

FUTURE FICTION

NOV.

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UNIVERSE IN DARKNESS

by
**J. HARVEY
HAGGARD**

ALSO —
**JOHN COLERIDGE
DENNIS CLIVE
BOB OLSEN**



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MAGAZINE

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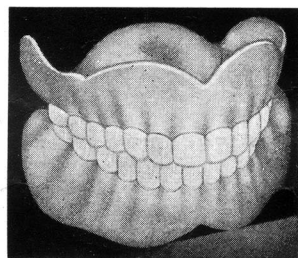


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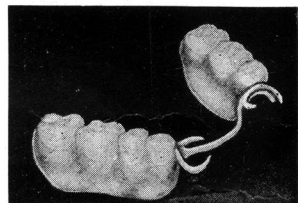
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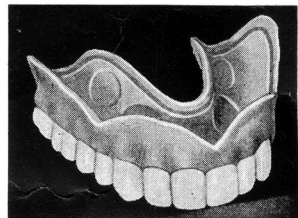
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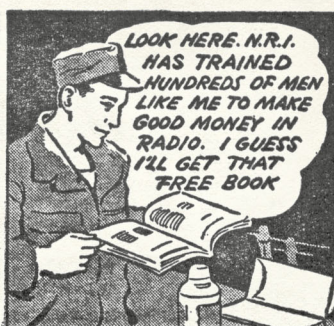
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FUTURE FICTION

Vol. I, No. 4



November, 1940

FOUR AMAZING NOVELETS

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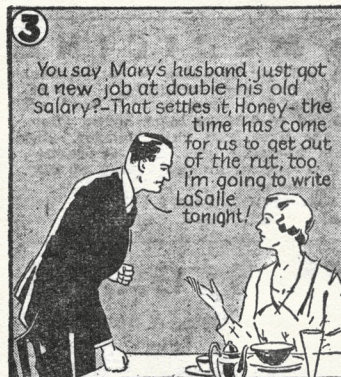
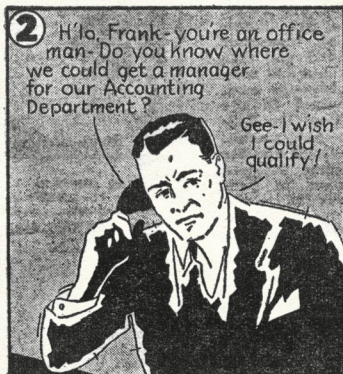
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COVER BY PAUL

FUTURE FICTION, published every other month by DOUBLE ACTION MAGAZINES, INC., 2256 Grove St., Chicago, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 60 Hudson St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter February 3, 1940, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1940, by Double Action Magazines, Inc. Yearly subscription, 75c. For advertising rates write to the Double Action Group, 60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.
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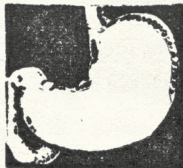


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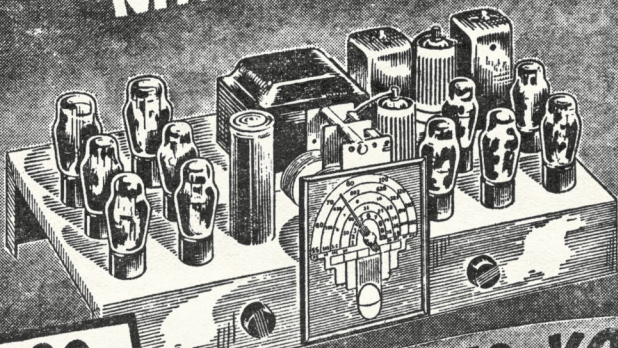
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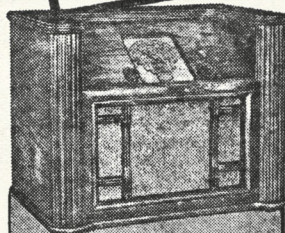
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UNIVERSE IN DARKNESS

by J. HARVEY HAGGARD

From the depths of space comes a mighty cosmic cloud of utter darkness —threatening to snuff out the lives of the Martian colonists! Against the terrific forces of Nature, coupled with the opposition of the Power Dictator, Tod Haldane matches his wits and brawn!

