyes fixed to the dark east.

Rumstedder looked around. Citizens were running toward the site of the burning palace. He guessed they didn't even know of the air attack about to take place.

Arako yelled suddenly. He was pointing into the star-frosted sky.

"They come!"

And come they did. Rumstedder's stomach turned over as he heard the full-throated thunder of the approaching fleet—the crescent shaped armada of Dargantala, flickering like so many stars as their mobile wings beat against air. Soon they would drop atomic bombs.

But no bombs dropped as the fleet came sweeping along.

"The curs think to terrify us first," Arako shouted angrily. "They think us defenseless. Give the word! Give the word!"

The fleet broke, dipping and diving like gnats over carrion. One plane now flapped along in a line that would put it in range of Rumstedder's projector. He felt nerveless. Had Kanig succeeded? Had he gathered men together? Were they at their posts, preparations made?

And what if the plan did not work. It could not work. The whole thing was madly fantastic. And yet those planes were light, fragile, slow-moving. . . . So ran Rumstedder's sickening thoughts as he caught the approaching

plane on the cross-hairs of the eye-piece. He swung open the intake valve. The drum was filling with gas. Another instrument opened the ejection valve. He held his breath, then blasted out a single word.

"Swing!"

In the immeasurable moment which lay between the command and Arako's answering stroke.

Boooom!

The sheer absurdity of the plan came to Rumstedder. It was well to play tricks before an audience as the Smoke Ring King. Feasible to knock a man off balance at a distance of forty feet. But to hope to bring an entire air-fleet down in the same way was but an indicator of insanity.

HOWEVER, the die was cast. He watched leadenly. Arako pounded once at the drum face opposite the ejection hole face, and at a velocity of more than a hundred feet a second—

A phosphorescent ring of gas hurtled into the air for two hundred and fifty feet and coiled itself around the plane.

Rumstedder yelled hysterically, his withheld feelings released. The gas ring, in its slow, equalized expansion, was a diabolically beautiful sight, billowing like floss glowing with brilliant sheen against the sky.

What actually happened was more devilishly satisfying to Rumstedder's soul. The ring retained its shape until the moment of impact. Then the plane literally staggered under the force of the blow. The ring broke up, softly curled around the plane, reached inside with many-fingered tentacles.

The plane, an insect fatally wounded, tipped over on its side, its wings missing a half-dozen beats. The nose pointed downward. It screamed in its flight. It disappeared behind a tiered building. The sound of its point-blank crash was audible.

"It worked," Arako howled gleefully at the sky. "Quick, now—another, before they collect their wits."

The second ring went home, forced the nose of the ship up. It went into a

tail-spin. Two planes down, forerunner of the disaster which shortly was to befall the whole Dargantalan fleet.

"The other projectors," Arako called to Rum. "General Kanik has his men at work."

It was true. Scores of brilliant rings were puffing up over the city of Presmotigo. And scores of planes, in the first three minutes of action, came crashing. Most of the rings missed their mark. Other rings, even though they missed, were drawn to the planes by the planes' motion through the air—a suction effect. Poison gas did its work.

Arako worked like mad, sweat streaming from his near-naked body. Seventy-eights of the Dargantalan planes came down before any of the pilots understood enough of what was happening to activate and then drop their atomic bombs. But bombs finally did fall, and where he sat Rum could see the livid bursts of the explosions. Fragments flew.

With a mere dozen of the enemy planes in the sky, the air-fleet of Presmotigo was at last manned. They buzzed upward, ludicrously slow-moving in contrast to the heavier, more powerful craft of Earth.

Rumstedder sent out concentric rings of gas, now. They were more effective than a single ring. In this manner, he emptied the gas tank. No more rings came forth. Arako, fatigue eating at his bones, hunkered down on his haunches, gleaming with perspiration, chuckling to himself in glee.

The other projectors were still working, now and then crippling another hostile plane. Once in a while, the enemy sent a Presmotigoan plane leafing down in flames. From numerous points in the city, fires were in competition with the flaming spire of the palace.

The last Dargantalan plane dropped. Rumstedder felt his muscles relaxing in sheer relief. Then Arako was on his feet, pointing, his face clouded.

"Off to your left," he shouted. "My own private plane. There—and it must be Pintor. We must bring it down."

Rumstedder saw the plane alluded to.

It was truly the royal plane, the double-sun insignia showing plainly on the fuselage.

Pintor—and the Lady Iya.

Arako made a strong, savage gesture.

"Come on," he cried. "There's a projector in the next block that was working until the last enemy plane went down. The victory is no victory if the traitor escapes."

Rumstedder was swung half-way around in the metal chair, his heart a stone in his breast. Arako had started away—to send a poison gas ring against Iya as well.

"Wait a minute," Rumstedder called. Arako turned, one foot on the dais steps, his face impatient.

"An air ring," Rumstedder snapped.

"An air ring?" repeated Arako, looking at Rumstedder without comprehension.

"You don't have to have smoke or gas," Rumstedder explained. Excitement and dread took hold of him.

"Come on!" he yelled.

ARAKO reacted to what was nothing less than a command, though he was plainly angry at what he thought a fool's plan.

The royal plane was moving slowly. It was zigzagging painfully, making little headway. It was keeping itself in the air only by a miracle. Almost the entire tail was burned away. Rumstedder grinned tautly. So Pintor, thinking to make an easy escape, had permitted the palace fire to turn against him. All this while, he had been fighting the fire that had virtually ruined his steering mechanism.

Rumstedder caught the plane on the hair-line. He forced himself to give Arako the word, for he could not know what would happen to Iya when the plane crashed.

Arako swung. Apparently, nothing emerged from the drum. But something did. The flapping wings stopped momentarily. The plane sagged down. Arako swung again and again as Rumstedder moved the drum to keep the plane on the hair-line. The plane, buf-

feted by an amazing storm, turned over and then fluttered down. At the last second it plunged.

Arako was off the dais then, speeding toward the site of the crack-up. Rumstedder raced after him, and outdistanced him. He went charging around a corner. The plane was crumpled on the cobbled street like a tattered moth.

A figure rose from the tangle of wreckage as Rumstedder came up, a figure that held a pyrogun. Pintor's sharp face was white and coldly impassive. As Rumstedder shot toward him, the pyrogun went off. A red-hot needle jabbed through his shoulder. It did not stop Rumstedder.

He grappled with Pintor and bore the man backward. Pintor's lips twisted in a snarl. He clawed and screamed as Rumstedder forced the pyrogun around so that it pointed at Pintor's chest. The man's breath was hot in Rumstedder's face. They stood like statues, straining for victory, each determined to conquer.

"Traitor," said Rumstedder. The pyrogun went off. Pintor sagged. There was an unpleasant burning odor on the air. Rumstedder made a convulsive motion with his hands, and Pintor, quite dead, dropped and rolled.

Rumstedder stood there panting, blood pounding in his pulses. He turned then, in time to see Arako stooping over Iya, whom he had taken from the wreckage. He went over and dropped to his knees beside her. He took one of her hands in his. Her eyes were open.

She smiled bemusedly.

"I don't know which one to call your majesty," she said.

Rumstedder helped her to a sitting position.

Arako's lips were crooked in a puzzled smile. "That you should have forgotten me, Iya," he mourned.

Rumstedder told him the story, including every detail. She caught her breath. Her eyes moved to Pintor, on the ground. No emotion save of relief crossed her face. With Rumstedder's assistance she arose to her feet. She stood close to him, holding onto his arm, still looking at Pintor, who was dead.

"It is good," she said at last. "It was but a political marriage, arranged between our families." She shuddered. Then she gave a little frightened gasp as she saw Rumstedder's burned shoulder. He winced as she touched it, with gentle pity.

A howl split the Plutonian night. General Kanig came swinging into sight, followed by a half dozen of his soldiers.

"So," he cried as he saw Rumstedder. "The impostor king!"

Rumstedder's jaw came out.

"I'm here," he said. "And I'll take my medicine."

"He'll take his medicine?" The great man was thunderstruck. "And where did you learn of the weapon that saved our city?"

Rumstedder explained wearily. "I used the same kind of projector in my act, only on a smaller scale. It could put out a match at the back of the auditorium. Or blow a late-comer's silk hat from his head. Or knock a man off balance at forty feet—all according to the force used. Sometimes I used just air—no smoke. It just happened that the poison gas projectors were fitted to the task. The planes were too light and too slow.

"It's quite scientific. Gaseous surface tension holds the rings together. I was able to shoot small streams of the gas upward. It eliminated the difficulty caused by solid streams of the gas dropping back over the city. It's an old idea. Back in the twentieth century on my planet, they were talking about throwing smoke rings from smokestacks to eliminate dirt. Such rings could be shot clear up to the stratosphere."

HE added as an afterthought: "The fact that there's no day or night here helped. Some of my acts were ruined in drafty theatres."

Kanig nodded, his lips working with emotion.

"Have you ever wondered why you were given the name Eugene?" he asked.

Rumstedder did know, now. Old John Rumstedder, his tutor, had told him what the name meant.

"I didn't think it was literally true, though," he said.

"The story begins a quarter of a century ago," said Kanig. "I was present when the late queen gave birth to her twin sons."

Arako started. His bearded face paled.

"Arako was born some hours before the other," Kanig continued grimly. "It was feared there would be political differences later on over the throne. The former king gave me the task of taking the unwanted twin to Earth. As was the tradition, however, the king first gave to each of the twins, by means of the hypnobioscope, the subconscious telepathic ability to will the machinery of the central power station to stop. Pintor, too, knew the secret of the twin sons.

"It is true," he said gruffly. "Pintor, however, kept track of the twin son. Pintor's father was Dargantalan. His loyalties to that city remained, though he was born in Presmotigo."

Rumstedder felt Iya's small hand nestling in his.

"And the name Eugene?" he asked.

Kanig fondled at his scorched beard.

"I gave you into the hands of our scouts on Earth. It was they who suggested the name Eugene—"

Rum broke in, crossing glances with Arako.

"Now the problem our father sought to prevent arises after all, you think?" he persisted.

Arako's fine eyes were pained, helpless. "I would not have it so."

"And I wouldn't, either. There's only one king in Presmotigo. It isn't I. You see, I'm still an actor—the Smoke Ring King. Up until now, I've been ashamed of that, but—well, the Dargantalan fleet no longer flies. I thought I had sunk as low as I could, but the name Eugene—well, I'm going back to my profession—" he swung toward Iya, flushing painfully—"if Iya will go with me?"

"Your majesty—!" She caught herself and smiled gladly. She curtsied to Arako. "I do not know if my king will permit."

Arako's glance was kindly. "Your king so permits."

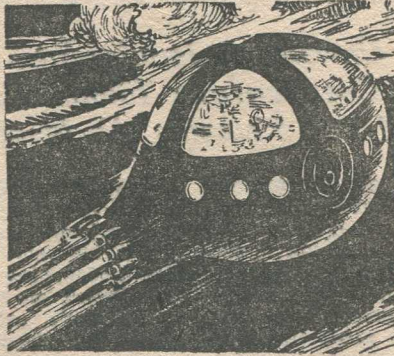
"I will go with—with Eugene then," said Iya.

Rumstedder found his arms around her, unaware and uncaring that Kanig and Arako were withdrawing, smiling their pleasure. Rumstedder thought then of the hours of despair, of self-

loathing, of loneliness in which he had submerged himself. Strange how much the true meaning of a name could have made—if he had known the implications behind it!

He kissed Iya tenderly.

Eu-gene . . . well born!



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THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW

FUTURIA, the PLANET of WONDER

Despite a Few Unwelcome Immigrants, Such as Jovian Fire-Men and Carnivorous Plants, the Futuremen's Strange World Still Remains the Ideal Place to Live!

THE planet created by the Futuremen is the only one in the System that contains a place where normal humanoid beings are accustomed to walk upside down. The Institute of Pure and Applied Gravitation, covering several square miles of ground, has for years conducted experiments on the effect of variable gravity on plant life, and one of its Rare Plant Departments is maintained under reverse gravity.

Once inside, of course, a visitor soon becomes accustomed to seeing top and bottom interchanged, and soon loses any idea that he is walking on his head. But as seen from the outside, the entire group of buildings and greenhouses presents a weird appearance.

Only the plant life bears its familiar aspect—and this is the one thing that is really abnormal. Grown under natural gravity, it has been transplanted here in the usual Earth fashion, and then subjected to reversed gravity.

Plants Grow Huge

The appearance of the plants is thus affected amazingly. With gravity pulling them upwards, they grow to many times their usual height. These experiments have already led to valuable discoveries of hitherto unsuspect functions of plant cells.

The Upside-Down Institute, as it is called, is but one of the many wonders of Futurian life. The transportation system is another.

Futura is the one planet that maintains practically free lateral and vertical transportation for all inhabitants. The costs are paid by taxes on special magnetic clothing sold only by the government. A man wearing this clothing need only step into the proper lane, at certain designated station, and be whisked away at a speed close to a hundred miles an hour.

As seen from below, he has all the appearance of flying, and the Futurian skies, full of soaring men, women, and children, never fail to intrigue visitors.

Eases Land Shortage

The new planet has had a great effect on System economic life. Five years after completion of its core, it was ready to receive immigrants.

But even before that, the news of its creation had spread panic among land speculators, and eased the land shortage. The Interplanetary Government could complete its landscaping at leisure, while the Futuremen went on to other tasks.

Futura's orbit is an ellipse, averaging about 160,000,000 miles from the sun. By treating the planet as a huge space-vessel, and giving it the proper acceleration from time to time, its motion can be easily controlled.

The use of gravity screens prevents it from disturbing the stable orbits of Mars and Earth.

Futura itself is smaller than Earth, but has much more available living space. Its surface is mostly dry land. Only two small artificial oceans have been created to serve as planetary reservoirs, and from these, a network of canals radiate over the entire surface.

However, the planet does not show all the regularities of design some government officials hoped it would.

Planet Still Shrinks

The reason lies below the surface. Though previously packed down under high pressure, the materials used in its construction have undergone further shrinkage that is still continuing. Great folds in the surface have formed the beginnings of mountain ranges, wide-spread depressions indicate the beds of new, natural oceans. Already the Rising Hills promise to put the Himalayas of Earth in the shade, and the Vanishing Lake has a water level a thousand feet below that of the neighboring dry land... when it has a water level at all. It dries up during the summer, to reappear during the fall.

In addition to the expected inhabitants, Futuria has had a great many unwanted immigrants.

These have been smuggled in on unfumigated space ships, in a gigantic System-wide racket that has only recently been broken up by the Planet Patrol.

Serpent-Men Under Control

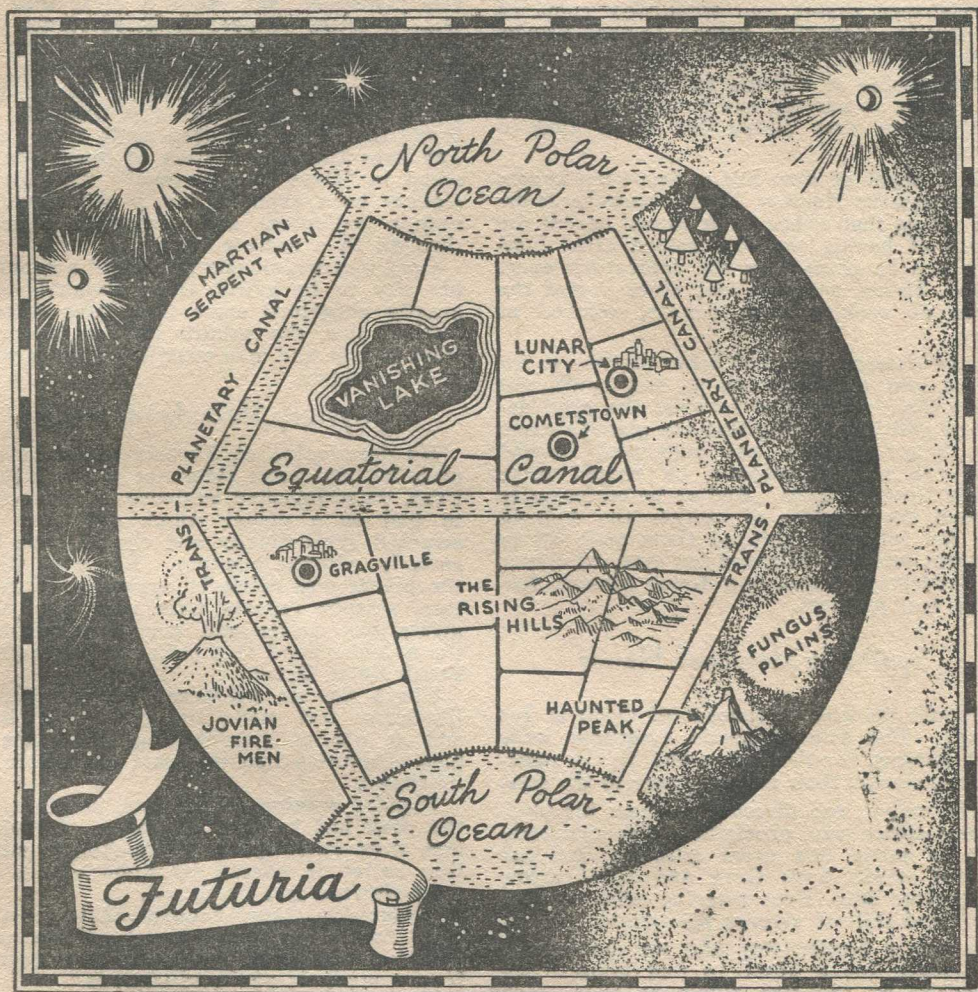
As a result, one large area is in the hands of Martian Serpent Men, a semi-humanoid

race whose fierce murderous habits had set the other inhabitants of their native planet against them. Of the thousand or so survivors of this almost extinct species of Mars, almost half succeeded in reaching Futuria.

