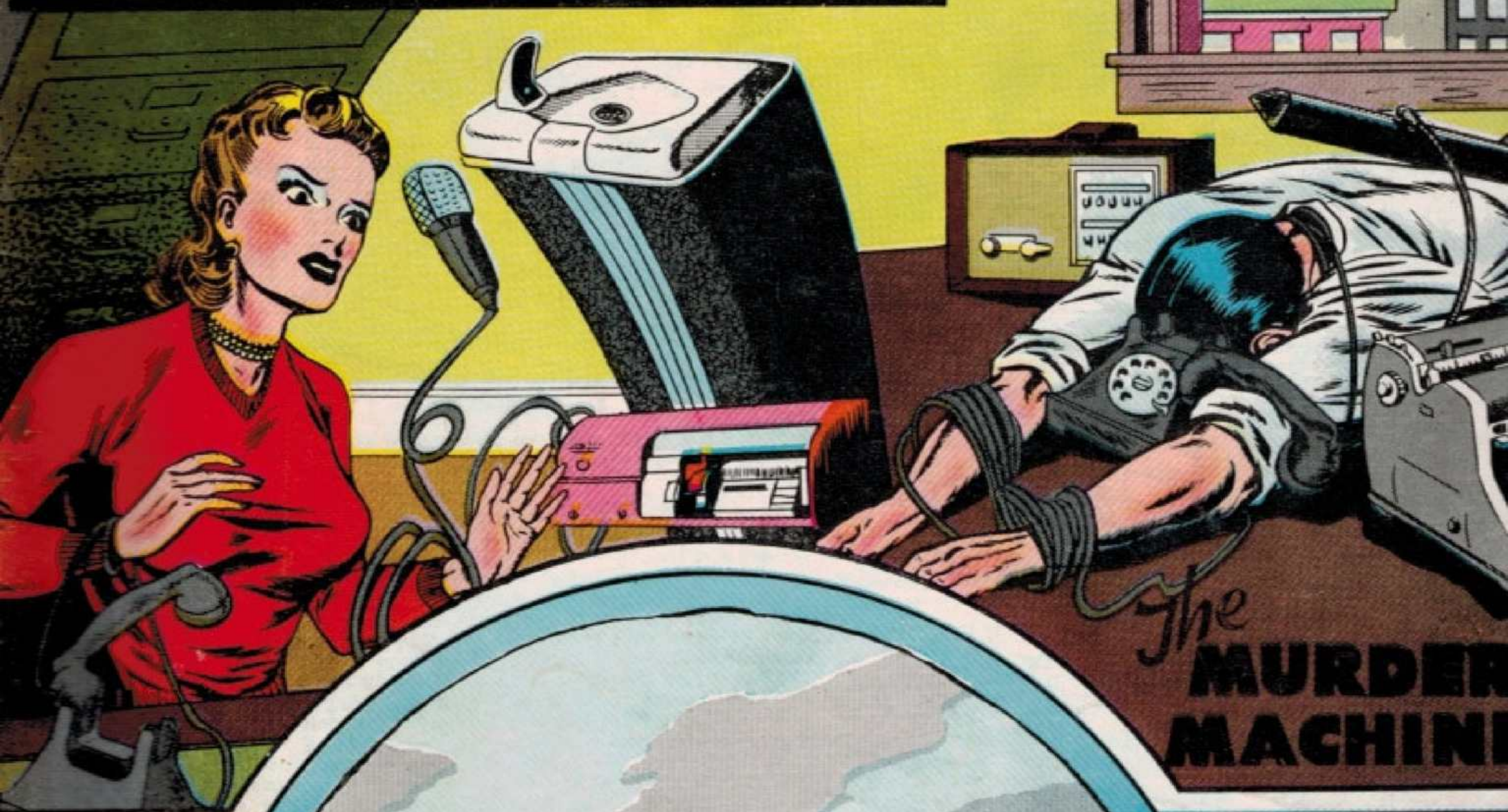


FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION



25¢
CDC

NO. 2



The
**MURDER
MACHINE**

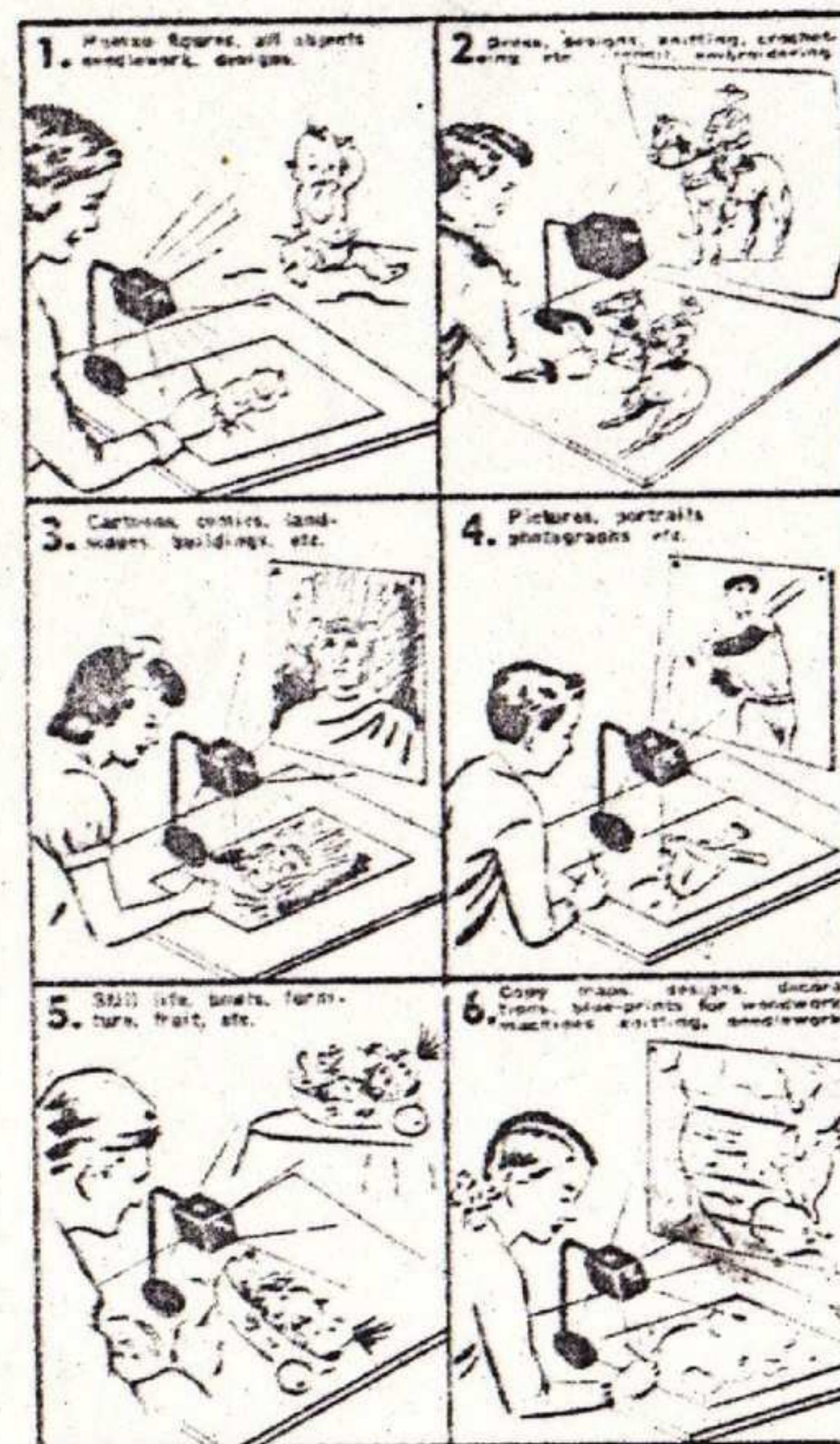


THE WAR OF THE MOONS

DRAW INSTANTLY

NO EXPERIENCE, NO TALENT, NO LESSONS, NO SKILL NEEDED!

THIS AMAZING INVENTION MAKES IT EASY FOR ANYONE TO DRAW INSTANTLY!



WIN POPULARITY! BE ADMIRABLE!

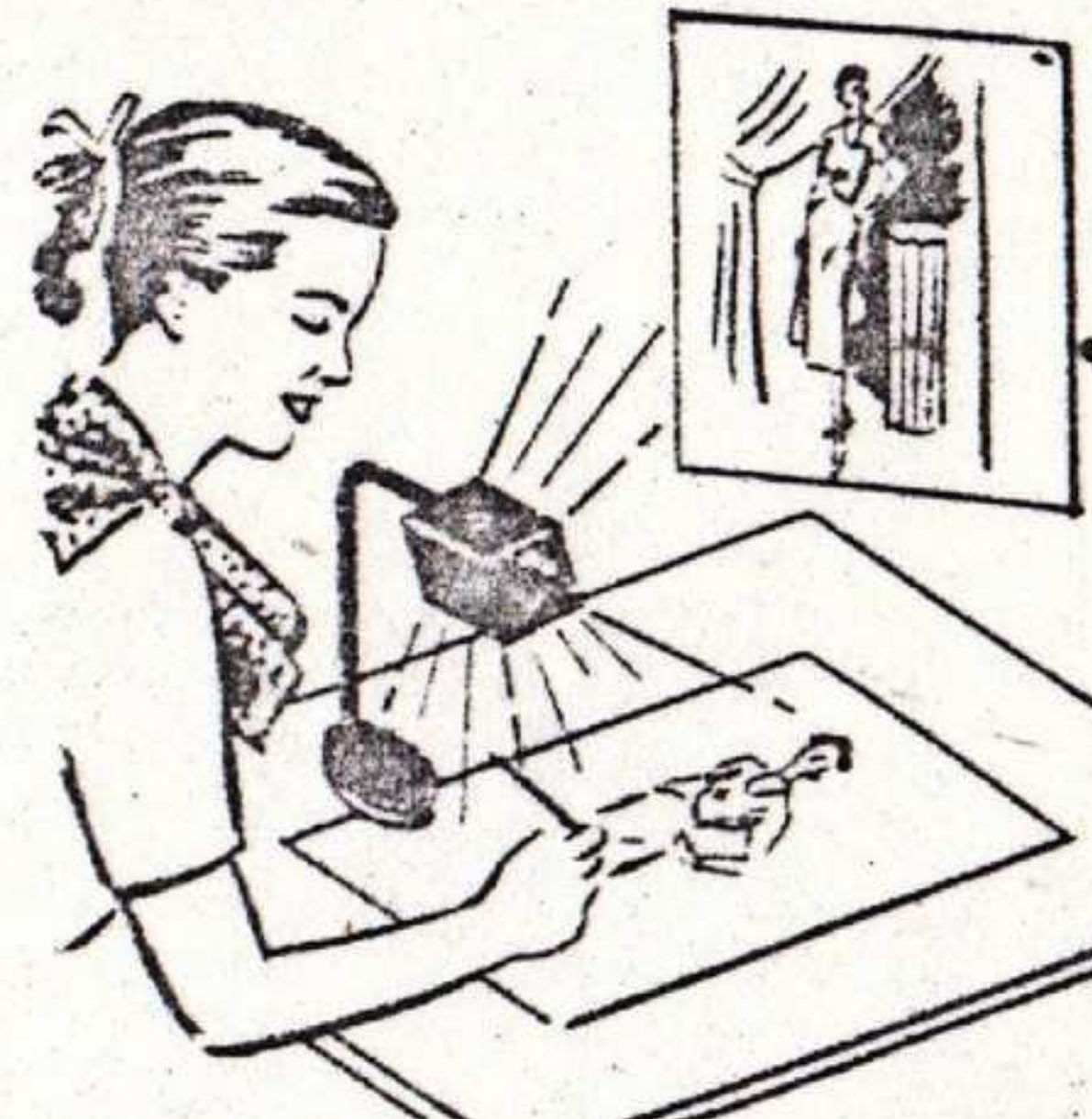
Your friends will ask you to draw them and you will easily be able to do it. The Master Art Helper will help make you popular. Thousands find that after a short time they can draw well without the Master Art Helper. It helps anyone to develop skills and artistic ability which often leads to a good paying career in art. Helps you draw window cards, maps, signs, portraits, living subjects, and used by many store keepers.

FREE! "Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist" This valuable illustrated booklet, "Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist" will be included free with your Master Art Helper. This booklet will help you understand many of the techniques of the proper shading and proportion and so forth, that are used in drawing human figures and maps. And, will help you improve your drawing skill.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. 10 DAY FREE TRIAL. If the Master Art Helper doesn't help you to draw anything you want to draw. If you can't draw people, animals, maps, figures, or anything else like a professional artist with this Master Art Helper, return it within 10 days and your money will be refunded.

MASTER ART HELPER COMPANY
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

Amazing Invention
Makes Drawing Easy!
DRAW ANYTHING!



Now you can easily draw people, animals, or still life, or maps like an artist even if you have never drawn a straight line before.

ONLY
\$1.98
Complete
STANDARD
MODEL

Now you can easily copy any picture and you can easily enlarge or reduce anything you wish to draw. Students get better school marks with it.

Now, anyone from 5 to 90 can easily draw, paint, or sketch almost anything quickly and accurately the very first time you use the Master Art Helper. You draw like a professional artist even if you have never drawn before. Thousands who were told they were "hopeless" at drawing, now draw like professional artists, and draw those "tough" maps and paintings with ease! No matter what you want to draw with the use of the Master Art Helper, it is automatically seen on any sheet of paper, then you easily, quickly trace the picture on the paper because you already see it there—and in color too! It develops children's art ability and improves their drawing technique! With the Master Art Helper you will draw an accurate professional-type drawing that anyone would think an experienced artist had drawn. This often helps students to get better grades in school! The Master Art Helper makes it easy to draw or copy anything you wish to draw larger or smaller or any size you wish, and is excellent for drawing MAPS usually required of students. It can be used easily on any table, board, or desk anywhere, at home or in school. The Master Art Helper is used to draw photographs both in-doors and out-doors. It requires absolutely no lessons or practice. If you write with a pencil you can easily draw anything with the Master Art Helper. The Master Art Helper can help you be popular and can give you lots of hours of enjoyment.

HOW IT WORKS

Simply look through the Master Art Helper and see what you want to draw right on the paper you are using. All you do is trace the drawing—like magic you have drawn a perfect professional picture!

Excellent for drawing required in school, office, shop, or store.

10 DAY FREE TRIAL! MAIL COUPON NOW!

MASTER ART HELPER CO., Dept. 50
318 Market Street
Newark, New Jersey

Rush me the Master Art Helper and your free booklet, "Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist."

☐ I enclose \$1.98; send postage prepaid. I understand I can return this merchandise after a 10 day trial and my money will be refunded.

☐ I enclose \$2.98; send De luxe Model.

Name

Address

City Zone State

SENT ON APPROVAL

FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION

Publisher
Ed Leeds

Editor
Walter Gibson

Associate Editors
Ed Burkholder
Litka Raymond

Art Director
Al Fago

Art Editors
Lou Morales
Frank Froilo
Dick Giordano
Stan Campbell

Business Manager
Burton N. Levey

Book Makeup
Anthony T. Conti

Stories

THE WAR OF THE MOONS

A thrill packed complete novel that will hold your attention to the last word.

(By Walter Gibson)

SPIDERMEN AND THE CAKES

The Spider Men learn something about cakes humans eat from a quick witted girl.

(By Bruce Crandall)

SHE WAS A CREATURE OF FIRE AND DEATH

Mattie Hawks sold her soul to the Deva for youth and beauty and love — and death.

(By Wallace Smith)

HE WOULDN'T DIE

The professor built a bullet proof man but forgot that human passions remain.

(By George Moffat)

THE MURDER MACHINE

Harcourt Dunwood hated the law and mankind and died because of that hate.

(By Phyllis Kaye)

THINK AHEAD

This space battle far above Pallas in the year 2296 will give you real thrills.

(By Larry Hennessey)

Features

SPEEDS THROUGH SPACE

SCIENCE FICTION ON PARADE

A
Capitol
Stories
Publication

FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION published quarterly by Capitol Stories, Inc. Office of publication: Charlton Bldg., Derby, Conn. Vol. 1, No. 2, Dec., 1952. Application for entry as Second Class Matter pending at the Post Office at Derby, Conn. Copyright 1952 by Capitol Stories, Inc. (Printed in U.S.A.) Single Copies 25 cents; Annual Subscription \$1.00. For Advertising Information Contact PUBLISHERS REPRESENTATIVES Times Building, Times Square, New York 15, N. Y.

SPEEDS THRU SPACE

Once space travel has become an accomplished fact, the pressing problem will be to make it both practically and commercially feasible. The determining factor will be speed, something which has been a most important element since the earliest days of human travel. Because of the vast distances between planets and the difficulty of obtaining supplies in mid-space, speeds will have to be incredibly faster than any that our mechanical contrivances have yet approached, if our space ships expect to get anywhere beyond our own moon.

As a cheering thought, the mere act of getting a spacecraft into operation will be more than a preliminary step to our goal. To reach space, a ship will have to attain a speed exceeding Earth's escape velocity of seven miles per second. This amounts to a tidy 25,200 miles per hour, which would enable us to reach the moon in about ten hours.

To cover 50 million miles to Mars at this pace would just about require 80 days, the number that one of Jules Verne's heroes took to encircle the Earth, back when readers laughed at such impossible stories of the future. That won't be too hard for our crop of coming astronauts.

But with Jupiter a year or more away, at the speed just given, our hopes begin to dwindle, until we remember that to get clear of Jupiter, a 37 mile per second escape velocity will be needed, due to the giant planet's greater gravity pull.

Naturally, no one would want to make a one-way trip to Jupiter, so such speed, totalling close to 135,000 miles per hour, can be pictured as a requirement. This will cut the Jupiter flight to a matter of a few months and would render feasible trips to Saturn and its moons — or even beyond.

Still more encouraging is the fact that certain travelers of the spaceways have already neared a speed close to ten times the highest estimate just given. These space racers are the comets, which have been known to top a million miles an hour, when wheeling around the sun. If our space ships can attain a "cometary speed" as this mark may be termed, interplanetary travel will definitely be something for the present, not too many years from now.

As for trips to other solar systems, the speed of light will be required as an absolute minimum. At that, it would take four years and four months to reach Proxima Centauri, the nearest sun to ours.

Maybe that speed will be automatic when we shoot our ships into space. We certainly won't know until we try!

The WAR OF THE MOONS

By WALTER GIBSON

THE Spaceliner Nanadu was three million Earth miles short of Phoebe when the dread news came. It flashed far sooner than expected and so abruptly that the passengers were stunned. One moment they were watching Chelmeley the Chameleon as he cavorted coyly on the three-dimensional visiscreen; then the Trans-Saturn News was cutting in and the "tridi" was showing the bombing of Jama, the capital of Japetus, in all its horrible and graphic details.

Not that it lasted long; indeed, its brevity was its real horror. Jama, a city of curious buildings shaped like cylinders and cones, was standing gray in the subdued light of the distant sun, when suddenly it sprouted smoke all at once, as well as from every portion. A cloud billowed upward, only to be parted in mighty waves by a still larger cloud that was followed by another more gigantic, until the whole had become a mammoth mushroom that lifted like a theater curtain to display the grim scene below.

Colorful structures had become a mass of ruins, so jagged, such a contrast of shells and skeletons that at first it seemed a trick of the visiscreen. Then, a whisper grew to a murmur in the Vue-salon of the Nanadu. On a thousand lips, the murmur rose to a mighty shout, like a human thunder-clap. Then, men and women were on their feet, singing a wild barbaric song:

"Moya Tita kata; moya moya tska!"
The song of Titan, the Moon Planet. A chant of conquest upon which the Grand Solar Alliance, dedicated to peace and commerce, had placed an absolute taboo. But who cared about the Alliance now? Titan, mightiest of moons was supreme in its own area. It had taken for itself the rank of planet which the G.S.A. had denied it. The satellites, Hyperion, Mimas, Enceladus and Tethys, with no opposition, Dione had capitulated after some resistance; then Rhea. Now, finally, Japetus, the die-hard, had succumbed.

Len Ryder, a rugged chap with deep-set eyes, straight lips and broad jaw, was translating the Titan chant into English for the inquisitive girl who sat beside him.

"The Titans, strong in days of yore," recited Len, "shall rule the universe once more. That's putting it in English verse. In Titanese, it's simpler. The term moya means either strong or ruler, the same thing to a Titan's way of thinking. When you repeat moya moya, you give it a larger significance. The term kata is the past verbal idiom, while tska symbolizes a future tense."

The girl gave a puzzled frown, as though she didn't find it as simple as it sounded. Then:

"You've been to Titan, Captain Ryder?"

"Of course," returned Len, in a boastful tone. "I've been everywhere. Right now, I'm going to the bar and have a drink. How about it, Miss Dale?"

MIRA DALE agreed, since she couldn't do much else. A swirl of the crowd was carrying them from the Vue-salon. Plenty of passengers wanted to join the celebration at the bar. But the crowd began thinning before Len and Mira were half way there. Something had happened to the Nanadu. The whole half-mile of rocket-shaped metal that made up the spaceliner's bulk seemed to be literally shuddering its way through space.

"What is it?" gasped Mira, as passengers reeled away. "A meteor swarm? They must be baffling our buffers all apart, but I didn't think they were ever this thick past Jupiter!"

"No meteors," returned Len, with a head-shake. He grabbed the bar and drew Mira toward it. "The pilot has stopped braking, that's all."

"But why should we be braking, with nearly three million miles before our next stop?"

Mira's question brought a smile from Len.

"This packet travels at cometary speed," stated Len, "and that's better than a million miles an hour. We've been decelerating for a few hours already and we'll have to slow a lot more, or the passengers will be jolted out of their space-pants before we hit port. But the skipper is going to step it up, just the same. He wants to get to Phoebe fast."

"On account of the Titans?"

"Who else?" Len gave a laugh. "They wouldn't mind bagging a prize like the Nanadu."

"But we aren't going to Japetus."

"They'll be coming to Phoebe. Pretty near six million miles for them, while we're covering three million. The Nanadu can probably get all the air, fuel and provisions she needs, and be on her way before the Titans arrive. Worse luck!"

"You sound as though you favored the Titans."

"I do. Here's to the Titans!" Len raised a foaming glass, as he shouted to others along the bar. "The universe loves a winner. Here's to the Titans, masters of their own world — and yours!"

Ugly faces leered approval as a hundred glasses thumped the bar, to symbolize a Titan toast. Those glasses seemed to bounce up to the grinning lips that awaited them; then, when they had gulped the spacebrau, those same lips chanted.

"Tita kata kata; Tita Tita tska!"

The girl nudged Len: "How does that versify in English?"

"It doesn't," returned Len. "It's in relation to past history; but they'll be big in the future. Believe me", Len's voice rose to an eager shout, "the Titans mean to take over. So more power to them!"

MORE glasses, thumped the bar including Len's own. The foaming spacebrau billowed like the atomic cloud above Japetus. The more of the damn stuff you drank, the fuller your glass would get, at least for a while. That was why the drink was popular on spaceliners, where concentrated foods and beverages were scaled at lowest prices.

"Tell me more about the Titans," Mira urged. "You termed them masters of my world, as well as their own. What do you mean by that?" "I'll show you." Len was setting glasses along the bar, first sliding them to leave streaks of spacefoam. "These are worlds and those curves are their orbits. What you're looking at, sister, is the Solar System."

"Go on."

"Mercury, Venus, Minerva," recited Len. He paused, eyed the girl closely:



"People from Minerva call it Earth, as if there could only be one of its kind. That wouldn't be your world would it?" Mira shook her head indifferently and Len chuckled. "It wouldn't be," he added, "or you'd have been insulted. Minervans always are."

The girl waved to the glasses. "Keep going, Captain Ryder."

"All right," acceded Len, "the next is Mars. Then we jump to Jupiter, mighty Jupiter. Uninhabited as yet, but with four big moons that bow and scrape to that bunch of inner planets. Willing to divide one vote among them, as members of the Great Solar Alliance!"

There was a sneer in Len's tone; then, emphatically, he thumped his own glass beyond the others.

"This stands for Saturn," Len asserted. "Big, but uninhabited, like

MIRA FIRED THE SUN BOLT GUN, BUT A SUDDEN SHIFT OF THE SPACE SHIP SAVED LEN'S LIFE.

Jupiter. Saturn has one great moon, Titan. It was offered one vote, to be shared with Dione, Rhea and Japetus. What an insult! Why, Titan is bigger than Mercury — Len thumped the innermost of the glasses — “and nearly as big as Mars. Here’s what Titans think of those worlds and their votes.”

WITH a sweep of his arm, Len sent all the glasses crashing except the one that represented Titan. He extended that to the barkeeper for a refill. It came up promptly and Len Ryder led another toast to Titan, invoking new enthusiasm from the crowd.

“Do you know what Titan is?” Len then demanded. “It’s more than just a planet; it’s the mid-point between the Sun and Uranus. You know how big Uranus is? So big it could swallow all that bunch of inner worlds and moons like they were so many pills. Its moons are inhabited and Uranus itself is reaching the habitable state. Right now, though, it has countless untapped natural resources which can be developed.

“That’s what they’re after, those thieving inner planets and their pee-wee Solar Alliance.” Len waved his hand across the bar, to the strew of glasses he had demolished. “Only they won’t get it — and you know why? Because Titan won’t let them.” He thumped the glass that stood for Titan. “We won’t let them! We — won’t — let — them —”

Dozens of voices joined in the chant with glasses thumping to the rhythm of “We — won’t — let — them” and the long bar took on the appearance of a snake dance, the way the Xanadu jolted along. Mira, not drinking, was eying Len coldly as she asked:

“Are you a Titan?”

Len shook his head, then modified it: “Not yet.”

“Just what does that mean?”

“I was on my way there,” returned Len. “On my way to Titan, lady, to take a job as skipper in their space-fleet. Now they will be needing me all the more. I can handle a packet to Uranus and beyond. Maybe do some privateering back Jupiter way.”

“What do you mean about the Titans needing you all the more?” demanded Mira. “Are you sorry you didn’t help bomb Japetus?”

“Naturally.” Len leered above his foam-rimmed glass. “I’d have liked to lay that egg on Jama myself!”

Mira’s face froze. A peculiar hush crept along the bar as though the jolting of the Xanadu had broken the enthusiasm. Mira turned her back on Len Ryder and strode toward a doorway, catching her steps as the spaceliner lurched. Suddenly, she swung about.

The girl’s face had gone livid, yet its white heat made her the more beautiful. Her spirit intrigued the object of her rage, Len Ryder, for the mocking bow that he gave was plainly a mask for his admiration. Mira’s response was a toss of her head, a wave of her hand, like imperious gestures of farewell.

It really could have been a permanent farewell.

An object gleamed in the girl’s hand, round like a gun muzzle but wider. From it spurted a silvery streak that whizzed faster than a flaming meteor, straight toward the bar. Only a jolt of the spaceliner, coming with the fling of Mira’s hand, saved Len from that missile.

The thing splashed like a sunburst as it hit the bar at Len’s elbow. It left a jagged hole in the mahogany, bigger than Len’s midriff. Len had seen people chopped in half with missiles like this. In fact, this was the first time he’d ever known one to go wide of its target. That could be charged to the lurch of the Xanadu, not lack of aim on the part of Mira Dale.

Now Len knew what planet the girl hailed from. The thing that hadn’t quite found him as its target was a Venusian sun-bolt, the most compact form of stored energy known to any world!

II

IT was lucky for the girl from Venus that her sun-bolt missed. Had Len Ryder succumbed, a hundred Titan sympathizers would have pounced upon Mira Dale and settled her fate. As it was, they hesitated long enough to voice their rage. Sharp words in Titanese were drowned by the fierce throb of a rising roar. Then, as Mira turned to dart away, a dozen men lunged toward her.

They were met by a counter-surge. In from half a dozen doorways poured ship’s officers and crew men, augmented by a flock of passengers. They were armed with electric whips that could snake a weapon from a hand at fifty paces and completely numb an opponent at a third that

range. Before the crowd at the bar could produce zip-guns or blow-knives, they were under control, except for Len.

The boastful space skipper was on his way to throttle Mira in person. He’d overtaken her and was laying a clutch on her neck when Trad Bylo, Third Officer of the Xanadu, intervened with two hundred and twenty Earth-pounds of heft. Such interference bothered Len only passingly. He battered Trad against a space-hatch and turned for another grab at Mira. Trad rallied long enough to receive a few more punches; then, a cluster of crew-men piled on Len and Mira fled for the safety of her cabin.

It was Bylo who saved Len from the crew members, but only after they’d softened him considerably. Yanking Len from their grasp, Trad reeled him out through the Vue-salon, where the Titan sympathizers were already being rounded up.

There, Trad fairly bellowed his triumph as he dragged Len along like a souvenir of a happy occasion.

“Outsmarted yourself, didn’t you?” scoffed Trad. “You didn’t figure these Titan sympathizers are all mouth and no guts. Maybe you thought the crew would turn yellow and quit. Well they didn’t, Ryder, and you’ll pay for it.”

Len was paying already, judging from the way Trad punctuated his remarks with body blows. Drooped, bleary-eyed, Len apparently couldn’t hear the cheers that rose for him. But the shout of “Moya Tita kata; moya moya taka” soon died from the lips that began it. Accepting Trad’s pummeling of Len as an example, the crew of the Xanadu put a solid finish to the fray. From then on a single peep in favor of Titan was a sure ticket to the ship’s hospital.