Here conditions of life have proved so favorable for the development of their eggs, that their numbers have increased tenfold. But the planet government has now limited their expansion, and they offer no threat to the planet's future.

Carnivorous Plants Appear

Along with the unexpected animal immigrants, Futuria has also found itself supplied with unwanted plants. A living forest, composed of carnivorous vegetative and semi-vegetative forms undoubtedly owes its formation to spores brought in on unfumigated ships. So too do the Fungus Plains, a flat area some fifty miles in diameter, that shines with a queer greenish light of its own, and



The Jovian fire-men, flame-breathers who had been threatened with extinction by the gradual cooling of their native planet, also emigrated without Government consent, and settled near the giant volcano which had formed in Futuria's southern hemisphere. They too gained a new lease on life.

The shrinking of the new planet's surface had naturally led to the evolution of considerable internal heat. This heat was particularly evident in the volcanic region, and had the double effect of making life tolerable for the Jovians, and impossible for most other races.

at night serves as a gigantic natural lighthouse for space ships racing in from the outer planets.

Mycologists estimate that more than ten thousand varieties of molds and other fungi grow here in great profusion. Unfortunately, the predominant kinds seem to be relatives of the exceedingly virulent Saturnian varieties, and most animals live no more than a few moments after setting foot within its borders.

Inhabitants Like Futuria

Of course, not all of Futuria's immigrants are unwanted. Great numbers of people from

all hitherto existing planets have taken up their abodes not far from the Equatorial Canal, where the climate is most pleasant. They have come in bewildering variety, and form the most cosmopolitan population yet seen within the System.

They have built up, with Government help, three main cities—Lunar City, named for the Futuremen's home, Cometstown, for the tear-drop-shaped vessel, and what may come as a surprise—Gragville, named, it need not be said, for the great robot himself.

The choice of a name for Gragville came only after an excited and somewhat amusing controversy that lasted for more than a month.

The mayor of what had at first been known as Settlement Number Three wrote to Newton asking that either he or Simon accept the honor of having the city named after himself, and be present at the dedicatory exercises. Simon, who had long since passed the stage of seeking such honors, refused at once.

Curt Newton, who had other matters to interest him at the moment, and could not spare the time needed to visit the city, declined politely, stating that the planet's name was honor enough, and suggested instead that the new metropolis be named after either Grag or Otho. And as he temporarily needed the services of neither the android nor the robot, he shipped them both off to Futuria, and the delighted but worried mayor of Settlement Three now found himself facing a real problem.

Synthetic Men Seek Honor

Should the city be named for Otho or for Grag? The two synthetic creatures were both anxious for the honor, and all the quarrelsomeness in their natures came to the fore.

The mayor, too discreet to show his preference either way, proclaimed a special election to settle this great question, and for several weeks both Grag and Otho threw themselves into electioneering with all the vigor and skill of veteran politicians.

It was a bewildering and not uncommon experience for a voter to find himself approached by the two rivals at once, each securing a firm grasp on some part of his clothes, and extolling his own virtues.

It is doubtful whether either Grag or Otho won many voters in this fashion, for their usual victim was too paralyzed with fright to understand what either of them said. The real decision was apparently the result of a whispering campaign—or rather, of two whispering campaigns, one of which failed to achieve its effect.

Voters Become Divided

Otho's tactics were to split Grag's supporters into two rival groups—one in favor of Gragville, the other in favor of Robotstown. In this way he hoped that even if he didn't obtain a majority of the votes, at least he would be able to win.

However, Grag's supporters saw through this maneuver, and made it clear that they were heartily opposed to Robotstown. The name didn't necessarily apply to Grag, and then too it might have been misleading.

At the same time, following Grag's directions, they repeated to any listeners they found that Otho had been made a fool of by one Bror Ingmann, Terror of Space—as narrated in "Days of Creation." This lie had already been exposed, but it still found ignorant believers, and Gragville squeaked through to a narrow victory.

Grag magnanimously permitted a suburb of his city to be called Otho Heights—to be greatly chagrined some time later when he learned that the suburb had outgrown the town proper and was considered far superior as a residence.

Mystery Shrouds Mountain

No description of Futuria would be complete without some reference to the Haunted Peak, an unexpected evidence of superstition to find on a planet which had been constructed synthetically and should have been entirely without mystery. But even before the planet was officially opened to immigration, strange reports were circulated about mysterious noises and events occurring in the neighborhood of a peak not far from the South Polar Ocean.

There was no evidence that any familiar life-forms had made the peak their home, and an official investigating committee denied absolutely that this part of Futuria was inhabited.

Popular opinion still insists, however, that the peak had become the home of invisible men from outer space. Astonishingly enough, this belief is shared by none others than Curt Newton and the Brain.

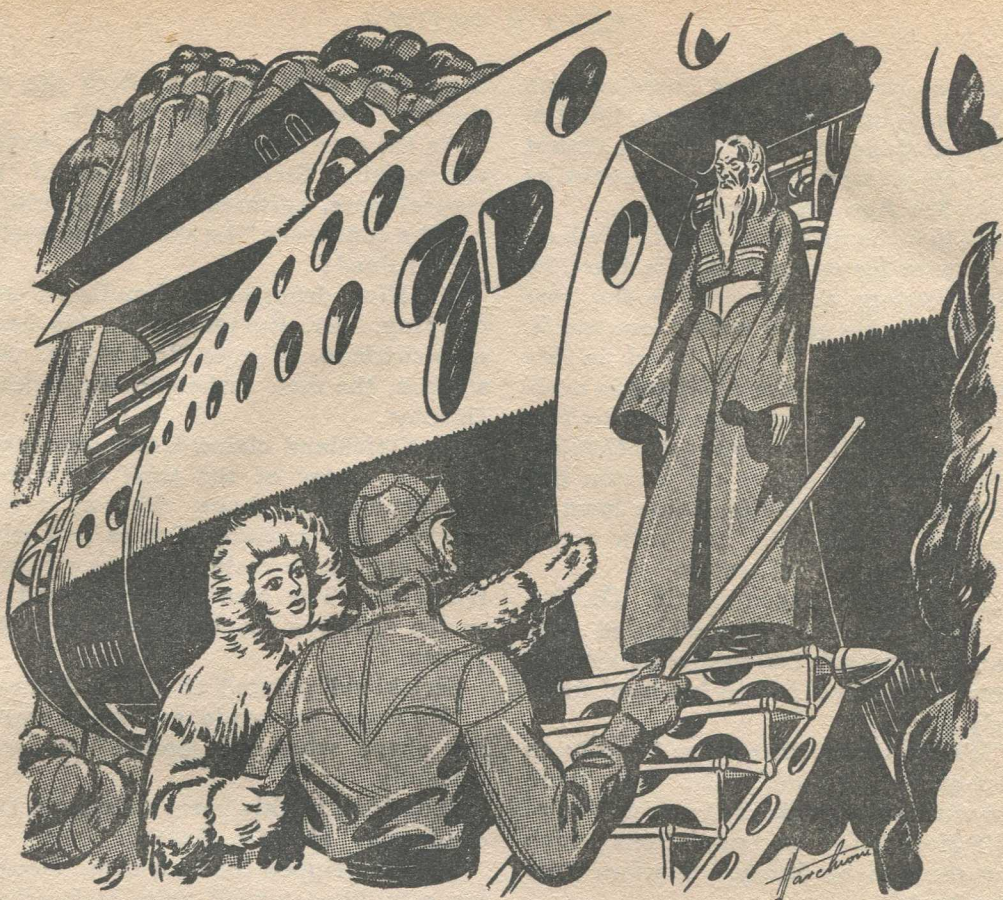
"Some day, Simon," observed Captain Future, "we'll have to investigate that place. There should be at least as much to learn as from a study of past civilizations."

"Some day, lad," agreed the Brain. "Meanwhile, we have our studies on magnetogravitational waves to occupy us."

Curt Newton nodded. And yet, he had a feeling that the Haunted Peak might be even more important than the investigations that now occupied the attention of the Futuremen. Some day, as he had observed . . .

Reluctantly, he relegated the idea to the back of his mind. It was a mystery that for the time being must remain unsolved.

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As Ba'abs motioned for him to follow, Reggie Hart glanced up and saw Bern

THE RETURN OF THE ICE AGE

By NATHANIEL NITKIN

Reggie Hart and a Party of Scientists Move One Thousand Years into the Future—and Face Terrible Catastrophe Engineered by a Ruthless Secret Enemy!

REGGIE HART was first out. He took one hurried look and then frowned.

"So this is the future," he said.

As they stepped from the time machine, the three men did not answer Reggie Hart. What they saw was a shock to them. After going one thousand years into the future they had expected to find the super metropolis of New York City, and they saw only an undulating snow plain, broken by occasional knolls.

And as the four men looked, the wind was high, and its biting gusts sent pow-

dered snow running over the glacier. Land and sky were fused in the same gray unity which the dim sun barely penetrated. There was no horizon. Clouds seemed to rise straight out of the earth, like swollen smoke puffs from an invisible fire.

Reggie Hart turned to the expedition leader, Dr. Henry Burton.

"Are you sure we landed in New York?" he asked.

Dr. Burton nodded. "That's right. I've been using the machine a few times before. It's trustworthy. This is the

first time we've projected ourselves one thousand years into the future, but I'm sure that this is where New York should be." He paused and added, "Looks as if the Ice Age has returned."

Though the disappearance of civilization under ice stunned Reggie Hart, he felt a strong attachment to the vast snowlands. He could not understand it. Perhaps it was Viking blood in his veins. He looked like a Viking in modern clothes. He had always been his best in the far North. During the war that had ended five years before the Burton Expedition left the White House lawn in the time machine, he had seen active service with para-ski troops.

The scientists began to stir. Dr. Rufus King, the geologist, whistled with dismay. Burton's brilliant assistant, Dr. Boyce Strickland jerked his head nervously.

"It's my theory that we've lived in an inter-glacial period," Dr. Strickland said with his high-pitched voice. "We've built civilization on foundations which now seem to be flimsy. Glaciers have come back."

HART turned to Strickland and noticed that the mathematician's face had turned to a waxy hue when the sharp wind stung it. Though tall, too, Strickland was thin, practically chestless, and his shoulders were round.

"It can't be helped, so what are we standing here for?" Hart demanded. "We ought to secure the machine. Don't tell me blizzards aren't coming. Look at these clouds. If the machine is damaged, we can never return to the Twentieth Century."

"Would you give us orders?" Strickland said. "We'll do our work without benefit of your opinion. You're only a newspaperman, a guest to boot."

"Don't be nasty, Strickland," Dr. Burton interrupted. "Mr. Hart's right. We'll do what he suggests."

They returned to the machine, which was built like a huge cylinder of duraluminum with plexiglass portholes and with a blunt plexiglass observation nose. The controls were in the nose, and

Strickland went there to check the recording instruments' graphic rolls.

As the men broke out rope to secure the machine, Strickland ran out of the control nose, agitated, out of breath.

"The condenser," he shouted hoarsely. "It's ruined!"

Dr. King dropped the bundle he was carrying. Dr. Burton jerked his head to Strickland. Reggie Hart swore. All at once, the men dashed to the control chamber.

As Strickland claimed, the condenser—nerve center of the time machine—was bent out of shape. Part of it was cracked, and strands of mica and wire stuck out of its resin cover like foamy tentacles. The men were stranded in an Ice Age, one thousand years into the future.

Strickland pointed to the condenser. "I'll swear the condenser was in working shape when we landed," he said solemnly.

"Someone in this party sabotaged the condenser," said Dr. Burton.

Silence gripped the four men. Accusing eyes were turned upon each other. Whoever the saboteur was, he had superb control of his face and eyes.

Then Dr. Burton turned to Strickland, "Give me the spare condenser," he said. "I'll fix the machine. We're going back at once."

Strickland opened a drawer beneath the dash board. Reggie Hart saw it was full of spare parts, rheostats, photo-electric cells, transformers, and coiled wire neat in their compartments. But one partition was empty.

Strickland stared at the empty compartment. Then he turned and looked at Burton.

"You mean you forgot to bring the spare condenser?" Dr. Burton shouted with a terrible voice. "What have you done? The expedition—It is a failure. We have met with a catastrophe!"

Strickland said nothing, though his face flushed and his eyes clouded with resentment. Dr. King sat down and moaned, thinking of his wife and children. Dr. Burton continued to shout at Strickland.

Reggie Hart interrupted him. "What's the use of accusing each other? Our problem now is to live. I assure you that the North can be cruel. We'll all die a slow and terrible death unless we act at once."

White-faced, Burton looked at him.

"Don't you see what it means?" he cried. "I'm old and I'll die soon—that's true. But my mathematics of time and my invention may be lost. I've spent all my money on them. I've willed them to the Smithsonian Institution. My work is in my safe, but will they get the invention?"

Dr. Burton had spent all of his pension as professor emeritus of mathematical physics at Harvard, and royalties from the inventions he had developed at Wright Field during the war, on his time machine. It was the last contribution of a rare type of scientist, a selfless man whose ambition was to advance humanity to a higher civilization.

Reggie Hart found it difficult to say anything. He stood for a few moments of embarrassed silence.

"Isn't there life on this planet now?" he asked. "Surely the Ice Age didn't destroy all life?"

Strickland twitched his shoulders nervously.

"Perhaps there is," he answered. "The last glacier terminated a few miles south of New York's latitude. It's my theory that this glacier doesn't extend far south, and there we may find a civilization of some sort."

"That will do," Hart exclaimed. "We're going south toward life."

DR. KING looked up at Hart sorrowfully. "But I don't see how we can find any. Even if the glacier's terminus is not far to the south, the new frigid zone will exceed the Tropic of Cancer. We can't carry all the food necessary for subsistence before we see the first signs of life."

"There's the extra lumber in the holds of this machine," said Hart.

"It's lucky we brought it along to build store-houses. We can fashion sledges out of it and drag food and supplies

with us on our march. That's our only hope to live."

The scientists caught some of Reggie Hart's infectious enthusiasm. Under his direction, they fashioned two sleds and finished them by nightfall. Then it was too late to start, and Hart made the men dig a snow shelter for the night.

"We'll have to set watches on our food," he said. "The fellow who sabotaged the machine may sabotage our food, too."

The men protested, but Hart was adamant. Finally watch guards were chosen, and as night fell, with a further lowering of temperature, the men slept, except for the watch guard who nursed a campfire of pieces of lumber.

The day had dawned exceedingly cold and grey when the men broke camp and began their southward march. Then they discovered that the flatness of the glacier was deceptive. Yawing crevasses and high pressure ridges had to be skirted. Every time the men detoured around an obstacle, Hart built a high cairn of hard snow and ice and marked it on a map he made.

There was no question of leadership. Strickland was the type of man who dreamed of grandiose plans and lacked the will to carry them out. Dr. King preferred to avoid responsibility and take orders. Dr. Burton was not an outdoorsman; he was a tenderfoot in snowcraft. Without challenge, Reggie Hart became the leader.

The long trek was an unrelieved agony. Though the season was supposed to be summer, the weather was cold. All woollens that the men had commandeered from the machine's stores, could not keep out the bite that seemed to freeze their souls. Cold became an obsession, almost an hallucination. Strickland stumbled along in a sort of delirium. King and Burton had long ceased to speculate on the cause of the Ice Age. Their brains appeared to have shrunk to the dimensions of dried peas. Reggie Hart alone stood it, but he suffered nonetheless.