Trad didn’t allow Len that luxury. When he reached Len’s cabin, he flung the space skipper inside, then entered and closed the door behind him, grinning back at the crew members to assure them that Len was due for a further beating. But as soon as they were alone, burly Trad poured Len a drink of Enceladus brandy and brought him a wet towel to soak his battered face.

“Sorry I had to let the boys go to work,” consoled Trad, “but there was no other way. If those blasted Titans had only laid off Japetus until this packet pulled into Phoebe!”

“I know.” Len nodded. “Then you could have dropped off and joined me on that spacechaser that I’ve got

anchored there. We might even have gotten to Japetus before the Grand Titan decided to blast it. But it wouldn’t have worked as well as this will.”

Len paused to study his face in a chromidium wall panel. His lips looked like a satellite’s orbit, the way they were swollen. His eyes weren’t so bad, though. Both had been blacked, but at least they matched.

“When we reach Phoebe,” continued Len, “all these Titan sympathizers will be dumped there. Naturally, I’ll be one of them, and a hero in their eyes as well. Now nobody will ever suspect that I’m actually working for the Grand Solar Alliance to contact the underground groups. It will make it all the easier for me on the smaller moons.”

To that, Trad Bylo nodded, though his beefy face was rather rueful.

It will make it harder for me, though,” Trad argued. “If the Titans hadn’t taken over Japetus, which is practically declaring war on the Solar System, I could skip ship in Phoebe without people guessing why. Now they’ll know that I’ve gone over to the Titans.”

“Just the opposite,” returned Len. “After the way you tore into the Titan crowd tonight, they’ll figure some of the bunch waylaid you for keeps. I’ll help spread the rumor, Trad. In fact” — painfully Len formed a broad smile — “if you will just stroll a little too far from the spacedock before this ship velocitates off Phoebe, I’ll personally supervise your capture, like you did mine.”

Trad’s smile of response was slightly on the sickly side, with Len’s face as the horrible example of what could happen to a prisoner taken in such a struggle. Then, realizing he wouldn’t have to play the hero as Len had, Trad broadened his grin, stepped from the cabin and waved good-night.

THERE wasn’t much time for sleep nor did the pitching of the Xanadu encourage it. By dawn, the spaceliner was braking hard to make up for the high speed maintained in the race for Phoebe. At last, the tiniest and outermost of Saturn’s numerous moons was sighted and the Xanadu spiraled to a landing. Her passengers promptly began to disembark.

Eight million miles from Saturn, Phoebe was a sad, drab sort of world, a mere two hundred miles in diameter. Maintained by the Grand Solar Alliance as an occasional port of call, Phoebe had jumped to importance when Titan began its schemes of conquest. Phoebe was four times farther from Saturn than any of the other moons and its motion was retrograde, so that it circled the planet in a direction opposite that of the others.

That didn’t deter Titan from want-

ing to gobble Phoebe like the rest of the satellites. But until Japetus fell, Phoebe was beyond Titan’s sphere of influence. Now, with Japetus conquered, it was a foregone conclusion that Phoebe would go the same route.

As a result, the spacedock was a scene of wild activity. Men, women and children were crowding into every form of space carrier, willing to risk the long trip to Jupiter, if only to get away. None wanted to board the Xanadu and continue on to Uranus. Once the forces from Titan took over Phoebe, the last spacestop on the Jupiter-Uranus run would be gone. No longer would spaceliners ply that route.

Passengers were leaving the Xanadu to wait for her sister ship, the Coleridge which was due in shortly from Uranus. They would go back to Jupiter on the Coleridge while the Xanadu continued to the outer reaches, perhaps never to return. But her loyal crew was ready to assume that risk.

Meanwhile, hundreds of robots were at work, unloading some of the cargo as well as baggage for the trip back to Jupiter. Len Ryder gritted his teeth at thought of such fine mechanical contrivances falling into the hands of the Titans. Under his breath, Len muttered: “Aka aka aka” which in Titanese meant “C’est la guerre.” However, Len had plans for a few of them. He laughed as he was shoved from the spacedock by members of the Xanadu’s crew, who still had him branded as a Titan sympathizer. This would only help further his plans.

Looking up at the deck of the Xanadu, Len saw Mira there. The Venusian girl looked jaunty in her transperplex costume, through which the dawnlight shone so thoroughly that about all it left to the imagination was the costume itself. Len remembered the furore that those revealing costumes had first created when introduced beyond the million mile limit of the planets which barred them. Now they were regarded as the correct thing for space-wear. Only it wasn’t exactly necessary to stand in front of a sunrise to prove it.

THERE were no cheers for Mira from the herded Titan sympathizers. They would have liked to tear Mira from the limbs she showed so prettily in the transparent space travel costume. In face they said so and even began to shout their opinions until Mira raised one hand to brush back wisps of stray blonde hair from her forehead. The crowd recalled how Mira could loose sun-bolts and the uproar ceased.

Trad Bylo, standing beside Mira as

if to guard her, bellowed an order to herd the crowd along. Len Ryder, like the rest, was shoved among the dull, volcanic-gray buildings that formed all there was of Phoebe City. Here, sullenly, the Titan sympathizers could only stare at empty shop windows and wait until the Titan spacefleet arrived for the formal occupation of Phoebe.

All the inhabitants of Phoebe had been planted there by G. S. A. and therefore none could stay. They must have foreseen the fall of Japetus, for they’d packed every last possession. Their robots, who did all the heavy work on the thin atmosphere of Phoebe, were carrying the last crates to the spacedock.

That gave Len the big idea which squared him further with the Titan sympathizers. As a robot returned empty-handed, Len stepped in front of the contrivance and gave the cross



THE ROBOT MAN
FOLLOWED HIM

motion that cut the beam to its electric eyes. The robot went through a series of mechanical reactions: Its eyes flashed, its arms flayed, it made false starts and stops. Though this was a worker robot, it was equipped to attack and kill, should anyone attempt to capture or steal it, as Len was doing now.

But Len didn't give its fighter mechanism sufficient opportunity. He switched from fast gestures to slow, approached boldly when the average person would have recoiled. In short, he played the robot like a fish on a line, throwing its reactors out of synchronization. Len was trying to put the metal monster on a dead center, much as a juggler would perform a difficult balancing trick.

Suddenly the trick was done. The robot stood rigid in a crazy position from which the slightest jar might disturb it. Len didn't allow that. Delicately, his hands massaged the thin atmosphere in front of the robot's blinkers. At last Len found the wave length that controlled the thing. The robot was under his command.

Snaring others was easy after that, since they all responded to the same wave. Len tested half a dozen of them for their vocotone, then issued commands. The six robots marched off like a squad assigned to a special duty, which they were.

TRAD BYLO was having a field day. The beefy Third Officer of the Xanadu had come down from the spacedock and was ordering Titan sympathizers about as if they were a lot of lowly Asteroidians instead of intelligent moon folk. True, anyone who backed the Grand Titan in his schemes of conquest was hardly entitled to the courtesies shown to persons who wanted to live in a free world; but Trad himself was behaving like a member of the BOOP or Bureau of Outerplanetary Police, which the Grand Titan had instituted in defiance of the G. S. A.

The Xanadu was still in dock and now the great shiny shape of the Coleridge was spiralling in from Uranus. While either of those mighty liners was still on Phoebe, bullies like Trad could have their say, especially with an electric whip-lash. From the corner of a gray lava building, Len watched Trad leer happily as he kept flashing the lash and bellowing: "Back! Get back, you space-scum! You moon rabble, you sons of Saturn, you daka-daka!"

That last taunt, about the ugliest expression in the Titanese language, brought a sudden surge from the mob, which was just what Trad wanted. His whip licked a vicious circle, sparks flew in thousands, numbing a dozen of the crowd,

sprawling them face first on the rough, gritty ground.

Then, before Trad could turn back toward the Xanadu, he found himself surrounded by a different sort of crowd, composed of creatures that were utterly oblivious to the effects of an electric whip. The six robots had closed in upon the ship's officer; their metallic hands were shooting forward to suppress him.

Trad snarled, made useless slashes with the whip, then tried to break away. The robots snagged him bodily, turned at Len's perfectly-pitched call and carried the struggling ship's officer along one of the narrow streets that curved away from the spacedock. The Titan sympathizers wanted to rush after them and relieve the robots of their human prey. But Len Ryder, again the hero of the occasion, waved them back.

In a rapid jabber of Titanese, Len assured them that he would reserve Trad for their later and more suitable disposal after the two G. S. A. spaceliners had cleared port. Then, cutting through another street, Len articulated new commands to bring the robots to a given point, which proved to be an obscure spacebasin, half-hidden by two lava-gray warehouses.

Here, a rakish space-cruiser was docked. On it were half a dozen rugged characters, true outlaws of the spaceways, the crew that Len had provided for this spacechaser. They gave their skipper a wave of welcome, then stared in amazement as six robots marched up, carrying Trad as their helpless burden. They came on board, dumped Trad and went rigid at Len's command.

Len gave the nod and the space-chaser slicked out from its secret wharf, bound toward Saturn's inner moons.

III

SHE was swift, sleek and slender, shaped like a long thin black cigar, a panetella type, to be precise and she even smoked like one. Pointed nose first, she cleaved the space while her tail-burner glowed with the effect of a cigar ash and the vapor jets sent thin blue curls of gas trailing backward through the interlunar void.

Her name was the Zipperino and it was apt. She'd been a methane runner from Jupiter during her hey-day, one of the many such that the Grand Solar Alliance had finally rounded up among the asteroids. She'd been sent to Phoebe to serve as a reserve revenue cutter, but the Titans had objected to G. S. A. ships operating within their orbit. So the Zipperino had been outfitted secretly for the work she was to do now.

In the cabin of the two hundred foot spacechaser, Len and Trad congratulated each other on the success of their ruse. It simply couldn't have clicked better. To all appearances, they had been utter enemies on the Xanadu and they'd carried that feud ashore at Phoebe. Now, with Trad as his prisoner, Len could pass muster with any Titan patrol ship that they might meet.

Actually, though, Len and Trad were partners, working for none other than the Grand Solar Alliance. The crew would be anybody's who paid the price. They knew they would get more from the G. S. A. than the Titan Council; even better, they'd be able to go and spend it after they got it. So the crew could be considered loyal as far as circumstances went. They were pleased, too, because Len had brought along six robots to do the troublesome deck-work.

Phoebe had dwindled to the size of a Martian tin dollar when Len looked through the sternoscope. The Zipperino was about the fastest thing in space but it wouldn't be smart to let her show full fumes in these orbits where by now the Titans had gained control. They might suspect her for what she really was, a G. S. A. spyeraft. So Len set her speed at two hundred milliknots, which was plenty fast, yet not enough to attract undue suspicion.

Soon, though, the Zipperino would be stepping up her speed. Len was thinking of a way to manage it, when he pulled down the great wall chart that showed Saturn and its many moons. As he did, Len recited the doggerel verse so familiar to all astronauts who plied the outer spaceways:

*"Phoebe, then Japetus and next
Hyperion;
Themis, Titan, Rhea and inward
to Dione.
Tethys, Enceladus, Mimas and
you're done."*

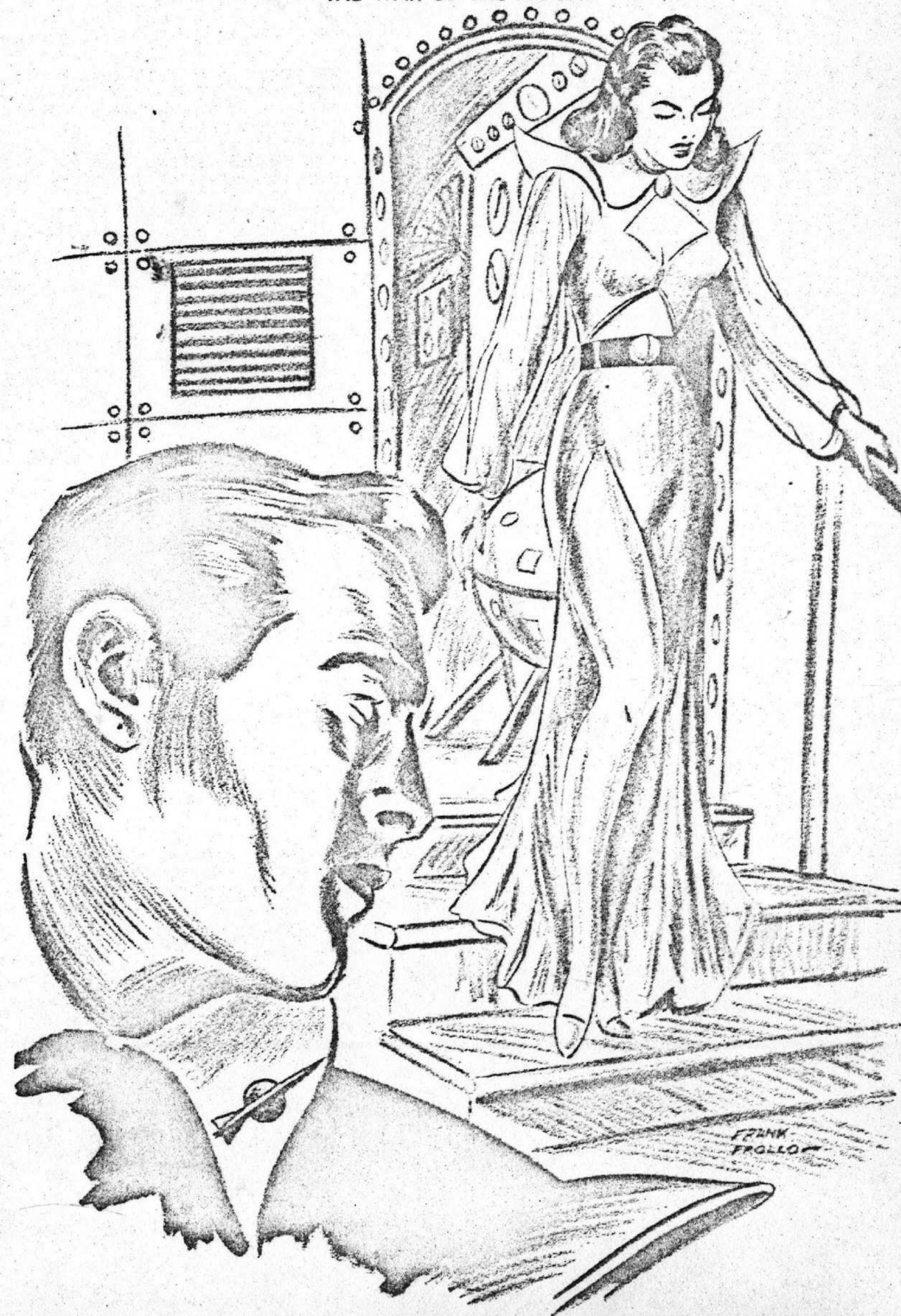
WHEN Len completed the verse, Trad shook his head in objection.

"You should leave Themis out," stated Trad. "Instead, you say 'Mighty Titan' and that fills the line. That's how they teach it to the Titanese school kids. And why not? The extra moon, Themis, disappeared a century or more ago."

One of the space crew, a burly, thick-lipped Ganymedian named Orth, added his say:

"They've got a song about it that goes: 'I wonder what became of Themis, that old moon of mine.' Sort of a theme song of Titan."

"You mean a Themis song," modified Len, without batting his deep-set eyes. "But there's no mystery about it." Len traced a long, dotted



LEN SAW MIRA WEARING A TRANSPARENT DRESS AND KNEW HE WAS IN FOR TROUBLE.

line that ran off the side of the chart. "This is the orbit of Themis. It's a wandering moon that got away from its primary, Saturn. It's on its way back, due about now, Themis is. Once its orbit crosses Saturn's, it will be snagged into the fold, another moon for Titan to govern."

With that, Len dismissed Themis and took up the question of Saturn's regulation moons, tapping them in order from Phoebe inward.

"We have solar agents on all these moons," Len stated, "Titan included. They're the underground that will have to be ready when our space-fleet strikes. I have instructions for all of them; instructions which they alone can understand. In fact, I don't know the answers myself."

Len began moving buttons on the chart, following the orbits of the various moons. Then:

"If these satellites would stay in line," declared Len, "it would be easy to pick a route. When they're scattered, it's bad, particularly as we have Saturn's gravity to contend with, in cutting over to the far side of the planet. So until the moons cluster, we've got to stop at those which are handiest."

Len fingered the buttons, pointed straight at one and decided:

"We'll start with Japetus."

STUNNED silence greeted the announcement. It was as if the great hush of outer space had invaded the air-tight cabin of the spacechaser. Stark horror reflected itself on the tough, tawny faces of the space crew. Even Trad Bylo, hardest of the lot, was frozen stiffer than a chunk of spacedrift. His big eyes bulging from his beefy face, Trad stared at Len Ryder, expecting at least the flicker of a smile to betray itself on the space skipper's lips.

Len didn't smile. He just waited. The others looked anxiously at Trad who finally found his voice and acted as spokesman for the lot.

"Japetus!" Trad's echo was a hoarse whisper. "Why, that would be murder, Len! After the atomic bombing they handed Jama, the whole area will be radioactive. Nobody will want to go near it."

"All the more reason," returned Len, "why the underground should stay there."

"What are they?" demanded Trad. "Men or robots? If they're men — I don't care what their planetary ancestry may be — they couldn't survive. Why, their eyes would pop out, their teeth would fall out —"

As Trad halted, his own eyes and teeth looked about ready to do as he described. Now, Len really did smile, but blandly.

"They are men," stated Len. "but they are immune. Every underground

lair is specially manned by survivors of atomic attacks or their direct descendants who have been tested and found to be A-A types. The Alliance planted them, just in case."

Trad's eyes widened at the announcement. Though he was in the employ of the G. S. A., this was news to him. Then, knotting his thick forehead, Trad asked:

"How about you, Len? Are you immune?"

Len lifted his discarded space-suit, gave it an effortless toss to Trad. It nearly knocked Trad over when he caught it.

"It's woven plumbium," explained Len. "Made from special cloth-of-lead. The helmet contains leaded plastic. So don't worry about me when we land on Japetus."

"But what about us?" queried Trad.

"You don't have to land," returned Len. "I'll take a couple of robots with me. So set your course, Trad, and wake me up when we get there. Last night was a trifle rugged. I need sleep."

BEFORE he turned in, Len took a look at Japetus. The satellite was hanging in the sky, bigger than a Minervan pie-plate and a lot more shiny. Indeed, its brilliance was phenomenal, for the Zipperino was approaching the side of Japetus on which the Great Quartz Desert was located. Five times brighter than the other side, this was one of the wonders of the Solar System. The closer you viewed it, the more wonderful it became.

Len could vouch for that when he awakened six hours later. It was the glare of Japetus that aroused him, as its crystalline surface caught the rays of the distant sun and magnified it with the glint of a million diamonds. This, despite the fact that the sun was only one hundredth as large as when observed from Len's home planet, Earth.

From a moon shape, Japetus became a huge bowl as the spacechaser came into the satellite's field of gravitation. Suddenly, the scene was one of dazzling daylight, streaming from a mighty continent. Japetus had a surface area about the size of Australia and the Zipperino was now right above the moon's equator, orbiting around to the other side. Dipping closer to the odd world, the spacechaser sped ahead of the sunlight and entered a grim, drab twilight.

Then, a mammoth luminary in its own right, the planet Saturn loomed ahead, rings and all. It gave a vague beauty to the rows of rocky hills that lay below the star-studded sky, even though this was the dull side

of Japetus. After all, it was pleasanter living here than in the razzle-dazzle of the quartz desert. At least it had been, until the Titans had launched their spite upon this lesser moon.

Now came the scene of devastation that even Len Ryder, though hardened to every ugly sight of space travel, dreaded it as something that he didn't care to view. From a broad plain rose the hollow ruins of Jama, a weird green dust still drifting from the rubble. What had once been a proud, happy city, now constituted a row of empty shells.

Not quite empty. Though it seemed incredible that any human beings could still be living in such sepulchres, Len knew of some. It was his job now to contact them.

Len went out to the control cabin and found Trad on duty there. Trad had discarded the uniform that he'd worn on the Xanadu and was now attired in dungarees like the other space hands. Len gave him an approving nod.

"You'll pass muster," assured Len, "if any patrol ship shows up from Titan. Hover us over to that ledge, Trad" — Len indicated the spot on the chartoscope — "and wait there for me. You'll be out of the radioactive area, so don't worry."

Trad landed the Zipperino on a towering bluff above the ruined city, slid into his space outfit, clamped his helmet extra tightly and stepped out through the space hatch. The leaded plastic of the transparent visor gave a ghoully green to the scene of devastation, adding odd, sickly tints to Saturn's varicolored rings. To Len, Japetus appeared as a pastel world.

When Len beckoned a pair of robots to follow him, the scene became even more unearthly. Despite his lead-weighted space suit, Len took great, long, bounding strides that carried him a hundred Minervan meters at a clip. The robots, automatically stepping up their pace, bobbed like rubber balls in and out of the crumbled buildings while Len coursed ahead, using shaky parapets and tottering walls as stepping stones. The comparatively slight gravitation of Japetus wouldn't have bothered him if he had fallen; but not once did Len falter along his sure-footed route.

Len was watching now for signal blinks among the ruins. He saw such glimmers but at first they were deceiving, perhaps purposely so. At times the flashes seemed to come from heights above the city but that could have been an illusion caused by the glint of Saturn's whirling rings, the dominant feature of the night sky. At last, the signals became coherent. They were guiding Len to a goal on a "hot or cold" basis, quick

blinks shying him away; slow, prolonged flashes coaxing him closer.

As Len finished a long stride that carried him knee deep into the debris of a small plaza, two gray-clad figures arose beside him and gripped his arms. They coded a quick message with their finger pressure, ordering Len to come along, which he did. Somewhere in the offing were Len's robots; they had lost ground continually while following their human master. So Len no longer made the gestures that actuated them. Those "mechs" could stay where they were; he'd pick them up after his visit to the Underground.

Like Len, these gray men were from some planet of Earth's size, or larger, for the gravity of Japetus was trifling where they were concerned. They moved Len to the center of the plaza, where a huge marble statue of Lunus, the great Japetus Liberator, lay scarred but intact. Though the statue would have weigh-

ed a dozen tons on Earth, the gray men lifted it with ease, revealing a jagged hole into which they guided Len Ryder.

The Underground had really gone underground on Japetus!

IV

NEVER before had any man been summoned before as grim a tribunal as the one which confronted Len Ryder.

Such a group as the Japetus Underground Council could not have existed prior to the year 2000 A. D., because not until then had any world, anywhere, realized what could happen to the second and third generations of humanity that had gone through the experience of an atomic bombing.

The Grand Solar Alliance had foreseen all that in the case of Japetus and had acted accordingly.

These inquisitors who now studied Len were the products of many worlds

and races, but they all looked alike. Their faceless features were as gray as the porous rock through which the ringlight of Saturn filtered into this volcanic grotto.

Perhaps that was just for effect, but Len doubted it. He was sure that these unfortunates wouldn't have to use theatricals to magnify their plight. They were good for one thing only, their ability to survive atomic raids because of their immunity to radioactive rays. That was why the G. S. A. used them in such duty.

Often, Len Ryder had known desperate men. He knew the extremes to which they could go when their lives were at stake. On that count, the members of the Japetus Council began where others left off. They didn't care about their lives; their stake was the life of the human race itself.

The lava-faced chairman rapped for order. When he spoke, it was in the smooth tones of Univol, the universal language that was instantly translat-



WHEN LEN BECKONED THE ROBOT MEN TO FOLLOW, THE SCENE BECAME MORE UNEARTHLY

able into any global tongue except the ancient trisyllabic Mirandan.

"You come from the Grand Solar Alliance," declared the chairman. "Why did they wait until Japetus was devastated?"

"Because they could not declare war upon Titan," returned Len. "The Alliance is restrained from warfare until an overt act is committed."

"Titan had already conquered Rhea and Dione."

"Through demands alone. Rhea and Dione capitulated like the smaller moons, fearing an attack that did not come."

"Is it right to stand by and watch that happen?"

"The Alliance can not answer that question," replied Len. "Its opinion is governed by the vote of its member worlds."

So far, all routine.

These were the sort of questions that were used to test persons who posed as messengers from the G. S. A. and Len had given the right answers. Now, the blank-faced chairman was becoming more specific.

"Why did the Alliance fail to warn Japetus?"

"Because," Len replied. "It did not expect Titan to attack so soon."

"Why should Titan have waited longer?"

"Because its great day of celebration has not yet come."

"When will that day be?"

"When the wandering moon, Themis, returns."

"And when will the Alliance attack?"

"On the day of Titan's celebration."

"And when shall the Undergrounds emerge?"

"The moment that the spacefleets clash."

There was a long pause; then, the chairman's hollow eyes roved the throng and his slitted mouth spoke:

"To the day of Themis!"

With the words, the chairman's withered hand banged an obsidian gavel upon a basalt block. He rose and the others with him, their faces as identical as dried peas in a wilted pod. A chorus of voices croaked in echo:

"To the day of Themis!"

Len Ryder bowed, turned on his heel and left the lavalined grotto accompanied by the two silent, slit-faced guides who had brought him here. On the way, he managed to glance along side corridors that led even deeper in this underground lair. From those, he caught the green-gold glint of neonium that represented fins and jet-tubes of spacecraft that would be assembled for the T-Day attack. The Japetus Underground would do its share; it was Len's job to visit the other moons of Saturn and stir them to the same enthusiasm.

Stirring enthusiasm wasn't the hard part. Getting there was going to be Len's great problem.

THAT fact was driven home to Len soon after the guards had left him. As he vaulted among the ruins of Jama, Len heard peculiar echoes of his footfalls. It seemed as though cornices, walls and paving blocks were tumbling too long after he had passed by them. Even in the slow-working gravity of Japetus, it didn't take minutes for loosened stones to fall to the ground.

The only answer was that persons were on Len's trail. Unable to navigate with his speed, they were hurrying too much and the crashing sounds were the result of their blunders.

Len let a leap carry him across a warehouse wall. He landed deep down inside the shattered building and eased beneath an archway which not only formed a hiding place but would spread any showers of masonry from collapsing walls.

The clatters kept coming closer.

Figures in space suits appeared upon jagged walls. They weren't from the Zipperino, for the space suits were of a style different from any that Len had seen in the space-chaser's lockers. Apparently they were strangers who had somehow crossed Len's trail. He couldn't see any good reason why they should be looking for him. At least no reason that could be termed good from his own viewpoint.

Even the fact that they'd traced Len here was bad. He didn't want anything to betray the location of the Underground on Japetus. With that thought, Len sidled from the arch and worked his way among the ruins.

Instead of being easy, this process was painfully weird.

Sneaking about on Japetus was like moving in a dream. Any attempt at speed became a lurch that carried Len beyond his landing point. He had to think as well as act in slow-motion to steal away unnoticed. By the time Len had drawn the searchers from the vicinity of the plaza above the Underground headquarters, he was practically surrounded and realized that now he would have to make a break for it.

From a new lurking spot, Len watched a figure climb to a wall-top. Len lifted an Earth-ton building block and hurled it toward his pursuer, following the missile with a leap of his own. The block floated ahead, traveling faster than Len's spring. It met the space-clad figure head on and they vanished together in a lazy crash of the weakened wall. Len kept on, clambering toward the cliff where the Zipperino hovered.

Len was spotted now. He saw other

figures rise and signal ahead. Up from a crevice sprang another figure with a speed that matched his own. An Earthian like himself, Len thought, from the power of that spring. He'd forgotten that the gravity of Venus so closely approximated that of his own planet, Minerva. Len remembered it when he came face to face with this new pursuer.

Dawnlight was replacing the glow of Saturn's rings and in the pink streaks of the distant sun, Len recognized the face of Mira Dale, staring at him through a plastic helmet that had been specially treated like his own.

This was no time to discuss such technicalities. All the hate, spite and frustration that Mira had shown earlier was still present in her features which might have been charming to anybody but Len Ryder. He turned and high-tailed it for the suburbs of Jama, waving for his two robots as he went.