At night, the scientists were exhausted and miserable. They would have flung

themselves on the snow, not caring if they lived or not, had not Hart whipped them with sharp words and forced them to dig snow shelters, one for food cache and another for themselves. Then they lit a fire with lumber that Hart had insisted on bringing along.

Warm food and coffee revived them. Then, except for the man standing watch over food, they fell into a stupor.

The next day was a repetition of the first except they came to a particularly bad pressure ridge, which Hart jokingly ascribed to snow tumbling over the Empire State Building. Dr. Burton caught the spirit by pointing out that the ridge extended for miles northwest and southeast.

"I think we've reached the Delaware River," he said.

But neither Strickland nor King appreciated the joke. All they saw in the pressure ridge was a barrier they had to surmount. Climb it they did, and as night fell, they were on the other side of the ridge.

At night, Reggie Hart stood second watch over the food cache. Though he was tired, he felt a strange peace sweep over him, a peace cast by the glowing campfire and by the timeless constellations, evidence of the immutability of Nature and the insignificance of Man in her schemes.

He heard stealthy feet creep up to him,—too late! Before he could turn, the unknown man whipped a stick smartly on Reggie's head. Hart flopped on his back with a jerk. Dancing orbs of orange fire blinded him, followed by blackness.

His head throbbed when he opened his eyes again. He moaned and tried to move. Sharp stabs of pain, like molten iron, ran through him and almost left him helpless. Then, as he shook his head and sat up, he realized his dangerous predicament.

The fire had died, and the wind was whipping up powdery snow that struck his face like a thousand needles. He staggered to his feet and looked at the sky. It was overcast, and snow had begun to fall. Visibility was barely five

yards. He groped for a few feet, found nothing. Then a blizzard exploded all around him.

HE fell on his knees, blinded by the driving snow. He was out alone, and his shelter was barely ten yards away. If he could reach it—but he knew that to stand erect would make him a living dead man wandering in a blizzard until cold, exhaustion, and death overtook him.

Slowly he edged back. His feet struck something. He turned around. He clutched and bent over it, studying it as soberly as he had ever stared at anything in the world. It was the remains of the campfire. He tried to remember its layout.

He imagined that the dead campfire pointed toward the shelter.

He shook his head. Now he was cool, determined not to let death claim him. He crawled around the fire. He found a slight mound under his feet. He cleared it, a heap of firewood. Now he knew where he was.

Slowly, deliberately he turned until the mound was to his left. Then he crawled against the wind. Suddenly the wind seemed to stop blowing although the blizzard raged furiously as ever. By that he knew he had come to the shelter's windbreak. He rose and stumbled a few feet before he reached the snow shelter, into which he threw himself.

Strickland was first to be awakened by the noise of Reggie Hart's fall. Then the men joined him. He told them what had happened.

The blizzard was short-lived and departed with daybreak. As Hart emerged from the snow shelter, and dug a short path to the snowfield, his worst fears were confirmed.

There was no sign of the food cache. A fresh coat of snow obliterated everything.

Hart bit his lips. He saw the men's faces turn ashen white, all except Strickland's, which seemed to have the composition of candle wax. Their shoulders sagged and their eyes betrayed despair.

"We'll look for the food cache," Hart said tonelessly.

It was a hopeless task. They dug and dug, but they saw only snow. The glacier had simply swallowed the cache. Then Hart suspected that the man who had waylaid him, would have broken the cache.

There was nothing to do but take stock of whatever food was left in the shelter. Pitifully small, it was about enough for a man to carry in a pack. It meant slow starvation, weakening the men one by one as they pushed southward until they dropped in their tracks to die. Hart might reach the farthest south, but not the scientists.

"There's only one hope for us," Hart said thoughtfully. "Listen—we'll divide food into four parts. I'll take my share and go southward until I reach civilization. The rest of you stay here until I come back with help."

AS THE men were too despirited to argue, they agreed. Hart fashioned a pack out of a burlap bag and stuffed his share of food into it. Then he shouldered the pack and left the camp without further word.

The first day, Hart made seven miles. He had to circle a dangerous crevasse. As he walked, he studied the country and noted the prominent topography on his map. To do this was clumsy, especially with his gloves on, but in the biting cold he did not dare to take them off.

Night fell. He dug a shallow shelter and capped it with snow blocks. Then he ate a cold supper. There was no wood to build a fire. In his troubled sleep, he dreamed of warmth and comfort.

The second day, he stumbled on, sometimes sinking to his knees in a snow bank. He had long since lost sensation in his limbs. They moved in almost perpetual motion without any sensation. His body, too, ceased to ache. However when he stopped just before nightfall, having made fifteen miles, pain returned with the impact of a whip lash.

But he had faithfully kept his map up to date.

When he ate his supper, he could only

sit and brood, heavily, vacantly, sullenly, resentful against all the world, against a Nature that had lured man to build a civilization and demolished it with her glaciers. Short rations barely satisfied his gnawing stomach.

He curled up in his snow shelter, biting down sobs as he went to sleep. His emotions, long pent-up and firmly controlled, now burst to surface. Without knowing it, he found himself talking almost hysterically like a child laughing at its brainless acts.

It was on the sixth day that a blizzard broke out with the fury of Nature on rampage. His food rations had dwindled to a handful of bologna, and his stomach had a peculiar rubbed-together feeling that occasionally gave him cramps. He found he could stand it by huddling in his shelter and waiting for the blizzard to abate.

But the storm continued for three days, and during these three days, Hart slept soundly. He woke only to clear snow that threatened to block the entrance of his shelter. Then his muscles ceased to ache, but his stomach was a hollow vacuum that pained horribly.

Two days after the blizzard abated, Reggie Hart found the first sign of human life. During the last two days, as he struggled ever southward, the glacier decreased in altitude, and he found dung from some unknown animals. He had used that as fuel for campfires, and the hot water he had prepared, partly relieved the pain in his stomach.

Now he was standing on a knoll. As his eyes reached out, he saw a dark line on the horizon—land! Between the land and his knoll, a slender thread of smoke rose straight into the sky, dispersed where a breeze reached it.

He resisted the impulse to dash toward the smoke. He swayed on his wobbling feet and sat down. Breathing slowly to clear his mind, he looked again. The smoke was still there.

He marked the spot where he was sitting on his map. Then he took a compass sight to the campfire. Satisfied, he tucked the map and pencil into his pocket

and stood up.

The sun was low when he reached the campfire. Nobody was in sight. The burning fire, though unattended, was surrounded by a semi-circular windbreak of snow, and on the top of it was a grill of a blackened substance. On it, meat was roasting, and as the aroma reached his nostrils, Hart felt a nearly insupportable pain in his stomach.

He stumbled toward it and knocked the meat off the grill. He fell on his knees. He picked the meat with his gloved hand and shoved up his improvised sun goggles with his elbow. When he bit a chunk off, he felt a thrill of ecstasy run through his body.

He was so busy, eating the meat, that he did not notice fur-clad men and women advance toward him. He saw their shadows when he was surrounded. Then he looked at them.

They were white men and women, and the men were bearded. Instinctively Hart felt his face and found that he, also had grown a beard. Of the women, the older had hard faces, but the younger were graceful, though swathed in fur parkas with hood thrown back to expose their long, silken hair.

THE men raised their spears and covered him. Hart looked at their armament with curiosity. Their spears and knives were made of polished stone and bone. Of iron or metal, infallible traces of higher culture, there were no signs. It was as if, with the return of the Ice Age, Nature had hurled highly civilized man back into the savagery of the Stone Age.

"So this is the future," Reggie Hart murmured again.

His words had an electrical effect on the strangers. They fell into a rapid jabber of imperfectly pronounced English with a primitive grammar. Then Hart realized that, with the throw back to primitive stone culture, many words lost their usages and vocabulary and grammar had become simplified.

He caught a few phrases.

"Even now he is Evil One," Hart translated.

"No. Think you Evil One come like tired wolf?" said another man. "Evil One never tired. Evil One stronger than Bear."

"I think Evil One sent him. Bewitch us."

"I go talk him."

A girl, barely past eighteen, stepped from the band and walked toward Hart. The men raised their spears higher to protect her from any move on his part.

Hart rose as she came to him. Now she was close, and her warm breath touched his cheek like velvet. The sinking sun, lighting her hair, set it off in a reddish-golden hue, and her tanned skin looked so smooth that, in spite of his fatigue, Reggie Hart gazed at her in admiration.

Warily she touched him and retreated a few steps with alacrity. Nothing happened. She advanced again, touching him for the second time. Reassured, she nudged him hard, felt his woollens and face. Then she turned to her people triumphantly.

"See, he no Evil One," she announced. "Ba'abs touch him. Nothing happen."

"Nothing will happen to you, sister," Reggie smiled.

The girl, Ba-abs, sprang away startled when Reggie talked. Then she returned to him.

"You—talk like Bern," she said.

"Who is Bern?" Hart asked with a puzzled frown.

"No know Bern?" Ba'abs exclaimed, genuinely surprised. "Bern, he wise man. He know many, many book. He teach us mysterious things. Everyone know Bern. You no know Bern?"

It was news to Reggie Hart that, even in savagery, man would have saved books and could read them. Vaguely he felt that if he saw Bern or whoever he was, he would get a rescue party for his colleagues.

"Take me to Bern," he commanded.

Ba'abs turned to her band. "We take him to Bern. Bern angry if you no obey Ba'abs."

The men lowered their spears and turned toward the south. Ba'abs shoved Hart to a position behind the men and walked along beside him. Then she

spoke to him again.

"You name?" she inquired.

"Reggie Hart."

"Reggie 'Art. It good name."

Hart had expected to see the worst in the village, and he was not deceived. It was composed of hide covered shelters like Eskimo summer abodes.

The village itself was on dry land beside a moraine that the glacier had rolled before it. As Hart passed them, he counted thirteen houses and saw curious eyes peer out at him. Then children ran toward the party.

He glanced at the children and saw that while the predominant racial strain was Caucasian, there were some Mongolian features among them. He fancied that there had been a death struggle between the Eskimos retreating before the advance of the Ice Age, and the dispossessed white men. Because he saw no pure Mongol type, he thought that the Eskimos were exterminated, and their women taken by white men.

The men of the party scattered. Ba'abs led Hart to a hill outside the village. As twilight was vanishing, he could not see well the dull object on the top of the hill until they arrived.

IT was a streamlined affair of greenish metal. It had two pairs of fins above and under the pointed stern, out of which thick pipes jutted. The upper part of the nose and portholes in the cigar-shaped thing were made of glass that was intact in spite of the obvious age of the huge thing. Over all, it was as long as the *H.M.S. Queen Mary* in which he had sailed to the front in the war. Reggie Hart fancied he was looking at a spaceship, ancient in this century, but not yet invented in his own.

Ba'abs motioned him to follow her up the ladder into the spaceship. As he was about to obey, he glanced up and saw the man known as Bern. Bern was standing in the entry-port of the ship. He moved back with a beckoning gesture and Ba'abs and Hart stepped into the ship. Then Hart scrutinized Bern more closely.

Now Hart understood why the Ice Age

men respected Bern. He was a patriarch; tall, firm and straight backed in spite of his age, and with a flowing white beard.

Chattering rapidly, Ba'abs told Bern of her meeting with Reggie Hart. Then Bern advanced toward him.

"Who are you, stranger?" inquired Bern. "Where you come from?"

Though Hart had expected Bern to show better command of English, he nevertheless was surprised to hear almost perfect pronunciation of the halting words.

"You will not believe me if I told you," Hart answered after a moment of hesitation. "I'm from the Twentieth Century."

"The Twentieth Century?" Bern said with a frown. "Where is that?"

From this Hart knew Bern's knowledge was imperfect, although he could speak well, which was mystifying.

"That's long, long ago," said Hart.

Bern nodded. "Books tell of time travel. I think I understand. How long you stay with us?"

Hart shrugged. "I'm afraid forever. Our machine broke down."

He had not seen Ba'abs go, and now she re-appeared.

"Meat ready," she said. "Reggie 'Art hungry?"

Bern smiled at her. Then he turned to Hart. "We eat first. You talk afterwards."

"Suits me fine," answered Hart.

Bern frowned. He did not seem to understand the phrase, but he let it go at that.

Dinner was an uncomfortable affair. First because they ate in what was the ship's library. Books everywhere, and out of curiosity, Reggie Hart examined some of them. Here was Shakespeare's complete plays, a medical encyclopaedia, Einstein's "Relativity Theory," a book whose author Reggie never heard of, and a thick volume entitled, "Mathematics of Time" by Dr. Henry Burton.

He opened the last and saw Dr. Burton's picture on the frontispiece. The first two pages were a foreword by the Smithsonian Institution, a centennial memorial to the great scientist who had tried to prove that time travel was pos-

sible, but who had disappeared with his machine into an unknown time.

Reggie Hart felt a queer sensation run down his spine. If he had Dr. Burton with him, he could prove the truth of his story beyond shadow of doubt.

Dinner was further uncomfortable because Hart's hosts grabbed chunks of meat from a common plate and ate without benefit of utensils. Ba-abs watched Reggie Hart with wondering eyes as he ate. She tried to copy his table manners with ludicrous results.

Finally it was over and Bern looked at Hart as if waiting for him to talk. Hart omitted the time machine for the present and described his struggle to reach help for his companions. And while Bern did not understand much of the story, he nodded.

"You say three men starve in Snow Land?" he asked.

Reggie Hart nodded. "That's right."

"We send party to save them in morning," she said.

It was a mystery to Hart how an apparently dogless village got dog teams. Then Ba'abs explained that it was puppy season, and the dogs were quarantined in a separate compound that she called *kenl*. Bern had read about it in a book and prescribed *kenl* treatment for dogs in puppy season.

SOON the rescue party was racing northward, along the line Reggie Hart drew on his map. Now he was wearing a fur parka, and though he had not fully recovered from his ordeal, he drove the rescue party, permitting stops only at night.

At first the men rebelled, but they were genuinely afraid of Ba-abs. Hart could not understand what power an eighteen-year old girl had over hard men who could crush her, unless it was Bern's invisible power. Then, as the rescue party sped northwards, they began to respect Reggie.

They did not comprehend how he found his way, even to snow shelters that he had built on his march. When they saw him consult his map and compass,

they muttered among themselves, loud enough for him to hear, that he was a wise man like Bern, and that he could read magic books.

It took them only three days to reach the base camp. The shelter was partly hidden by a big snowbank. With the aid of his men, Reggie Hart cleared the entrance, shouting into the shelter as the work proceeded. He shouted and when he received no reply, he became afraid he was too late.

Soon the entrance was large enough for him to crawl through. He was followed by Ba'abs. As he entered the shelter, he saw Dr. King lying in his sleeping bag, eyes closed. He crept to Dr. King and shook him violently. Slowly the geologist opened dull eyes, staring vacantly at Hart. His lips moved slightly, but he was too weak to talk.

Later, with a campfire burning, they fed King under Reggie Hart's direction. Soon King recovered some of his strength and looked at his rescuers.

"What happened to Burton and Strickland?" asked Hart.

"Went hunting—caught ptarmigan day before—blizzard . . . Lost!"

Then as though King's efforts to speak sapped his strength, he fell back into his sleeping bag. Hart touched King's brow. It was warm.

"Look. Ba'abs find book!"

Reggie Hart turned around. Ba'abs had been ransacking Strickland's bag, and now she was displaying a book, a small affair covered with red leather.

"Give me that book," Hart said curtly.

Frightened by his almost violent speech, Ba'abs handed him the book. It was a diary. With curiosity, he opened it and read the first page. It said:

June 31st.—I finished the mathematical calculations pertaining to the successful operation of the time machine, one thousand years to the future. It will be recognized as a triumph of my genius. Dr. Burton must not get credit due to me.

Hart scowled at finding this, which did not affect him agreeably. He looked further, and the next page read:

July 2nd. My plans are complete. If

Dr. Burton knows, he'd call off the trip because he'll never return. At last I will get the credit that is due to me.

Hart's indignation increased. The implication was clear, but he could not yet understand what Strickland meant. He turned another page. It read:

July 5th.—The expedition starts tomorrow. Dr. Burton does not know that I have a mathematical hypothesis that the Glacial Period will return one thousand years hence. It is perfect for my plans.

July 7th.—My plans worked! I wrecked the condenser and am hiding the spare condenser in my pocket. That fool, Reggie Hart, fell for my folderol that there is a civilization southward. Just wait until the party is far from the machine!

Anger crept over Reggie Hart's flushed face. Now he knew Strickland's nature, an egomaniac who was planning the destruction of the expedition for his own benefit.

Rapidly Hart thumbed the pages and came to the last entry. It read:

August 3rd.—Luck is on my side. We caught a ptarmigan and I was able to persuade Dr. Burton to come with me to hunt for food. Dr. King is so weak that he will die anyway. Reggie Hart undoubtedly is lost in the glacier.

I will lure Dr. Burton near the time machine and tell him everything. How he will love to hear what I am planning to avenge my years of ignobility in his hands. He had all the credit for what I have done. Never will it happen again. I will kill him and return to the Twentieth Century. I will tell the truth about the coming Ice Age, but will add that the others were killed in a crevasse. I will attain fame as a mathematician who proved the feasibility of time travel.

REGGIE HART closed the book firmly. He was thoughtful for a while, then turned to the men he had brought back with him.

"Load two sledges," he shouted. "We're going to save Dr. Burton if we can. The rest of you stay here with King."

It was hours later when Hart thought he saw something on the snowfield, but he was not sure. He stopped the laboring sledges and walked to what had attracted his attention—a mound with a small hole near the snow level. Experi-

mentally he dug snow from the hole. He enlarged it and he was looking into a snow shelter.

Then he called his men. Ba'abs was first to reach him. Rapidly they cleared the hole, and soon Hart crawled through.

It was Dr. Burton, still as in a sleep of death. With a beating heart, Reggie Hart crawled to him. He removed the doctor's hand and felt for pulse. It was faint, but nevertheless Hart refused to abandon hope.

The forehead was bandaged with cloth strips. Hart thought that Strickland had tried to kill Burton by a savage blow, but the younger mathematician's strength had been sapped by hunger and ordeal, and the attempt had failed. Dr. Burton had retained the vitality to fix his sleeping bag and crawl into it to die, after Strickland left him for dead in the snow shelter.

Minutes were precious. Hart could not afford to linger long. Although he was doubtful if Dr. Burton would live, he left one sledge and two men to try to bring the scientist back to life. Then with Ba'abs and another man, he raced toward the time machine.

Night overtook them before they reached the machine, and they were forced to camp. The next morning they found it and Dr. Strickland.

Lying on its side, the machine was half covered with snow. Its plexiglass was cracked in two places, and snow filled the control room in the nose. A girder was bent. The blizzard had ruined it beyond repair.

Dr. Strickland lay on his back in the nose of the time machine. His arms were bent at right angles, and his ungloved hands were white as the snow about him, frozen stiff. His gloves lay nearby, and there were a few matches spilled from the match-box which Hart found, not far off, half buried in the snow, near a piece of timber taken from the ship. The missing but utterly useless condenser was inside the match-box.

Seeking refuge from the cold, the mathematician had tried to light a fire to warm himself. He had made a mistake in taking off his gloves. Then his hands

froze, and helpless, he died, frustrated. His plan had been perfect, but he had failed to take into account, a contemptuous Nature, which had wrecked the time machine.

The irony of the thing worked upon Reggie Hart's overwrought nerves. He burst into a hysterical laugh that scared Ba'abs and the man with her.

Several days later, Reggie Hart was watching Ba'abs from the transparent nose of the spaceship. She looked cute as she approached, puppies in her arms.

Dr. Burton had died without reviving. The strain had been too much for him, and his life ebbed when Reggie Hart returned. They had buried him in the snow shelter where he had expired.

Dr. King on the other hand, was on road to recovery. Only an hour before he had been talking enthusiastically to Reggie Hart.

"Do you realize what it means?" he cried. "Why, I can make accurate observations of the glacial phenomena. I shall write my discoveries in a record book for posterity. Later, when civilization returns, men who read my notes will appreciate them."

Reggie Hart, however, was not thinking of it. Return to the Twentieth Century was impossible. Yet somehow, as he watched Ba'abs, he was not sorry.

Bern touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Come, Reggie 'Art. I want to talk to you."

Hart followed Bern into the library. There, Bern took some books and handed them to him.

"Listen, Reggie 'Art," Bern said. "I am old and will die soon. You will be the wise man of my people, and you must make your vows. Teach my people how to read. Teach them knowledge."

Hart looked at the books with curiosity. They were text books. Then he looked at Bern.

"My grandfather taught me how to read," the patriarch continued. "He forgot much, but I read books. My grandfather's grandfather taught him to read. My grandfather's grandfather's grandfather made my family promise to keep books for my people."

NOW Hart knew the mystery of the books and of Bern's imperfect knowledge. He imagined that the original survivors had loaded a spaceship with books and scientific instruments—he had found a microscope, a few chemicals, and many apparatus—so that the stricken civilization would not perish without leaving some record for future ages.

"Reggie 'Art, promise me you will be my people's wise man and teach them," said Bern.

"I promise."

"Ba'abs tell me she love you. I talked to King. He tell me where you come from. For years I dreamed of son like you. Promise to take care of her."

Reggie Hart flushed. Just then Ba'abs entered the spaceship's library with her puppies. She looked at Hart, and when their eyes met, she averted her glance, blushing.

"I promise," said Reggie Hart.

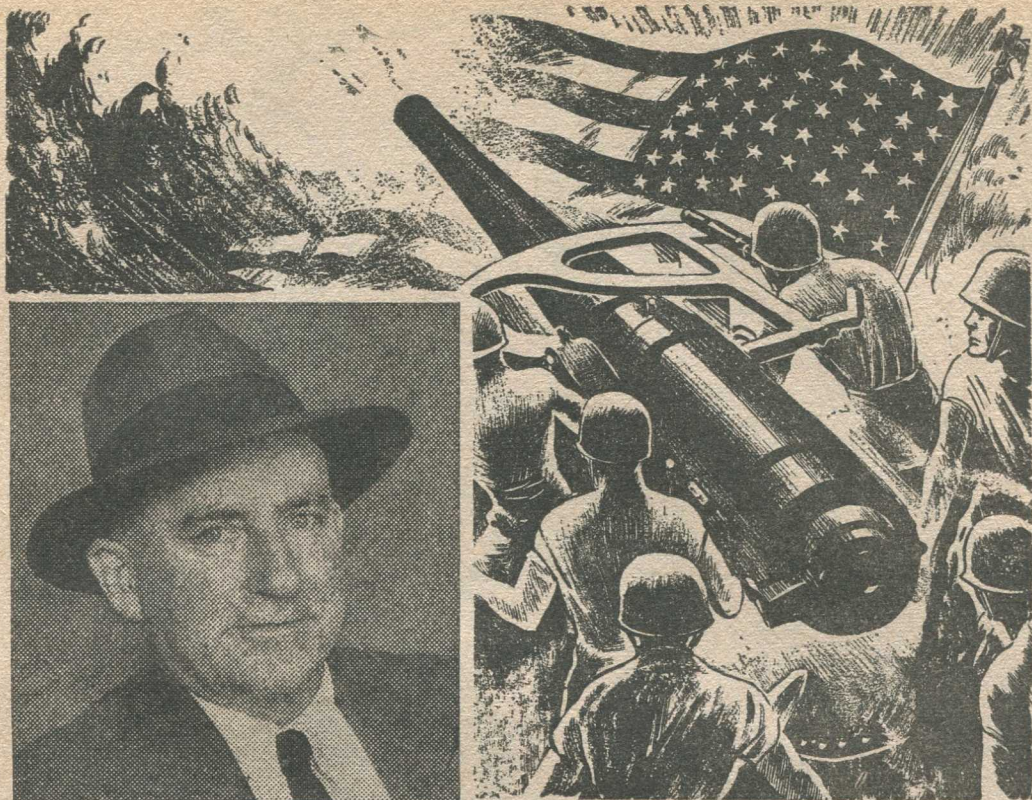
BE A PAID-UP PATRIOT

BY March 15th fifty million Americans will have had to file income reports and make payments, many of them paying taxes for the first time. All single persons earning more than \$500 and every husband and wife either of whose individual income was \$624 or more and everybody who paid or owes a tax on 1942 income must file a return.

This year taxpayers must compute income tax, Victory tax, and possible percentage of the partially forgiven 1942 tax—as well as make an estimate return on the current 1944 income! Salary and wage withholding taxes have not relieved us of the obligation of filing returns.

Don't delay, patriots! File your returns early to help Uncle Sam. Don't wait until the last minute, discovering too late that you need expert advice, or making a bottleneck jam for the Bureau of Internal Revenue. To help you, there are accountants and lawyers in tax offices and banks throughout the country who will advise you free of charge. There are simplified tax forms and explanatory booklets.

War is expensive. Remember that ninety-five cents of every tax dollar goes directly into the war effort. The sooner the war is won, the sooner taxes will fall to normal levels. We all know the job must be done. So be a Paid-up Patriot!



H. I. PHILLIPS

At a Special Price

By H. I. PHILLIPS

Author of "Private Purkey," "All Out Arlene," and other books

YOU wouldn't wait to chip in for a new hose if the one being used to fight the fire in your own house blew out, would you?

If you were going over Niagara Falls on a tightwire and heard it snap, you wouldn't say: "See me later," if somebody suggested a contribution to buy a net?

Would you say, "I'm too busy just now," if you saw a neighbor drowning and the only rope nearby was in a window under a sign "Make me an offer"?

OF COURSE NOT!

And what you are being asked (invited is a better word) to do when asked to buy War Bonds is no different. This struggle is for survival. If you want to survive don't quibble over the **SURVIVAL RATES!**

Kick in with your money! Plenty of men and women are kicking in with their lives. Buy War Bonds and it's terrific. But be a fullback, not a halfback or a quarterback.

It's what we do in back that helps in front.

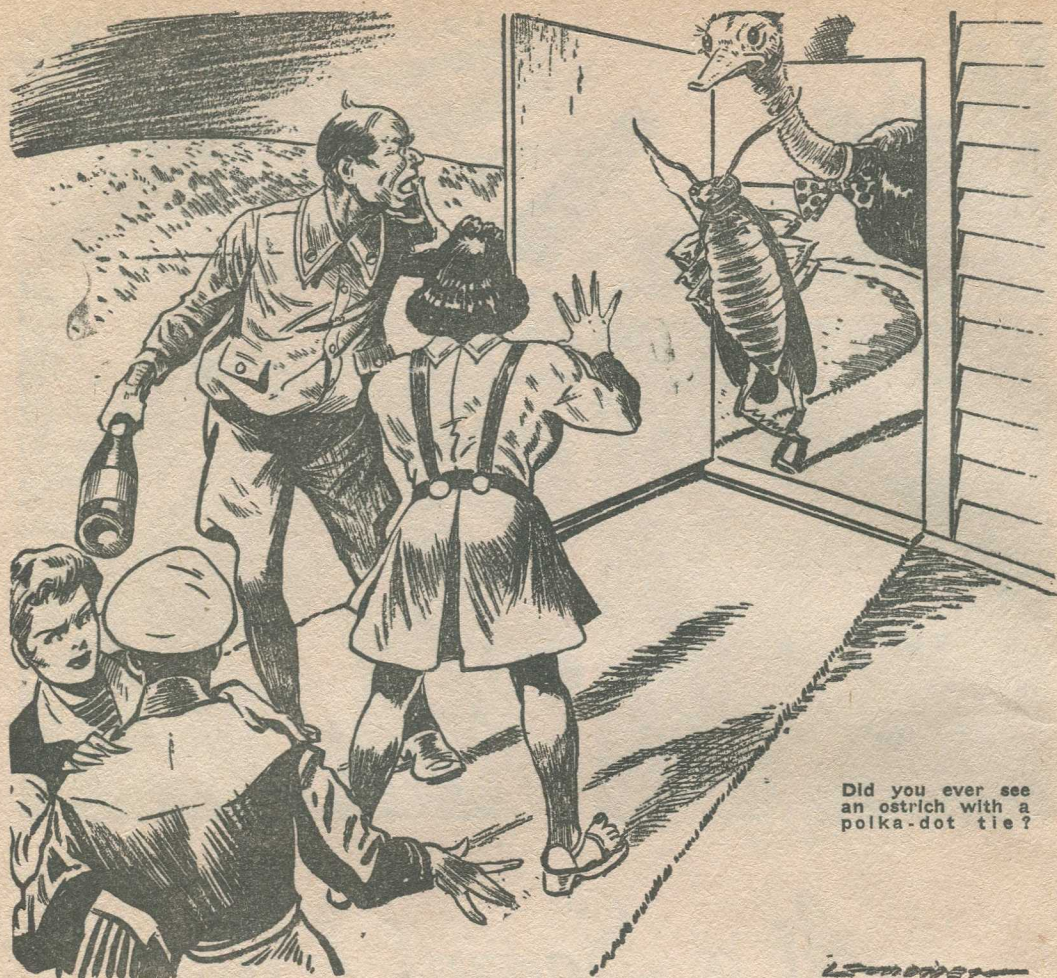
Come across so that the enemy will never get across! Fork over so that they will never come over! Waving the red, white and blue is swell, but the real red, white and blue waver also waves the long green!

"My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of the I sing," is wonderful, but we can't win this war by vocal effects. Come down out of the choir for a few minutes and let's see how good you are with the cash register, pocketbook and old sock!

Yeah, you love those rocks and rills. Of course you do. So don't tighten up when you put a value on the rocks and don't put a ten percent valuation on the rills.

And "thy woods and templed hills" . . . what about 'em? You'll never get a chance to buy wood cheaper, mister. And whatever the hills cost you are getting them at a special price, with the temples thrown in.

And remember the priceless crack of Jack Lait: "When you back the attack you are fighting those who attack in the back."



Did you ever see
an ostrich with a
polka-dot tie?

NOTHING SIRIUS

By FREDRIC BROWN

Captain "Pop" Wherry and His Family Discover a Planet That Shows Them Emphatically It Doesn't Want to be Discovered!

PLEASANTLY, I was taking the last coins out of the machines and counting them while Ma was entering the figures in the little red book. I called them out as usual. Nice figures they were.

Yes, we'd had a good play on both of the Sirius planets, Freda and Thor. Especially on Thor. Those little Earth colonies out there are starved to death for entertainment of any kind, and money doesn't mean a thing to them.

They'd stood in line to get into our tent and push their coins into the machines. So even with the plenty high expense of the trip, we'd done all right by ourselves.

Yes, they were right comforting, those figures Ma was entering. 'Course she'd add them up wrong, but then Ellen would straighten it out when Ma finally gave up. Ellen's good at figures, and got a good one herself, even if I do say it of my own daughter. Credit for

that goes to Ma, anyway, not to me. I'm built on the general lines of a space tug.

I put back the coin-box of the Rocket-Race and looked up. "Ma," I started to say. Then the door of the pilot's compartment opened and John Lane stood there. Ellen, across the table from Ma, put down her book and looked up too. She was all eyes and they were shining.

Johnny saluted smartly, the regulation salute with which a private-ship pilot is supposed to honor the owner and captain of the ship. It always got under my skin, that salute, but I couldn't talk him out of it because the rules said he should do it.

He said, "Object ahead, Captain Wherry."

"Object?" I queried. "What kind of object?"

You see, from Johnny's voice and Johnny's face, you couldn't guess whether it meant anything or not. Mars City Polytech trains 'em to be strictly deadpan and Johnny had graduated magna cum laude. He's a nice kid but he'd announce the end of the world in the same tone of voice he'd use to announce dinner, if it was a pilot's job to announce dinner.

"It seems to be a planet, sir," was all he said.

QUITE a while it took for his words to sink in.

"A planet?" I asked, not particularly brilliantly. I stared at him, hoping that he'd been drinking or something. Not because I had any objections to his seeing a planet sober, but because if Johnny ever unbent to the stage of taking a good drink, the alky would probably dissolve some of the starch out of his backbone. Then I'd have someone to swap stories with. It gets lonesome traveling through space with two women and a conscientious Polytech grad who follows the rules.

"A planet, sir. An object of planetary dimensions, I should say. Diameter three thousand miles, distance two million, course apparently an orbit

about Sirius A."

"Johnny," I began, "we're inside the orbit of Thor, which is Sirius I, which means it's the first planet of Sirius and how can there be a planet inside of that? You wouldn't be kidding me, Johnny?"

"You may inspect the teleplate, sir, and check my calculations," he replied stiffly.

I got up and went into the pilot's compartment. There was a disc in the center of the teleplate, all right. So Johnny wasn't seeing things. Checking his calculations was something else again. My mathematics end at counting coins out of coin machines. But I was willing to take his word for it.

"Johnny," I almost shouted, "We've discovered a new planet. Ain't that something?"

"Yes, sir," he commented, in his usual matter-of-fact voice.

It was something, but not much. I mean, the Sirius system hasn't been colonized long and it wasn't too surprising that a little three thousand mile planet hadn't been noticed yet. Especially as the orbits swing high, wide and handsome on Thor and Freda. So far out, they'd be colder than Pluto if the Dog Star wasn't twenty-six times as bright as Sol.

There hadn't been room for Ma and Ellen to follow us into the pilot's compartment, but they stood looking in at the doorway and I moved to one side so they could see the disc in the view-plate.