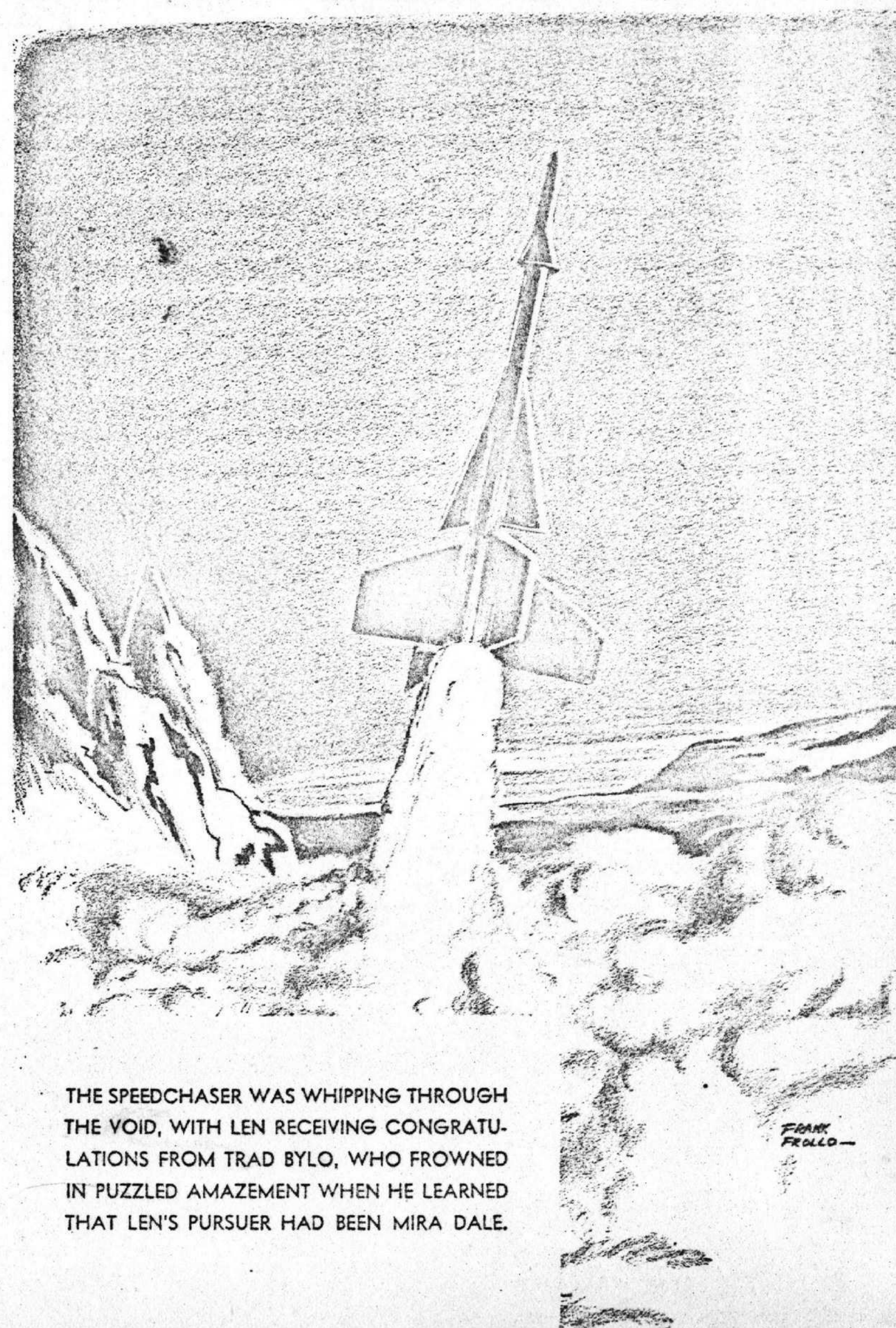
Fortunately, the mechanical figures were close by. One, then the other, sprang in sight and Len launched them toward Mira, all a matter of simple control gestures. They responded faster than Mira could handle her sun-bolts. One robot sprang toward the girl as she moved a deadly volt-tube after Len and she was forced to aim the charge at the mechanical attacker. The robot disappeared in a brilliant sun-burst tinted with steel-blue around its edges.

The second robot was almost upon Mira and she swung her other hand in time to give it a similar blast. It was amazing, the vivid way in which the robot melted in an instantaneous sun-splash. But Len didn't pause to admire the blue blaze. He wanted to reach the Zipperino before Mira could reload.

With one great leap, Len cleared the ledge and landed on the space-chaser's deck as she was getting under way. Mira's bolts couldn't have dented the ship, for its bulk would easily have absorbed their energy. They were concentrated to dispose of human targets; nothing larger. So when Len turnstiled in through the space hatch, he was safe from Mira's thrusts.

Again, the spacechaser was whipping through the void, with Len receiving congratulations from Trad Bylo, who frowned in puzzled amazement when he learned that Len's pursuer had been Mira Dale. Then Trad's beefy face broadened in a grin.

"At least we know she's on our side," assured Trad. "She must have seen us skip out of Phoebe. Maybe she put a crew together just to rescue me. You'd better take me along to



THE SPEEDCHASER WAS WHIPPING THROUGH THE VOID, WITH LEN RECEIVING CONGRATULATIONS FROM TRAD BYLO, WHO FROWNED IN PUZZLED AMAZEMENT WHEN HE LEARNED THAT LEN'S PURSUER HAD BEEN MIRA DALE.

meet the next Underground, Len. We'll square Mira if we run into her." "She'd mistrust both of us," returned Len. "No, we'll stick to orders, Trad, and strictly. We have half a dozen moons to pick from so there's plenty of space to shake this dame."

Len's statement was more than an opinion; he voiced it as a positive conviction.

The space skipper wasn't due for just a single surprise. He was in for a lot of them.

V

LEN RYDER had really zigzagged among the moons of Saturn, using every trick he'd learned as a space skipper. By all calculations, he should have thrown Mira Dale off the trail long ago, instead she'd clung to it like meteor dust to a comet's tail.

Whether the girl was just out-guessing him, or their minds ran in identical channels, Len didn't know. She'd simply bobbed up on every moon he visited and Len didn't like it.

It had been cat and mouse, five times in succession. Len didn't want to keep on playing the mouse.

There was one thing in Len's favor. At least he hadn't come within range of Mira's bolt-gun. He could thank his own smart judgment for that. Each time he'd ventured from the Zipperino, Len had deployed his robots as decoys, never recalling them until he was safely back on the spacechaser. So he still had four robots, all nicely intact, like himself.

The trouble was that Len had been spotted, always close to Underground headquarters, on every moon including Dione, where he'd had to crawl beneath an iceberg to complete his mission. It wasn't always Mira who had spotted him. For that, Len could be thankful, considering how fast and frequent the girl was with her sun-bolts. But somebody of her crew was always close enough to keep tab on Len's movements.

Len had mentioned this to the various Undergrounds and they had smiled it off. They were different from the group on Japetus. These other moons had their own patriots, who were hiding in the fringes of populated districts. They represented extremes in humanity: the Rheans, for example, had greeted Len with a formal dinner in which Earthian champagne had been specially served for their honored guest. The Dionese, in contrast, were practically Eskimos, hibernating beneath a surface world of ice.

But they were all living for T-Day. Nothing else counted. The toast: "To the day of Themis!" whether drunk in champagne or melted snow, summed

up the opinion of every Underground.

NOW, heading out of Dione, Len himself was at the helm of the Zipperino with Enceladus dead ahead. He'd picked Enceladus by the toss of a coin, before visiting Dione. It had been a toss-up between Enceladus and Mimas, so Trad had agreed with Len that a coin might be the best bet to outguess Mira, considering that everything else had failed.

Mimas and Enceladus were the innermost moons of Saturn, discovered by Herschel in 1789. Never had their discoverer dreamed that within a few centuries space ships would fly between those moons faster than he had ever traveled between his adopted England and his native Hanover. When Mimas and Enceladus were in conjunction, as they happened to be at present, they were a mere touch of the direction dial and it was done. With hardly a swerve, the Zipperino ate up the distance to Mimas. As the little moon grew to world size, Len cut in close and banked the spacechaser under the shelter of a blackish cliff on an otherwise barren landscape.

Such a hiding place was needed, for when Len stalked from the deck in his space-suit, his long strides carried him into a scene of amazing brilliance.

One side of Mimas was always turned toward Saturn, practically frozen that way by the great planet's tremendous pull. Len had placed the spacechaser in the in-between zone, so now he was viewing Saturn not quite above the horizon. Space travelers often thrilled at the sight of Earth as seen from its satellite Luna. Such a scene was insignificant, compared to Saturn, viewed from Mimas.

Twice as near, and hundreds of times the volume of Earth, Saturn seemed to fill the sky with its mighty bulk and vivid glow. Across the mammoth planet lay a broad shadow, cast by its rings which were edgewise toward Mimas. This sight was truly worth traveling half the distance of the solar system to see. Despite the urgency of his visit, Len paused, found himself captured in sheer fascination, and wrenched himself loose with an effort.

Turning his back on Saturn, he strode for the darker side, watching for the lights of the reception committee that was constantly expecting his arrival. There was no sign of Mira, nor any spacecraft that could have brought her here. Pleased by this, Len was totally off guard when members of the Mimas Underground suddenly surrounded him and demanded his identity.

With a smile, Len gave it and was conducted to headquarters. There he

delivered the usual message.

"It is too bad that we must wait," Len stated simply. "But the time has been well chosen. The return of Themis can be viewed from all the rest of Saturn's moons. There will be no need of any messages between them. All can act automatically and at once."

The simplicity of the plan brought nods from the Mimas Council, though the chairman added a bland smile.

"That might be important on Rhea, Japetus, and particularly Titan itself," the chairman stated. "But we of the lesser moons and particularly the inner circle, have our own methods of communication. By the time you reach Enceladus, the result of this conference will be known there."

"That's perfect!" exclaimed Len. "Then I won't have to stop there. Somebody has been crossing my path and I came here to dodge them. Chances are that she — I mean they — are waiting there right now, expecting me on Enceladus. The odd thing is, this party is a friend — or should be — because we're both on the same side."

WHILE on his way back to the spacechaser, Len checked again and made sure that Mira wasn't here on Mimas. Trad was awake when Len stepped on board and they were chatting as the Zipperino jetted up into the black sky. Then, as Trad saw the tremendous disk of Saturn looming above the moon's horizon, he exclaimed:

"Why, this can't be Enceladus! The old Ringmaster is big enough for Mimas. What did you do, Len, lose your way?"

"Purposely," nodded Len, swinging the ship away from Saturn. "I had a hunch that the coin fell wrong side up."

"You're heading into Enceladus now?"

"No need, Trad. The boys on Mimas are going to relay the message. Don't ask me how. Maybe they have space pigeons."

"But suppose something goes wrong —"

"It's not likely," interposed Len, "unless I stop on Enceladus myself. So we'll let Mira wait there, where she can't help us and therefore can't hurt us. The way she's been playing the protector, the Titans may be wise to something by now. Next thing, the Boops may be after us."

"Then Mira may already need our help!"

"She won't get it on Enceladus. We're going to Titan. That's where the biggest Underground is, right in the Grand Titan's own ball-park. After we've talked to the boys on the home grounds, we'll worry about Mira. She's looked out for herself well enough so far. Too well."

Len's mind was made up about going to Titan. Trad finally saw it was no use to argue, so he gave it up, but Len noticed his reluctance.

"If you're worried about showing your face on Titan," Len told Trad, "we can double back to Mimas and let you stay there. The Underground would look out for you, although they'd have to hold you as a prisoner until after Themis Day —"

What do you think I am?" interrupted Trad. "Yellow, like a batch of cosmic dust?"

"I'd just call it caution, Trad."

"Yeah? I could be just as cautious on Enceladus as Mimas. So why not drop me off there? Maybe I might change my mind and go on to Titan afterward."

"You'll go on to Titan now and let's have no more arguments."

WITH that, Len turned in for what was left of the interlunar night. This was a hard life, skipping from one daybreak to another. Even worse than the dawnhoppings were those landings on moons at night, when Saturn put on such a brilliant show. Out here in the void, you could sleep, but you never knew for how long.

And now, Len couldn't sleep at all. Something was sticking in Len's craw, some carry-over from that futile argument with Trad. He wasn't a bad sort, Trad, and Len hadn't objected when the G. S. A. had saddled him onto Len on the claim that he was the perfect man as well as the most convenient to serve as Len's lieutenant.

Len knew what ship's officers could be like, particularly when they'd served on superliners like the Xanadu. They were the big pains of the spaceways. But he'd yielded to persuasion from the G. S. A. in regard to Trad Bylo. Partly because it was easy for Trad to ship on Phoebe; partly because Trad knew his way around Saturn's moons.

Both counts had exceeded expectations.

Len's capture of Trad on Phoebe had made Trad's desertion look legitimate. As for Trad's navigation, he'd called a perfect shot on every moon and hadn't encountered any of the treacherous space currents that eddied around Saturn and the monster planet's satellites. Frankly, Len had expected a few skids off Saturn's rings, but Trad hadn't even brushed them.

So what was wrong with Trad?

Len could give the answer in one word:

"Enceladus."

Len spoke it aloud to a figure standing inside the doorway of his tiny cabin. The figure stirred in response. Len made motions with his hands. With a laugh, he said:

"It's all right, Tin Pot."

Tin Pot was Len's favorite robot of the four left after Mira had bolted a couple into blue smoke. Len had been testing out the mech's duplex reactions and was almost sure he could get a triplex result of light, sound and contact, corresponding to the human senses of sight, hearing and touch. Now, Len sat up in his bunk and began to smoke a fireless cigarine. He'd gotten used to them around Jupiter's methane region, where all sparks were taboo.

"It doesn't make sense, Tin Pot," declared Len. "You'd think from the way Trad wants to haul into Enceladus, he's got a date there with a blonde."

A swerve of the Zipperino nearly dumped Len from his bunk. Len came to his feet.

"Sounds like I called the turn, Tin Pot," Len chuckled at his own pun. "We're heading into Enceladus and I've just remembered that Mira Dale is a blonde. Not that I didn't know. It was just that I didn't care. Now we'll see if Trad does."

Trad was in the control cabin, comparing chartoscope with viziscreen when Len popped in on him. Trad's beefy face went the color of a cold storage cut when he saw the space skipper. Len's eyes went to the communicator box, caught a flash of its sound track, just before it flickered off.

"Somebody tuning in?" demanded Len. "Like Mira Dale and her mystery ship, for instance?"

Choked up, Trad shook his head.

"Then whose orders are you taking?" snapped Len. "I see by the 'scope that you've set a course for Enceladus."

"Only by accident," gulped Trad. "I mean it was only a bluff. The contact was from a Titan patrol ship. They wanted to know our port. I couldn't say Titan without consulting you, so I gave them Enceladus. It satisfied them, or they wouldn't have cut off."

Len nodded his agreement.

"That means we can keep on to Titan," declared Len. "I'm not tired, Trad, so you'd better get some sleep yourself."

Trad was ready to put up an argument; then he decided against it. His lips tightened until their whiteness contrasted utterly with his purple face. Then, abruptly, Trad left the cabin.

Len spoke aloud to Tin Pot, who had followed him here from the bunk room.

"Never fall in love," Len told the robot. "It might land you anywhere, Tin Pot, even on Enceladus. You never can tell what a woman may do, particularly one like Mira Dale."

That was more a prophecy than a

passing comment. What Mira had in store for one man in particular, was something that shouldn't even happen to a robot.

VI

WHEN the Zipperino spacedocked in Titanica, the capital of Titan, she was promptly surrounded by green-clad members of the BOOP who practically screamed for the crew to show their credentials and to make it fast.

All had them, from Len Ryder down the line, with one exception, Trad Bylo.

They took Trad into protective custody and began a search of the spacechaser. When they came up with Trad's uniform from the Xanadu, the beefy man began to stutter. He thought somebody had spaceditched that outfit, so he claimed. That brought a sneer from the Boop Commander.

"You'll hang until you talk," the B. C. told Trad. "Meanwhile, this ship is interned along with its crew."

"By whose order?" demanded Len. "Yours or the Grand Titan's?"

"By order of the Grand Titan —" The B. C. had hardly gotten the words out before Len's fist snapped his chin. The result was quite terrific. The gravity on Titan was slightly less than that of Mars, where an Earthian wallop could count for plenty. Len's powerful punch sent the B. C. flying clear across the dock beyond the spacedasher's rail and landed him far below with the force of a ten-foot Earth-fall, enough to stun him for the time.

Before the other Boops could come after Len with their sharp-cornered clubs that could be used as knives, the space skipper stepped back and let his robots intervene. Then:

"You heard your commander," Len told the Boops. "He said he was acting at the Grand Titan's order. That makes me answerable to one person only: the Grand Titan himself."

The green-clad squad came to salute. Then, almost politely, they bowed for Len to accompany them.

"Come along," Len told Trad. "You're the bone of contention, so you'll be needed. As for witnesses, we have these." He gestured to the robots and they tramped from the spacedock with Tin Pot in the lead. "Yes" — Len added a chuckle. "We'll sell the Grand Titan a bill of goods yet."

PEOPLE paused to stare at the curious creatures that were being marched along the streets of Titanica.

Not the robots: they were used to such.

Len and Trad caused the commotion because they weren't in uni-

form. To be allowed at large on the mighty moon of Titan, you had to wear some sort of uniform. Syndic Lodi, now the Grand Titan, had decreed this immediately upon taking over the dictatorship.

"A dictator is a great advantage," Len told Trad, for the benefit of the green guards. "He puts you in uniform, so everybody knows who you are. His word is supreme, so there's no argument as to who is head man. When you want to meet him in person, there's always a way. A nice way, like putting the hop on a Boop." They were marched across the great esplanade, fringed with the gorgeous palm trees that the ancient Titans had cultivated with the aid of bottled sunlight. Ahead loomed the Grand Titan's palace, resplendent with huge gem stones that glittered with the fire of diamonds.

"They call those titanias," said Len. "The wonder gems. If they were, they'd lose their lustre, when exposed to the weather. Actually, those gems are quartz, from the Japetan desert. And why not?" Len raised one hand and gave a sidewise salute. "Japetus belongs to Titan now. Mighty Titan, master of many moons!"

People along the street were responding with the Titan salute. As a rag, Len transcribed it to his squad of robots. But the Titans took it seriously and saluted the mechs as if they were human. To Trad, Len understood:

"Maybe they'll be needing robots to fight on their side. These streets are half-deserted. A lot more Titans have gone underground than these Willy-nillies realize."

All along the way to the palace, Len and Trad had been seeing huge portraits of the Grand Titan, done in mosaics as well as paintings. When they were marched into the palace and up to the reception room, they had gained the subconscious impression that they were going to meet a big man. Instead, Syndic Lodi looked like a shrivelled peanut in its shell, as he sat in his conference throne behind a huge table hewn from a single block of Japetan cairngorm.

The floor of the room scintillated with powdered quartz which reminded Len of the dry snow on Dione, though he didn't say so. Instead, Len side-flipped a salute as any rakish space skipper would and stalked across the gritty carpet straight to the table, beckoning Trad along. The robots. Len had checked outside the palace.

"Skipper Ryder, at your service," announced Len. "I'd be spacechasing out to flush the G. S. A. fleet now, if these Boops hadn't interfered."

Syndic Lodi leaned forward on his elbows and watched a tape unroll. It

was a code that had been recorded at the spacedock and flashed ahead.

"Your record is good, Ryder," commended the Grand Titan. "In five years you have betrayed three trusts. We can use good traitors."

Len smiled inwardly. The G. S. A. had framed that report and let it fall into Titan hands.

"But this man" — Lodi waved at Trad — "by what standard would you class him as good?"

"I wouldn't," returned Len, boldly. "I'd rate him as the best. Why do you think I shipped out on the Xanadu when I could have come on the Coleridge, a month ago?"

The Grand Titan shook his head, to prove he really didn't know.

"Because Bylo here was on the Xanadu," explained Len. "Why, we could have sabotaged that packet and the Coleridge too. I had Trad keep his uniform, just to prove it."

"According to earlier reports," objected Lodi, "Trad Bylo was captured by robots on Phoebe."

"By my robots," boasted Len. "Does the story stack up now?"

"Except for one thing. You took a long time getting here from Phoebe."

"Naturally. We made the rounds of the moons to see if there were any other spacechasers we could use."

Lodi's eyes, sharp as gimlets, showed interest as he queried: "And were there any?"

"No," Len shook his head. "That makes ours all the more valuable."

"Possibly," agreed Lodi. "If we need scoutcraft at all. Any time the G. S. A. throws a spacefleet at Titan, we'll know it before they get within ten million miles. What's more, we'll be ready for them. However—"

Lodi slanted his mouth into a peculiar slit that was probably his idea of a smile — "we can use you and your chaser, Ryder. Tonight you can take off to welcome Themis, the wayward moon, whose orbit crosses ours tomorrow. If Themis has any inhabitants, which I doubt, you can inform them that they now are Titans."

"And I take Bylo with me?" queried Len. "As first mate?"

"Why not?" returned the Grand Titan. "As third officer of the Xanadu, he should certainly qualify for the berth you've given him."

OUTSIDE the palace, Len and Trad watched the green-shirts stalk away to tell their commander that he'd been over-ruled by the Grand Titan in person. Len gestured impatiently when Trad began to pour his thanks.

"Get back to the spacedock," ordered Len. "I'll join you there after I've contacted the Underground here on Titan."

Trad hissed a soft whistle, like the call of a Neptunian skudra above the fossilized dzak.

"That's a tricky task, Len."

"Not with Miss Mystery missing," returned Len. "So far, she's been the woe in the wogo as they say on Io. She can't even show her face here on Titan. Anyway, the robots will throw her off, if she's around. So get going, Trad."

Trad was off, with the robots following, and Len began to thread his way among the buildings surrounding the esplanade. The first place that he stopped was at a uniform shop, where he showed his credentials, explained his present status, and called for a suitable outfit. The proprietor checked over a vocoscope, found Len satisfactory and suggested a uniform of lunar gray which he had in stock. Len tried it on, paid for it in Japetan quartzoks, which were now accepted currency on Titan. He went to the dressing room ostensibly to pick up his dungarees and have them wrapped; instead, Len stepped out through the back door.

From then on, it was a case of dodging green-shirts and explaining matters afterward. You just weren't supposed to have a moment to yourself in the beautiful, sparkling city of Titanica. You couldn't finish a glass of spacebrau or wait for a helicobus without some mug in green coming up and wanting to see your Cs, as credentials were called for short.

Len didn't pause long enough for such queries. He was away from the garish new palace, in among the baked-clay buildings of the old city that the present regime intended to supplant with ugly chrome structures. Here, Len really knew his way around, which was fortunate, for the Boops were thicker in this area, once the hot-bed of the die-hards who had opposed Syndic Lodi.

There were new signs in this area. Such places as the "Patriotic Cafe" and the "Hotel Freedom" were now styled the "Lodi Tavern" and the "Syndic Inn." Those were the very spots that Len picked, knowing that the Underground would be smart enough to frequent them rather than places that were on the doubtful list. At each, Len gave a countersign and results came soon.

As Len moved through an alley with smooth, glazed walls, the tiling swung open on secret hinges and two burly figures stepped out to steer him through the opposite wall, which timed its pivot to the first. Down rough-hewn steps, Len and his companions threaded their way through a maze of passages and sliding panels to the headquarters of the Titan Underground. There, before a conclave of five hundred delegates,

Len delivered his all-important message; that the time to strike would be tomorrow, the Day of Themis.

Len was then conducted through some other passages which proved surprisingly short, considering where he came out. On the street, Len blinked in amazement to find himself on the edge of the esplanade. The Underground headquarters was practically beneath the Grand Titan's palace!

All the way back to the spacedock, Len was chuckling over that situation. He saw the Zipperino moored where he had left her, the four robots standing on deck as proof that Trad had returned. His spacechaser, Len decided, was better guarded than the Grand Titan's palace. How easy it would be to take over Syndic Lodi in person!

Not as easy as taking over Len Ryder.

The robots were just out of summoning range when Len made a turn past the end of the spacedock to reach the steps that would take him up to his ship. It was then that a human figure stepped swiftly from

beneath the steps and planted a solid, rounded object between Len's shoulder blades.

Len didn't need the low-toned warning that came with it. Only a Venusian bolt-gun could supply a muzzle of that size. The tone of course, was Mira's and Len obeyed her order to march beneath the spacedock. Quite a surprise, this, but it was only the beginning. Titan, the moon planet, was a place that specialized in surprises.

Who was waiting beneath the spacedock but Trad Bylo and the members of the Zipperino's crew. Trad's face was uglier than Len would have believed possible and the crew members reflected the same mood. Apparently, Mira and Trad had been doublechecking Len as well as doublecrossing him ever since leaving Phoebe.

The only place they'd missed out was when Len had by-passed Enceladus. It was Mira, whose signals Trad had answered at that time. But they were making up for it here on Titan, this pair who had tricked Len Ryder from the very

start!

VII

THEY hanged Len Ryder until he talked.

For those unfamiliar with this form of Titanese torture, it should be stated in all fairness that Titans did not originate it. Actually it was instituted by the first Earth-men to visit their moon, Luna. There, in attempting to hang a moon pirate, they discovered that the gravitation wasn't sufficient to strangle him.

Instead, it produced a slow-choking process from which the victim usually recovered but seldom fully. The same quaint custom had been carried to both Mercury and Mars, then finally to Titan. Those worlds were admirably suited to the torture, but Mercury and Mars had banned it by order of the G. S. A., which didn't function here on Titan. So chaps like Trad Bylo could still have their fun, legally though not lethally.

Strung up like an old-fashioned horse thief, Len was clawing the air with the hands that they'd bound in



LEN HURLED A BLOCK THROUGH THE AIR HOPING TO HIT THE ONCOMING ROBOT MAN.

back of him. His head was roaring with the tumult of a mighty surf and he was kicking madly to find a foothold that just didn't exist. Everything was black before his eyes, until hands lifted him, easing the rope that burned his throat. Then a voice — Trad's voice — cut through the roar, as though from far away.

"Will you talk now, Len?"

When Len gargled the equivalent of "No" they let him slip down into the noose again and the torture was resumed. For some reason, each new treatment hurt worse. At last, Len throated all the gasp that he could summon: "I'll talk!"

They eased Len down but didn't cut him loose. With the rope slack about his neck, Len swallowed some water that Mira proffered him and even the cool liquid seared his throat. Mira's face was very grim, but with sympathy completely absent. Then Trad took over in his hard-boiled fashion.

"All right, talk!" Trad ordered. "Look at this moon map and point out the Undergrounds. You know where they are. You've been there." Len began a head-shake only to have the rope tightened. Mira intervened, but she was more practical than sympathetic.

"Let him talk," the girl said. "For one thing, he can't point to the spots with his hands tied."

"We aren't going to untie them," retorted Trad. "You've been acting like you were on his side and it's time you quit."

THIS was refreshing news to Len, to learn that anyone had been on his side, except Tin Pot and the other robots. But he couldn't remember Mira intervening in his behalf. Probably she'd shown some sympathy at a time when he was practically blacked out. A good point to remember, though.

At any rate, the rope was relaxed, so that Len could speak, which he did hoarsely and painfully.

"I can't point them out," stated Len. "Not accurately. The guides that took me there mixed me purposely."

"That I can vouch for," assured Mira, as she put the moon map in a projector. "I got mixed just trying to follow them."

The girl clicked a switch and the map of Titan and the other moons was thrown in huge size upon the dull white texitite wall of the big room beneath the spacedock. Using a thin pencil-ray as pointer, Mira probed the moon charts one by one, telling Len to speak up whenever the light came close.

Speak up, Len did.

"That's about it," he gruffed, keeping his nods short, so the rope wouldn't tighten on his neck. "Yes,

now you've spotted another. About there for Tethys."

Each time, Mira spread the ray and let it etch a permanent circle on the surface of the sensitized chart. When Len had finished, Mira stated simply:

"He's about right, Trad. I know, because I was there. The only one missing is Enceladus. That is, except Titan, but it wasn't our job to track the Underground here."

Trad gave a short laugh and faced Len.

"In case this is all Plutonese to you," stated Trad, "our job was to trick you into leading us to the various Undergrounds. You and your G. S. A. are about as dumb as that outfit the ancients called the United Nations."

"Your crew was planted by the Titans. So was I and so was Mira. We had you bluffed from the time things started on the Xanadu, at least Mira did. Why, she even missed you purposely with that sun-bolt. She couldn't afford to kill you then."

Len managed to glare accusingly at Mira.

"That's right," the girl declared. "The same way on Japetus. I picked off those robots instead of you."

"After all," added Trad, "she had to tag you other places. Well, it tallies well enough to mess any of those Undergrounds in case they try to operate. The question now is when they're going to try."

Len's lips went firm. Trad promptly stepped over and tightened the noose. The rope began inching Len upward from the floor, while Mira faced him and made a fervent appeal.

"Please, Len!" The girl's tone was earnest. "Don't be a fool. It won't help you, or anybody. I — well, I just know, that's all. What you won't tell, somebody else will. It always works out that way."

SHE was really beautiful, Mira, though Len wasn't in a mood to appreciate it. She was wearing the transperplex costume that she had sported on the deck of the Xanadu. The transparent stuff was impervious to about everything except the gaze of human eyes, though even that didn't matter now, for Mira didn't have the sun behind her. It wouldn't have mattered to Len anyway, because everything was going black, real black, blacker than the sky above an airless asteroid.

But Len could still hear the girl's pleading voice:

"If you'll only believe me, Len! I don't want you to suffer. I want you to live. If you talk, they'll let you live. You have my promise, Len — my full promise —"

Mira's words took effect. Len managed to gulp that he would talk. As the rope relaxed, he did.

"The Day of Themis," croaked Len. "That's when the Undergrounds will move. Tomorrow, the Day of Themis."

"You expect us to believe that stuff?" demanded Trad. "Why, everybody is turning out to celebrate tomorrow. There will be Titans everywhere."

"But it's the one time the moons can work together," persisted Len, hoarsely. "They won't need signals or anything. All they have to do is watch for Themis. There's a spacefleet due first, to open the attack. But the Alliance is depending on the Undergrounds."

Before Trad could sneer his disbelief, one of the crew members gestured for him to listen to a news report that was flashing through on the fellow's wrist-audio.

"Alliance spacefleet sighted," the announcer said. "Due here by dawn if it keeps on coming, which probably it won't. They are a long way from their base and the Titan fleet is ready —"

Trad waved for the man to switch off the report; then he gestured for the others to cut down the rope. Len's hands were still bound, though, as Trad marched him up to the Zipperino with Mira and the space crew following.

"Who's yellow now?" Trad was sneering. "You talked fast and loud when the pinch came. The pinch right there." Trad laid two fingers on Len's throat and squeezed. "That was the treatment you needed. I've got to give Mira credit, though, for serving up the clincher."

They had reached the spacechaser and crossed its deck into the control cabin, where Mira was picking up a thin-bladed knife to cut Len's bonds. Trad gestured for the girl to wait.

"No use, Mira," stated Trad. "We'll be dumping him loose before we're a thousand miles above Titan. Len won't need his hands when he's just a cake of frozen spacedrift."

"But you said you'd let him live!" blazed Mira. "Why, you —"

"I just played along with you," interposed Trad. "Now, first we'll contact the Grand Titan. Then —"

"First we'll go through with our promise!" With a quick slash of her knife, Mira cut Len free. "Then we'll discuss other matters. What's more, we'll talk them over my way."

Mira had covered Trad with a bolt-gun, but the beefy man only grinned. With his own hands, he gestured for both Mira and Len to raise theirs. The cabin doors had opened and the members of the space crew were covering Len and Mira with thermo-guns. There just wasn't a chance against such odds.

Hands raised, Len stepped forward and said wearily:

"It's no use, Mira."

Even Trad didn't guess the purpose of the hopeless gesture that Len delivered as a follow-up. It just seemed as though his arms were tired, which they were. But Len himself was tired of playing a losing game. Len's hand motion changed all that. It brought four robots, all at once.

VII

BEFORE Trad Bylo and the space crew realized what had hit them, they were handled in the mechanical but efficient style that only robots could display. Three robots took a pair of crew members apiece; the fourth gave Trad full attention. They simply clamped down on the surprised humans, hoisted them bodily, wheeled about, and heaved the wiggling figures over the side of the Zipperino to where the spacedock should have been.

Only it wasn't there any longer.

Len Ryder had gotten to the controls and was putting the space-chaser under way.

From the rail, Mira Dale was watching the ground dwindle, like the figures that had been pitched overboard. She saw Trad come to his feet, shake his pygmy fist at the departing spacechaser. His voice was barely audible as he shouted:

"The Day of Themis! Don't think I won't remember!"

That was all Mira could possibly have heard from below, for now the Zipperino was traveling far faster than the speed of sound, building its escape velocity to the three miles a second needed to carry it clear of Titan.

Then Mira herself was clutched by robot hands and her bolt-guns were clattering from her numbed hands as she was dropped unceremoniously into a chair in the control cabin, where Len faced her with a grim stare.

"Why — why —" At first, Mira couldn't find the words she wanted to sputter. Then: "Why, you don't trust me — after all I did for you."

"Of course I trust you," Len waved away the robots. "Just pick up those guns of yours."

Mira tried, but couldn't.

"We brought you in here just in time," explained Len. "You'd have been frozen in another five seconds. The Zipperino is about the fastest thing on jets, except for that mystery ship of yours."

"She's pretty fast, the Wiffenpoof," conceded Mira, "but we took short cuts with her. I don't think she can catch this packet."

"I'm hoping she won't," returned Len, drily, as he stooped to pick up Mira's guns, "but just in case, I'm going to keep these toys of yours myself. I couldn't take another double-cross, I don't think."

Mira's hands had lost their numb-

THE WAR OF THE MOONS

ness, for she managed to clench her fists. Her eyes blazed too, as she exclaimed:

"Don't put me in that class, Captain Ryder! We were on opposite sides right from the start and if I showed false colors, so did you! We wouldn't be friends now, if Trad Bylo had played fair."

"Maybe we still aren't friends," decided Len, as he pocketed the bolt-guns. "It takes two to make friends, like a quarrel. Besides, I don't want to be pals with anybody who played on the side of the Titans. I only bluffed that I was for them."

MIRA'S voice choked when she answered. Her eyes were tearful too, but it could have been the altitude. The ship was rising faster than its automatic air compressors could function.

"When I make promises," stated Mira, "I keep them. I had relatives who wanted to get away from Titan. I made a bargain to go there in place of them."

"You mean," queried Len, "that the Titans actually released them first?"

Mira nodded: "That's why I went through with it."

"The old honor system!" exclaimed Len. "They knew you'd fall for it. So you decided to stick it out."

"That's more than you would," retorted Mira, hotly. "You certainly let down the Undergrounds."

"You didn't exactly try to stop me."

"I promised you life, that was all. Trad had said he'd let you live. I made him go through with it."

"You and my robots. Mostly the robots."

At that, Mira turned angrily toward an inner door.

"I'll find myself a cabin," she declared, "and stay there for the night if it's all the same to you."

"All the same," returned Len, "except that I can't let you stay alone. Don't worry" — he gestured Mira away as she stared with outraged eyes — "I'll be busy here at the controls. Tin Pot will look after you."

"Tin Pot!"

"My Number One robot," Len snapped his fingers and the mech appeared to follow Mira. "Good night, Miss Dale."

With that, Len concentrated on the controls, his lips showing a satisfied smile. He couldn't blame Mira for thinking he'd gone yellow. That was part of the game, the big part. But he couldn't even tell her why he'd acted as he had. Not yet. Not until tomorrow dawned over Titan with the wayward moon Themis returning to the fold.

By talking volubly and too much, Len Ryder had covered the real secret entrusted to him by the Grand

Solar Alliance.

VIII

HOURS later, Themis sparkled in the firmament like a brilliant morning star. As it enlarged to moon size, the big G. S. A. spacefleet zoomed ahead of it. Len veered the Zipperino away as the fleet crossed the path of Themis. He looped inside a hundred mile circuit, neat going, considering his speed. Coming about, he saw all the other moons of Saturn, a glittering array, with Titan predominant.

Yet they all looked like so many peanuts in the presence of an elephant when compared to that old showman, Saturn. The mighty ring-master was in the background, beaming down on what history was to call the Battle for Themis.

A clank from the corridor told Len that Mira was approaching. Not that Mira clanked; the sounds came from Tin Pot, who accompanied her. The girl entered the control cabin, gestured testily at the robot.

"Why don't you get it to serve coffee?"

"A good idea," replied Len. "Bring it, Tin Pot."

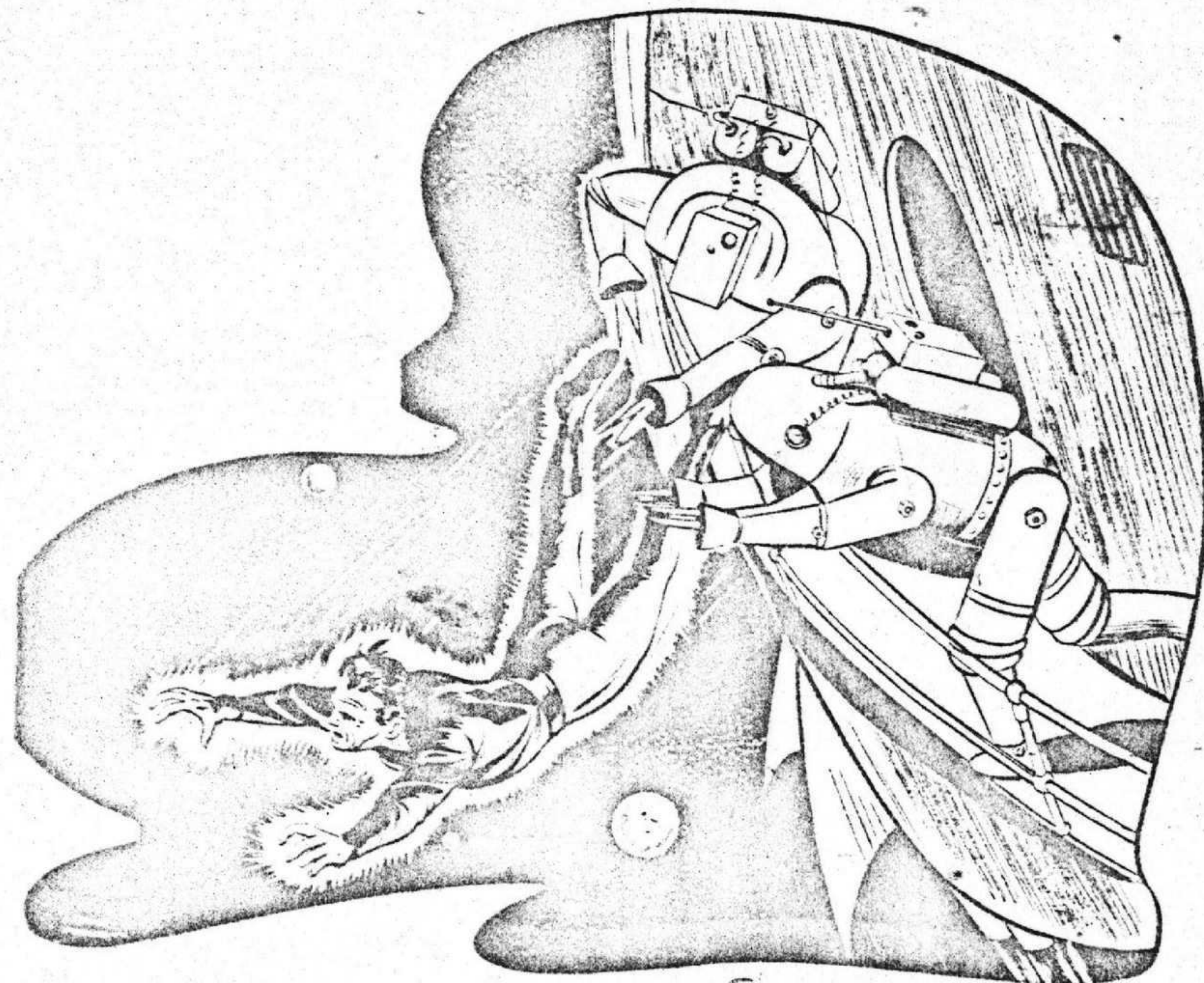
The robot went to the galley and returned with two cups of steaming coffee while Mira stared amazed.

"You mean I harbored that master mind all night?" the girl exclaimed. "I'm beginning to feel like Lady Frankenstein." She took a cup and sipped it. "Thanks, Tin Pot. You make good coffee."

Mira's smiling mood ended as she looked through the plastic frontoscope that topped the control panel. Len watched the girl's face turn whiter than a powdery Dione snowbank. Mira was witnessing a most terrifying sight, the head-on clash of two mighty spacefleets. Len had established the Zipperino as an observation post for one tremendous fray.

The Alliance's armada had come from the satellites of Jupiter. It was formidable both in numbers, and the size of the ships themselves. They had traveled four hundred million miles to reach the area of Saturn, a long haul for a powerful space-wagon. It had meant a sacrifice of fighting power in order to gain the needed range.

Strong though they were, the ships were a motley lot. The G. S. A. had depended upon its members to supply the fighting force. There were stubby rams from Mercury, rakish bolt-slingers from Venus, sleek Minervan battle cruisers from Earth, sand-blasters that bore the Martian emblem, plus an assortment of spacecraft supplied by the four big moons that cast a single vote in the name of Jupiter.



THE STRUGGLE WAS VIOLENT AND BRIEF, AND THEN CAME THE SENSE OF UNLIMITED SPACE.

To meet the invaders, speedy ships were flocking from Saturn's moons, which at present formed a semi-circle with Titan near the center. Only two were absent: one was tiny Phoebe, too distant to be of account; the other was Themis, coasting in on an eccentric orbit that was bringing it home from a century-long excursion.

They were converging into a funnel, those moon ships. Though smaller than the invaders, they were faster and better armed for their size, since they needed much less fuel. They zipped in toward the invaders, cut loose with a rapid barrage and scooted away to wheel and come about as if surveying whatever damage they had done.

There wasn't much from that first sortie. Bolder, the moon ships came in closer and faster the next time. Now the invading fleet responded. Mira pointed excitedly as the Venus ships cut loose with tremendous sunbolts that completely obliterated each enemy ship they struck. The Mer-

cury rams launched themselves as targets against the biggest of the Titan ships to meet them with such crashes as to demolish both contenders.

Minervan craft were shooting atomic rockets, while the Martian blasters covered the scene with a sand screen. But the Titan forces were by no means overwhelmed. They jetted a constant stream of missiles that dented the invaders badly. The crippled ships began to limp away from the Alliance's battle line as it formed for a new attack.

Now that they'd tested each other's strength, no further time was lost. The fleets seemed to merge in a head-on drive, every ship stabbing for some opponent's weak point. Sunbursts, exploding ships, clouds of smoke and sand were everywhere. New waves of fighters were coming from Titan and the other moons. The Grand Titan was hurling everything into the fight to settle it early.

The invading armada broke and fled. It had made the same old mistake. It had sent too little and too

soon. With the moon fleet spreading in pursuit, the retreat became a rout. But meanwhile, Themis came barging closer, a wrinkled world a few hundred miles in diameter, its surface barren rock, devoid of air. The prodigal moon really looked the part as though it had wasted all its substance during a riotous round of the solar system.

With the approach of Themis, most of the Titan fleet turned back from the chase. As the ships raced toward their home moons, Mira gave Len an accusing glare.

"Trad spread the news all right," said Myra. "They're coming back to smother every underground. Just watch!"

From the circle of moons, tiny spaceships jetted into sight from hidden hangars. Myriad puffs of smoke told that Underground fighters had emerged, hoping to take over. Their signal was Themis, for the returning moon had become the central figure in their sky. A grand idea if it had worked.

Instead, the Titan spacefleet was

fanning toward the individual moons, ready to suppress the Underground revolt. Mira's eyes widened as she studied Len's face and saw him smiling at the sight. To Mira's strained mind there could only be one answer: Len Ryder was siding with the Titans after all.

Then, from Len's happy lips came a reassuring laugh as he pointed straight toward Themis and said:

"Watch!"

IX

BEFORE Mira's astonished eyes, the incredible occurred.

Themis, as Mira had noted earlier, was a wrinkled, patchy moon, not worth the price of the battle that had so far surged all around it. Themis was something that the winner could take or leave as he might prefer.

But now the dead world had suddenly come to life.

Sharp bursts of smoke were coming from all over the pock-marked moon, like little puff balls sprouting and then bursting. From those tiny clouds came objects that looked like guided missiles, until their tail-jets flared great streaks of flame.

Then Mira saw that they were sleek destroyers of the latest, swift-test pattern, the kind of craft ordinarily intended to repel an invading fleet. As attackers they lacked only one thing, range of operation.

That problem had been neatly solved in the present case. The destroyer fleet had brought its base with it in the form of Themis, the forgotten moon.

Swift spacefighters were being catapulted into the void not by mere dozens but by hundreds. Their jets added to their superspeed and spurted them in and out of the Titan fleet like busy needles trailing long threads behind them. Each batch of Titan ships, heading for individual moons, appeared to be standing still compared to the killer-craft that needled among them.

Killers they were.

The sluggish Titans had no chance against those spaceraiders. The destroyers literally chopped each flotilla into bits, giving them no chance to assemble, which wouldn't have helped the Titans anyway. All the Titans could do was summon a few destroyers of their own that were harbored on various moons. They'd been kept in reserve in case the main fleet of the G. S. A. came too close. Now they were desperately needed to fight off a menace of their own kind.

But those reserves failed to get under way.

The Undergrounds were stopping them. Above each moon, a Titan flo-

tilla was fighting for its very life and therefore unable to suppress the revolt below. Actually, the Titans had been tricked into breaking up their grand fleet to handle these minor missions. Now they were failing as task forces and at the same time finding themselves unable to unite under a single command.

Len explained all that to Mira as he put the Zipperino into top speed and began the rounds of the Saturn lunar system to see how thorough the rout of the Titans had become.

"We knew we could never crack the Titans with one big attack," stated Len, speaking for the G. S. A., "and they knew it too. That's why they took over. It's what every dictator from ancient times up to Syndic Lodi has counted on, making himself too tough a nut to crack."

MAYBE Lodi was a tough nut still, but his fleet wasn't. Mira could vouch for that as she watched the destroyers knock one squadron all apart with thermoflares, a thousand miles above Enceladus.

"If you step on those reptiles too early," continued Len, "you're branded as all wrong. If you wait too long, they grow from vipers into dragons and you have to exhaust more resources than they're worth. That's what's been done though, all through history, until today. We're witnessing a pattern for the future not an echo from the past."

The ragged Titans now were being driven back by some of their own destroyers which had been taken over by different Undergrounds. The greatest surge came from devastated Japetus which the Titans had practically abandoned, thinking that few humans could exist amid the ruins of Jama. Instead, they were rising in a huge force.

"The weakness with dictators," stated Len, "is that they call their shots years ahead, sometimes even writing books to show how smart they're going to be. That's the time to outsmart them. In advance. Planting people who were atomically immune was one example. The G. S. A. knew that Japetus would hold out until the Grand Titan blasted it. So they stocked the moon with humans who weren't blastable."

"I realized that," the girl said, "when I was tagging you on Japetus. But I didn't suppose the A-As had been planted in such numbers."

"Neither did the Grand Titan," chuckled Len. "In fact, we let him know about the Japetus Underground, to see how far it would worry him. When he practically ignored it, we were sure he wouldn't worry about Themis either."

Mira did a double-take.

"You mean that all this" — she waved her hand about the control cabin from frontoscope to sternoscope including the side viewers in between — "all this tremendous attack was planned months ago?"

"Years ago," returned Len, with a rugged smile. "When Themis was still slicing its way through the asteroid belt. It takes Saturn thirty years to go around the sun, you know. I guess it was about three Saturnian months ago that the G. S. A. began turning Themis into an interplanetary space-base. Call it seven and a half Earth years. They don't have months on Saturn."

"Earth years!" echoed Mira. "Then you are from Minerva!"

Len nodded.

"I suppose I should put up with you," decided Mira. "After all, you're kind to robots. You know, every time I look at Tin Pot, I think of that pair I flared on Japetus and I feel guilty."

"Tin Pot is an exception," declared Len. "But don't let poor robots worry you. Not when you see what's happening out there."

THE raging space battle reached its final throes. All the void seemed studded with sizzling streaks that looked like falling meteors but were actually Titan ships. They'd managed to gather the remnants of their fleet and they were heading off past barren Themis. The clustered Titans were firing away at the destroyers that harried their flanks. But the racers were keeping at them, like a pack of ardent hounds.

"Seven and a half Minervan years," mused Mira. "Why, that would be twelve whole years on Venus! You mean they stowed those destroyers in Themis that long ago?"

"No," replied Len. "They'd have become obsolete by now. What they did was store men and materials inside the wandering moon. Project Antipodes, they called it. They picked up code messages, telling of improvements made in spacecraft, and built their own fleet as they drifted on toward Saturn."

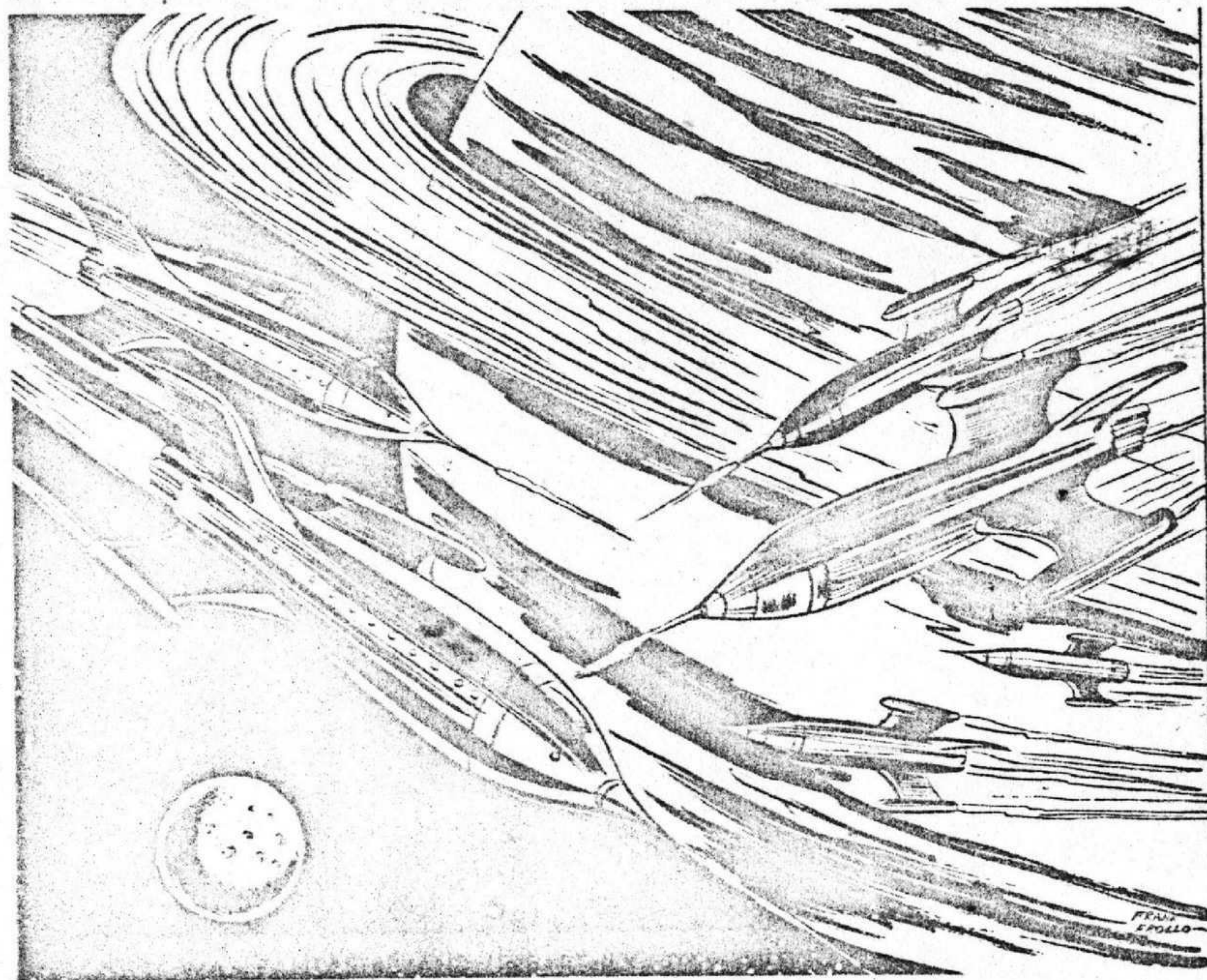
"But all that material..."

"A lot was obtained from Themis itself. The moon is rich in minerals. If nothing else. So as they hibernated it, they turned its substance into use. They fashioned take-off tubes inside the moon. That's how they spurted out so fast."

Mira studied Len admiringly as though he represented the G. S. A. in person.

"You thought of everything, didn't you?"

"I did what I was told," declared Len, simply. "I passed the word re-



IT WAS FANTASTIC AND UNEARTHLY, THIS WILD BATTLE OF SPACESHIPS.

guarding Themis Day and I purposely let it get to the Grand Titan."

Mira's eyes went wide with amazement.

"You mean you talked purposely when Trad was giving you the rope treatment?"

"Of course. I had to hold out a while to make it appear valid." Len chuckled. "You know, you saved me a lot of trouble, teaming up with Trad the way you did. I was wondering how I could spread the news regarding the Undergrounds without making it appear phoney."

Mira had begun to understand.

"I see," she nodded, timing the purse of her lips to her slow frown.

"Yes, the Titans had to be tipped off. You figured they'd take a crack at your spacefleet."

"That's what they thought," Len agreed, "and it was what we wanted them to think."

At Len's words, Mira looked and saw what he meant. The destroyers had herded the Titan fleet into a trap. As they zoomed

past Themis, the Titans . . . what was left of them . . . ran squarely into the G.S.A. fleet, rallied for a head-on smash, but this time the invaders were far stronger. Besides, the Titans couldn't scatter, because of the destroyers that were chopping at their flanks.

FIREWORKS filled the void, illuminating the scarred surface of Themis in perhaps the greatest display of pyrotechnics in all history. The fireworks consisted of the Titan space-fighters. They were blasted into so many burned-out hulks that went scattering into space, spinning crazily like discarded pin-wheels.

Below the Zipperino lay the spread-out landscape of Titan itself, for Len had been coasting toward the moon planet while he and Mira were watching the space-show. Len docked the spacechaser and they stepped out on deck. Above the palace, the green and gray striped flag of Titan had been supplanted by the star-studded emblem of the G. S. A., its golden stars sparkling from the deep red field.

The black and white pennants of the Underground were present, too, waved by throngs that streamed from the esplanade into the narrow streets. They were singing a chant that went: "Titi moya Tita; moya Tita moya." In English it could be rendered: "The Titans are themselves again; as Titans, always always, they'll remain." But Len Ryder didn't bother to translate it.

Len wasn't even thinking in any Earthian language. He was specializing in Venusian at the moment. Mentally, not vocally. As it was long ago said on Venus: "Silence is the language of love" and Len was proving it with the pressure of his lips upon those of the girl who was nestled in his arms. Mira's eyes, glimmering upward like surprised stars, were practically asking: "And who would have thought this could ever happen to us!"

Probably not even Tin Pot, who stood by motionless, his metal face showing the perpetual expression of an unperturbed robot.

THE END

SPIDERMEN AND THE CAKES

By BRUCE CRANDALL

EVELETH dashed around the house in a burst of energy, polishing the walls and straightening furniture. She knew that her mother could have done everything much more easily with the Scramp, the all-purpose cleaning machine, but Eveleth needed some active out-let for the pent-up energy and excitement she felt.

It was the 20th of May, 2052, her sixteenth birthday!

Outside of the small, compact plastic house the sun shone brightly and grass and trees were blossoming in the balmy spring air. It was a lovely day. For the moment Eveleth could forget that this was the twentieth year of the great inter-planetary war, that she had never seen her own father because he had been killed a month before her birth by an electronically guided missile that fell on the building where he worked as coordinator for the War Planning Emergency Board.

Her three older brothers were away from home, all serving in the Army Rocket Corps. But she and her mother were planning to have a party to celebrate Eveleth's very special day and that, at least, was something to look forward to.

"Mother! Mother!" the young girl called excitedly. "Where are you?"

"In here, dear, in the sun room." Eveleth found her attractive mother sitting in the completely transparent plastic solarium bending over a pile of filmy yellow material.

"Oh, my new volynylon dress! Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes," the older woman answered. "I'm fixing the flowers on the shoulder. I got them from the garden just this morning, but I've sprayed them with havricot and they should keep all day."

A gentle chime of bells filled the house. "Breakfast is ready," Eveleth commented. The automatic electric stove had cooked everything to order and now was signaling that its job was done.

They walked into a spotless, cool chromium kitchen and found two plates of bacon and eggs sitting invitingly on the top of the stove. Two steaming cups of coffee had already

been placed on the table by the electronic server. The women sat down and ate slowly and leisurely.

WHEN they were finished, the server automatically moved the dishes into the washing machine, from which they emerged clean and sparkling in a matter of minutes.

Eveleth reached back in her chair and pushed a button on the wall. Music flooded into the room in a burst of sound. Suddenly the melodic symphony was interrupted by a smooth voice.

"Attention all citizens! Attention all Americans! Be on the lookout for a secret space ship from the planet Venus, which has landed on our sphere this day. It is reported to contain five men and all are armed! Attention all citizens . . ."

Mrs. Hamilton flicked off the loud-speaker. "We don't want to hear depressing news this morning," she sighed. They went into the library. There Eveleth turned on a large screen on which a printed page appeared. She adjusted the light and sat down to read.

It seemed only seconds later that she again heard the mellifluous chimes of the kitchen stove, but when she looked at the small jeweled watch on her wrist, a present from her brother Carlton, she noted that it was indeed time for lunch.

Her mother was already sitting down to a plate of juicy hamburgers when the girl entered the kitchen.

"Honestly," Mrs. Hamilton said, "I don't see how your Aunt Martha's family can stand eating those boring vitamin pills all the time when it's so much fun to have cooked food."

"They say it's the latest thing," Eveleth answered, "that soon people won't even bother with food and after a while, our shapes will change and we won't have any stomachs at all."

"Well, we'll look pretty odd, that's all I can say," her mother began, "and I for one . . ." She stopped suddenly. "Did you hear something?"

Eveleth paused, with the fork half way to her mouth. There was a slight buzzing sound somewhere in the house. "Maybe it's just the Scramp or one of the bed-makers that needs oil."

"I . . . I suppose you're right, still . . ." the older woman had a worried look on her face.

"Now, mother," Eveleth started to say when she was interrupted by the entrance into the room of two strange creatures.

"Don't make a sound," one of them said in an ominous, metallic voice. He emphasized his words by waving a long tube of bright metal at them. "I can kill you with this without the slightest disturbance."

Mrs. Hamilton and her daughter sat as if petrified. The two men, if such they were, were horrible to contemplate. They had long spiny bodies with four arms and four legs shooting out from each end of the torso. And their heads were triangular with feelers shooting out from the foreheads on either side.

AFTER the two men had looked around and apparently seemed satisfied that the women were the only occupants of the room, three more of the strange creatures joined them.

These must be the men from Venus, Eveleth thought with horror. The Venusians were considered the most deadly enemies of the earth men, though very few people had actually seen them. Their strength and advancement in the field of weapons was well-known.

"What . . . what do you want?" Mrs. Hamilton finally managed to gasp as her unwanted guests circled the dining table.

"Shelter," the same metallic voice answered. "Shelter until nightfall, when we will destroy you and your entire city."

I don't believe them, Eveleth and her mother thought simultaneously. Destroying one city wouldn't get them anywhere. They are after secret documents, papers which will show them the earth men's plans to conquer Venus. It was a well-known fact that such papers were in existence somewhere in the city. If only we could warn the government, the women said to themselves.