"How soon do we get there, Johnny?" Ma wanted to know.

"Our point of nearest approach on this course will be within an hour, Mrs. Wherry," he replied. "We come with half a million miles of it."

"Oh, do we?" I wanted to know.

"Unless, sir, you think it advisable to change course and give it more clearance."

I gave clearance to my throat instead and looked at Ma and Ellen and saw it would be okay by them. "Johnny," I continued, "We're going to give it less clearance. I've always hankered to

see a new planet all to myself. We're going to land there."

He said, "Yes, sir," and saluted, but there was, I thought, disapproval in his eyes. Oh, he'd have had cause for it if there had been. You never know what you'll run into busting into virgin territory out here. A cargo of canvas and slot-machines isn't the proper equipment for exploring now is it?

But the Perfect Pilot never questions an owner's orders, doggone him! Johnny sat down and started punching keys on the calculator and we eased out to let him do it.

"Ma," I said, "I'm a blamed fool."

"You would be if you weren't," she came back. I grinned when I got that sorted out, and looked at Ellen.

But she wasn't looking at me. She had that dreamy look in her eyes again. It made me want to go into the pilot's compartment and take a poke at Johnny to see if it would wake him up.

"Listen, honey," I said, "that Johnny—"

But something burned the side of my face and I knew it was Ma looking at me, so I shut up. I got out a deck of cards and played solitaire until we landed.

JOHNNY popped out of the pilot's compartment. And saluted.

"Landed, sir. Atmosphere one-oh-sixteen on the gauge."

"And what," Ellen asked, "does that mean in English?"

"It's breathable, Miss Wherry. A bit high in nitrogen and low in oxygen compared to Earth air, but nevertheless breathable."

He was a caution, that young man was, when it came to being precise.

"Then what are we waiting for?" I wanted to know.

"Your orders, sir."

"Shucks with my orders, Johnny. Let's get the door open and get going."

He saluted, and we got the door open. That was that. Johnny stepped outside first, strapping on a pair of heatjectors as he went. The rest of us were right behind him.

It was cool outside, but not cold. The landscape looked just like Thor, with bare rolling hills of hard-baked, greenish clay. There was plant life, a brownish bushy stuff that looked something like tumbleweed.

I took a look up to gauge the time and Sirius was almost at the zenith, which meant Johnny had landed us smack in the middle of the day side.

"Got any idea, Johnny," I asked, "what the period of rotation is?"

"I had time for only a rough check, sir. It came out twenty-one hours, seventeen and a half minutes."

Rough check, he had said!

Ma answered. "That's rough enough for us. Gives us time for a walk and what are we waiting for?"

"For the ceremony, Ma," I told her. "We got to name the place, don't we? And where did you put that bottle of champagne we were saving for my birthday? I reckon this is a more important occasion."

She told me where, and I went and got it.

"Got any suggestions for a name, Johnny?" I asked. "You saw it first."

"No, sir."

I said, "Trouble is that Thor and Freda are wrong now. I mean, Thor is Sirius I and Freda is Sirius II, and this orbit is inside theirs, so they ought to be 'two' and 'three' respectively. Or else this ought to be Sirius O. Which means it's Nothing Sirius."

Ellen smiled, and I think Johnny would have except that it would have been undignified, while Ma just grunted. "William—" she began, and would have gone on in that vein if something hadn't happened.

Something looked up over the top of the nearest hill. Ma was the only one facing that way and she let out a whoop and grabbed me. Then we all turned and looked.

It was the head of something that looked like an ostrich, only it must have been bigger than an elephant. Also there was a collar and a blue polkadot bow tie around the thin neck of the critter, and it wore a hat. The hat was

bright yellow and had a long purple feather. The thing looked at us a minute, winked quizzically and then pulled its head back.

None of us said anything for a minute, and then I took a deep breath.

"That," I said, "tears it. Planet, I dub thee Nothing Sirius."

I bent down and hit the champagne bottle against the clay, but it just dented the clay and wouldn't break. I tried again and looked around for a rock to hit it on. There wasn't any rock.

I took out a corkscrew from my pocket and opened the bottle instead. We all had a drink except Johnny, who doesn't drink or smoke. Me, I had a good long one. Then I poured a brief libation on the ground and recorked the bottle. I had a hunch I might need it again, and maybe need it worse than the planet did. There was lots of whisky in the ship and some Martian greenbrew, but no more champagne.

I said, "Well, here we go."

I caught Johnny's eye and he said, "Do you think it wise, sir, in view of the fact that there are—uh—inhabitants?"

"Inhabitants?" I interrupted him. "Johnny, whatever that thing that stuck its head over the hill was, it wasn't an inhabitant. And if it pops up again, I'll konk it with this bottle."

BUT just the same, before we started out I went inside the Chitterling and got a couple more heatojectors. I stuck one in my belt and gave Ellen the other. Ellen's a better shot than I am, but Ma couldn't hit the side of an administration building at ten paces with a spraygun, so I didn't give her one.

We started off, and sort of by mutual consent, we went the other direction from where we'd seen the whatever-it-was. The hills all looked alike for a while and as soon as we were over the first one, we were out of sight of the Chitterling. I noticed Johnny looking at his wrist-compass every couple of minutes, and knew he'd know the way home.

Nothing happened for three hills and then Ma said, "Look," and we looked.

About twenty yards off to our left there was a purple bush. There was a buzzing sound coming from it. The buzzing sound came from a lot of things that were flying around the bush. They looked like birds until you looked a second time and then you saw that their wings weren't moving. But they zoomed up and down and around just the same. I tried to look at their heads, but where the heads ought to be there was just a blur. A circular blur.

"They got propellers," Ma said. "Like old-fashioned airships used to have."

It did look that way.

I looked at Johnny and he looked at me, and we started over toward that bush. But the birds, or whatever, flew away quick, the minute we took a step. They skimmed off low to the ground, and were out of sight in a minute.

We started off again, none of us saying anything, and Ellen came up and walked alongside me. We were just far enough ahead to be out of earshot, and she said, "Pop——"

And didn't go on with it until I answered, "What, kid?"

"Nothing," she replied sorrowful-like. "Skip it."

So of course I knew what she'd wanted to talk about, but I couldn't think of anything helpful to say except to cuss out Mars Polytech and that wouldn't have done any good. Mars Polytech has one trouble only. It's too darned good for its own good, and so are its ramrods of graduates. After a dozen years or so outside, though, some of them manage to unbend and limber up.

But Johnny hadn't been out that long, by eleven years or so. The chance to pilot the Chitterling had been a break for him, of course, as his first job. A few years with us and he'd be qualified to skipper something bigger. He'd qualify to jump up there a lot faster than if he'd had to start in as a minor officer on a bigger ship.

Only trouble was, that he was too good-looking, and didn't know it. He didn't know anything they hadn't taught him at Polytech and all they'd taught him there was math and astro-gation and how to salute, and they hadn't taught him how not to.

"Ellen—" I started to say.

"Yes, Pop?"

"Uh—nothing. Skip it." I hadn't meant to say that at all, but suddenly she grinned at me, and I grinned back, and it was just like we'd talked the whole thing over. True, we hadn't got anywhere, but then we wouldn't have even if we had, if you know what I mean, and I don't think you do.

So just then we came to the top of a small rise, and Ellen and I stopped because just ahead of us was the blank end of a paved street.

An ordinary, every day plastipaved street just like you'd see in any city on Earth, with curb and sidewalk and gutters and the painted traffic-line down the middle. Only it ran out to nowhere, where we stood, and, at least until it went over the top of the next rise, there wasn't a house or a vehicle or a creature on it.

I looked at Ellen and she looked at me, and then we both looked at Ma and Johnny Lane, who had just caught up to us. I said, "What is it, Johnny?"

"It seems to be a street, sir."

HE CAUGHT the look I was giving him and flushed a little. He bent over and examined the paving closely, and when he straightened up his eyes were even more surprised. I queried, "Well, what is it, caramel icing?"

"It's permaplast sir. We aren't the discoverers of this planet, because that stuff's an Earth product."

"Um," I sort of mumbled, "Couldn't the natives here have discovered the same process? The same—uh—ingredients might be available."

"Yes, sir. But the blocks are trademarked, if you'll look closely."

I replied, "Couldn't the natives have—" Then I shut up because even I saw how silly that was. But it's tough

to think your party has discovered a new planet and then have Earth-trademarked paving bricks on the first street you come to. "But what's a street doing here at all?" I wanted to know.

"There's only one way to find out," said Ma. "So what are we standing here for?"

So we pushed on, and on the next rise we saw a building. A two-story red brick with a sign on it that read, "Bon-Ton Restaurant." It was in Old English script lettering.

I said, "I'll be a—" But Ma clapped her hand over my mouth before I could finish, which was maybe just as well for what I'd been going to say had been quite inadequate. There was the building only a hundred yards ahead, facing us at a sharp turn in the street.

I started walking faster, and I got there first by a few paces. I opened the door, and started to walk in. Then I stopped cold on the doorstep, because there wasn't any "in" to that building. It was a false front, like a cinema setting, and all you could see through the door was more of those rolling, greenish hills.

I stepped back and looked up at the "Bon-Ton Restaurant" sign, and the others walked up and looked in the doorway, which I'd left open. They came back and we just stood there until Ma got impatient and said, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"What do you want me to do?" I wanted to know. "Go in and order you a lobster dinner? With champa— Hey, I forgot!"

The champagne bottle was still in my jacket pocket and I took it out and passed it to Ma first and then to Ellen, and then I finished what was left of it, and I drank it too fast, because the bubbles tickled my nose and made me sneeze.

I felt ready for anything, though, and I took another walk through the doorway of the building that wasn't there. Maybe, I figured, I could see some sign of how recently it had been put up, or

(Turn to page 112)

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something. But there weren't any signs that I could see. The inside—or rather the back of the front, if you know what I'm talking about, was smooth and plain like a sheet of glass. It looked like a synthetic of some sort.

I took a look at the ground back of it, but all I could see were a few holes that looked like insect holes. And that's what they must have been because there was a big, black cockroach sitting (or standing, because how can you tell whether a cockroach is sitting or standing?) by one of them. I took a step closer and he popped down the hole.

I felt a little better as I went front through the doorway. I said, "Ma, I saw a cockroach. And you know what was peculiar about it?"

"What?" said Ma.

"Nothing," I told her. "That's the peculiar thing. There was nothing peculiar. Here the ostriches wear hats and the birds have propellers and the streets go nowhere and the houses haven't any backs to them, but that cockroach didn't even have feathers."

"Are you sure?" Ellen wanted to know.

"Sure I'm sure. Well, let's take the next rise and see what's over it."

WE WENT, and we saw. Down in between that hill and the next, the road took another sharp turn, and facing us was the front view of a tent with a big banner that said, "Penny Arcade."

This time I didn't even break stride. I said, "They copied that banner from the show Sam Heideman used to have. Remember Sam, and the old days, Ma?"

"That drunken no-good?" asked Ma.

"Why, you liked him, too, Ma."

"Yes, and I liked you but that doesn't prove that you aren't or that he isn't——"

"Why, Ma," I interrupted. But by that time we were right in front of the tent. Looked like real canvas because it billowed gently. I said, "I haven't got the heart. Who wants to look through this time?"

But Ma already had her head through the flap of the tent. I heard her say, "Why, hello Sam, you old soak."

I said, "Ma, quit kidding or I'll——" But by that time I was past her and inside the tent, and it was a tent, all four sides of one and a good big one at that. And it was lined with the old familiar coin machines. There, counting coins in the change booth was Sam Heideman, looking up with almost as much surprise on his face as there must have been in mine.

He said, "Pop Wherry! I'll be a dirty name." Only he didn't say "dirty name"—but he didn't get around to apologizing to Ma and Ellen for that until he and I had pounded each other's backs and then he'd shaken hands around and been introduced to Johnny Lane.

It was just like old times on the Mars and Venus carney lots. He was telling Ellen how she'd been just 'so high' when he'd seen her last and did she really remember him? And then Ma sniffed.

When Ma sniffs like that, there's something to look at, and I got my eyes off good old Sam and looked at Ma and then at where Ma was looking. I didn't sniff, but I gasped.

A woman was coming forward from somewhere in the back of the tent and when I call her a woman, it's because I can't think of the right word if there is one. She was St. Cecilia and Guinevere and a Petty girl all ironed into one. She was like a sunset in New Mexico and the cold, silver moons of Mars seen from the Equatorial Gardens. She was like a Venusian valley in the spring and like Dorzalski playing the violin. She was really somethin'!

I heard another gasp from alongside of me, and it was an unfamiliar note. Took me a second to realize why it was unfamiliar. I'd never heard Johnny Lane gasp before. It was an effort, but I shifted my eyes for a look at his face. And I thought, "Oh—oh. Poor Ellen." For the poor boy was gone now, no question about it.

And just in time—maybe seeing Johnny helped me—I managed to remember that I'm pushing fifty and happily married. I took hold of Ma's arm and hung on.

"Sam," I said, "who on Ea—on what—"

ever planet this is——”

Sam turned around and looked behind him. He said, “Miss Ambers, I’d like you to meet some old friends of mine just dropped in. Mrs. Wherry, this is Miss Ambers, the movie star.”

Then he finished the introductions, first Ellen, then me and then Johnny. Ma and Ellen were too polite. Me, I maybe went the other way by pretending not to notice the hand Miss Ambers held out. Old as I am, I had a hunch I might forget to let go if I took it. That’s the kind of a girl she was.

Johnny did forget.

Sam was saying, “Pop, you old pirate, what are you doing here? I thought you stuck to the colonies where you’d get a play, and I sure didn’t look for you to drop in on a movie set.”

“A movie set!” I said. Things began to make sense, almost.

“Sure. Planetary Cinema, Inc. With me as technical adviser on carney scenes. They wanted inside shots of a penny arcade so I just brought my old stuff out of storage and set it up. All the boys are over at the base camp now.”

LIGHT was just beginning to dawn on me. “And that restaurant front up the street? That’s a set?” I queried.

“Sure, and the street itself. They didn’t need it, but they had to film the making of it for one sequence.”

“Oh,” I went on. “But how about the ostrich with the bowtie, and the birds with the propellers? They couldn’t have been movie props. Or could they?” I’d heard that Planetary Cinema, Inc., did some pretty impossible things.

Sam shook his head a bit blankly. “Nope, you must have seen some of the local fauna. There are a few, but not many, and they don’t get in the way.”

Ma said, “Look here, Sam Heideman, how come if this planet has been discovered, we hadn’t heard about it? How long has it been known, and what’s it all about?”

“Man named Wilkins discovered this planet ten years ago,” Sam chuckled. “Reported it to the Council, but before it got publicized, Planetary Cinema got

wind of it and offered the Council a whooping rental for the place of the condition that its existence be kept secret. As there aren’t any minerals or anything of value here and the soil ain’t worth a whoop, the Council rented it to them on those terms.”

“But why secret?”

“No visitors, no distractions, not to mention the jump on their competitors. All the big movie companies spy on one another and swipe each other’s ideas. You should know that by now. Here they got all the space they want and can work in peace and privacy.”

“What’ll they do about us finding the place?” I wanted to know.

Sam chuckled again. “Guess they’ll entertain you royally now that you’re here and try to persuade you to keep it under your hat. You’ll probably get a free pass for life to all the Panetary Cinema theaters, too.”

He went over to a cabinet and came back with a tray of bottles and glasses. Ma and Ellen declined, but Sam and I had a couple apiece, and it was good stuff. Johnny and Miss Ambers were over in a corner of the tent whispering together so earnestly that we didn’t bother them, especially when I told Sam that Johnny didn’t drink.

Johnny still had hold of her hand and was gazing into her eyes like a sick pup. I noticed Ellen moved around so she was looking the other way and didn’t have to watch. I felt sorry for her, but there wasn’t anything I could do. Something like that just happens if it happens. And if I’d been Johnny’s age and it hadn’t been for Ma—

But I saw Ma was getting impatient and edgy and after a few yarns back and forth, I said we’d better go back to the ship and get dressed up, if we were due to be entertained royally. Then we’d move the ship in closer. I reckoned we could spare a few days on Nothing Sirius. I left Sam in stitches by telling him how and why we’d named the planet that, after a look at the local fauna.

Then I gently pried Johnny loose from the movie star and led him outside. It wasn’t easy. There was a blank, bliss-

ful expression on his face, and he'd even forgotten to salute me when I'd spoken to him. He hadn't called me "sir" either. In fact, he didn't say anything at all.

Neither did any of the rest of us, walking up the street.

There was something knocking at my mind, and I couldn't figure out what it was. There was something wrong, something that didn't make sense.