The Venusians must have sensed



THE SPIDERMEN WERE PLEADING FRANTICALLY, THE SHRILL VOICES RISING TO HIGH PITCH

what was going through their minds because they suddenly grabbed the two women and bound them to their chairs with strong wire. Then they began conversing among themselves in a strange, harsh language. After the conference was over, four of the men went out of the room. Only one was left to guard them.

The stove chimed softly and deposited a batch of delicately browned cookies on the table.

The party! Eveleth suddenly remembered. People will be coming here to the party! If only they could warn

them or get help in some way.

The Venutian guard was looking suspiciously at the cookies. He picked one up and felt it with his scrawny, spider-like claws. Then he crumbled it into a heap on the floor. Immediately the Scramp wheeled out of a closet and started to clean up the broken bits of cookie. The startled Venutian fired at the machine with his metallic tube until it lay shattered in pieces beside the table.

Meanwhile, the stove continued to turn out more cookies and then, finally, a beautifully decorated birth-

day cake. The icebox started humming steadily and Eveleth knew it must be making the ice cream.

He's getting nervous, she thought to herself as their captor gazed from one mechanical gadget to another with a bewildered look on his face. The girl struggled with her wire binding, but could not loosen it.

"What is all this?" the man finally said in a wary voice.

"It is food," Mrs. Hamilton answered. She had been trying unsuccessfully to reach a button on the wall which turned on a two-way television transmitter.

"Food," the flat metallic voice repeated. "Ah, yes, I have heard of this, in my studies of the earth men. What is it, again, that you do with this food?"

"You put it in your mouth and chew it," Eveleth said, almost laughing at the ignorance of the Venutian.

"Your mouth? From where you talk? But does it not clog your speech machine?"

"No," the girl answered, growing more bold as an idea began to form in her mind. "Why don't you try some?" She had heard somewhere, it now came back to her, that the Venutians subsisted entirely on synthetic pills, as some of the earth people were now attempting to do. Perhaps that accounted for their insect-like look and lack of body.

CAUTIOUSLY the man from another planet reached out and lifted a cookie to his mouth. He broke off a piece of it with large, ugly, yellow teeth and seemed to hold it in his mouth. He swallowed gingerly. Then he took another bite and another and another until the cookie had been completely devoured. Because of his greedy haste, he choked slightly on the last mouthful, but nothing daunted, he managed to continue, licking the crumbs around his thin, pale lips.

"Have some more," Eveleth urged. "There's plenty." She could barely keep the smile of satisfaction from her face. This might yet give them a chance to get free.

The Venutian put down his weapon, out of the reach of the earthlings, on the table and grabbed for the food with all four hands.

He was stuffing himself eagerly when his four companions returned.



THEY ATE THE CAKES GREEDILY, LIKE LITTLE HOGS, AND THEN WERE HELPLESS

They started an angry tirade in their metallic voices upon seeing him, but after a few moments of rapid conversation, all of them were eating.

Soon the supply of sweets had disappeared. One of the Venutians even ate the broken cookie that had been thrown on the floor. Their eyes had a wild look and their formerly flat mid-sections were distended and swollen. Their original captor was holding his stomach as though in pain, but the others still searched for more food.

"More," one of them finally said to Eveleth. "We want more."

This was the chance she had been waiting for! Keeping her voice and face under control, the young girl said: "The stove must be refilled before it can bake again. If you will untie me, I shall be glad to take care of it."

Throwing caution to the winds, the Venutians hurriedly freed her hands and feet. The young girl went to the refrigerator and took out milk, eggs and butter. Then she took a plastic container of flour from a cupboard. On one side of the stove were three round protuberances. They were automatic food mixers. Opening each of these she poured in a certain amount of the ingredients, closed the cover, and pushed a button.

"The mixers will blend the batter," she explained to the Venutians, "and then it will be poured automatically into pans and cookie sheets in the stove. It doesn't take very long."

EVELETH wandered around the room as she spoke, trying to get close to the button that turned on an automatic radio sending set and the one that controlled the television transmitter. If either of these devices were put in operation, it was highly possible that someone might tune in on their audio-visual frequency and see and hear what was going on in the Hamilton house.

There was a soft persistent buzzing at just that moment that seemed to permeate the whole house. Eveleth's heart leaped, but she tried to keep her face blank. Someone was trying to contact them on the transmitter!

"What is that?" the Venutians demanded in a chorus.

The girl tried to keep her voice matter-of-fact.

"Some of the wiring must be wrong,"

she said casually. "I'll try to stop it."

She moved quickly toward the control panel along the wall and started to push the sending button, but a scrawny arm barred her way.

"Just a moment," the harsh metallic voice said. "I don't think you'd better touch that."

"But . . . but," she protested, and then the buzzing stopped. Whoever was trying to get them had given up upon receiving no answer.

"See," the Venutian said with a nasty smile on his ugly little triangular face, "there was no need to push any buttons." He grabbed her with his four steel-like arms and again tied her to the chair.

Mrs. Hamilton looked at her daughter wildly. Their one chance! And now it was too late. The stove again began to pour forth baked goods and their captors devoured them greedily, hot from the oven.

They must get sick, Eveleth thought frantically. They can't keep on eating that stuff like that when they're not used to it and not get sick. It will just be a matter of time. Their original captor had a definite green look about him now and was no longer vying with the others to see who could get the most. His beady eyes began to have a lacklustre look and his distended stomach gave him the appearance of a pregnant woman. If the situation had not been so serious, it would have been funny, the girl realized.

The other men, too, began to look a little ill. They pushed the final batch of cookies away from them with an effort. Then they collapsed into chairs and dozed. The long tubular metal guns were lying on the table in front of Eveleth and her mother, but their hands were securely tied and they could not reach them.

Eveleth looked up at the clock. It was four-thirty. Her birthday guests were scheduled to arrive in half an hour. Exerting all her strength, the girl tried to move her chair along the floor. It squeaked ominously. She stopped, heart pounding. But the Venutians did not stir. Then she moved a little further, managed to work herself over to the door, still upright.

IT was a sliding panel door, but a small crack had remained open. Eveleth wedged a leg of the chair through it. Her mother, catching on to the idea, laboriously scooted herself

over to the television control panel. Then she tried to jam herself into the button. It wouldn't work. The panel was just a little too high, and the smooth top of the chair was inches under it. Giving a superhuman lurch, Mrs. Hamilton attempted to push the button with her forehead. The force of her movement knocked the chair over with an alarming clatter.

One of the Venutians opened sleepy eyes. Then he jumped out of his seat and alerted his companions. Eveleth and her mother were dragged back to the table and tied securely to it. At that exact moment the front door bell chimed.

"The guests," the girl murmured aloud before she could catch herself.

"What did you say?" the skinniest Venutian, the one who seemed to be the leader, demanded.

"Uh, nothing, just that somebody must be at the door," Eveleth was terrified over what might happen next.

The man barked sharp commands to his men in their native language. He seemed to be none the worse for his eating orgy, but the others were still dull and lethargic in their movements.

The bell chimed again and three of their captors moved out of the room. Eveleth drew in a deep breath and started to yell with all her strength. "Help, the Venutians . . ." She got no farther. A bony hand slapped her sharply in the face.

Suddenly, outside the clear plastic panel at the back of the kitchen, she saw a face peering at them. It was her cousin Henry, a small, mischievous boy of eleven. Turning back quickly, Eveleth realized that the Venutians had noticed nothing. Perhaps Henry would bring help, but knowing his unreliability, she realized that it was nothing that could be definitely counted on.

Mrs. Hamilton moaned a little but made no attempt to cry out. She had been badly bruised in her fall and was twisted into an awkward position.

The three men came back into the room with two prisoners, Eveleth's Aunt Martha and her daughter, Hildreth. Both women were shaking in terror. The Venutians tied them up along with their other two prisoners. They looked around to reassure themselves that all persons on the premises were now securely tied.

Then the leader went to the refrigerator and took out several plates

of delicately molded ice cream. "This also is 'food,'" he asked no one in particular.

"Yes, yes," Eveleth said eagerly. "It is very good. Try it." The Venutian did just that, smacking his lips noisily after every mouthful. After a few moments, the others joined him in his feasting.

THE TRANSMITTER buzzed again, but no one paid any attention to it. Aunt Martha had started questioning Eveleth and her mother in low tones, but only the girl was able to answer and explain what had happened. The Venutians did not seem to mind the talking, feeling pretty sure that the women could do nothing to harm them.

As the transmitter buzzed insistently, the door bell chimed. Then the stove deposited a fully cooked steak dinner for five on the table and the ice box ejected salads and butter.

The Venutians stopped eating ice cream and looked around in bewilderment. The myriad sounds confused and distracted them and for the first time, they did not seem in complete command of the situation.

Suddenly the sliding panel of the kitchen door was thrust open and half a dozen uniformed security policemen rushed into the room, weapons in hand. Behind them Eveleth caught a glimpse of the gamin-faced Henry.

The Venutians, caught by surprise, nevertheless managed to reach for their metal guns. But before they could fire, the officers were on top of them. All eleven men fell to the floor, fighting and grunting.

Even though the earth men were slightly superior in number, the Venutians had an advantage because of their extra arms and legs.

"Hit them in the stomach," Eveleth shouted to the police. "They've been eating like pigs. Hit them in the stomach!"

A burly, blond young man in the blue uniform of the security police heard her above the din and the hysterical screams of her Aunt Martha and young Hildreth. He drew back his fist and hit the Venutian squarely in the midsection. The man groaned and ceased to fight, all four hands clutching the injured portion.

The young cop shook his head. "Well, what do you know about that. Hit them in the stomach, boys," he shout-

ed as he dove at another Venutian.

Henry had crept cautiously into the room, skirting the struggling figures on the floor. Eveleth saw him and called out, "Untie us, Henry. Quick. Maybe we can help."

The child looked at her calmly, as though weighing the merits of her request. Finally, he walked over and began working at the tough wire that bound her wrists. Once the girl was free, she undid the rest of her bonds and then helped Henry untie her mother, aunt and cousin.

Three of the Venutians now lay unconscious on the floor and Eveleth took the wire and tied them securely. The remaining two Venutians con-

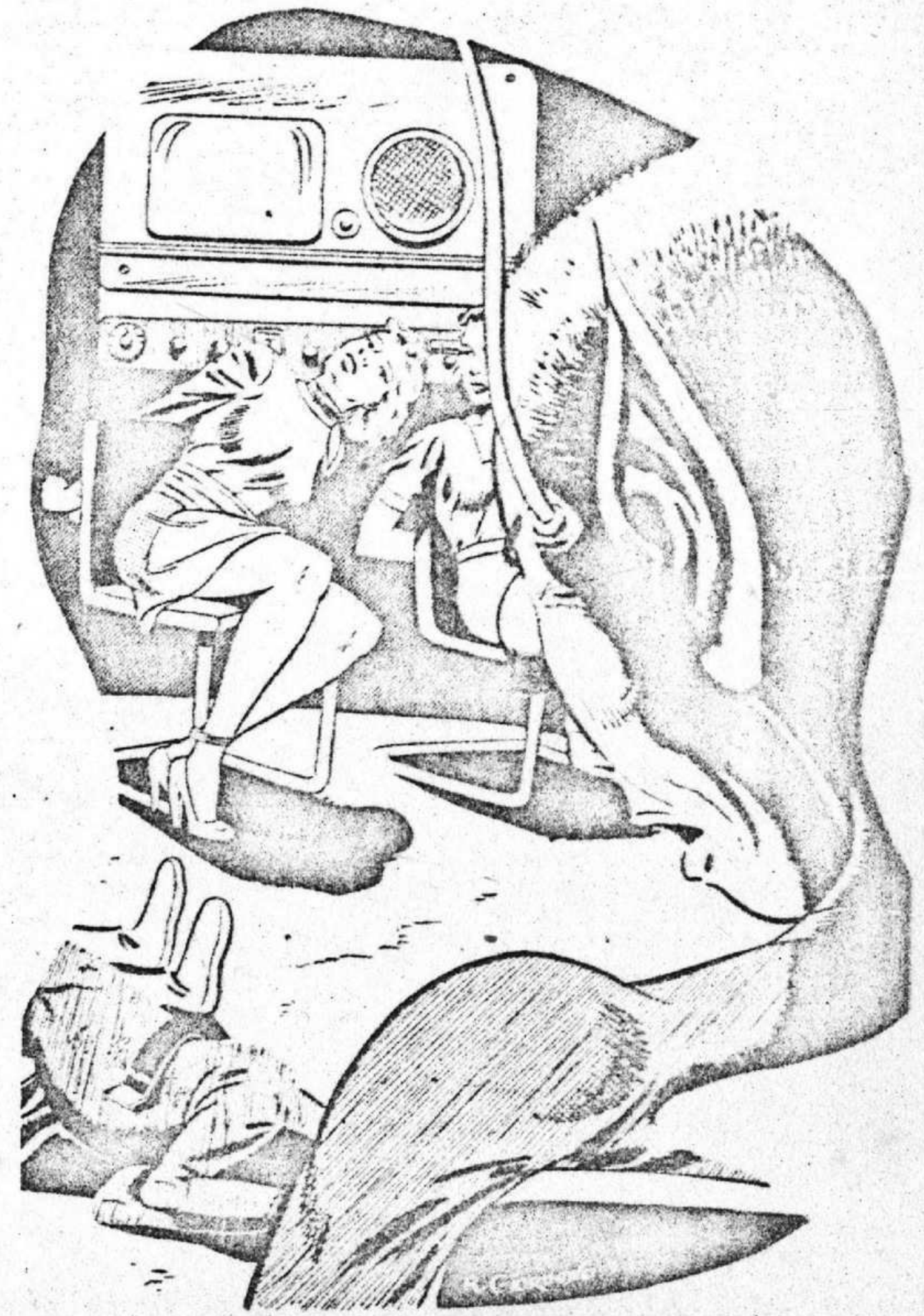
tinued to fight, but they were no match for the earth men.

When all five of the scrawny creatures had been subdued, the police turned to her.

"How did you know their stomachs were so vulnerable?" one of them asked. "We thought these guys were so tough."

Eveleth smiled. "It's a new secret weapon, officer. Remind me to give you the recipe sometime. And now, won't you have a piece of my birthday cake?"

—THE END—



EVELETH TWISTED FRANTICALLY IN THE CHAIR, KNOWING DEATH WAS ONLY A MATTER OF MINUTES

SHE WAS A CREATURE OF FIRE AND DEATH

By WALLACE SMITH

THE toothless old hag toiled up the seven flights of stairs to her barren attic room. Once inside, she emptied the contents of her battered old knitting bag on the bed. It had been a good day, and a small pile of wallets, watches, rings, and coin purses rolled out.

Suddenly she became conscious of a cold wind blowing in the room. She turned and saw to her amazement that the window was closed. As she stood staring, the figure of a man suddenly materialized in front of her.

The man was very tall and exceedingly slender. His face was long and had a wolfish look, eyebrows peaked and nose sharp. His mouth was a thin hard line that opened to reveal small pointed teeth. He wore his black hair long and with sideburns. His clothing, too, was black and over his shoulders was a voluminous cape.

"Who are you?" the woman panted in terror.

"Come now, Mattie Hawkes, you must know me. I am from the astral world, the world of the Passion Devas, but we have much in common and I have very often been in your thoughts." His voice was a low vibrant sound in the chilly stillness.

"What do you want?" Mattie Hawkes murmured fearfully.

"I want you," the Passion Deva hissed.

"No, no," Mattie screamed. "Don't take me. Get away from me. I'm an old woman, but I want to live."

The Deva bowed low, saying softly, "You misunderstand, my dear. I want you as a young and beautiful woman, and I know how you can become one. Listen to my plan. I am sure you will be pleased with it. Your body is of the human world, Mattie Hawkes, but your soul has always belonged to us."

Gradually Mattie Hawkes began to lose her fear, becoming curious to hear more of what the eerily handsome man had to say. She sat up, stuffing her foot back in the knitting bag as though afraid he might snatch it from her. The Deva watched in sardonic amusement.

"Don't you want to be young and beautiful, Mattie Hawkes?" he asked

tauntingly.

"I was young and beautiful once," the old woman cackled, "but the Devil himself couldn't make me that way again."

The peaked eyebrows rose to sharp points. "You think not?" he smiled wolfishly. "Perhaps you are right, but I can. Come, look into this mirror." He whipped a looking glass from under his cloak.

Cautiously Mattie Hawkes got up and walked toward him. She peered at the mirror and the face that stared back at her was young and indescribably lovely.

"Would you like to look like that again?" her companion asked.

"What . . . what would I have to do?" she wheezed.

"You would have to belong to me," he leered. "Only to me."

"Yes, yes," she muttered feverishly. "I'll do it. Only tell me, quickly, how?"

HE put the mirror away and drew from his pocket a small vial filled with a purplish, almost black fluid. She looked at it wide-eyed, her sharp ugly face pushed almost into his hand.

"This is a special potion from the astral world," he intoned ominously.

"You must take the contents and pour them into a steaming tub of water. You must soak in the water for fifteen minutes. And then, my dear, you will be a fitting bride for the Passion Deva. There will be none in the astral world who can equal your beauty." He held the vial out to her.

Mattie took it, turning it slowly around. "Just take a bath," she muttered, trying to hide a slight expression of distaste. "What's in it?"

"A blue precipitate. I shall leave you several tubes of it, but by itself it is powerless. In order to get more of the purple fluid, another ingredient is necessary," the Deva explained.

"Why would I want more?" she asked in bewilderment.

"Because," he hissed, "one bath will last only seven days. Then, unless you have more of the potion, you will again become old and ugly. And I wouldn't want that to happen."

"What is the other ingredient," she questioned, some of her normal craftiness returning.

"The blood of a young, good-looking man born under the sign of the great Astral Deva," he said mysteriously. "You will have the power to kill a man with the kiss of your lips. I will show you how. Once in every seven day period, you must go out and find a man who is born under this sign, lure him to your boudoir and kill him to get his blood. But you must do no more than kiss him. You shall belong only to me and you must be faithful to me. This shall be the condition under which you retain your youth and beauty."

"How will I know when I have found a man born under the sign of the great Astral Deva?" Mattie asked in bewilderment.

"The vibration in your body will tell you when you are in his presence. With your great physical attractiveness, it will be a simple matter to lure him to his death."

"Are there many of these men?"

"Enough, my dear Mattie, to serve our purpose. And henceforth I shall call you Valerie. It is a name of destiny, fit to grace my love. Now hurry and take your bath."

THE old crone bent her wrinkled face over the tubful of steaming water. Trembling with anticipation, she poured in the contents of the glass vial. Then she peeled off her tattered rags and lowered her old scrawny, leather-like hide into the tub. A profusion of straggly gray hair was pulled to the top of her head and fastened with a gay scarlet ribbon. Her evil, ugly face was split by a toothless grin as she relaxed and settled back in the warm water.

As the steam rose up around her, a gradual transformation started to take place. The brown, lined skin of her face began to smooth out, become lighter in color. The wrinkled pouches of flesh surrounding her meanly glittering little eyes disappeared and the stubby lashes lengthened and curled. Underneath the water she felt her shrunken, gnarled limbs start to straighten out and become strong and supple.



THE OLD HAG LOOKED AT THE MONEY GREEDILY, CONSCIOUS THAT SOMEBODY HAD COME OUT OF NOWHERE AND WAS STANDING BEHIND HER.

A quarter of an hour later a beautiful young girl placed a dainty pink and white foot on the bathmat and shook the water from her firm white flesh. The scarlet ribbon held luxurious blue-black hair away from her delicate heart-shaped face with its finely arched black brows, straight patrician nose, full red lips, and brilliant, strangely gleaming green eyes.

She rubbed her body with a turkish towel until it tingled with a rosy glow. Then she stood and stared at herself in the steam-clouded mirror on the bathroom door. She was not too tall, but her slender figure was held erect, with small, well-formed breasts and a cleanly-curving line from waist to hips.

"Ah, that's much better," she murmured in a warm, vibrant voice with rich, throaty undertones.

Kicking the old woman's rags into a corner, she wrapped herself in an ice-blue satin dressing gown that had suddenly appeared on the towel rack. Then she went into the bedroom.

The Deva was lounging on a satin-covered bed, his legs stretched out in front of him and an ebony cigarette holder in his slender fingers. The room was decorated in an expensively feminine manner.

The girl's eyes widened. "What . . . how . . . oh, it's beautiful," she breathed.

The astral being smiled in pleasure at her appreciation. "A proper setting for my jewel," his glance ran over her admiringly as he spoke. Then he stood up and walked toward her, his arms outstretched.

VALERIE, for Mattie Hawkes had passed into the limbo, turned her face toward his with an eager smile. They melted against one another. "You belong to me," he whispered against her hair, "never forget that, Valerie."

A cold chill of foreboding passed over the girl's body, but she ignored it. She was young and beautiful and she owed it all to him, this creature from another world. No price was too great to pay.

They spent the next two days in the room, feasting on strange foods and drinking exotic beverages while Jarrett, as he told her to call him, taught her all that she must know in order to preserve her powers.

Finally, on the third day, when Valerie was becoming restless, he turned to her: "Now, my darling, you must go out among human beings and bring back your victim. You will be free during the days because I have work to do, but remember, every night at midnight I will come here to you. Don't ever fail to be waiting for me. And don't ever give yourself to any other man, mortal or astral. Understand?" His black eyes had red glints in them as they bore into her green ones.

She swayed toward him sensuously. "Of course, Jarrett. How could anyone ever compare to you?"

He was gone and she was alone at last. She revelled in the beauty of her image in the mirror for a long while. Then she donned filmy nylon lingerie and a jade green dress with matching hat and stepped out the door into the world she had last seen as an ugly, poverty-stricken old woman.

Out on the street the warm September sun poured its light down on the hurrying mid-morning pedestrians. Valerie swayed in and out among the crowds, conscious always of the admiring glances directed her way, but not yet deigning to return

them with anything other than a cold, haughty stare.

She was standing on the corner waiting for the lights to change when she noticed the man next to her. He was tall and well-built, about thirty-five years old, she judged. His face was turned away from her, but Valerie could see that he was good-looking, and his clothes had a custom-tailored quality. Suddenly her pulse began to pound madly and she felt the palms of her hands become moist.

"This is one of them," she muttered to herself. "It's only the first, but I can't take a chance. I can't let him get away."

Deliberately, as they started to cross the street at the same time, she twisted her ankle and fell against him.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," she said in feigned embarrassment as the man caught her in his arms.

"That's all right," he murmured, staring into her green eyes with utter fascination.

She looked at him for a long moment, then she started to free herself from his grasp, letting out a moan of pain as she stepped down on her ankle.

"Oh, are you hurt?" the man asked solicitously, again taking hold of Valerie's arm.

"It's my ankle," she murmured. "If you could only help me get home."

It was so simple that the girl almost laughed in his face. He hailed a taxi and drove to her address, almost carried her up the stairs. Then he placed her on the sofa and got some ice for her ankle.

She lay there looking up at him adoringly, her full red lips parted in an inviting smile. The V-shaped neck of her dress exposed smooth white flesh and her long, dark hair was spread out on the cushion behind her.

The man gazed down, suddenly conscious of her body, and his breath became heavy as he panted. He knelt beside the sofa, dropping the ice pack on the floor. The glittering green eyes drew him to her. His arms encircled her warm body and their lips met in a passionate kiss. When they drew apart, the man's face was deathly pale and there was a drop of blood on his lip. He stared at Valerie for a moment with glazed eyes and then toppled to the floor.

Quickly the girl sat up and leaned over, feeling for the heartbeat. There was none. She bared her small, even, white teeth and gave a shrill, blood-chilling cackle, reminiscent of the old woman, Mattie Hawkes.

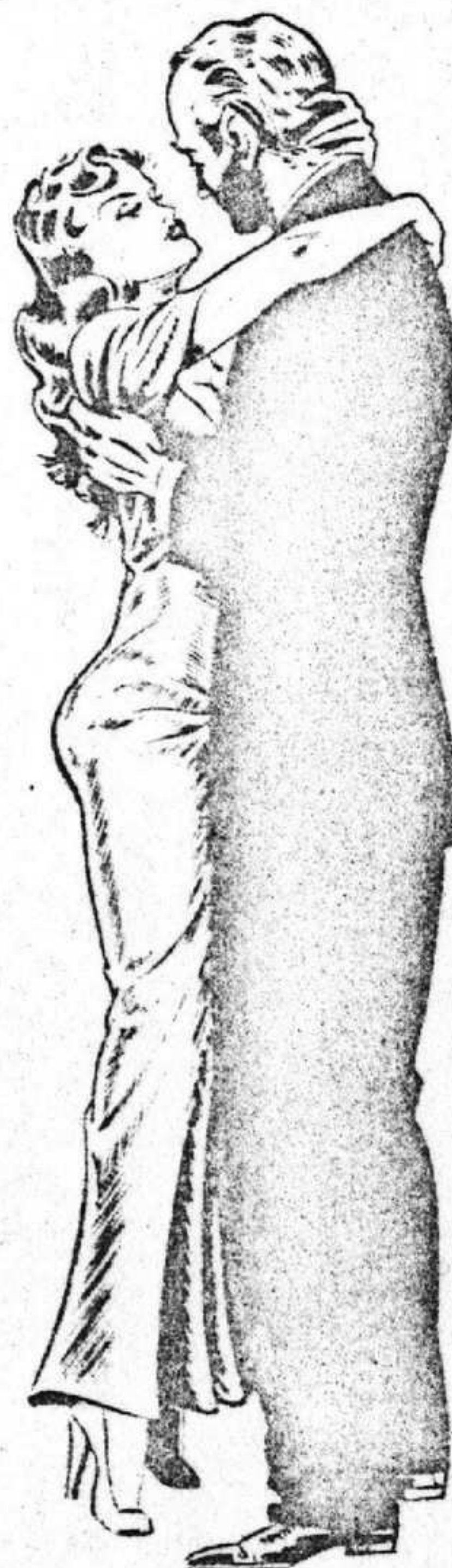
THE door leading to the bedroom opened and Jarrett stood there, a pleased smile on his face. "You have done very well, Valerie. Are you sure he is the right type?"

A wave of fire swept through her veins at the sight of her lover. "I could feel it Jarrett," she told him, "just like you said."

Quickly the man's blood was drained from his body, tested, and mixed with the blue precipitate. Valerie looked proudly at the small vial of purple fluid that had come to mean so much to her. Then Jarrett showed her how to dissolve her victim's body in a tub of acid so that no trace of it would ever be found.

"Now," she said when they were done with the grisly task, "we can have the rest of the week to ourselves."

He took her into his arms and crushed her to him with fierce passion. There was no hint of tenderness or gentleness in his manner



SHE COULDN'T RESIST HIS LIPS

and Valerie responded in kind.

That night they made their first public appearance together, the tall, distinguished, demoniacally handsome man and the unbelievably beautiful young girl. Everywhere they went eyes followed the unusually good-looking couple with strange fascination, but they were oblivious of anyone but each other.

Valerie adored being seen with Jarrett, feeling the admiring glances they drew. In the weeks that followed, she found her victims and disposed of them quickly and efficiently so she would have more time to spend with him.

But gradually he began to see her less and less frequently. The days were long and tiresome by herself in the tiny apartment, but she was afraid to go out for anything other than business in case she might miss him. However, he came only at midnight every night, for a few short hours. And then one night he didn't come at all.

VALERIE became tormented with jealousy, imagining that Jarrett was bestowing his favors on another woman. When he walked in the next midnight, at the last stroke of twelve bells, she lashed out at him furiously: "Where were you? I waited all night without sleeping, but you did not even call." She started to cry.

Jarrett's lean face grew hard and ugly and anger flared in his deep black eyes. "How dare you speak to me so, me, your master! Don't get any ideas, Valerie, that you are a free person. You are my slave, and I shall come to you when I please." His hands closed down on her white shoulders with brutal strength, his eyes bored into hers. "You are my slave," he hissed menacingly, cruelly.

When he left, Valerie threw her weary body down on the bed and sobbed bitterly. But she knew Jarrett's power over her and on his next visit she was agreeable and compliant. He had taught her enough of the astral world so that she knew it would be fatal to anger a Passion Deva.

And then she met Andrew Harrison. It was the first day of the seventh week of her rejuvenation. Valerie had just had her bath with its renewing, life-giving power. She felt youth and eagerness flowing through her veins and she longed for excitement. So she dressed and went out.

Jarrett would be coming at midnight, but it was too long to wait. The air was crisp, cold, and invigorating and the beautiful young woman tingled with pleasure as it blew against her creamy skin, swept back

the long, dark hair. She walked aimlessly, basking in the attention she attracted as though it were the light of the sun.

After a while, Valerie realized that she was hungry. There was a restaurant across the street and she went in. The place was crowded with noon-time diners, so Valerie consented to share a table. She draped her coat carefully over the back of the chair and looked across the white cloth.

A young man was sitting there, tall, lean, sun-tanned, with clean-cut, regular features and wavy blond hair. Her green eyes looked into warm deep blue ones and she began to feel the now familiar pounding of her pulses and moistness in her palms. He had been born under the sign of the great Astral Deva! It was unusual to find another one so soon, but what did it matter, Valerie told herself.

"My name is Andrew Harrison," the young man said. "I'm glad you sat down. I hate eating alone."