Ma was worried, too. Finally I heard her say, "Pop, is Sam right about them entertaining us? I mean, if they really want to keep this place a secret, wouldn't they maybe—uh—"

"No, they wouldn't," I answered, maybe a bit snappishly. That wasn't what I was worried about, though.

I LOOKED down at that new and perfect road, and there was something about it I didn't like. I diagonalled over to the curb and walked along that, looked down at the greenish soil beyond, but there wasn't much to see except more holes and more bugs like the one I'd seen back at the Bon Ton restaurant.

Maybe they weren't cockroaches, unless the cinema company had brought them. But they were near enough like cockroaches for all practical purposes.

And they still didn't have propellers or wheels or bow-ties or feathers. They were just plain cockroaches.

I stepped off the paving and tried to step on one or two of them, but they got away and got down holes. They were plenty fast and shifty on their feet.

I got back on the road and walked with Ma. When she asked, "What were you doing?" I answered, "Nothing."

Ellen was walking along not talking, and keeping her face a studious blank. I could guess what she was thinking, and I wished there was something could be done about it. The only thing I could think of was, to decide to stay on Earth a while at the end of this trip and give her a chance to get over Johnny by meeting a lot of other young sprigs. Maybe even finding one she liked.

Johnny was walking along in a daze. He was gone, all right, and he'd fallen with awful suddenness, like guys like

that always do. Oh, maybe it wasn't love but was just infatuation, but right now he probably didn't know what planet he was on.

We were over the first rise now, out of sight of Sam's tent.

"Pop, did you see any movie cameras around?" Ma asked suddenly.

"Nope, but those things cost millions. They don't leave them setting around loose when they're not being used."

Ahead of us was the front of that restaurant. It looked funny as the devil from a side view, walking toward it from this direction. Nothing in sight but that, and green clay hills, and the crazy street we were walking on.

There weren't any cockroaches on the street. Seemed as though they never got up on it or crossed it.

When I spoke to Johnny, he didn't seem to hear me, and I decided not to say it because I didn't know what I was going to say. There was still that something knocking at my mind. Something that made less sense than anything else.

It got stronger and stronger and it was driving me as crazy as it was. I got to wishing I had another drink. Sirius I was getting down toward the horizon, but it was still plenty hot.

I even began to wish I had a drink of water. Ma looked tired, too. "Let's stop for a rest, we're about halfway back," I said to her.

We stopped. It was right in front of the Bon Ton, and I looked up at the sign and grinned. "Johnny, will you go in and order dinner for us?" I asked our precise young man.

He saluted and replied, "Yes, sir," then started for the door. He suddenly got kind of red in the face and stopped. I chuckled, but I didn't rub it in by saying anything else.

Ma and Ellen sat down on the curb.

I walked around back of the restaurant front and it hadn't changed any. Smooth like glass on the other side. The same cockroach was still by the same hole.

I said, "Hello, there," but it didn't answer, so I tried to step on it but it was too fast for me. I noticed something

funny. It started for the hole the second I decided to step on it, even before I had actually moved a muscle.

I went around to the front again, and leaned up against the brick wall. It was nice and solid to lean against.

I took a cigar out of my pocket and started to light it, but I dropped the match. *Almost*, I knew what was wrong. Something about Sam Heideman.

"Ma," I said, and she turned around and looked up at me.

"Ma, isn't Sam Heideman d—"

And then, with utterly appalling suddenness, I wasn't leaning against a wall any more, because the wall just wasn't there and I was falling backward.

I heard Ma yell and Ellen squeal.

I picked myself up off the greenish clay. Ma and Ellen were getting up, too, from sitting down hard on the ground because the curb they'd been sitting on wasn't there any more either.

There wasn't a sign of the street we'd been walking on, or of the Ben Ton restaurant I'd been leaning against. There wasn't anything but greenish hills like we'd first seen from the door of the Chitterling.

That fall had jolted me plenty, and I was mad. I wanted something to take out my mad on and I looked around to see if my friend the cockroach had gone up in smoke along with the wall and the street. He hadn't. I tried for him again, and missed again.

Then I looked around at the others. Ma looked as mad as I felt. She was rubbing herself where she'd landed on the ground. Johnny looked startled and like he wanted to cuss but didn't know how.

Ellen didn't look anything. She just looked, down at where the street ought to be and over toward me where the Bon Ton ought to be, then back toward where we'd come from as though wondering whether the tent was still back there.

"It isn't," I said.

Ma asked, "It isn't what?"

"Isn't there," I explained.

Ma glowered at me. "What isn't there?"

"The tent," I went on, a bit peeved. "The movie company. The whole she-

bang. And especially Sam Heideman. It was when I remembered about Sam that the street went out from under us."

"Remembered what about Sam?"

"He's dead. Don't you remember six years ago, in New York, when we were reading some old copies of *Interplanetary Variety* and came across his obit? Sam Heideman's dead, so he wasn't there. None of it was there. And the minute I realized that, they pulled it out from under us."

"They? What do you mean, they, Pop Wherry? Who is they?"

"You mean who *are* they?" I said, but the look Ma gave me made me wince. "Let's not talk here," I went on. "Let's get back to the ship as quick as we can, first. You can lead us there, Johnny, without the street?"

He nodded, forgetting to salute or 'sir' me. We started off, none of us talking.

After we got to where the end of the street had been, we could see our footprints, and the going was easy. We passed the rise where had been the purple bush that the birds with propellers had been flying around, but the birds weren't there now. Neither was the purple bush.

I had a pretty good hunch, too, that we wouldn't see any more elephant-sized ostriches in bow ties. We didn't.

But the Chitterling was there, thank heaven. We saw it from the last rise, and it was just as we'd left it. It looked like home, and we started to walk faster.

I opened the door and stood aside for Ma and Ellen to go in first. Ma had just got her foot on the first rung when we heard the voice. It said, "We bid you farewell."

I looked around—all of us looked around—but there wasn't anybody or anything doing the talking. Well, there hadn't been any street there either. Or one-sided restaurant or propeller-birds.

"We bid you farewell, too. And the deuce with you," I answered, letting 'em know I meant it.

I motioned to Ma to go on into the ship. The sooner I was out of this place, the better I'd like it.

But the voice said: "Wait," and there

was something about it that made us wait. "We wish to explain, so you will not return."

Nothing had been further from my mind, but I said, "Why not?"

"Your civilization is not compatible with ours. We have studied your minds to make sure. We projected images from images we found in your minds, to study your reactions to them. Our first images, our thought-projections, were confused. But we understood your minds well by the time you reached the farthest point of your walk. We were able to project beings similar to yourselves."

"Sam Heideman, yeah," I said. "But how about the da—the woman? She couldn't have been in the memory of any of us because we didn't know her."

"She was a composite—what you would call an idealization. That, however, does not matter. By studying you, we learned that your civilization concerns itself with things, ours with thoughts. Neither of us has anything to offer the other. No good could come through interchange whereas much harm might. Our planet has no material resources that would interest your race."

I had to agree to that, looking out over that monotonous rolling green clay. It supported those tumbleweed-like bushes, a few of them, but didn't look as though it would raise anything else. As for minerals, I hadn't even seen a pebble.

"Right you are," I shouted back. "Any planet that raises nothing but tumbleweeds and cockroaches can keep itself, as far as we're concerned. So—" Then something dawned on me. "Hey, just a minute. There must be something else besides weeds and roaches, or who the deuce am I talking to?"

"You are talking," replied the voice, "to what you call cockroaches, which is another point of incompatibility between us. To be more precise, you are talking to a thought-projected voice, but we are projecting it. And let me assure you of one thing—that you are as physically repugnant to us as we are to you."

I looked down then and saw them, three of them, ready to pop in holes if I made a move. Back inside the ship, I

said, "Johnny, blast off."

He saluted and said, "Yes, sir," and went into the pilot's compartment and shut the door. His face had been studiously blank. He didn't come out until we were on automatic course with Sirius just a dwindling star behind us. Ellen had gone to her room. Ma and I were playing cribbage.

"May I go off duty, sir?" Johnny asked and walked stiffly to his room when I answered, "Sure."

AFTER a while, Ma and I turned in. A while after that we heard the noises. I got up and went to investigate.

I came back grinning. "Everything's okay, Ma," I said. "It's Johnny Lane. He's as drunk as a hoot owl." And I slapped Ma playfully.

"Ouch, you old fool," she sniffed. "I'm sore there from the curb disappearing from under me. And what's wonderful about Johnny getting drunk? Are you?"

"No," I admitted, regretfully maybe, "But Ma—he told me to go to blazes. And without saluting. Me, the owner of the ship."

Ma just looked at me. Sometimes women are smart, but sometimes they're pretty dumb.

"Listen, he isn't going to keep on getting drunk. This is just an occasion. Can't you see what happened to his pride and his dignity?"

"You mean because he—"

"Because he fell in love with the thought-projection of a cockroach," I pointed out. "Or thought he did. He has to get drunk once to forget that, and from now on, after he sobers up, he's going to be human. I'll bet on it. And I'll bet, too, that once he's human he's going to see Ellen and realize how pretty she is. I'll even bet he's head-over-heels before we get back to Earth."

"If you're right—"

"I am right," I told her gleefully, "I'll get a bottle and we'll drink a toast on it. To Nothing Sirius."

And, for once, I was right. Johnny and Ellen were engaged before we got near enough to the Solar System to start decelerating.



THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE



SCIENCE LEADS THE WAY TO VICTORY

FUTURE WEASELS TO GIVE AND GIVE—If your missus wants a fur coat of the weasel, ermine, marten or mink variety after the war, she will be able to get it a lot more easily and cheaply than at present, thanks to experiments conducted by Professors Robert K. Enders and Oliver P. Pearson of Swarthmore College in collaboration with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

It seems that before the young of these species are born, they lie fallow, as it were, for periods of uncertain length, while their mamas take a long snooze during the dark winter months. Artificial lighting fools the fond parents, who think winter is over and get busy producing more pelts for fur coats. It may be a dirty trick on the animals, but the ladies won't think so.

* * *

ASTRONOMER CRACKS STAR-PLANET BORDERLINE—Dr. K. Aa. Strand of Sproul Observatory has come up with proof that the invisible third component of the triple star 61 Cygni is a planet rather than a star as previously supposed. As a result of this discovery, he is certain that a continuation of accurate photographic observation of double stars will reveal further stellar masses of such small magnitude that the boundary between planet and star, which has hitherto seemed clear enough, will disappear. As no planets have hitherto been found outside our own solar system, the results promise official backing for many of Captain Future's intergalactic planetary jaunts.

* * *

HUGE CARGO PLANES TO EASE POST-WAR FREIGHT PROBLEMS—Cargo planes capable of carrying 38 tons of perishable freight around the world in weather-proof packages were predicted by paper company executive J. H. Macleod at a Chicago scientific meeting recently. The biggest benefit to the manufacturer will be the elimination of costly warehouse facilities now needed to keep such freight in shape for the present longer periods required for transshipment. Package engineers have already assured tailor-made packaging for tight stowage by means of special corrugated boards, coating materials and adhesives with tough, flexible corrugated material used simultaneously to wrap and to pack. In the near future, you may have to unwrap your breakfast eggs before cracking the shell.

HIGH OCTANE FOR FUTURE PUDDLE JUMPERS

—Post-war automobiles will run with high octane gasoline and incorporate many of the current features of aircraft engine design, according to engineers of Universal Oil Products Company. Once the process by which the heavy molecules of raw oil are cracked to produce the super fuel, is made available to small refiners, individual car owners will find themselves getting many more gallons to the mile with much less wear and tear on their engines. All they'll need is winglike mudguard extensions to leap the largest of puddles.

* * *

PARKING LOTS TO BE TERRACED LANDING FIELDS

Parking lots of the future will be landscaped terraces on which helicopters may land, rest, and take off, according to Professor Martin Wagner, regional planning chief of the Harvard School of Design. Under these terraces, regular parking levels for more familiar ground-hugging vehicles will exist. But whether women drivers will be any more adept at parking vertically without bumping mudguards than they are in today's horizontal methods remains to be seen. We can only hope.

* * *

NEW PLANE COMPASS INDIFFERENT TO TEMPTATION

—A new airplane compass which is not thrown off by bombload, armor plate or the motion of the plane has been developed by W. A. Reichel of Bendix Aviation Corporation. The Gyro Flux Gate Compass uses the earth's magnetic field to develop minute electrical impulses which, when amplified, turn the compass indicator. According to its inventor, it is "as great an advance over the conventional magnetic compass as that compass was over the lodestone."

* * *

NYLON SHORTAGE MAY ENDURE AFTER WAR

—those precious nylons may be as hard to come by when the war is won as they are in the heat of conflict—at least for a while. Foreseeing that most of the smaller communities of America will have air-mail pick-up service, Dupont expects that use of the air-coal-gas miracle for two-rope purposes alone will keep a lot of ladies' legs bare for some time to come.



UNDER OBSERVATION

(Continued from page 9)

As I am a bookworm I feel I should write and let you know what I think of him. I have been wanting to write, but couldn't find the courage. But I finally got it. I love to read about the Future, and these stories are exceptionally good.

I haven't any complaints to make except have a little more love between Curt and Joan as they seem awful cold to each other for sweethearts. And I would like the stories just a little longer. But—don't take out the short stories, as they are good too.

I have just finished reading "Magic Moon." And like it very much. But the first thing I always read is "Under Observation," as I like to read what other people think of Captain Future. And tell these old Bachelors to stop asking to have Joan taken out of the stories. I think she is nice and very pretty. Except in every picture she seems to look different. Tell Brett Sterling to keep up the good work. He is great!

I wish Captain Future was published more frequently.—15 Sycamore St., Somerville, Mass.

Whenever you gal pee-lots write in, you just naturally have the old Sarge purring like a full battery of rockets in perfect firing order. I quite agree with you, Martha, about the softening and refining influence of the romantic touch. These junior lunatics you are caged up with in this old astrogation chamber may holler a lot about girls being in stories, but they would look rather silly (if not synthetic) running around without mothers somewhere in their lives, wouldn't they? And they'd be the first to miss the influence of love upon the destinies of mankind.

LOOKING TOWARD TOMORROW

By Pvt. Walter E. Pomper

Dear Sarge: I just finished reading my first copy of CAPTAIN FUTURE and really enjoyed it. I never found any interest in stories connected with the "Tomorrow," but from now on you have a steady reader of CAPTAIN FUTURE.

Give my congratulations to Brett Sterling on "Magic Moon." I really liked the way he described Capt. Future's making of the metal-less electric generator and projector. I have neglected the study of science but Capt. Future has aroused my interest again. I can hardly wait for my next copy. I'm really looking forward for the day when Hitler and Tojo are blasted into atoms and we can enjoy a new C.F. magazine every month.

You'll find the name strip and coupon enclosed which should make me a Futureman and Kiwi. Send me my membership certificate and a list of rules. I also would like to know how to become a "Space Peelt."

Hope that you won't have to swallow another jug of Xeno after you have read this.—555th Engr. Hq. Pn. Bn., Camp White, Oregon.

There are no special rules, Pee-lot Pomper, to be a FUTUREMAN—just a genuine interest in scientification. You are now a member, so start putting your two-bits' worth in to help build and plan and talk for a better world tomorrow. Things are going to be plenty different after this war—and it's up to all of us to see that they are better, as well.

A POET PEE-LOT

By Earle Franklin Baker

Dear Sarge: Could a steel-soldier rate a berth on your rocket-ship? I know something about metal. I could come in handy if you got wrecked on some world and your supply of Xeno ran low.

I've found time to write, aside from my work at the steel mill here where we are hammering out the steel that will beat the Axis. (Thought: Hitler would find himself flat on his fortress spitting out teeth if we had a half-dozen robots like Grag to set loose on Europe.) Whenever I hit a low spot and feel blue, I pick up a copy of CAPTAIN FUTURE, and if the cover doesn't cheer me up, the always excellent tales therein do. They hit the jackpot with me every time.

I fought through a mob at the corner drug store, pushed three old ladies and two boys under a table, snatched the last Winter number from some guy's

hands and flipping three nickels onto the counter, fled, clutching my prize.

I am still drooling over the cover. Bergey does excellent work. I like your covers for CAPTAIN FUTURE. Who gives a rap if they sometimes don't exactly click with text. For my steel pennies you have the best covers in the pulp field.

MAGIC MOON rates the best bouquet the rare gardens of Venus can produce. It was space adventure of the first order. Excellent A. Brett Sterling has the brain of a Jules Verne. I hope his pen never runs dry. I enclose a poem about Captain Future. Hope you can find space for it. Some of the fans will remember me. I've sold to national magazines.—1811 S. Courtland Ave., Kokomo, Indiana.