He had a wonderful smile and Valerie couldn't resist returning it. She introduced herself and soon they were chatting away as though they had known each other always. After lunch Andy invited her to a movie. Valerie was surprised at her eager consent. Always before she had been anxious to get her horrid but necessary job over with, but this time it was different. The young man was such a good companion that she was reluctant to hurry him to his death. After all, she thought, I do have a whole week.

THE movie was followed by dinner and dancing in a smart night club. Andy was a wonderful dancer. His embrace was warm and comforting rather than hard and possessive. And he whispered softly into her ear as they glided across the floor.

Valerie and Andy had lifted their glasses of champagne to drink a toast when suddenly she caught a glimpse of the timepiece on his wrist. It was twenty minutes to twelve!

She almost cried aloud in fright. Jarrett would be at her apartment in less than half an hour. She had forgotten all about him.

Her eyes clouded with terror, Valerie turned to her escort. "Please excuse me," she breathed hurriedly. "I have to go." Grabbing her wrap, she dashed out.

"Wait," Andy called after her, too startled to move, "Tomorrow, lunch at the same place . . ."

"Yes, yes," she cried, her voice floating across the room.

The clock began to chime the midnight hour as she flung herself into the apartment. She leaned weakly against the door for a moment, panting with fright. Then she tossed her

coat on a chair and endeavored to compose herself and look relaxed. Jarrett must never suspect that she had almost missed their rendezvous.

"Ah, my dear," said her lover when he entered the room, "you look especially lovely tonight. There is a warm glow about you that the cold beings in the astral world could never equal." Jarrett stayed a long time that night, and it was almost like it had been in the beginning, but Valerie could barely hide her impatience to be rid of him.

Finally he left and she dressed nervously and rushed to keep her date with Andrew Harrison. He was standing in front of the restaurant, looking anxiously at his watch. She felt a strange constriction in her chest at the sight of him, and it had nothing to do with blood vibrations she always got with men who were born under the Astral Deva. This was something entirely different, a feeling she didn't quite understand.

"Oh, Valerie," his voice was warm and rich, "I was afraid you wouldn't come."

"Of course I came, Andy," she murmured huskily, suppressing the desire to melt in his arms. "I wish I could explain about last night, but it's impossible."

"I don't care about anything as long as you're here now," he whispered, taking hold of her arm.

THEY spent the day riding around in the country, in spite of the fact that it was almost winter. Valerie refused to think about the day when she must lure Andy to her apartment and use him for her own wicked purposes. Perhaps she could find someone else; there were still five more days after this one.

They had dinner at a little inn a few miles out of the city. Valerie insisted that she had to go home early. She refused to make the same mistake as the previous evening. You could never tell with Jarrett. She shivered at the thought that even now he might be waiting for her.

"Whatever you say, darling," Andy said gently, squeezing her hand and smiling. Valerie's blood tingled at his touch. She yearned to kiss him, but not as she had kissed the others. That was possible. Jarrett had showed her how the kiss of death was used; it was a particularly devilish device of the Passion Deva.

That wasn't what was really bothering her. It was Jarrett and her pledge to be true to him. Perhaps he knew what she was doing when she wasn't with him. Astral beings were capable of a great many superhuman feats.

Andy stopped the car and took Valerie in his arms. All thoughts of caution fled from her mind as she melted into his tender embrace. His lips

were warm and hard, but gentle nevertheless. Valerie's hand stroked the back of his neck with something more than passion. This other feeling was somehow part of her reluctance to kill Andy.

That night Jarrett did not appear, and Valerie was almost hysterical with relief. The thought of being with him after kissing Andy in the car was physically revolting to her. In addition, it would remind her of what she must do.

When she finally fell into a tortured sleep in the early hours of the morning, Andy's broad shoulders, strong athletic body, and handsome face had floated through her dreams. She envisioned herself going away with him, far from Jarrett and his evil face. But it was only a dream. The vial of blue precipitate on her dresser reminded her that the youth and beauty Andy found so enchanting was a tenuous thing, subject to the whim of an astral being.

"Perhaps I can find another suitable man for this week," she said aloud. "Then I can be with Andy again after it is all over."

She toyed with the idea the next two days, in between her dates with the handsome blond young man, but she found no one who struck the respondent cord in her body. And time was running short.

It was on the evening of the sixth night. They were sitting in Andy's car and necking. The hour was early and Valerie put all thoughts of Jarrett out of her mind.

Andy's face was bent low over hers, his arms around her slender body. She felt warm and soft and cuddly. Their lips met in a passionate kiss. "I love you, Valerie," the young man whispered quietly.

A low cry escaped her lips. She looked at him with tears in her eyes, suddenly realizing what had been happening to her. She was in love! This was a thing that had never been intended. Slaves of a Passion Deva did not fall in love. Their charms were purely physical and their minds and hearts were cold and cruel, as those of their masters.

The old woman, Mattie Hawkes, had been incapable of true love. That was why Jarrett had picked her as his mistress. It was a vicious trick of fate that her lovely rejuvenation should have fallen prey to this disastrous emotion. Valerie tore herself from Andy's arms and ran from the car.

Jarrett came that night and his slave met him with an intense passion that sprang from horror and fright at her own weakness.

"You are a creature of fire, my love," he whispered in her ear as they lay side by side. "For a while I was worried that some strange being pos-



THE VICTIM WAS HANDSOME AND VALERIE FELT A STRANGE URGE OF LOVE AND PASSION.

sessed you, but now you are again my own Valerie. Don't ever change," his voice took on a tinge of menace and his fingers were cold as they caressed her.

She awoke the next morning with a splitting headache and jumpy nerves. Every strange sound caused her to start. This was the seventh day. Never before had she waited so long to gather the blood for the blue precipitate. She had made up her mind. She could steel herself against the love she had for Andy, but she could never kill him. Another victim must be found.

Dressing with utmost care, the girl prepared to go out and stalk her quarry. She was about to leave when the shrill sound of the doorbell echoed through the apartment. She opened the door and there stood Andy, haggard, unshaven, and looking utterly miserable. Her heart went out to him in spite of herself.

"Andy . . ." her voice choked.

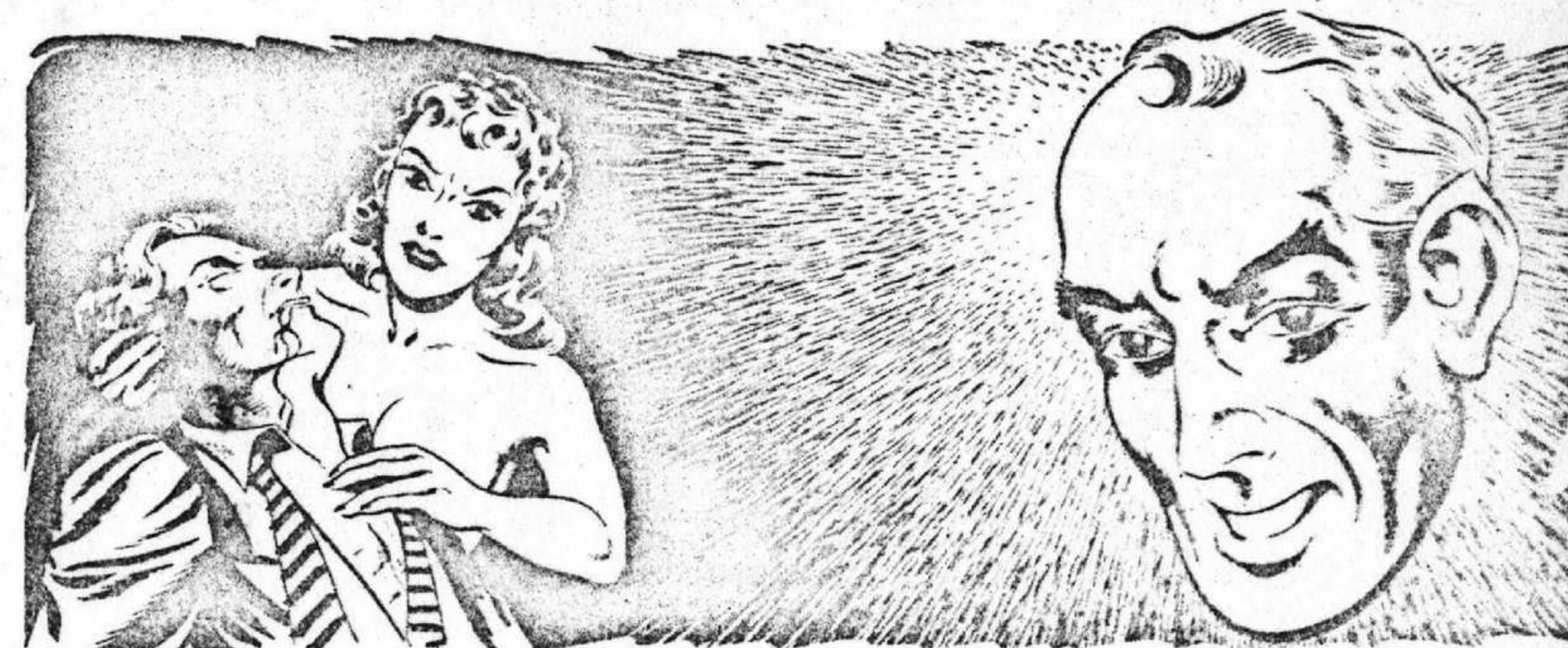
"I had to come, Valerie, to find out what was wrong . . . what I did that made you run away . . . Please let me in," he said hoarsely.

SHE stepped aside and he entered the apartment, his arms trembling at his sides as he avoided touching her. He sank into a chair and looked around with bloodshot eyes that seemed to register nothing.

Valerie stood staring at him, trying to control the turbulent emotions that thundered through her body. Finally she could stand it no more. A wave of reckless passion swept away all common sense. She threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Andy, Andy," she moaned. "I love you . . . so very much."

His hands wandered, shakily yet eagerly, over her body. Valerie clung to him, touching his face, his chest, the back of his neck. Nothing mat-



VALERIE DIDN'T LAUGH AS SHE TOOK THE DYING ANDY IN HER SOFT ARMS.

tered except Andy. He bent her head back over his arms and she closed her eyes as his mouth sought hers.

After a few moments Andy picked her up and started in toward the bedroom. "No, no," she protested frantically, "not in there." She couldn't bear that room; it held too many horrible memories — memories of Jarrett.

Without a word Andy placed her gently on the sofa and started to undo the buttons of her dress. There was none of the fumbling eagerness of the callow youth. His movements were controlled, deliberate, and infinitely tender. Valerie gave herself to him with the joyful feeling that this was the first time she had ever known the true beauty of making love.

The hours passed faster than one would have believed possible. They lay close together on the sofa whispering soft endearments to each other, making plans for the future that Valerie knew would never come true. Then Andy made love to her again. Afterwards they must have dozed.

When Valerie awoke, the watch on Andy's wrist said ten o'clock, and the blue-black sky of night was outside the windows. She almost cried out in terror. Jarrett would be here in two hours and the spell of the youth potion would wear off at the hour of midnight.

It was too late to find another man with the right kind of blood and Jarrett must never know of her unfaithfulness. There was only one thing to do. Andy, her wonderful love, must be sacrificed. If she allowed the spell to come to an end and became old and ugly again, he would not want her anyway and the kiss of death would no longer work once she lost youth and beauty. It was now or never and time was growing short.

Frantically she leaned over and pressed her mouth to Andy's. He awoke at just that instant and his

warm, love-filled blue eyes stared at her for a second. Valerie almost broke away, but the urgency within her was too compelling. He closed his eyes again and then it was all over.

SHE didn't laugh as she gazed down at his body. A strength-sapping sadness pervaded her being, but there was no time for human weakness. Hury, hurry, her mind whispered. She leaned down for one last kiss from his inert lips. Then she set about preparing the purple fluid.

There was no time to dissolve the body. She must first get her bath. The liquid was ready and the steaming water filled the tub. As she stepped into the bath, brownish wrinkles were already beginning to mar her perfect body. She noticed them with distaste, vanity becoming uppermost in her mind. This was more important than anything, even Andrew, this gift that had been given to her. She lay back in the warm water, sighing with relief.

Her mind was busy with plans. She must never again let herself get so involved with a mortal being. Jarrett would be sure to discover it if she did. As soon as the formula had done its renewing work, she would dispose of Andy's body in the acid and await her astral lover. The world of the Passion Devas went on forever. Surely a sacrificed love was not too great a price to pay for immortality. Her eyes closed and she dreamed of the years ahead of her, safe from the ravages of time.

A few minutes later she looked at her hands and let out a scream. They were old, gnarled, and wrinkled. She reached up and touched her face, clawing at the seamy creases she found there. The wisp of hair that blew across her face was gray and

coarse.

What had happened?

It was the right type of blood, the right solution, everything as it had been before. What was wrong?

Trembling violently, she grabbed the tube that had contained the purple elixir and rinsed it in water, getting every last drop. She waited. Still no change. She remained old and ugly.

"What has happened," she cried aloud, and her voice was shrill and cracked.

A coldness filled the room and Jarrett was standing before her, tall, elegant, handsome, with an expression of hate and disdain on his face.

"Well, Mattie Hawkes," his voice was cold and bitter, "you thought you could betray the trust of Jarrett, the Passion Deva, and get away with it."

"What . . . what do you mean?" the old hag in the bathtub whispered, then with an agonized cry, "Don't call me Mattie Hawkes. I am Valerie . . . Valerie . . . Valerie . . ." It was a shrill scream when she finished.

"You were unfaithful to me, allowed yourself to be possessed by another man. You even did more than that. You invited his love," the Passion Deva poured anger into his icy voice.

"I'm sorry, Jarrett, but I killed him . . . I killed him to get the blood . . . so I could be young and beautiful — for you!" Her toothless grin made the words ludicrous. "But the bath didn't work."

"I destroyed the spell. You broke your pledge so I destroyed the spell, you old bag of bones. You will never again be Valerie, only Mattie Hawkes, the scrawny crone who picks people's pockets and pilfers junk in the slums." He laughed uproariously.

"No, no, I want to be Valerie. I promise to be good and faithful. You'll see. I promise," she begged, sobbing into the now tepid bath water.

"Never. You'll rot in hell, but you'll never be Valerie again!" He swept his cloak about him imperiously and turned to go. The old woman jumped up in the tub with an enraged cry

and made a lunge for him. He turned toward her again, made a slight motion with his hand, and she fell to the tile floor, a hoarse rattle coming from her scrawny throat.

Jarett stood over her, like a hawk watching his prey, his thin, elongated figure making a strange shadow on the walls of the room, and his huge

cape giving him a satanic look. In a low, rumbling voice he muttered an incantation over the ugly, twisted pile of old bones. The green eyes were staring and lifeless. A cold wind again swept through the room and the man was gone, back to the astral world from whence he came.

THE END

Science Fiction On Parade

By LITZKA RAYMOND

THEY say that Science-Fiction is here to stay and the pages of "BEYOND TIME AND SPACE" are proof of it. This book, published by Pelligrini and Cudahy, is one of the most ambitious in the STF field and definitely a "must" for the reader who wants to be brought up-to-date clear from the very roots.

The reason is that August Derleth, the editor, whose name and fame have merited him top rating with STF enthusiasts, has chosen the stories for this anthology from the past 2000 years, so that the book provides an excursion into the literary realm along with its appeal to the imagination.

There are three dozen stories in all, so the buyer is assured of quantity along with the quality that the name Derleth guarantees. Variety is also a factor, since the editor has roved the earthly bounds of time and space in gathering this representative selection by authors from every age and clime.

DERLETH it should be added, was editor of "THE OUTER REACHES" also published by Pelligrini and Cudahy. In a review of "The Outer Reaches" we mentioned its ingredients of green cats, blue mutants, robots and rocket-ships which formed a delectable dish from the STF standpoint.

That was a book in which the contemporary authors chose the stories themselves and gave their reasons why, thus rendering the book unique indeed. Now, August Derleth has followed through with his own choice of stories from the past as well as present in "Beyond Time and Space."

FURTHER proof as to the staying quality of STF is found in "SEVEN SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS" of H. G. Wells, published by the Dover Press. This volume includes "The First Men In The Moon," an early

thriller among modern epics of space travel. It features "The Invisible Man" from which the now-famous movie was adapted. "The Time Machine," another Wells classic, is also in the collection.

Add to these "The Food Of The Gods," "In The Days Of The Comet," "The Island Of Dr. Moreau," and "The War Of The Worlds" and the result is 1015 packed pages of unsurpassed imaginative fiction that carries a constant note of potential realism. Merely two or three of these stories would be worth the price of the volume, hence seven novels give it a truly encyclopedic quality.

Science-Fiction might have ten times its present readership if there had been more than one H. G. Wells. Where Jules Verne made strictly scientific predictions, Wells as one of his successors, wove fantasy into such a fabric and came up with social and economic forecasts that have been balanced by modern equivalents. These date back some forty years and the "dawn" of Science-Fiction, which occurred two decades later, was scarcely more than a feeble, flickering reflection of the Wells brilliance.

MORE in the field of strict adventure, but with a strong flare of the fantastic is another massive volume: "FIVE ADVENTURE NOVELS" of H. Rider Haggard. Also published by Dover Press, this book includes "Allan Quatermain," "Allan's Wife," "King Solomon's Mines," "Maiwa's Revenge," and "She." It is the last-named novel that delves heavily into the fantastic and is a recognized classic among strange adventures.

"BULLARD OF THE SPACE PATROL" authored by Malcolm Jameson, edited with introduction and notes by Andre Norton; published by World Publishing Company.

A beloved character in Science Fiction, John Bullard was born on

Terra in the ancient district of Ohio in 3915. There was nothing about him to catch the eye or rivet the attention. He was neither handsome nor ugly enough to cause comment. Reputed to be able to think fast in an emergency, he passed in due course from the Patrol Academy into the Service.

This is the story of how Commander Bullard gained his fame among the mariners of deep space — the men and officers in that patrol which keeps the peace of the inner and outer planets and whose armadas wage the grimmest of all wars in a black night where stars are suns and the slightest miscalculation means awful death in an interstellar vacuum.

No bug-eyed monsters of the space operas in these pages. Bullard of the 3900's is a very human Captain Hornblower of his day. Manifestly drawn, alive and vigorous, by a man who admired the power of gadgetry but who also respected the eternal dignity of human beings. Everyone — not only STF addicts — will enjoy these fantastic, often humorous adventures of Commander John Bullard.

The author's early years were devoted to art, architecture, and engineering. He became a Commissioned Officer in the Navy during World War I. It was with this experience that he so capably built the astro-gation devices used in "Bullard of the Space Patrol." Science Fiction lost a fine author when Malcolm Jameson joined the ranks of The Great Beyond in 1945.

NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME" published by Henry Holt and Company is something new by way of anthology. The introduction by Anthony Boucher tells the why and wherefore. He feels that STF readers need a volume of originals — not reprints — written by a group of top flight authors, and this is it. Not only are these stories unveiled

(Continued on Page 50)

WE WOULDN'T DIE

By GEORGE MOFFAT

OLD Bill Carter, guard of the Center National Bank, whistled to himself, as he always did. It was nine sharp and he was opening the door to the bank. The tellers and officers had arrived twenty minutes before, and the tellers were busy getting the cash to their windows to take care of the morning rush.

The first customer was a tall man who walked erect, like a machine, his arms swinging at his sides with the momentum of his movements. His face was finely chiseled and his skin looked like rubber, unlike any skin old Bill had ever seen.

Bill was wondering about the man as he adjusted the shades on the front door and latched it open. He heard a sound somewhere behind him, but didn't pay any attention to it. Then a gun roared, the explosion echoing throughout the bank. Bill wheeled around, saw a sight that sent his blood coursing madly through his entire body.

The tall, strange-looking man had grabbed the steel work of the tellers' counters and was pulling it down as if it were merely straw. Somebody behind the counter fired another gun. The bullet thudded against the strange man and bounced to the floor, flat and harmless.

In less than half a minute the man had grabbed handfuls of cash and was stuffing it inside him. Then he started for the door. Bill was no coward. He had a gun. It came out and his hand squeezed the trigger as the man was within two feet of him. The bullet crashed against the man's chest, near his heart, and fell to the floor, as the other one had.

The right hand of the man lashed out in a blow that caught Bill on the side of the face. There was a crunching of bones as he went down, every bone in that side of his face broken. The burglar alarm was clanking. The sirens of police cars shrieked. Policemen leaped out of cars carrying Tommy guns.

These spat fire at the stalking creature, who was headed for a car at the curb. The bullets didn't stop him. He was in the car. The tommyguns were trained on it. The bullets crashed against the side, even hit the tire guards, but didn't penetrate.

Then the engine of the car roared and it left the ground and disappeared into mist-laden skies.

THE next morning the newspapers carried the streamer headline: THE IRON MAN STRIKES AGAIN

In the office of Chief of Police Carl Unger, a lean-faced man, sat opposite the Chief and Major Frank Smith, head of the state police.

"Gentlemen," the lean-faced man spoke slowly, "you have asked my advice about this mysterious Iron Man who has been wrecking such terror. It is my opinion that you are not dealing with a human being. This is a tin robot, conceived by perhaps the greatest scientist living today. I don't know his name. I only know that any man that produces a robot like that is truly great."

Chief Unger and Major Smith had worried and haggard faces. This was the first experience with this strange creature for Chief Unger, but for the last month Major Smith and his entire force had been trying to track down this amazing robber, who struck first in one city and then another.

As a final resort, Major Smith had called in the services of Professor Anton Murillo, an Italian who had come to this country and was known as one of the great scientists of the day.

"It is not beyond the realm of possibility," the professor continued. "The artificial heart is a reality and circulation is a simple matter in a robot. One stumbling block to perfecting the robot is that one mystery that science knows little about — that is, until now. That is the spark of life. The brain can be handled through the principle

of radio and radio rays, but actually the robot has no brain of his own. There is somebody who flashes brain waves and the body is so constructed that it reacts to these waves."

"That's all very fine, professor," Major Smith said, "but how can we stop a creature like this? He has robbed banks and payrolls, operating with the finesse of a veteran crook."

"I would suggest, gentlemen," Professor Murillo said, "that you find the brain behind this creature, if you are shrewd enough. Do this and you can bring this automaton — and his maker to justice. Until then, I can't offer you much hope."

"But this automobile," Chief Unger exclaimed. "That's about as fantastic as the robot himself."

Major Smith said: "That has an explanation. The automobile is really an airplane, disguised as a car. When it rises from the street, the wings come out. But the mystery is what happens to it. We have had planes searching the skies after each robbery. Nothing has been found. Where does the robot killer flee to?"

"That," Professor Murillo answered, "is tied up to the man behind this creature."

"Finding that man," Major Smith exclaimed, "is impossible. We have checked every scientist and have found none that could handle a thing like this."

"You have asked my advice," Professor Murillo got up, "and I have told you what you are up against. This robot robber doesn't strike in the same place twice. Tomorrow or next week, he will probably rob a bank in some other city. How much has he gotten already?"

"Nearly a million dollars," Major Smith replied. "We have tracers out on the money, but none has appeared anywhere."

"Perhaps it may never appear in



PEDRO LET THE LIMP AND LIFELESS BODY OF THE PROFESSOR FALL TO THE FLOOR.



THE BULLETS BOUNCED OFF PEDRO'S BODY AS HE CARRIED THE LOOT TO THE AERO AUTO.

this part of the country," Professor Murillo answered. "It could easily be handled in some foreign country and by the time you get track of it, the Iron Man may be forgotten."

"Forget him!" Major Smith said. "That's one thing I'll never do. We thank you for your advice, professor. We may call on you again."

"Anytime you wish, I am at your service," Professor Murillo said and walked out of the room.

AN hour later, in a quiet residential section of the state capital, fifty miles from Center City where the robbery took place, a car drove into the garage. It was a commonplace Buick, one which could excite no suspicion at a casual glance. Yet if the Buick were studied closely, several important details might be seen. The hood was a little longer than the average Buick and the bumpers were wide enough to contain the hidden wings.

The tall man got out of the car slowly, standing always erect. He then walked straight to the rear of the house, pushed the door open, and entered. Without looking to the right or left, he walked through the hall of the

luxurious mansion and into the study.

Seated behind a huge black desk was Professor Murillo. He looked up and greeted the erect man with a pleasant smile.

"Pedro, you did well," he said. "I have just had a conference with Major Smith and the Chief of Police at Center City. They wanted advice from me about this strange creature whose body is bullet proof."

Pedro said: "You tell them anything?"

"Naturally I didn't," the professor laughed. "I gave them a story about how it was possible to make a robot man. They swallowed it, hook, line, and all."

"That is well," Pedro grunted again.

The professor picked up a paper weight, looked at it, his lean face laughing a little.

"I wonder what they would have said had I told them the truth," he spoke slowly, as though studying each word. "A robot man! Bah! How old fashioned and how silly. I even told them that you were controlled by radio waves sent out by the man guiding you. I told them that they had to

catch the man behind you. What chance have they to catch the great Professor Murillo? None whatever. You are the vanguard of a great army that will be invincible. You are the final perfection of the ossification of the human flesh. You can withstand bullets, knives, even small artillery. An army of fifty thousand like you — and the world will be mine. How much money did you get?"

Pedro reached inside his coat where he had a sack. He pulled the sack out and tossed it on the black desk. Professor Murillo's eyes flashed as he greedily pulled the money out. He didn't take time to count it all, but he had a good estimate.

"Over a hundred thousand," he cried. "That makes more than a million, all stashed away for the great day. Next week it will be several thousand more."

PEDRO'S face twisted in sullen anger as he said: "I want money. I don't want to control the world and you ain't given me much."

"Take it easy, Pedro," the professor answered. "You will be the leader and you will have millions and beautiful women when our goal of conquer-

ing the world has been achieved. It was a great day, ten years ago, when I stumbled onto that strange tribe of savages in the Belgian Congo whose skins were impervious to the arrows and spears of the enemy. They were peaceful and this process had been created centuries ago to protect them against war-like enemies."

The professor hesitated, looked up at the ceiling, his right cheek twitching.

"As a scientist," he continued, "this intrigued me. But the possibilities were there and suddenly it occurred to me what power a man would have if he perfected an even more drastic ossification of the flesh. What these Americans don't know is that I secretly admired both Hitler and Mussolini, but I was no fool. I played both sides. My international reputation as a scientist blinded the Americans to my real feelings."

Getting up and walking around the table, picking up a sharp letter opener as he did, the professor walked to Pedro's side. Pedro was staring at him, his face showing little expression.

"Ossification of the human flesh," the professor jabbed the pen knife in Pedro's neck and the point bent as if it had been stuck into iron. "Those natives were primitive in their method. The acid solution they used merely hardens the skin. The process I used on you, Pedro, does more. It makes your skin a metallic substance, like iron. Lead and zinc did that, but it had one danger. A man must breathe with his skin as well as his lungs and if his pores are stopped up, death will come quickly."

Pedro said: "Sometimes I feel funny."

"Sure, you do," the professor replied. "your skin needs air. I have the simple solution for that and without it, you would not live twenty hours. But that is a mystery. That will keep you working for me, Pedro. If you get any ideas that don't fit in with mine, you die very quickly."

THE Professor walked back to his chair, opened a drawer and looked at a bottle of blue fluid. He said nothing to Pedro. This was the solution Pedro had to use in his daily bath to inflate the tiny pores of his metallic skin and which enabled him to breathe.

"Next week," the professor closed the drawer slowly. "you will make your big haul, Pedro. You will get thousands and hundreds of thousands. The mint is ripe for plucking. I have planned every detail. The hour when the shift is made in workers is four o'clock and in those few minutes not

more than three persons are in the room where the hundred and thousand dollar bills are being made in packages. This is one job I go on with you to see that no mistake is made."

Pedro's sullen look deepened. He growled. "I work all the time. I let you make my body hard and it hurts . . . it always hurts . . . and I get no money . . . I want a girl . . . a girl . . . you don't let me see anybody . . ."

"You'll be a king, Pedro," the professor exclaimed, "when the hour is here. What I have done to you, I can do to a thousand men. Only it requires money, lots of money to build my laboratory in the mountains, safe from prying eyes. I'll have not only a thousand but tens of thousands of soldiers whose skin can withstand machine gun bullets, gas, every kind of weapon, and with that army as a nucleus, I can take over Washington. And there are millions in this country waiting for a dictator. They hate labor and labor unions. They are fools. They want everything that human greed offers, and they will follow me as the Germans followed Hitler, hoping to get just that."

The professor's words didn't cause the angry look to leave Pedro's face. He got up and grunted: "I want a woman . . ."

"Sure, you want a woman," the professor sneered. "You morons think of nothing else. That is why you are slaves and always will be slaves of men smarter than you are. It is the law of the jungle and the law of the universe. Power is brains and brains win. Get ready for your bath now, your blue bath. I can't let anything happen to you."

Pedro was mumbling to himself as he left the room and went upstairs. Professor Murillo took the bottle of blue liquid and followed his ossified man.

FIVE days later the large marble building which houses the U.S. Mint at the state capital seemed like a beehive of industry; men and women came pouring out of the large doors. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, the hour when the day shift gives over to the night workers.

Few noticed the strange looking car that stood near the curb. There was, of course, little difference in this car from others, except its fenders, which were wide and gave the automobile a squat look.

Behind the wheel Professor Murillo was wearing a mustache and a wig of red hair. Pedro sat stiffly, like a robot man, beside him. Professor Murillo said, "You have your instructions.

Speed is what counts. Go and don't make any mistakes."

Pedro opened the car door, stepped out on the sidewalk. The men and women coming out of the mint building didn't give this strange looking creature a second look as he entered the building by a side door.