FLY WITH THE FUTUREMEN by

Earle Franklin Baker

I've shipped aboard the "Comet"
I helped a world win free;
I went with Captain Future
Beneath the Jovian sea!
I've hunted fun with mighty Grag,
Watched Otho bake and cook,
With aid of "The Brain" we won the moon!
Through the pages of a book!

I've sped thru space in this fast ship,
In a "Quest Beyond The Stars;"
I've fought the "Outlaws of the Moon"
And wooed "The Maid of Mars."
Saw Oog and EEK break a Xeno jug!
And what a yell I heard,
As if I'd really been there,
Through "Thrillings" printed word!

I've seen Curt with "The Comet Kings,"
With Joan brave bitter fate;
And battle deep inside the moon
Where horrible monsters wait!
I've roamed uncharted stellar skies,
Yet never left this Earth,
For a book and my old easy chair
Gained me a Spaceman's berth!

I love to fly with the Futuremen
To a far off golden shore,
And like all Captain Future Fans,
I, too, ask for more!
I never leave this good old Earth
As on strange scenes I look,
But my humdrum life's adventurous
Through the magic of a book!

And there's Kiwi Baker's tribute to the Futuremen. Pretty neat, eh? Of course, the old Sarge is no judge of this kind of stuff. He never graduated from the limerick class himself. And here's more comment on the cover. Okay, Pee-lot Baker, will you take up a position in the corner just opposite those glowering-faced junior astrogators yonder? You're on the other side of the debate.

MIXING THE SARGE'S DRINKS

By Frederick E. Warth

Dear Sarge: Well, I've just finished tearing the last ish. to pieces, so take your head off that aspirin-stuffed pillow and have a glass of miffin juice (which is better than Paul Miles' Su-Tu-ish). As for those blue-bub berry weeds you're going to feed me, I have just had some mifsuno which counteracts bub-bub berry weeds (mifsuno is a mixture of miffin juice, Su-Tu-ish, and Xeno).

I know you don't know me yet, but you'll hear a lot from me in the Future (somewhere along the 30th century). The first S.F. mag. I read was CAPTAIN FUTURE. "The Face of the Deep." I didn't stop reading it until I had finished. Since then I have been reading all the S.F. I can get my hands on, but your books rank with the highest.

Now to tell you what's what in this ish. First, as usual, the cover: the colors made the book look like a rainbow. Captain Future looked like a moron and the female (Jane I suppose) looked a little odd, too. I could have done better myself (Oh! Yes! I'm an artist) but I think he could do much better than that. As for "Magic Moon" I did not stop reading it until I had finished. Brett Sterling is as good as Edmond Hamilton, if not better.

The shorts were fair.

"The Worlds of Tomorrow," "The Shape of the

Future" and "The Metamorphosis of Simon Wright," were all interesting as usual.

I have another complaint to make. I noticed that you never do what the fans ask you to do.—413 E. Park Ave., Savannah, Georgia.

Ah, so the senior astrogator doesn't do what the junior pee-lots want him to, eh? Well, Kiwi Warth, life is still too pleasant for the old Sarge to do certain things suggested or to go to certain spots named or indicated where there are no tourist accommodations. As for doing the other things—well, I'm a space sarge, not a contortionist.

Now, you climb over into that group of cover dissenters on the left, and we'll settle your hash in time for lunch.

IN A TRANCE

By Merry Coats

Dear Sarge: This is the very first time I've ever written to any magazine, so if I pull any boners I hope you'll bear with me.

Unfortunately (for me) I have just recently begun to read science fiction—now I read all I can get my hands on. CAPTAIN FUTURE is among my favorites. He's really marvelous and he certainly gets in and out of amazing scrapes.

"Magic Moon" in the Winter issue, and in fact every Futureman tale I've read so far, has held me in a trance. I couldn't stop reading once I got started. I am among those who wish for longer and more Futuremen stories.

I've never read any of Hamilton's work, but I'm plenty satisfied with Sterling.

May I join your Futuremen Club, please?—No Address.

Welcome to THE FUTUREMEN club, gal, and pour yourself a glass of Pluto Punch. Certainly, Merry has an address, you little space apes, but in sending her a membership card, Frog-eyes misplaced it, and the old Sarge is not going to withhold a gal pee-lot's communique from print because of this technicality. In the name of Curt Newton, Merry, I thank you.

And are we getting memberships and praise
[Turn page]

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this month! Don't blame the old space dog. I'm not picking out special letters. Listen to this one:

I HAVE CHANGED

By Arthur Oesterreicher

Dear Sarge: In times before I read CF, I never liked characters like him. Now I have changed. I think you have a swell book. I just read "Magic Moon." It is a very thrilling story, full of suspense. I have but one complaint. This isn't only about CF. It concerns all artists. When a picture of the earth is shown, why can't you ever show something beside the America's? "Days of Creation" sounds good. It looks as if it will top "Magic Moon" in this ish. How about a Finlay or Leydenfrost cover? Bergey isn't so bad either. Take Belarski out of the air mags and put him in stf.—241 West Olive Street, Long Beach, L. I.

There's something pertinent in what you say, Kiwi Oesterreicher, but so many junior astrogators wouldn't recognize a global map of Earth with any other continents on it, that the artists have become chained by custom. Maybe things will be different after we win the war. Then, in celebration, perhaps an individualistic artist will depict the map of Europe on the globe of Earth as seen from space. But you are all out of step; you should be complaining about or praising the cover on this present issue.

COVER IS GOOD

By Kent Bone

Dear Sarge: You told us to get our letters in as soon as we could so here's mine.

I've got about a dozen helium bags tied to my typewriter because I'm floating around in the air. You ask why? I was so happy after reading this issue, that I guzzled about 12 gallons of xeno and so I'm floating around.

Boy, Sterling sure did a bang-up job on "Magic Moon." Say, that isn't a bad idea—I mean, making a movie about Captain Future. I certainly wish I could see a movie about him.

"To Dust Returneth," by Henry Kuttner and "The Companions of Sirius," by William Morrison were both excellent short stories.

Art! The cover was good, BUT don't you think Bergey needs a rest?

Inside work! The best drawing was on page 106 by Virgil Finlay. The next best drawing was on page 28.

The Futuramen was the best Special Feature. Under Observation was the next best Special Feature. If any of you readers have any back issues of CAPTAIN FUTURE that you don't want (before 1943) please write to me. I would like to obtain them.

Well, here's hoping for a new cover artist and for C.F. to become bi-monthly or monthly.—2577 Ferris Ave., Detroit 9, Mich.

Okay, Pee-lot Bone, so Bergey needs a rest, but the cover is good. You draw a blue chalk mark down the middle of the floor between our two groups yonder and lie half on one side and half on the other. Here's hoping you don't get trampled—much, when the fracas starts. And look out! Here comes another one.

CAN ARTISTS READ?

By Steve Adams

Dear Sarge: What's the matter, can't you talk Bergey into reading the story? Take this issue's cover (I don't want it) the art work is wonderful, but please, Sarge, pretty please with Xeno on it, tell me when both Curt and Joan were caught by a "Swallower?" See what I mean, Sarge? And now for the interior pics, Oh Happy Day! A pic by Finlay, and a honey! How about some more of his work? Preferably on the Cap. Future tale. Sokoll's pic was good, but who is the guy who did the Cap-

[Turn to page 122]

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tain Future drawings? Is he afraid to sign his name? If so, I don't blame him.

Now for the stories:

I: "Magic Moon" definitely not up to par, not enough science and none of that old Hamilton spirit. Another question—in the beginning of Chap X, Cap. got his head and one arm free of the swallower and in the next moment was hurled through the water. How?

II: "To Dust Returneth" good, but slow-moving.

III: "The Companions of Sirius" above average, but how could one man be as smart as Jameson?

IV: Articles and Features, as usual—100% Okay.

I guess that about does it, so until the next time.
—64 S. S. Carolina Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

If you have studied your lesson thoroughly, Kiwi Adams, you already know the answer to your question about **MAGIC MOON'S** artist—answered a few flashes back. You had better lie down beside Pee-lot Bone, as you seem to hover on the fence about the cover. Pull a couple of floor plates over you for protection when the fight begins.

DENEB DOUBLE TALK

By Charles D. Cosby

Dear Sarge: Did you or did you not say, "Wake me up when you have torn this present issue to pieces?" Well, wake up, Sarge, time to stomp the experts. (Meaning all us Futurism, S.F.L. members, Kiwis, and pee-lots.) By the way, Sarge; are you triplets or are you being impersonated in T.W.S. and S.S.?

Well, I suppose the best place to start is the cover. I see we have our colored proton rings back again; but that's O.K. They were gone so long I was beginning to think Curt was using a new type gun.

Now Earle K. Bergey is O.K. as far as art goes; but he, or someone else who tells him what to draw, either does not read the story or ought to read it twice.

The animal in the picture is, by all the descriptions in the novel, a "breather." This harmless creature was more afraid of Joan than she was of it. Also, when Curt met the "swallower" he was alone. That completely removes Miss Randall from the cover. By the way, what keeps the water from going under Joan's suit? There is no watertight connection as between the suit and the helmet; which she did not have on when Curt found her.

Let's move on to your department. Only one thing wrong there, too short. Ought to add three or four more pages, both sides. Cut out the shorter of the shorts, only have one, and use the space to good advantage—in "Under Observation" and the rest in the main novel.

Pee-lot Fisher's offer to teach **ESPERANTO** is very generous. I for one have taken him up on it. H. Malamud, I. Berkman & H. Rogovin say they have talked to C. F. (By the way, Sarge, are they one person or is he all three?)

He, or they, said:

"Future and I figured out how we could extend the vibration drive to vibrate the ship slowly backward through time as well as swiftly through space."

"That means he could get as far as Deneb in five minutes."

In other words he, or they, mean the *Comet* would have to travel 130 light years a minute. (Deneb is 650 light years from Sol.) This would give Greg no time to miss any interstellar orb which might be in their way. I say Greg because he would not be under suspended animation.

Why couldn't C.F. use the two-dimensional warp that was invented by the friends he made in "Quest Beyond the Stars"? He would get there in a few hours.—194 Main St., Binghamton, New York.

You argue this matter out with Goldilocks and the three bears, Kiwi Cosby. The old Sarge astrologues in the old-fashioned rocket ship. Your stand on the cover situation opens a new angle for debate, but we'll line you up with the pee-lots on the righthand side. I'm not going to go into that old explanation again about poetic license with the exact text and stuff like that. You space rascals know it all by heart.

KUTTNER COMES FIRST

By Chad Oliver

Dear Sarge: We shall commence operations with the most important item. And, for the first time in my memory, it is not the feature novel. No, it was an unheralded little item tucked away in the back of the book. I'm speaking of Henry Kuttner's magnificent *To Dust Returneth*. This, I think, was a classic—the first I've read in a long time. It was simply superb; it made up, all by itself, for all the trips we readers have so often read in CF's short story department. It will be a long, long time before we get another short like this; that is to be expected. But now you have something to build on. Come on—let's make CF's short stories something really exceptional.

A word of caution here: Limit the number of shorts per issue to two. *The Captain Future novel is still of prime importance.* A yarn like *To Dust Returneth* comes along only once in a blue moon.

It is certainly no slur on *Magic Moon* that it has to be content with second place, for it was an excellent yarn—fully as good as *The Star of Dread* last issue. Sterling is going great guns on a difficult task—more power to him.

Lastly, in the fictional realm, we have Morrison's "The Companions of Sirius." It wasn't bad, but that is all I can say for it.

And now—the cover. The Bergey Blotch this trip impresses me as being extremely trite—which is a polite way of saying something else. Of the interior pix, Mr. Finlay was best, closely followed by the pic on Page 19. Whodunit? Orban? Also, a word of appreciation for the ever-careful work on "The Worlds of Tomorrow." Those plates are always excellently done.

Too little attention, I think, is given to the features in CF. "The Futuramen" is always interesting and well-written. "The Worlds of Tomorrow" is likewise excellent, with imaginative plotting and writing. "The Future of Captain Future" is about the best of its type in the business. And "Under Observation" is likewise usually excellent—depending, of course, on the quality of the letters you receive.—3956 Ledgewood, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Step over to the corner, Kiwi Oliver; your line forms on the left. The S.R.O. sign is being dusted off, and the old Sarge is slowly building up choleric pressure.

[Turn page]

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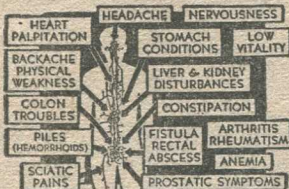
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SIX LONG YEARS

By Pvt. Charles T. Check

Dear Sarge: Having just finished the latest CAPTAIN FUTURE novel, which I thought fair compared to the rest of his novels. I thought I might as well join the CF club, and tell what I think of some of the CF stories. The best of them all, or so I thought was the "Star of Dread," but maybe some other enthusiastic SF fan might think different, but since I have been reading SF for about 6 long years I am beginning to think I am a pretty good judge of SF, and I honestly can say that I enjoy CF the best of them all, and I read every SFM that comes out. Congratulate Brett Sterling for me, because I think he is carrying on Hamilton's work successfully. Well, I will have to sign off now and get back to my work, which is soldiering—2nd Base Hq. & Air Base Sq., Davis-Monthan Field, Tucson, Ariz.

We think so, too, Kiwi Check. In fact, it looks as though most of the junior astrologers think so this month. The only thing the little ogres really find to snap at is the cover. We'll get to that all in one wad. You impartial pee-lots take it easy on the sidelines and watch the fur fly.

ONE BROADSIDE

By Herman F. Corcles, Jr.

Dear Sarge: You had better duck because here are a few brick bats. I finished the Winter 1944 issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE this evening. It was swell except:

1—The cover does not depict a part of the story.
2—The author neglected to say how Capt. Future escaped the Swallower with the prop gun.

3—Why didn't the mercury in the mirror from his makeup kit decompose from the blight, or did they revise the list of metals?

I am not always this way, but this was too much! —720 W. 20th St., Upland, Calif.

This brings up another one of those triangle points about the cover. But at least you don't take issue with the quality of the artwork, Pee-lot Corcles. You warm the corcles of my heart for this, so cut yourself a slice of the bread-and-jam session and enjoy it from the sidelines with the other well-behaved students.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE BIG THREE

By Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: Haw! Haw! Haw! Pardon me, Sarge, but (heh! heh!) that Winter cover was the finest darn thing I've seen all year. Here we see the head of Dumbo the elephant, with one ear wrapped around Cap Future and the other ear around some old gal of about 75. The hero looks like Lil' Abner from the Ozarks, and he's firing some purty colored smoke rings into Dumbo's optics. The entire miss is afloat in a green sea, full of bubbles and vapor. Har! Har! "Tain't scientific—it's ridiculous. Get Bergey to do another one of these; I haven't laughed so hard since the time somebody mixed H₂SO₄ with the Sarge's Xeno.

Candidate for the firing squad; the guy who thought up the title *Magic Moon*. The story itself? *Magic Moon* gets 3½ stars (4 means "superb," while over 4 is a classic).

We are truly living in an age of marvels! The shorts were actually passable! Kuttner, always an especial fave of mine, gets 3 stars. As for *Companions Of Sirius*, every Morrison story rates the same in literary value: 2 stars, one comet, and an asteroid (in other words, so-so).

The features are improving, happily enough. Keep *Shape Of The Future*—it's a good idea to have some straight, practical science.

So Finlay will do the pix for *Days Of Creation*, eh? Sounds too good to be true. I shall hold my breath for three months before making comment.

Now we rip into *Under Observation*. Notice the amazing amount of youngsters! Almost half of them aren't over 15, judging from their letters in this and previous issues. This is a good sign; STFANDOM desperately needs fresh blood if it in-

tends to get back on its (flat) feet. How old am I? Who cares?

Ever stop to analyze the reason for the strong appeal CF holds over young and innocent minds? This can be explained by three simple reasons:

1—Fast, light, easy reading.
2—Weird animals, places, people, and events, are practically irresistible.

3—Cap Future is merely a scientific version of *Soupyman* and the *Green Hairnet*.

I fully realize that I'll be kicked back into the bolt box for that last statement.

Before signing off, three rousing cheers to TWS, SS, and CF for the amount of space they have unselfishly devoted toward backing patriotic movements such as the Red Cross, Victory Gardening, USO, and War Bonds. Keep it up, by all means. When the day of peace comes at last, your magazines will be able proudly to say, "We helped!"—S. J. Baker Ave., Dover, N. J.

Kiwi Kennedy, you sneaked up on our soft side with that last paragraph of yours, and the old Sarge hasn't anything to say to you except to offer you a snort of Xeno. We are trying to help, and we know that every dodgasted one of you pee-lots are doing the same thing.

HOSPITAL FLASH

By Cpl. Richard M. Needham

Dear Sarge: After reading your Winter issue of CF I tho't it was about time to write another communique. "Magic Moon" was very good.

Being as I am in a hospital, and due to the fact that I have time on my hands and in addition that the Post Exchange carries Cpt. Future and companion mags, I've had an opportunity to get others in my ward interested in reading all science-fiction mags I get hold of. That won't make you mad. As most mags I get are companions to CF. Keep 'em coming.—Ward D-4, Station Hospital, Camp Forrest, Tenn.

Thanks, Corporal. We'll keep the mags coming up. You hurry up and get well.

HOW COME?

By Norman G. Johns

Dear Sarge: I would like to join your club but I wish you would clear up a mystery for me.

I recently got hold of an old copy of CAPTAIN FUTURE dated Winter, 1940. I read the novel called "Captain Future and the Space Emperor," and I liked it so much I wanted to read more, but I didn't know if the mag was still published. When I happened to see it recently at the drugstore I bought it at once, but I found that the old Captain Future was written by Edmond Hamilton while the new story was by Brett Sterling. I looked through the pages of CAPTAIN FUTURE, but I could find no explanation. I would like to know how the author came to be changed and if Captain Future and his three comrades Grog, Otho, and The Brain have been changed in any way.—lost address.

A logical question, Kiwi Johns. Edmond Hamilton entered the Armed Forces some time back, and Brett Sterling took over the job of recording the adventures of the Futuremen. There has been no change whatever in the characters, style, or general set-up. There is a little argument, however, on the possible change in quality. Some like Hamilton better, some like Sterling better. Personally, the old Sarge likes 'em both.

UNDER OBSERVATION TOPS

By Donald McWilliams

Dear Sarge: I've read about four issues of your mag CF and I think the story "Worlds To Come" has been the best.

While we're on the subject, does anybody want to sell, trade or in any other way get rid of their CF mags beginning with the first one?

Your own department is the best of its kind in SF Magazines, so don't let anybody kid you about that.—1013 N. 5th Ave., Evansville, Ind.

[Turn page]

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Thanks for the compliment to the depart-
ment. Now, here's a lady:

MISS MISSES ISSUES

By Mary West

Dear Sarge: I have never written to a mag be-
fore, but I have been reading CF since my father
brought the first issue home.

I have just finished "Worlds To Come," and I
think it's swell. I always read CF first. I think it's
best.

I missed the last two issues and would like to
have them very much. I always hate missing issues.

Say! What's the idea? The fronts don't go with
the story? I think someone drank too much Xeno.
—609 W. Park Ave., Kokomo, Ind.

Okay, Kiwi Mary, you belong in the third
group of cover dissenters. Glad to have you
with us.

STERLING CAN WRITE!

By Michael Pelsang

Dear Sarge: If you can stop guzzling that Xeno
jug for a minute, read this ethergram. Well, the
best magazine I read among the Thrilling Publica-
tions Group is CAPTAIN FUTURE. That Fellow Ster-
ling sure can write science fiction. Like some of the
authors in your publications he never writes com-
plicated stories or does he try to confuse the reader.
He knows how to blend romance with adventure to
make a good story. Keep him on till cats-kill-mts.
STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES
are all right, but a little more illustration please.
Namely, let's see what the characters in the stories
look like.

I guess the other readers would like to see what
the old Sarge looks like. I know I would. Don't
be so modest and pub a picture of yourself in the
mag.—309 65th St., West New York, N. J.

There seems to be a little disagreement on
the artwork, Kiwi Pelsang, said the Sarge
dryly. Some kiwis think there's already too
much of it. We'll pass your praise along to
Brett Sterling.

NEW GAL FAN

By Mrs. Wilma Williams

Dear Sarge: I'm a new fan to your mag. May I
say it's tops?

Just finished the summer issue. But what's this?
The letters in your section in the Summer issue are
all from men. Don't you have women readers?

Can't say I agree with those graping males about
the love interest in Captain Future's stories. It's
OK, not too much, not too little.

As to Otho and Grag and their bickering, I'd say
keep it up. The story needs a bit of comedy to
lessen the tension. You know?

Have read many science fiction mags of future
worlds and people, but have found Captain Future
and his Futurmen to top them all.

"Star of Dread" is the best I've read in many
months and believe me when I say I read every-
thing I can get my hands on in this type of story.
Don't know how I've missed your mag.

Count me in from now on.
Just one little complaint. The mystery of man
origin wasn't quite clear. Was the ending meant to
leave a sense of suspense?

Just wondered. Let's have more views from
women in your section. Huh?—707 N. Madison,
Peoria, Illinois.

Bless you, gal, the Summer issue just hap-
pened to be a rather barren and desolate
number as far as the reader department was
concerned. You just bet you are welcome,
and you'll find several gal pee-lots for com-
pany this voyage. Yes, the origin of mankind
is still shrouded in mystery. Curt Newton
will track that secret to its final lair yet.

THREE YEARS CONVINCES

By Kenneth Lesser

Dear Sarge: After reading CAPTAIN FUTURE for
three years, I have finally decided to join The

Futuramen. As far as Xeno jugs go, "The Star of Dread" in the Summer issue rates five, which in my space language is good. The shorts could have been better. Brett Sterling is a good author, but not as good as old Ed. "The Star of Dread" is much better than Brett Sterling's first story "Worlds to Come."—*Smith Farms, Nassau, New York.*

Welcome to our circle, Kiwi Kenneth. We think Brett Sterling is getting better, too. Here follows another comment on Sterling.

STERLING IMPROVEMENT

By Arlen McGee

Dear Sarge: I am very happy to inform you that the one science fiction fan of Gooding, Idaho, has accepted you as a member of his clan.

I am doing this because of your good judgment in selecting Brett Sterling to keep the stories of that superfine adventurer, Captain Future, coming to us.

The last novel by author Hamilton that I have been able to get was "The Face of the Deep," a story ranking very high on my list of "better than average" science fiction.

It looks as though Brett Sterling has some improving to do before he will be able to turn out stories of such merit as Hamilton's "Planets in Peril," however, "The Star of Dread" showed a decided improvement over "Worlds to Come."

Bergey is doing fine on the cover, and will continue to do so as long as he shows some originality in his work. His best was for "Worlds to Come." And I don't think readers should do so much fussing about the cover not depicting the exact scene, colors and expressions of the story and its characters. If it is well done and shows some relation to the story why trifle about its minor defects?—*Route One, Gooding, Idaho.*

Okay, Pee-lot McGee, you've gone and taken sides. Line up with the cover experts on the righthand side of yonder section.

By all the space imps! Here's a fourth angle on the cover controversy.

NO MORE LEG ART!

By James Ayers

Dear Sarge: Listen, you xeno-guzzling pee-lot, quit putting those darn cheese-cake pictures on the front of CF! I will put the mag down so fast that it will even amaze me. No more such pictures! This is a science book and you should put CF and the Futuramen on the front.

If you have a picture like that anymore I won't read the book.—*609 First St., Attala, Ala.*

Well, blast my rockets, but here is a kiwi who honestly must be one of those twelve-year-olds all you pee-lots kid about. Now, you look here, young squirt, most everybody likes pretty girls—even the old Sarge (thank Jupiter)—and our cover pictures are definitely not what you say they are! Not by the standards of the Spacemen's Cafe murals on all the colonized planets. So you just read the stories, James; the Sarge will look at the pictures.

Right about here would be a good place for the old Sarge to blow the whistle for the fray to start and then pick up a rocket wrench and begin peeling a few coconuts—but I'm gonna fool you. If you have stood in line long enough to feel foolish and conspicuous, you may return to your astrogation charts.

Seems to me somebody said something in this controversy about a picture of the old space dog on the cover, and another asked for a picture of Saturn in this department. About the cover, I don't know. That would really start fireworks. About a drawing—there was one of the old Sarge in STAR-
TLING STORIES a few issues back, and there is one in the current issue of THRILL-
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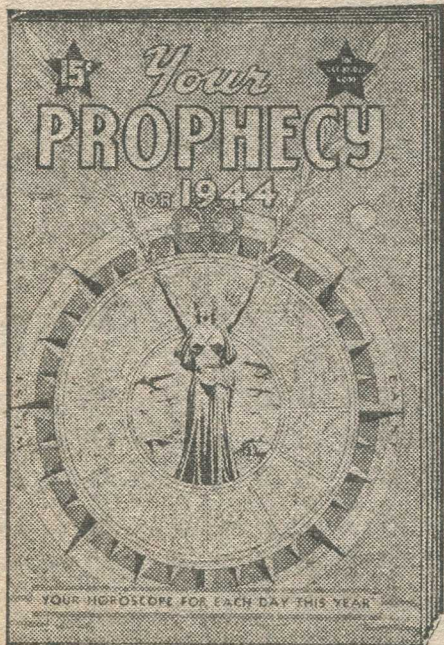
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stands. I guess we'll have to complete the vicious cycle, and show up here in UNDER OBSERVATION with a portrait some day.

Which reminds me, Kiwi Cosby asked a couple of parsecs back if Saturn was being impersonated in our two other magazines. You know danged well the old Sarge rides herd on you space monkeys in all three books—and a heck of a headache it is, too.

No, I'm not dodging the issue about the cover scrap! You junior astrogators are to do the fighting. The old Sarge is just to referee. If you must have an answer, I can think of no better one than is contained in this last communique coming up.

THE STORY'S THE THING!

By Beverly Harris

Dear Sarge: This may seem a bit irregular to you, a girl writing and asking for a membership. I hope you don't bar them from *The Futuremen* club.

I think that the Summer issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE is very good, but it was topped by "Planets in Peril."

I have missed a good many of the CF issues and I am very sorry.

Please don't have Captain Future go into the future again. Really, twenty million years is a long time for even CF to traverse.

I am very poor at pronouncing doubletalk and I wonder if there couldn't be some way you could arrange a sort of pronunciation department for those names like Chah Har, Deneb, Kus, Aar, Shih, Golo, Zur, and all those others. It would make the story more interesting, I think, if I knew how to pronounce the names of the characters and places.

I am speaking for myself, you understand. I don't know how the other Captain Future fans would feel about such a thing.

I agree with another fan, I believe you called him Pee-lot Albert Hollin, about the covers. He stated, "Those kiwis and pee-lots who complain about the covers should have their heads examined! They should know that covers don't make a story."—Bow 763, El Dorado, Kans.

They sure don't, Kiwi Beverly. They just make a headache for the old Sarge. But wasn't it nice that the cover was practically the only real beef the little meanies had this issue? They'll become vegetarians in no time at all at this rate.

With which sage remark we will now air out the astrogation chamber and be on our merry way.

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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3-44

THE FUTURE OF CAPTAIN FUTURE

A Forecast for Next Issue



IN A disreputable space-man's cafe on Venus one night, a terrific sensation was created by the entrance of Captain Future and two of his famous Futuremen, Grag and the Brain. With the air of persons who knew what perilous business they were about, they approached the spot where a tough young Earthman was holding high wassail.

This chap was known as Rab Cain, an adventurous young space-booter who was reputed to be no better than he should have been. He was suspected of knowing a lot about certain Martian drug-smuggling. And Curt Newton obviously intended grilling the tough and boisterous young spaceman. Instead of grilling, however, it became a *drilling* business.

For Rab Cain refused to answer questions and, when crowded, put up a strenuous resistance. He got so angry that he committed an act of blundering folly. He drew an atom-gun on Captain Future.

But the amazing thing was that he was greased lightning on the draw, and for one of the few times in his life Captain Future was shaded. Of course, Curt Newton drew, but Rab Cain beat him by just that margin which meant the difference between life and death. They both fired, and Captain Future fell to the floor badly wounded.

Before Grag, amazed and unprepared for this turn of events, could get started, Rab Cain fled from the place in the resultant confusion and escaped to the nearby space port. A space freighter was just preparing to take off to carry special workers to one of the planets of Arkar, a star which was one of the nearer suns to the Solar System.

Thus, Rab Cain escaped, leaving the champion of the entire System desperately wounded. But the Futuremen were not content to leave matters as they were. They succored their beloved leader and then made immediate plans to follow the culprit on to Arkar.

This is the beginning of an amazing series of adventures and the uncovering of as heinous a plot to gain the mastery of the Solar System as the Futuremen have ever encountered. What happens to Curt Newton and what happens to all the intrepid spacemen who dare the awful void to work on the planet Ron makes **RED SUN OF DANGER** one of the most exciting novels that Brett Sterling has yet written.

The next issue of **CAPTAIN FUTURE** will bring you this completely new adventure of Captain Future and his famous band. **RED SUN OF DANGER** is the full-length novel which will head the table of contents in our next number. —THE EDITOR.

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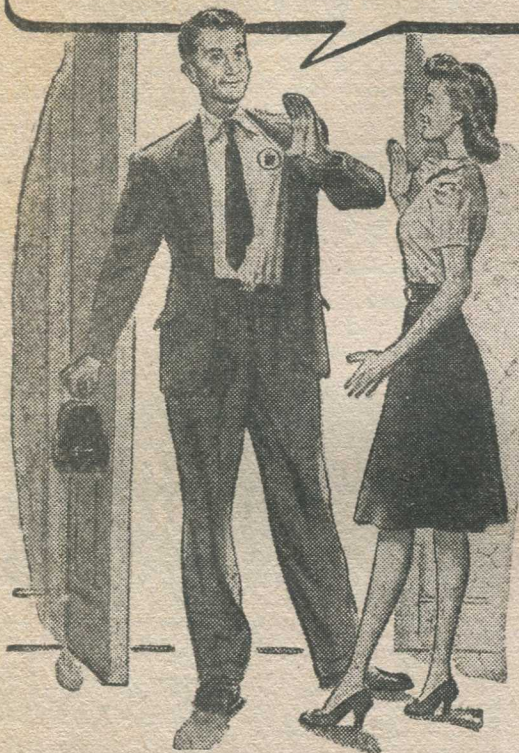
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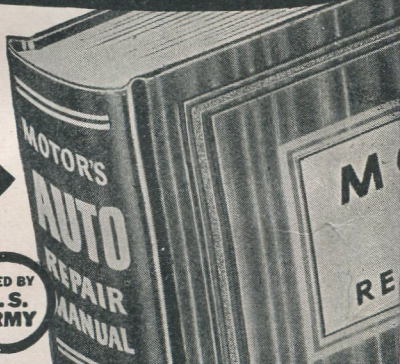
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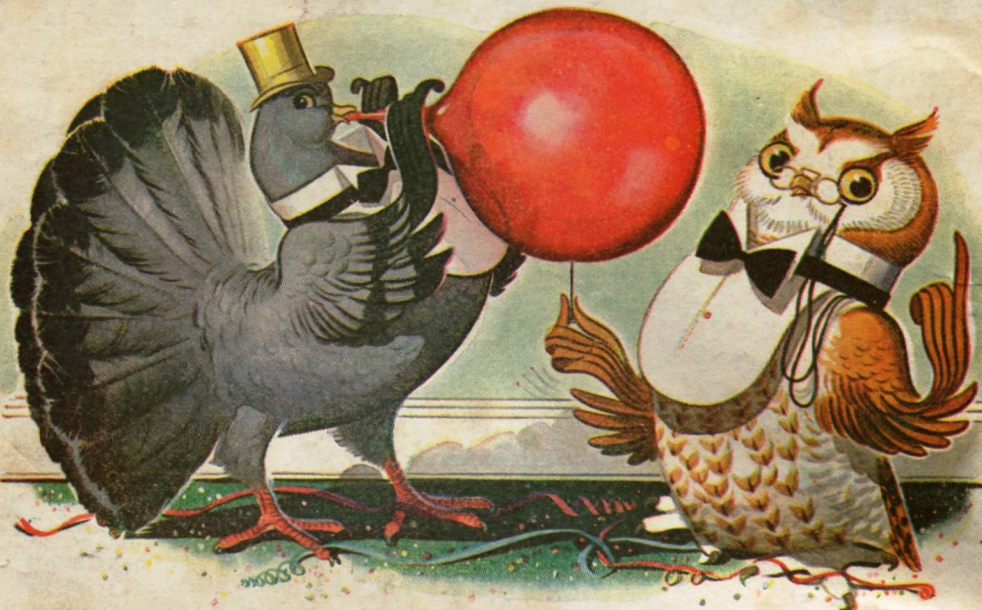
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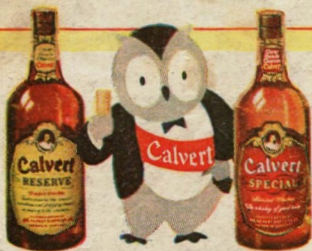
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