On the second floor, in the packing room, two girls and a man were busy sorting out the thousand dollar bills, putting them in bundles to be sent to Federal Reserve banks. In a few minutes the night shift would be there and the room would be filled with fifty workers.

The door opened and Pedro entered. None of the three looked up. Pedro gave a bellowing roar and the three jumped, and as they saw the strange looking man, one of the men stepped on a floor button and alarms began ringing in the hallways.

Pedro paid no attention to these clanging bells. He stalked across the room, with the three employees shrinking away from him. At a table he grabbed packages of thousand dollar bills and stuffed them in the sack he carried outside his coat.

This sack was bulging with bills as he turned and started out of the room. As he got to the door, guards with sub-machine guns formed a barrier. They let go with the guns. The bullets thudded against Pedro and dropped to the floor as he strode toward a line of men, his huge hands flaying out, knocking men right and left.

In the hall more guards appeared with guns. They squeezed the triggers and the guns roared. Pedro walked toward them, the bullets falling off him. The guards screamed in terror as they saw this giant creature coming toward them. Some dropped their guns and others fled.

Pedro went down the stairs, two steps at a time. In the first floor hall there were more guards. The same scene was repeated as on the second floor, and Pedro ran out of the building, leaped for the car as Professor Murillo pushed a lever and the wings of the aeroplane car spread out. The engines roared and the car taxied a short distance and then soared into the air as police cars came racing for the mint from all directions, their sirens shrieking wildly.

The appearance of the robot robber at the mint brought Major Smith and the FBI to the state capital by plane. It was the same old story to Major Smith, only this time ten aeroplanes took to the air a few minutes after the robbery. However, they were unable to spot the mysterious auto plane

that soared away when the police cars raced for the mint.

IN his luxurious and sound-proof library, Professor Murillo stood at his desk, his eyes feasting on the huge pile of thousand dollar bills that lay before him.

"Magnificent," he cried. "You did a wonderful job, Pedro. There must be nearly a million dollars here. Now my hour has struck. The fool police have no suspicion of who is behind all this. Another haul like this and we go to the mountains, Pedro, and work will start on my secret laboratory where I will make hundreds of men like you. With them I can control first this country and then the world. I will make a race of men whose bodies are impervious to bullets. A whole race of super giants."

His hands went through the pile of bills and he threw them in the air and as they fell back on the top of the desk, he gave a wild, incoherent laugh and his eyes had an insane look.

"Money is power, Pedro, wonderful and exhilarating power," he screamed. "I will be not only the greatest scientist because I have made the perfect man, but I will have the world at my feet, yes, at my feet . . ."

Pedro growled: "I don't want power."

"A great army of men like you, Pedro," the Professor screamed. "Who can stop them? No machine guns and no bullets. Bombs from the air cannot hurt them. An army that will sweep all the fools in the world out of power."

"I tell you I work hard and you give me nothing. It ain't fair."

The Professor sat down and looked at Pedro. The wild look had left his face. It was cold, hard, and deadly.

"You fool," he sneered, "you have a power no other man has and yet you talk about wanting a woman. You are like all the other fools in the world."

Pedro was staring at the thousand dollar bills, scattered over the top of the desk. The sullen look left his leather-like face and his small eyes gleamed, as if he was only suddenly conscious the money was there.

"Money," his voice was hoarse. "Lots of money — gobs of money."

HE got up slowly and his huge

frame towered over the desk and the Professor. He took two steps forward, slow, deliberate steps, and his great paw-like hands reached out, closed on the bills.

"Stop, you idiot," the Professor screamed. "Drop that money."

A silly grin came on the face of Pedro and the hardness of his skin made the expression weird and savage. His hands clutched the large bills and then he threw his head back and a bestial, inhuman laugh came from his deep throat.

"I get money — gobs of it," he roared, "and I don't have any fun. I hurt all the time. When I walk, my skin breaks like bones. You made me a giant. You made me able to throw bullets off my body, but you didn't make me happy. You didn't give me any reason for acting like I do. I want money. I want women, many women and I . . ."

"Pedro," the professor's face was pale with fear, "you have to take your bath. If you don't, you will be dead in half an hour. This bottle of liquid, the blue one. It is the only thing that can save your life. I am the only man who knows what it is."

"That blue bottle," Pedro stopped laughing and looked at the bottle with the curiosity of a boy. "I don't want to take any more baths. That blue water burns and sometimes makes me feel crazy. I want to go out and have fun . . . yes, fun . . . fun. And this money . . ."

The hands full of bills went high in the air again and the crazy laugh came from Pedro.

"You fool," the professor cried. "Come with me now and have your bath."

The laugh died in Pedro's throat. "I ain't taking no bath," he said. "I ain't living here any more. I don't like people shooting at me . . . I am going to leave . . ."

He took two steps toward the door. The professor was out of his chair, standing in front of Pedro.

"Take it easy, Pedro," he said. "Listen to me. You can't leave. You won't live another half hour if you don't have your bath. You are my slave and you can't ever get away from me."

A strange, gurgling sound came from the throat of Pedro. His hands went out, caught the professor by the

throat. He gave one scream of terror and then there was a crunching of bones. A moment later Pedro let the limp and lifeless form of the professor drop to the floor. Then he walked back to the desk, gathered up the thousand dollar bills, and without looking at the body of the professor, whose face had turned a bluish black, he strode out of the house and into the gathering darkness of the night.

IT was noon the next day when news of the murder of the famous Professor Murillo was flashed to Major Smith at the state capital where he was still working on the mint robbery. A neighbor, seeing the door to the professor's house open, had ventured in and found the body.

When Major Smith arrived at the home, Chief of Police Carl Borne and his detectives were in the library. The body of the professor still lay on the floor and Doctor Felix Morgan had just completed his preliminary examination.

"Strangled," was his verdict. "and whoever did it has hands more powerful than a vise. Every bone in his neck was broken."

Near the body lay the bottle of blue liquid. Major Smith picked it up and said, "I wonder what kind of medicine this is?"

Doctor Morgan said: "I tasted it and I would say that it is some form of astringent and certainly it has nothing to do with the professor's murder."

Three days later two small boys, playing in a vacant lot two miles from the professor's home, came on the body of Pedro. It was hideously distorted, death having been caused by porous suffocation. The thousand dollar bills were scattered around the body.

The newspapers carried sensational stories about the ossified man and his crimes and in the same issue eulogies were written about the fame and reputation of Professor Anton Murillo, the renowned international scientist.

No connection was seen between his death and the discovery of the body of the ossified man.

THE END

The MURDER MACHINE

BY PHYLLIS KAYE

HARCOURT Dunwood lovingly polished the chromium side panels of his machine. It shone brilliantly in the light of the setting sun coming thru the window in his small office. He called it the Animaticus Electronicus, and it was made to the exact specifications of notes his father had made during his long years in prison.

"Poor Dad," Dunwood murmured to himself, "how he would love to have seen his invention perform."

When the elder Dunwood died in prison, his son, also a mechanical engineer, had fallen heir to the precious notes and experiments laboriously recorded over the years. And Harcourt Dunwood had built the Animaticus Electronicus, tested it, and proved its worth. He had also inherited his father's bitterness against mankind. He would use the machine to vent his hatred against his fellow human beings.

It was a fantastic device, for it caused other machines to come to life, animated them, and gave them the power of movement — and the power to destroy. Looking at it, the Animaticus Electronicus appeared to be an ordinary electronic ray, encased in steel and chrome with numerous dials and antennae, but the waves it emitted struck resonant chords in the molecular and atomic structure of other mechanical devices and gave them the power of independent movement.

Harcourt Dunwood had tried the animator in his home, on his telephone, his radio, and typewriter, any mechanical gadget that had movable parts. But now was his big experiment, and he had selected as his laboratory the huge offices of the Martinson Company next door. He would see just what the numerous machines of a big company would do if they were given the opportunity to move by themselves. Dunwood's hatred of mankind seemed to flow through his fingers with physical power as he turned the knobs of the machine and set up the gentle humming that started animating waves of electricity in the direction of the telephone, combining with the impulses given off by all materials, both animate and inanimate.

The telephone receiver leaped out

of its cradle and swung around in the air in front of the crafty engineer for a moment. Then it started toward him. Dunwood raised his arm. The receiver hesitated a moment, then meekly returned to its resting place. He, at least, could control the fruits of his father's inventive genius.

The time was ready. He would sneak into the next office through the joint fire escape and set up his machine. Then would come the final test. It was just five o'clock. He moved to the window, supporting the heavy animator in his hands. Then quickly he slipped out onto the iron grating and climbed into the next office. It belonged to a minor executive of the Martinson Company, and the small adjoining wash room offered a perfect refuge for himself and his machine. Quietly he set to work.

THE door closed behind the last of the file clerks and Roberta Willoughby was alone in the office, staring disconsolately at the pile of work on the desk in front of her. Why did Miss Twillingham, her boss, have to get sick just when the midwinter reports were due?

"I'll be here all night," Roberta muttered in disgust as she picked up a sheaf of papers and started in.

The jangling of the telephone bell sounded harshly in the eerie stillness of the huge deserted office. She picked it up. "Hello, hello," the girl said. Her only answer was a roaring sound. Then she heard a click and there was silence.

"Now what was the point of that?" she muttered and returned to her work.

The only sound in the office for the next two hours was the scratching of Roberta's pen and the pounding of her typewriter. Then she stopped working and took a sandwich out of her desk drawer. She shuddered as she looked around the office, the dark shadows deepening to blackness as they spread out from the pool of light around her desk, the ghostly covered typewriters and adding machines and the deserted desks of her co-workers. Everything was shrouded and quiet, deathly quiet.

The insistent buzzing of the switch-

board aroused the girl from her mournful contemplation. "Now what," she muttered. If there was an outside call, the phone on her desk should be ringing.

But it wasn't an outside call. One of the little orange buttons was twinkling brightly. Someone in one of the inner offices wanted to use the phone. Roberta started to plug them in with an outside line when suddenly her heart stopped beating and her breath strangled in her throat. There was no one in the inner offices! Trembling, she stared in horror at the light. The buzzing persisted.

Frantically Roberta tried to turn off the board, but she couldn't remember what key she used to accomplish this.

THE frightened girl walked softly toward the front door, opened it, and looked out into the hall. There was a dim light in front of the elevator, but otherwise she peered into darkness. And everything was quiet, not a sound nor movement gave hint of a human presence other than her own.

"Where's the cleaning woman?" she whispered aloud. "There's supposed to be a cleaning woman." She wanted to go to the elevator and ring for the night watchman, but she was afraid to venture out into the shadowy corridor.

Finally she decided to go into the inner offices and see who had tried to use the phone. Picking up a paper weight from her desk for a weapon, she crept cautiously toward the closed doors, neatly lettered with the name of the president of the company. Through the clouded glass she could see no light. It was pitch black inside.

Quickly Roberta went in, touched the button by the door, and the plush office was flooded with golden light. No one was there. She went through the entire suite of rooms, but found nothing out of order. The phone that was connected with the signal button on the board was on the desk near a typewriter, but the receiver was in its proper place as though nothing had disturbed it since five o'clock that afternoon.

"I'm going nuts, being here all by myself," Roberta said aloud. "I'm go-



THE ROOM WAS MOVING AND ROBERTA WAS SUDDENLY CONSCIOUS OF THE TELEPHONE WIRES AROUND HER WRIST IN A VISE-LIKE GRIP.

ing to get at the work and get out of this place."

Everything looked as usual in the brightly lit corner where she was working, and then she noticed the telephone — and the typewriter. Both had been moved. They were now close together, and the paper that had been in the machine was lying crumpled on the floor.

As she stood there, staring, the switchboard began to buzz. She ran to it and then the phone on her desk started ringing. At the same instant typewriters all over the office suddenly moved by themselves, tapping vigorously, ringing the bells at the end of the carriage, and shooting back, all of their own accord.

Roberta's voice rose in a shrill scream amid the din and she fought frantically to get the cord of the switchboard plug away from her throat around which it had somehow become twisted.

IN the morning they found her lying by her desk, strangled to death. Everything else was in perfect order. Frightened little clusters of people gathered around the desks and the switchboard discussing the grisly happening.

The police were baffled.

At five o'clock promptly every employee made a beeline for the front door. One hapless stenographer forgot her purse and hat and had to go back to the empty room to get it. Her friends waited for her at the bus stop for a while and then went on home.

Later that night the cleaning woman discovered her dead body lying by the water cooler. A police autopsy revealed the startling fact that her lungs were filled with water. She had been drowned.

The next day Arthur Martinson, president of the company, had a strange visitor. He was a man in his early thirties, small, round, and very jovial looking. He gave his name as Harcourt Dunwood and he offered, for the sum of five thousand dollars, to rid the Martinson Company of the disasters that had beset it in the last two days.

Arthur Martinson looked at the round man in amazement. "You mean to tell me," he said unbelievably, "that you can clear this thing up?"

"For five thousand dollars I would certainly be willing to try," Dunwood answered, "and you don't have to pay me a cent unless I am completely successful."

"It sounds like a fair deal, Mr. Dunwood," the greying executive told him.

As soon as the man left, Martinson picked up his phone and called Lieutenant Vincent Arlington of the police department.

"I told him to go ahead, Lieuten-

ant," he said into the phone. "But I would like you to check up on him. I'd like to know just why he thinks he can prevent more murders from occurring."

Lieutenant Arlington was equally baffled. "Thanks for the report, Mr. Martinson," he told the distraught employer. "We'll get busy on it right away. Harcourt Dunwood, you say. Somehow that name seems to ring a bell. I'll let you know what we find out."

That night Harcourt Dunwood stayed alone in the offices of the Martinson Company. Nothing happened. Unknown to him, Lieutenant Arlington was secreted in the closet of Mr. Martinson's office.

In the morning he told the elderly man: "He didn't do a thing. Just wandered around, read a few magazines, ate a sandwich, called up some friends. But outside of that he didn't do a thing. I wonder what his angle is?"

"Did you find anything out about him, Lieutenant?" Martinson asked.

"No, but we're still checking. I'm more positive than ever that I've heard that name before."

THE next night Dunwood was again alone in the office, except for the police lieutenant hiding in the closet. At about midnight, Arlington became thirsty, and first being sure that the chubby little man was in the outside office, he stepped from his vantage point and went to the water cooler. He was leaning over to get a drink when he felt something hit him on the back of the shoulder. If he had not bent over so suddenly, the blow would have landed squarely on the back of his head and probably knocked him unconscious.

As it was, it had merely grazed him and he whirled around with lightning speed. The sight that met his eyes caused him to gasp with disbelief. The receiver of the black French telephone was flying through the air and just settling back in its cradle as he looked. It had obviously been the thing that struck him.

"I'm going crazy," Arlington muttered, making for his closet sanctuary. He tripped on the adding machine cord and almost landed flat on his face, but managed to recover without further mishap.

The next morning he confronted Martinson, his face ashen, eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep. When he related what had happened, the older man looked at him in amazement.

"After all, when you come right down to it, what else was in this office with those two girls besides the telephone and the other machines. It's fantastic, but so is the whole case," Martinson said.

"I saw this with my own eyes," the

Lieutenant said. "What I want to know is why the machines haven't bothered Dunwood."

The phone on the desk rang sharply and with noticeable hesitation, Martinson reached for it. It lay inanimate in his hand, just a telephone. He listened for a moment and then turned to the police officer. "It's for you."

"Yes, Arlington speaking," the lieutenant murmured. "Okay, okay, sure."

He hung up, said to Martinson: "Now I know where I heard the name Dunwood before. Eldridge Dunwood. He was a very famous mechanical engineer, worked for the government during the first World War. He was sent to prison for misappropriating funds and died there just a year ago."

"And what about Harcourt Dunwood?"

"That's his son. The boy was only a youngster when Dunwood was sent up. There might be a tie-up somewhere, but I can't figure it out."

"Do you have any record on the son?" Martinson asked.

"Nothing criminal. He's also an engineer, went to M. I. T. But he's never been in any difficulty with the law. Besides, the murders of your two employees occurred before Dunwood appeared on the scene. It might just be coincidence."

"I know, but why is he so certain he can solve the mystery? I'm going to stay here with you tonight and see for myself just what occurs."

"Okay, Mr. Martinson, but I must warn you that it might be dangerous. After what happened last night . . ."

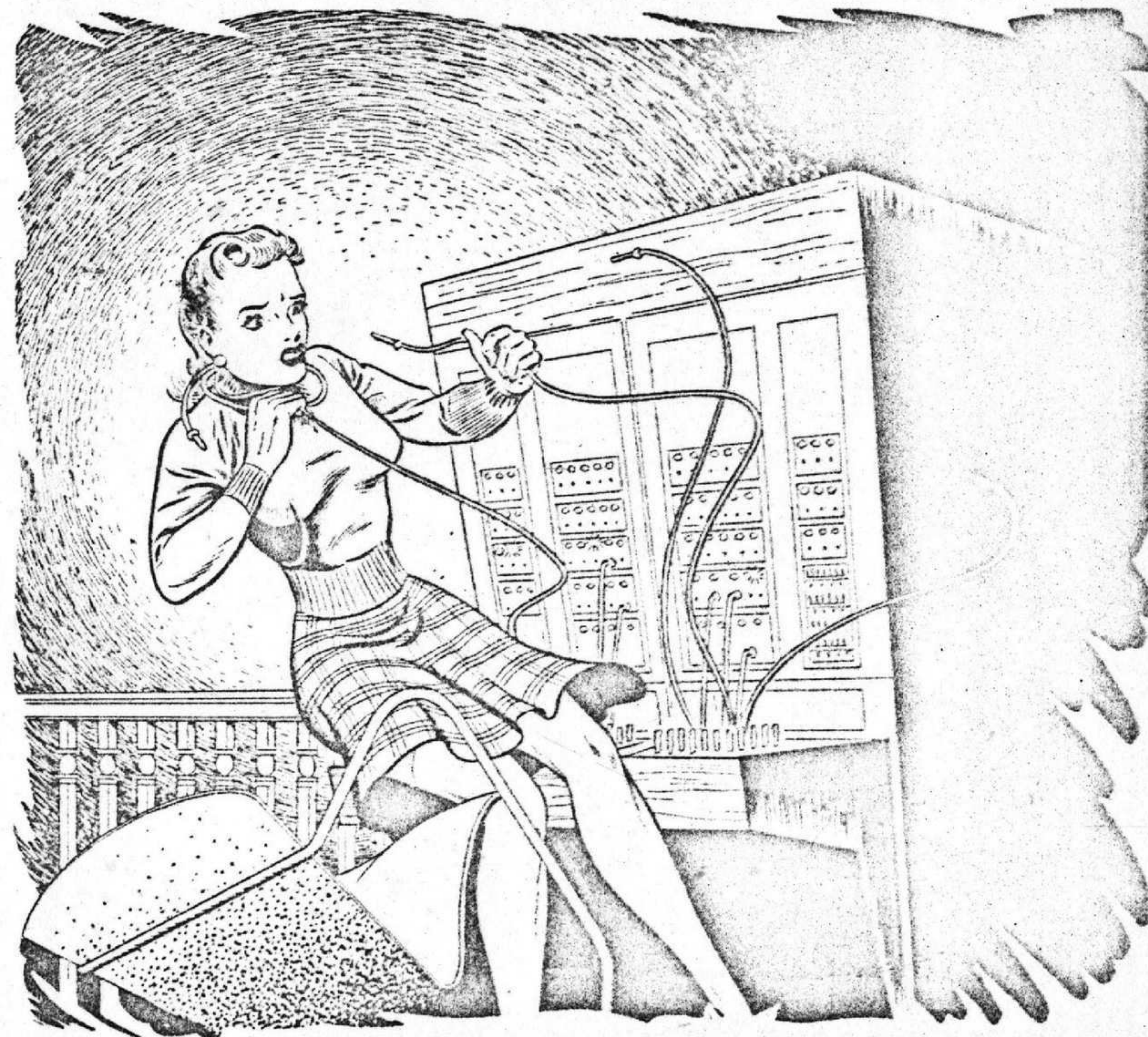
"I've got to do something, Arlington. Five of my employees have quit in the last two days and the rest are just going along on nerve. The whole organization is being disrupted."

The intercommunication system on Martinson's desk buzzed, and he flicked a switch. "Mr. Dunwood to see you," his secretary's voice announced.

"Get in the closet, Lieutenant, and hear what he has to say."

HARCOURT Dunwood padded into the office on his small, neatly shod feet. He gazed in distaste at the elaborate luxury of his surroundings, mentally comparing them to the humble quarters he occupied next door. For a long time he had hated the opulent prosperity of the Martinson Company. Now he was faced with a dilemma.

He had it in his power to destroy this thriving business. A few more inexplicable incidents and fatal accidents to employees, and the company would be forced to close down. On the other hand, he needed money for continued research, and the five thousand dollars he could get from Martinson might enable him to build a machine more powerful than the one his father had devised. His nimble brain had already thought up several improve-



THE WIRES WENT AROUND ROBERTA'S NECK AND SHE FOUGHT FRANTICALLY TO BREATHE.

ments.

He had now a method of causing inanimate objects to move, perhaps even to feel, but the next step was to give them the ability to think. With a weapon like that he could destroy and kill on an undreamed of scale. No atomic bomb could equal the damage that might be done by, for instance, the telephones in almost every home in the country. It would be a revenge worth waiting for.

His round, guileless blue eyes looked up at Martinson, masking the hatred he felt.

"Have you found out anything, Dunwood?" the executive asked.

"Not yet, sir," the little man answered, "but I spent the last two nights here by myself and nothing unusual happened. Perhaps your murderer will return in a few days, when he thinks things have quieted down."

"Yes, that sounds logical," Martinson replied, "but, tell me, Dunwood,

just how do you happen to be so interested?"

"That's another question that you'll have to wait to find out the answer," he said, his voice somewhat peremptory.

"Okay," Martinson said. "Keep working on the case. You seem to be the only one who has any ideas at all, and something must be done."

After Dunwood left, the lieutenant and Martinson looked at each other in bewilderment. If anything, the situation had become more complex and inexplicable.

THAT night the two men were squeezed into the closet in the company president's office. They could hear Dunwood in a room to the left, muttering to himself and apparently absorbed in some sort of work. Then a strange humming sound filled the office.

Martinson turned to his companion,

"What's that?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know," the Lieutenant replied in a whisper, "but now that you mention it, I remember hearing that same sound last night, just before I went to get my drink of water."

"Well," the older man said, "we won't learn anything by staying in here."

Cautiously he opened the door of the closet. The office was dark and spooky looking, with only a dim light coming from under the crack in the doorway. The humming continued.

"Let's go into the outer room," Martinson said softly. As he started across the carpeted office, Arlington noticed that the telephone seemed to move slightly on the desk. He hurried after his companion, not caring to explore the situation further.

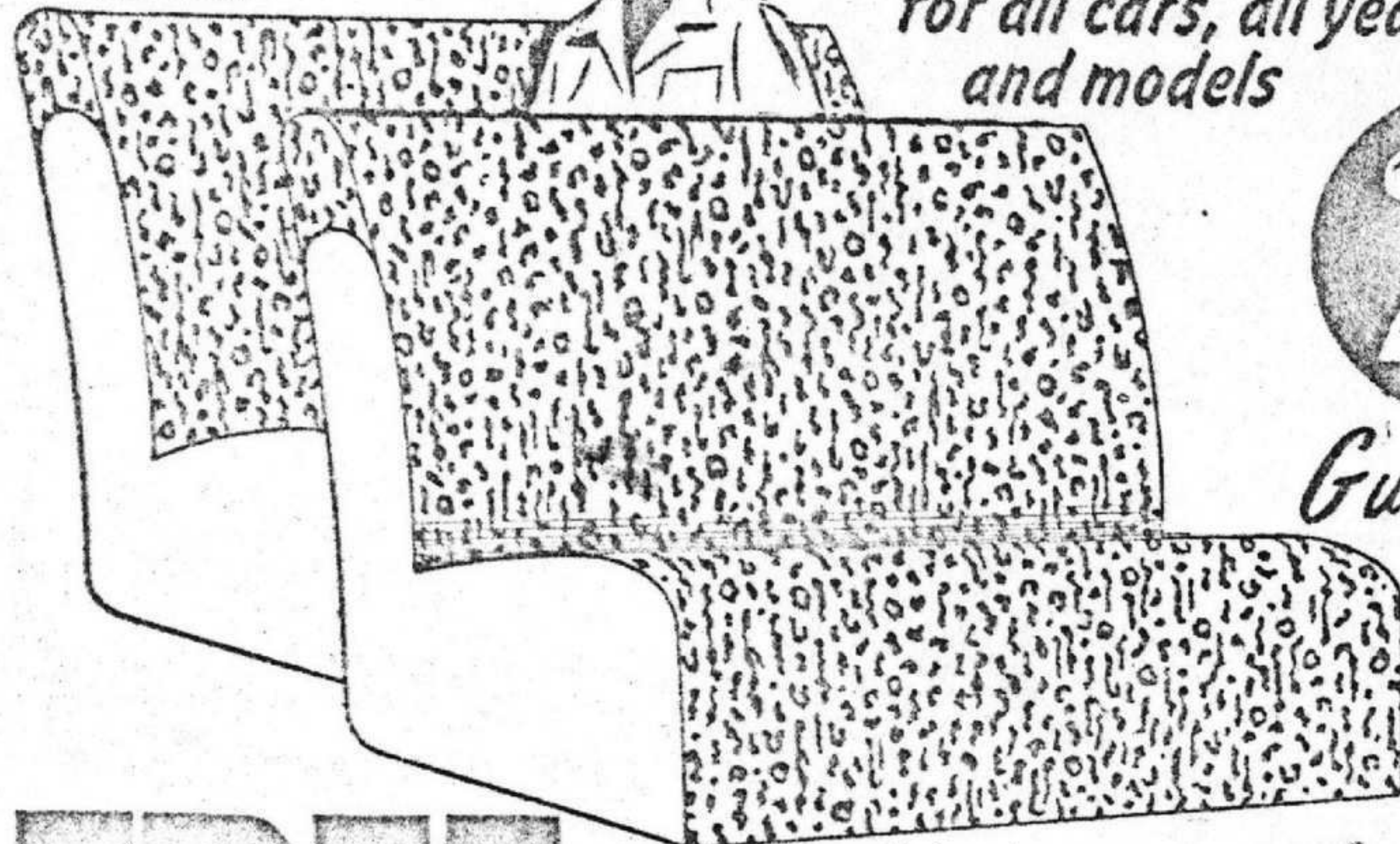
They stepped out into the reception room; bright light could be seen through the glass in one of the other private offices and the strange noise

LEOPARD

GENUINE
VINYL PLASTIC

Auto Seat Covers

for all cars, all years, makes
and models



2⁹⁵
EACH

Guaranteed

Try in
your car
for 10 days
at MY risk

FREE



Dear Motorist: Compare these luxurious yet PRACTICAL seat covers with cloth or woven straw selling for much more! See how they beautify your car and give MUCH MORE PROTECTION to the upholstery! Try them right in your own car WITHOUT ANY OBLIGATION to keep them—entirely at MY risk! If not thrilled, return them within 7 days and back comes your money! You have everything to gain—NOTHING to lose!

"THE SEAT COVER KING"

SENSATIONAL MILLION DOLLAR DEVELOPMENT

American science and industry spent over \$1,000,000 to develop the amazing VINYL PLASTIC that made these seat covers possible. It's NEW, DIFFERENT, TOUGH... yet it feels like SILK and resists FLAME, WATER, GREASE, GRIME and many ACIDS!

SLIDE ON OR OFF QUICK & EASY!

Simplest construction with GRIP-TITE elastic binding! Slide them on... slide them off in LESS THAN ONE MINUTE! Can be folded away when not in use! No tacking... no sewing that may mar upholstery needed! Mildew and mothproof. NEVER CRACK OR PEEL! What a difference between regular cloth or straw covers and this tough, genuine VINYL plastic! Keeps cool in summer. Cleans off easily—NO sanding over! Resists soiling by babies or pets! Water, grease, dirt can't penetrate this tough plastic material that wears and wears! Even \$25.00 tailored to measure textile covers do not give you this thorough protection!

SAVE WITH SAFETY THIS MODERN WAY!

Did you ever list up old fashioned textile seat covers only to find that dirt and grime, grease and water had soaked right into the upholstery? Car dealers always look UNDER the seat covers. Be smart. Don't be lulled into false security! Save yourself disappointment and aggravation! Have FULL protection with these modern, beautiful seat covers! Shows the convenience of sliding them on or off to suit your needs. Best of all, you pay only \$2.95 for FRONT or REAR seat!

SPECIAL SAVINGS OFFER!

A pair for front and rear seats—BOTH for only \$5.00. You save yourself about a dollar more! SEND NO MONEY! The price, plus postage on delivery or send check, money order or cash for quick, FREE delivery and SAVE EVEN MORE! Please mention car make, model and year; also if SPLIT front coupe, or 4 door FULL front. Yes you can try these seat covers at OUR risk for 7 days. Full price cheerfully refunded if you are not thrilled. RUSH COUPON NOW!

MOTO-MATIC COMPANY, Dept. 142-FF
129 West 33rd Street, New York 1, N. Y.

SEND NO MONEY

MOTO-MATIC COMPANY, Dept. 142-FF 129 West 33rd St., New York 1, N. Y.

RUSH sets LEOPARD DESIGN SEAT COVERS as checked below on TRIAL for ONE FULL WEEK. You are to refund full price paid if I am not satisfied in EVERY way! The PRO-KROME is mine to KEEP even if I RETURN seat covers!

☐ Send FRONT seat only—2.95

☐ Send FRONT & BACK set—5.00

Car MODEL _____ YEAR _____ FULL or SPLIT front _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____

☐ SAVE MORE by enclosing CASH, CHECK or MONEY ORDER. Same MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!



SENSATIONAL
CREAM

PROTECTS—BEAUTIFIES
YOUR AUTO CHROME

GIVEN—New, nationally advertised PRO-KROME Cream that PROTECTS your auto CHROME while adding new, GLEAMING BEAUTY! Just smooth on—So easy and QUICK—only 5 minutes needed! Large \$1.25 tube with EACH seat cover. 2 TUBES with order for set of 2 covers. Also sold separately at \$1.25 each. PRO-KROME is yours to keep even if you RETURN the seat covers for refund! ACT NOW! You have everything to GAIN and nothing to lose. SEND COUPON NOW!

office made their way toward Arlington and Martinson.

"Run," the officer shouted. He grabbed Martinson by the arm and pulled him out of the office, slamming the door shut behind them. A second, or two later Dunwood had opened it again and the machines were after them.

THEY ran into the president's office, but the telephones and two adding machines leaped at them and joined in the chase. "Stay away from the outer office," Martinson yelled. "There are millions of them in there."

The two men ran in blind panic. Once a telephone wire coiled itself around the policeman's leg, but he managed to untangle himself and get away before more of the machines came to help. It was like a ludicrous nightmare, and Dunwood stood there, unmolested in the middle of it all, watching with a look of ecstasy on his face.

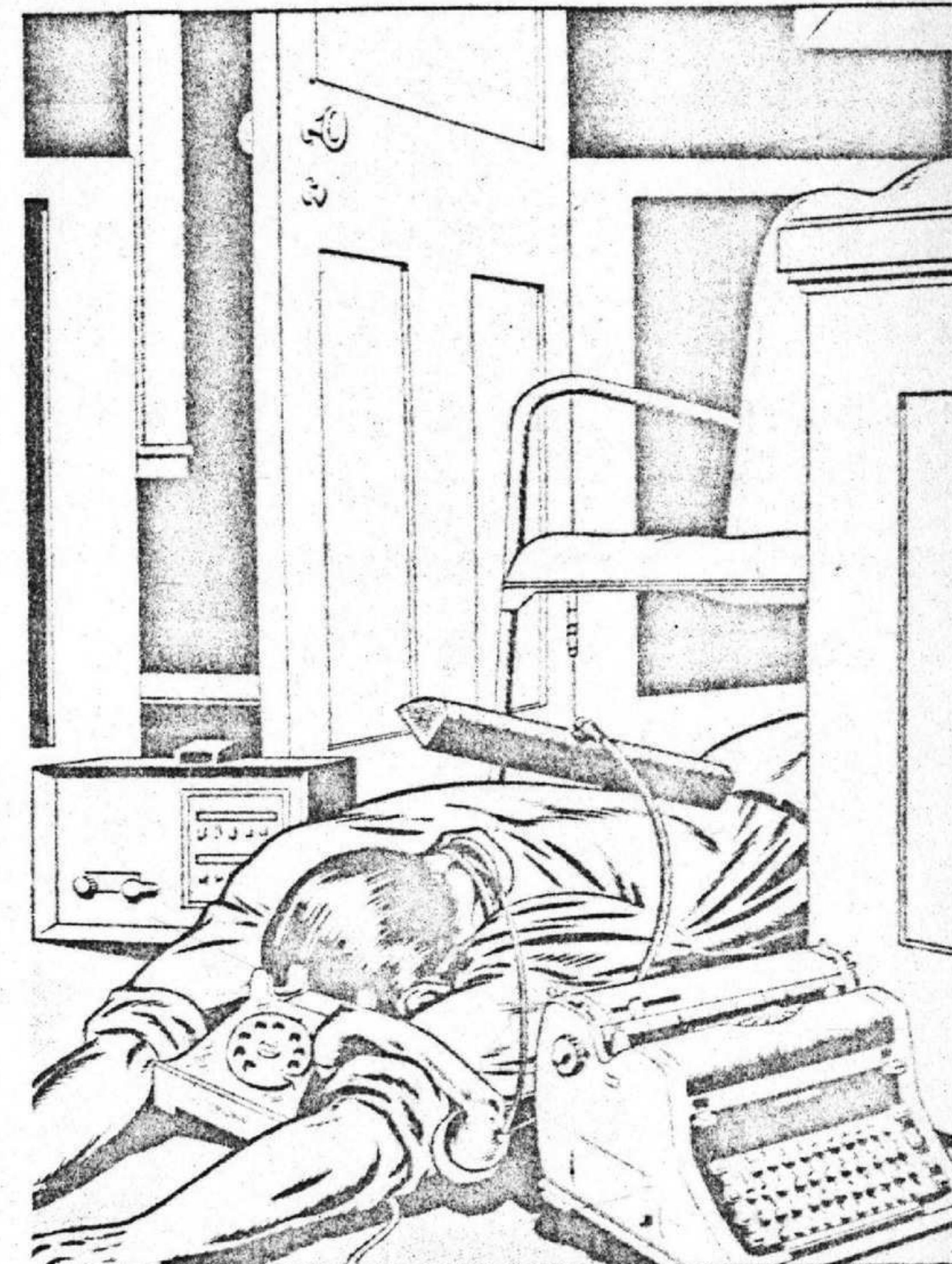
Martinson had knocked over the drinking fountain and was soaking wet. He managed to get into a corner where he rested, panting and breathless. Lieutenant Arlington had found sanctuary by a doorway. The moment of utter uncontrolled panic had fled and he was thinking desperately of some way out.

"The machine!" he whispered. "I've got to get to that damned animator. It's the only way." Martinson was on the other side of the room and could not help him. Warily keeping an eye on the crazy engineer, he started edging toward the inner offices. It was possible that all the office machines had chased them into the outer room. Anyway, it was a chance he would have to take.

He was almost inside the room where the machine was still energetically buzzing when he saw a small adding machine flying through the air straight for his head. He ducked and it crashed through the glass partition behind him. Dunwood heard the noise and started toward the lieutenant with an enraged yell.

Meanwhile, Arlington had gotten to the Animaticus Electronicus and was frantically turning knobs and dials. Still the powerful humming persisted. Which was the one that turned it off? He turned the largest one far to the left but nothing happened. Dunwood was almost in the room with him.

SUDDENLY the machine gave off a weird moaning sound almost like an air raid siren. The din in the other room rose to a feverish pitch and all at once it seemed as though every machine in the office was rushing toward the center of control. The first obstacle they encountered was Harcourt Dunwood and they attacked him with vicious fury, squeezing the life out of his rotund little body and ripping his clothing to shreds.



DUNWOOD WAS DEAD, HIS DREAM OF POWER OVER.

Lieutenant Arlington stood aghast for a moment. He couldn't let another human being die like that, even if he had intended to kill them. He picked up the unwieldy animator, lifted it high above his head, and threw it to the floor with all his might.

The Animaticus Electronicus first hit the corner of the desk and then crashed to the floor with a loud clatter. It lay there for a moment shuddering and grinding alarmingly. Suddenly it gave one terrific heave and fell into a thousand quivering pieces of metal. Then everything was quiet, eerily, fantastically quiet.

Trembling with the physical effort of lifting the machine and from sheer fright and horror, the Lieutenant turned slowly from his contemplation of the animator and looked in the doorway.

MACHINES were scattered in every direction, lying quiet and lifeless, and in the middle, still tangled in cords

and wires, was Harcourt Dunwood. He, too, was not moving. The policeman walked toward him, gingerly stepping over the motionless office machines.

The man's face was turning bluish and there were long red scratches down his cheeks. His bulbous body seemed to have shrunk and was barely covered by tattered remnants of clothing. Arlington leaned down and felt for his heart and pulse. He found neither.

Martinson walked wearily and hesitantly into the room. He looked at the Lieutenant bending over the horrible dead figure. "Is... is... it all over?" he asked in a toneless whisper, his face ashen grey.

"Yes," Arlington said. "All over." He stood up and the two men looked at each other, almost afraid to believe that their recent experience had been reality.

THE END

AMAZING DOUBLE-ACTION SKIN TREATMENT THAT CONCEALS AS IT MEDICATES PIMPLES ACNE, BLACKHEADS AND other externally-caused SKIN BLEMISHES!

Actual clinical tests conducted by leading doctors have proven that an amazing, new-type medication helps clear up skin blemishes while it covers and hides embarrassing pimples! In the many cases tested by the doctors, there were a mixture of men, women and children, White and Negro. Some with recent skin eruptions and others with skin troubles of many years. The results were:

100% SUCCESSFUL
IN CLINICAL TESTS

*45% were COMPLETELY CLEARED!
38% were DECIDEDLY IMPROVED!
17% were IMPROVED!

NOW AVAILABLE TO YOU

GUARANTEED
TO HELP YOUR
SKIN LOOK
LOVELIER AND
MORE ATTRACTIVE
IN A FEW
MINUTES
OR DOUBLE
YOUR MONEY BACK!

Leading
SKIN
SPECIALISTS
RECOMMEND THIS
DOUBLE TREATMENT

Physicians prescribe two ways to help control skin eruptions: First—clean the skin and clear the pores of clogging dirt. Second—inhibit the excessive oiliness of the skin.

The clinically-proven ingredients in the scientifically-tested formula of Scope Products have been compounded to help overcome these external causes of pimples and blemishes! Actually starves pimples because it helps remove the oils that skin specialists often associate with acne!

SKIN DOCTORS STATE THAT
TO NEGLECT YOUR SKIN MAY
PROLONG YOUR COMPLEXION
TROUBLE AND MAKE IT
MORE DIFFICULT TO CLEAR UP!

DELAY MAY BE HARMFUL—
Send for Scope Medicated Skin Treatment
with its special "cover-up" action!
MAIL COUPON AT ONCE!

SCOPE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. GH-2, 1 Orchard St., New York 2, N.Y.

TEEN-AGERS and GROWN-UPS REGAIN NEW POPULARITY

People of all ages have discovered a new-found joy with a clearer lovelier looking skin! If you've been hoping to improve your complexion . . . to increase your popularity with the opposite sex . . .

to climb to success in the business world—we recommend this amazing treatment. Just a few minutes each day can yield more gratifying results than you ever dreamed possible!

HIDES PIMPLES ON LIGHT, AVERAGE & DARK COMPLEXIONS!

To help people of all complexions quickly conceal their externally caused blemishes—Scope Medicated Skin Formulas come in special tones. No matter how many other treatments or old-fashioned preparations have disappointed you—here is a

product that guarantees to improve your appearance or double your money back! Scope Medicated Skin Formula is GREASELESS, FAST-DRYING and STAINLESS! Make-up can easily be applied over it.

SURE, QUICK RESULTS—WORKS LIKE MAGIC!

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK!

If you are not delighted in every way by the improved condition and general appearance of your skin in just 10 days, return the unused portion and we will promptly send you double the purchase price! You have nothing to lose but worrying over your bad complexion. WE TAKE ALL THE RISK!

SEND NO MONEY

You fill out the coupon and by return mail we will immediately ship you the Scope Medicated Skin Formula in a plain package. Try Scope Treatment! If you are not entirely satisfied, return the unused portion for refund of DOUBLE your purchase price.

MAIL THE TRIAL COUPON TODAY!

SCOPE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. GH-2,
1 Orchard St., New York 2, N.Y.

ACT NOW!
Please send me on a 10-Day Trial the Scope Medicated Skin Treatment. I will pay postman \$1.98 plus postage on delivery. If not entirely satisfied, I may return the unused portion for double my purchase price back.

Check ☐ Light ☐ Medium ☐ Dark Complexion

Name _____

Address _____

City & Zone _____ State _____

☐ SAVE MONEY. Enclose \$2. now and we pay postage. Some double your money-back either way you order.

Enclose payment with Canadian or Foreign orders.

THINK AHEAD

By
**Larry
Hennessey**

A terrific space battle was in progress above Pallas, one of the "Big Four" of the minor planets that compose the asteroid belt. A lone black spacefighter, strange and rakish in construction, was engaging half a dozen silvery cruisers, the cream of the Pallas home fleet. Any one of those silver streaks should have been able to blast the black stranger from the sky. Instead, it was playing hob with them.

From the ground, Commandant Roj Scovil watched the fray with a frown showing through his modified space helmet. At every stage, the black pirate seemed to outguess the opposition. Literally, its commander was thinking ahead. When two silver streaks converged, hoping that the black ship would cut between them and be mousetrapped by a third silver fighter, the ruse failed completely.

The black pirate slashed over and disabled one silver ship. It wheeled toward the other, skirted back and suddenly crippled Number Three with a rattle of voltage guns. Next it was away, going after the reserves. Like a hawk, it chased a silver fighter, guessing every trick and twist the latter tried to make. Again, the deadly voltage rattled home.

Only two silver ships remained. They did the obvious; they ganged up on the black pirate. At that, it still outguessed them by coming in so fast that it was able to exchange broadsides in both directions. As a result, all three ships skimmed down and struck the rocky ground, kicking up huge clouds of dust. Rescuers, a hundred of them, went to the aid of the crews. There wasn't enough gravity on Pallas to produce a serious crash. Chances were that none of the men were hurt.

But when the crowd, like the cloud, had cleared away, a strange discovery was made. Not a member of the mysterious pirate crew could be found! Vague figures had been seen, but briefly. It would seem that they had faded with the dust!

STRANGER things than that could happen in this year of 2296. That was why Commandant Scovil just couldn't believe it. He said so to his orderly, Jon Brett, as they walked back to the dome-shaped building that housed the military command. On Pallas, an interplanetary settlement dedicated to the welfare of the entire Solar System, Scovil's word was law. He intended

to use it that way.

"That ship came from beyond Pluto," Scovil told Brett, grimly. "You've met some of the Plutonese, Jon, and you know how well versed they are in telepathy. Chances are that anybody from beyond could read minds even better!"

"You've got something, Chief!" exclaimed Brett. "Why, they were thinking ahead all during that battle. Up until that last maneuver."

"They were still thinking ahead," declared Scovil, as they passed through the revolving air-lock and he paused to remove his helmet. "They wanted that triple crash to kick up dust and bring a crowd. That's how they vanished!"

"With the dust?"

"Of course not. With the crowd!" Commandant Scovil stepped through the vacuum curtain into his glarium-walled office and sat down at his fibrolite desk, where he began to doodle odd space symbols on the pulpine memo-pad beside him. Orderly Bret still stood gaping as though trying to absorb the full sense of the Commandant's statement. Scovil finished making doodads and gave a short, discouraged laugh.

"It's as simple as A B C," stated Scovil. "But that makes it harder to figure than X Y Z. How many non-registered visitors on Pallas right now, Brett?"

"Three hundred," replied Brett. "That is three hundred and a few more. Most of them are going out on the 'Achates,' the next spaceliner that stops at Pallas. The 'Achates' is due here tomorrow morning."

"I'm glad you specified a few more than three hundred," declared Scovil, more grim than ever. "That black spacefighter could have held three men. That would be one to a hundred."

Brett stared blankly, then asked: "You mean they'll be posing as non-registered visitors?"

"What else?" Scovil's query was blunt. "If they take passage on to-

morrow's spaceliner, they can get off at Mars or some other planet. With their power to think ahead, they can stir up wars, depressions, revolts, whatever else they want.

"However limited their mental capacity," continued the commandant, "they can still outguess the greatest living scientists. In short, they can take over what we call the civilized system — if we let them."

"In that case," declared Brett, very seriously, "we must not let them."

"A very good thought," nodded Scovil. "And now, Brett, suppose you think ahead, if you can, and just tell me how we are going to stop them."

THE commandant arose, cupped his hand to his brow. His voice came slowly, mechanically, as he specified the complications of the situation.

"I have more proof that these men are Trans-Plutonians," declared Scovil, "nor can I prove that they intend to take over, though I feel quite sure of it. What makes it more unfortunate: I do not have the authority to detain non-registered visitors who want to leave on tomorrow's spaceliner."

"But you can question all of them," reminded Brett, brightening. "That should certainly give you a chance of weeding out the Trans-Plutonians."

"Never a chance," Scovil shook his head. "Don't you see, Brett, it's their business to think ahead. That gives them the faculty of outwitting us at every turn. We couldn't trap them with a single question, because they would know what it was going to be before we even asked it!"

"I guess they do have all the answers," Brett's voice was rueful, a hollow echo. "But that makes it all the more important that you do something, Chief. And fast."

There was something sarcastic in Scovil's smile as he asked: "But what?"

"You can quiz all strangers, at least," asserted Brett. "Later on, you can prove that you followed your duty."

"Prove it to whom?" demanded Scovil. "Who will be running things after these three fiends have planted the roots that will destroy all civilization? Since I have no way of holding them at present, what good can questioning do —"

AGAIN, the commandant halted. This time, it was his eyes, not Brett's that were staring widely. A strange smile spread over his face, then dwindled:

"You've got something, Brett," Scovil declared. "What it is, I won't tell you, not now at least. For your own good as well as mine. For the good of the entire Solar System, for that matter. I'm having every stranger on Pallas brought to this office for questioning, individually. I can at least tell you that much! So go and give the order."

Brett turned away only to have Scovil call him back.

"I can tell you one thing more," the commandant added. "You can make it public knowledge that a great menace is in our midst. You can state that I shall give each person a clean bill if he shows the right credentials. But any false documents" — he shook his head — "will simply lead to immediate arrest. Have guards posted outside, to take our three suspected strangers into custody. I shall find them."

Scovil's final statement was emphatic and Brett wanted to ask him how he expected to do the impossible. But on that point, the commandant's lips were sealed. He did, however, add one more specification and a grim one.

"These Trans-Plutonians are dangerous, Brett," reminded Scovil. "As my orderly, it is your job to give me adequate protection while I am interviewing strangers, but without their knowing it. How you intend to do that" — the commandant smiled — "is your own problem. I don't even want to know the slightest detail. Somebody might read my mind about it."

ONE hour later, Scovil was handling the rush of customers. Two minutes was the most that he could give in scrutinizing passports and other credentials as he interviewed each non-registered visitor. The thirty-third stranger was a darkish, mild-eyed man who showed a passport from Venus. Scovil studied it as he had the others, then reached to his pulpine pad.

"I'm giving you clearance, Mr. Vodar," stated the commandant, noting the name on the passport. "Show this to the guard at the outer door."

Scovil paused, smiling at Vodar, but on the pulpine pad, which his hand obscured so Vodar could not see it, the commandant wrote: "We want this man. Hold him in full custody . . . RS"

Folding the sheet, Scovil placed it in a self-sealing envelope, which he pressed tight as he gave it to Vodar. The man with the Venusian passport walked to the door, but before Scovil could call out "Next!" Vodar had swung around. His hand released a knife that seemed to materialize at his finger-tips and travel with the speed of a bird.

The throw went wide as a sob-gun sighed from a loop-hole punched in the glanium wall. Soon, Brett appeared; calmly removed Vodar's body from

the spot where it had sprawled. Those sob-guns were practically ultra-violet flame-jets. Very deadly in the hands of a capable man like Brett.

All proceeded calmly and in regulation fashion until the hundred and nineteenth visitor, a self-styled Saturnian named Throg. Scovil studied Throg as he had Vodar; gave him the same kind of a sealed note. At the door, Throg tried the same knife trick. Bret got him instead, from a punch-hole in the ceiling.

The two hundred and forty-third stranger was an Earthian named Lowden, so he said. Scovil gave him a note like Throg and Vodar had received. Lowden went to the door; turned more suddenly than the others and tried to get Scovil sooner. But this time, Brett was still quicker with the trigger of the sob-gun.

They went through to the end of the list. Scovil and Brett, just on the chance that the black spacefighter might have held an extra crew member. But there was none.

WHEN the interviews were finished, Brett entered the office and received the prompt congratulations of the commandant. To those, the orderly could only shake his head.

"You did the real job, Chief!" exclaimed Bret. "But how in all the worlds, civilized or uncivilized, did you manage to spot the three you wanted?"

For reply, Scovil beckoned Brett from the office. As they walked along, Brett simply wondered all the more.

"There couldn't have been anything wrong with their passports," mused Brett. "They'd never have slipped on that. So I just don't get it."

"You will," assured Scovil, "and very soon."

They reached the cell-blocks reserved for military prisoners. Occasionally, those were fairly well stocked with captured space pirates, but lately they had been almost empty. Now, Brett was surprised to see them jammed to full capacity. They contained no less than three hundred assorted strangers, all shaking their fists in unrestrained anger when they saw the commandant.

Scovil ignored them for the moment, except for a gesture toward them as he spoke to Brett.

"I gave them all the same note," stated Scovil. "All three hundred odd. Every time I looked at a passport, I kept saying one thing to myself as I read the stranger's name: 'You are from that pirate ship—you are from that pirate ship'—that was the thought I concentrated on. With it, I wrote an order to hold the bearer. The same thing for every man I interviewed. But naturally, there were only three who could read my mind—"

"The three telepathic pirates!" in-

terrupted Brett. "They must have thought you'd singled them out. That's why each of them tried to kill you."

"Exactly," replied the commandant, as he gave a turnkey a nod to release the prisoners. "Only those three knew how to think ahead. Their trouble was they couldn't think back. If they had, they'd have realized how secure they were and they wouldn't have fallen for my game. Thinking ahead is good enough, but it's sometimes smarter to think back."

As Bret thought back, he decided that in this case it certainly was. The strange, uncanny power to think ahead had brought destruction to the men who owned it.

Orderly Jon Brett had never heard of anybody getting hurt by thinking back.

THE END

S-F ON PARADE—

(Continued from Page 34)

for the first time but they have added a new touch, the spiritual.

The writers are chosen from the fields of time travel, interplanetary voyagings, cybernetics, robots, parapsychology, political science, alien life and communications.

Anthony Boucher contributes the last story in the collection. Delightful is his treatment. He places his remnant of civilization in San Francisco in the not too distant year 2000. Not much remains of our great age of the 1950's. A priest of very high order is obliged to live incognito and make his journeys with the aid of a robass (not a robot) which sees all, knows all and converses with the priest, even admonishes him. It is intriguing reading and to tell the synopsis here would spoil part of the fun. The good samaritan will always be with us.

"THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY" edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. and published by Simon and Schuster is an excellent collection of stories which have appeared previously in magazine form only.

The introduction to the book is in itself worth the price of the volume. It consists of informative data which the painstaking Mr. Campbell has collected during his years in the literary field. A resume of the growth of the science fiction novel which he feels will be with us forever more. An excellent historical summary of STF.

FIVE full-length stories compose "THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS FOR 1952," edited by Everett T. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty, published by Frederick Fell. Another volume in the yearly series, this will specially interest all readers making a permanent collection of STF.

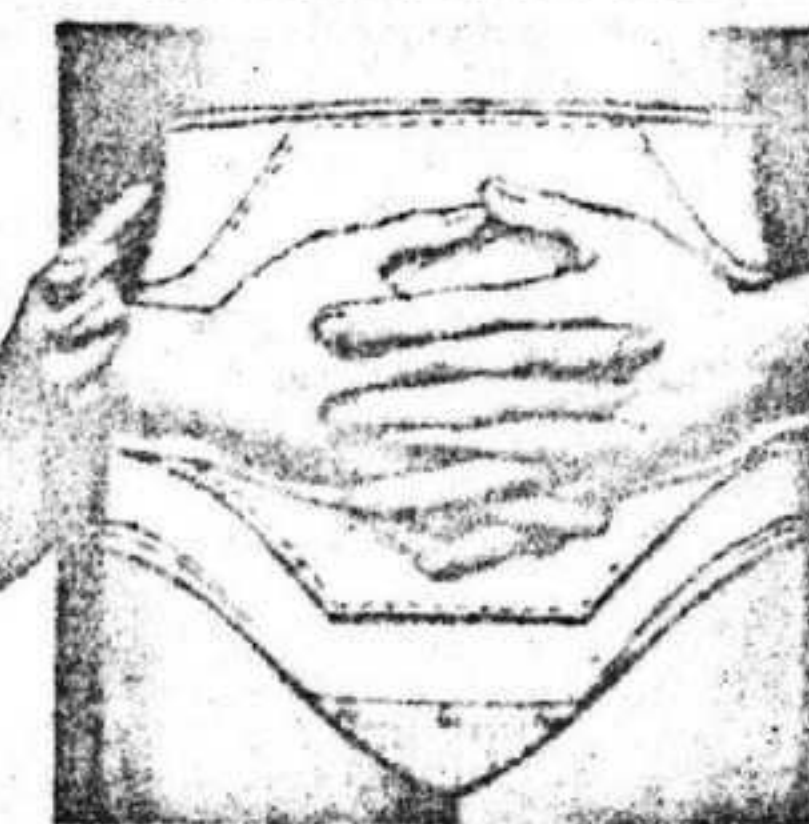


APPEAR SLIMMER INSTANTLY!

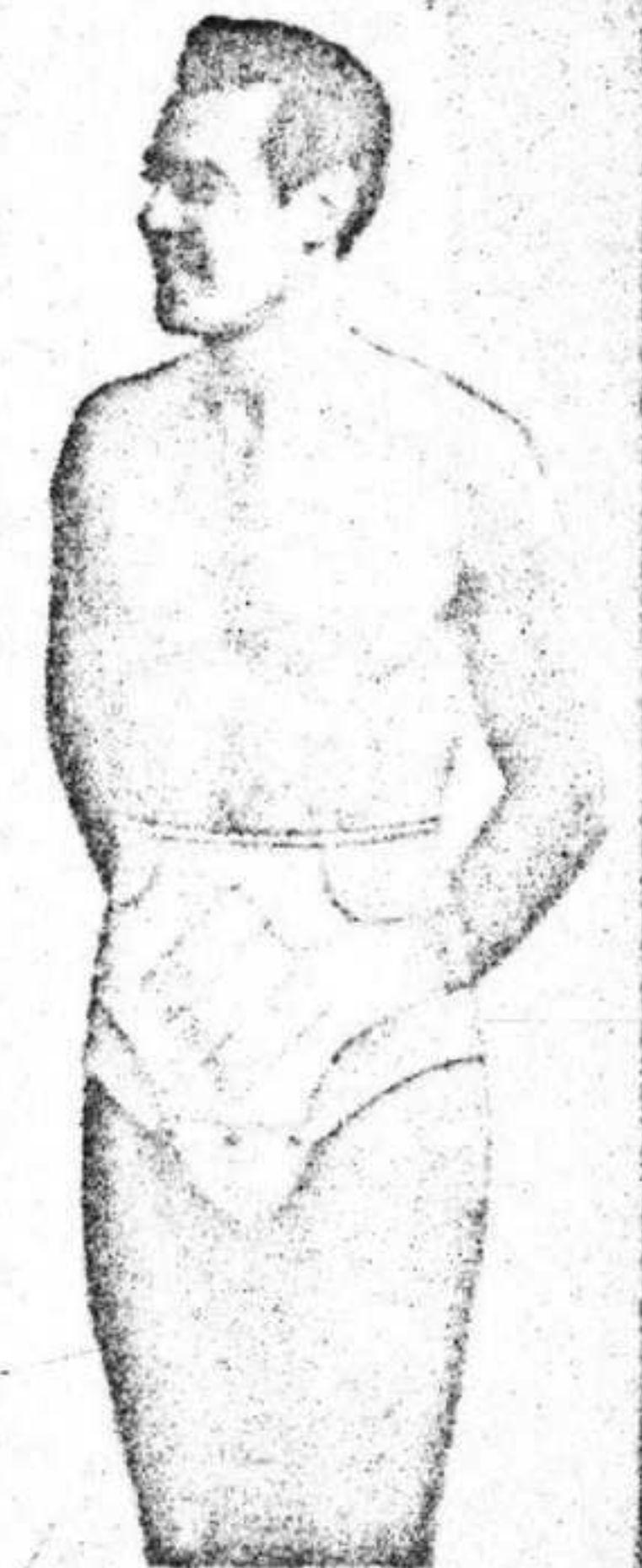
With the Amazing
TUMMY FLATTENING COMMANDER

Only \$2.98

INTERLOCKING HANDS
OF FIRM SUPPORT*



Test now how you'll feel wearing the COMMANDER this way: clasp hands across the abdomen as shown and press up and in. Feel good? Protruding stomach held in? That's how you'll look and feel when you put on the COMMANDER. No leg bands, buckles, straps or laces. Changeable crotch piece.



--- WARD GREEN CO. Dept. P-39 ---

113 West 57th Street, New York 19, N.Y.

Rush COMMANDER on approval in Plain Wrapper by Return Mail. I'll pay postman \$2.98 plus postage. If not delighted with immediate results, I may return in 10 days for immediate refund. (Special Large Sizes 48 to 60—\$3.98.)

MY WAIST MEASURE IS _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____

☐ I enclose \$2.98 (or \$3.98 for sizes 48 to 60). Ward Green Co. pays postage. Same refund offer holds.

☐ Also send _____ extra crotch pieces. (75¢ each, 3 for \$2.00.)

FREE 10 DAY TRIAL OFFER

Convince yourself. See the amazing difference with your own eyes. Try the appearance reducing COMMANDER at our expense. If not delighted with the immediate results, return in 10 days for immediate refund. Sent in Plain Wrapper by Return Mail. Don't wait! Act NOW!

TRADE MARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFFICE

SEND NO MONEY!