CHAPTER I

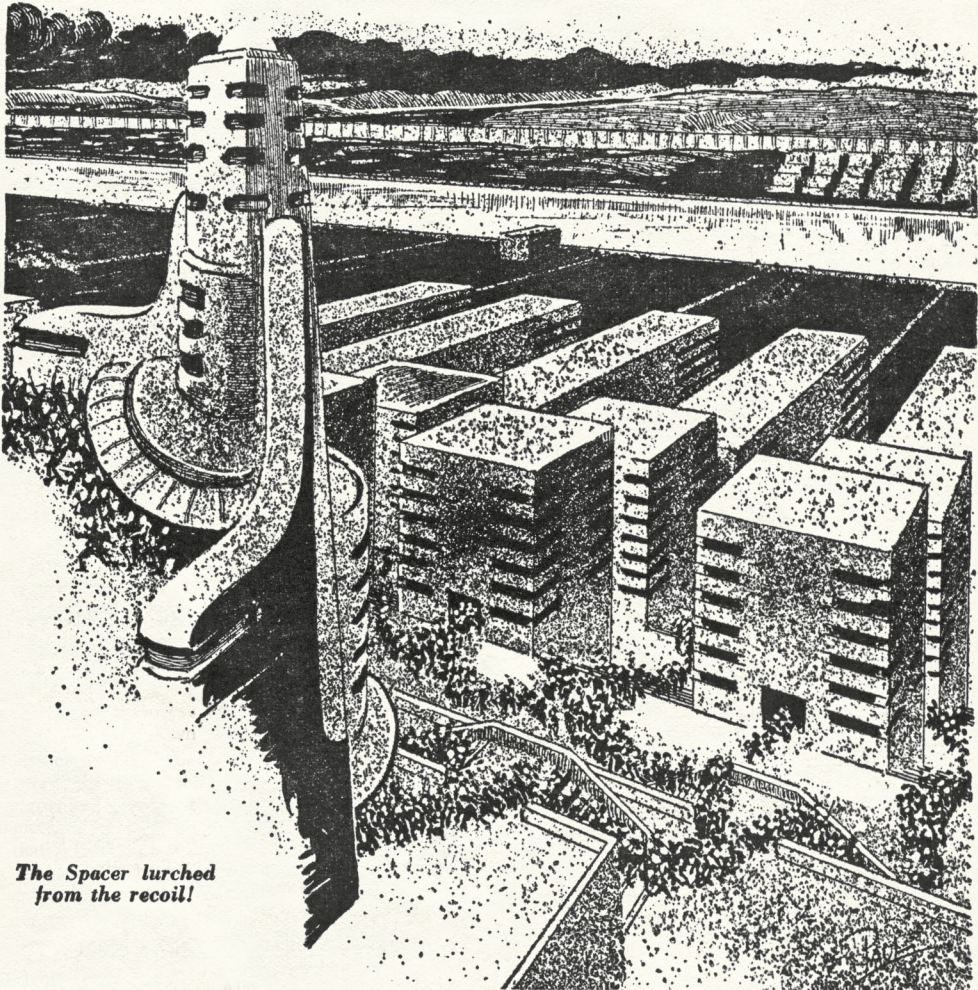
THE CLOUD OUT OF SPACE

BY THE end of August, 2093, it was made certain that the solar system was about to intersect the immediate path of a vast cloud of cosmic dust, also headed in the general direction of Vega, and there would follow an undetermined period during which all sunlight would be obscured from earth.

It was expected that the sun and its attendant planets would seep through the "dark nebula," for such it most assuredly was, in a period slightly longer than a fortnight. Led by the fiery oratory of the aquiline senator from the United Americas,

Borles Marchand, the Earth Congress in session at London hurriedly rushed a bill through both houses placing the military organizations of all nations under temporary control of their own policing unit, known tentatively as the Aerial Earth Police and associated with a vast secret service organization whose tentacles dipped into the governmental roots of all countries.

Of the few who shouted themselves hoarse in opposition, the representative from the recognized Martian East State, Tod Haldane, was outstanding in vehemence. Apparently, under the hysterical circumstances, only the young colonist, born on another world, saw that such an action would place the earth under the virtual dictatorship of the select group guiding the



*The Spacer lurched
from the recoil!*

destiny of the A. E. P., and the flinty-visaged Borles Marchand was acknowledged openly as being the power behind the throne of that organization.

Now that Borles Marchand had realized his nurtured ambitions, Tod Haldane, clad in the blue metalline of the Martian East State, left the congressional chambers hurriedly, wondering how long it would take the wildly cheering congressmen to wake up and find that their own powers had been voted from them and that they were now helpless.

Racing up the corridors of the upper house, he so surprised the plumed guards outside the private chambers that they saluted in recognition as he vanished through the inner doors, then gaped dumbfoundedly after him, wondering what to do about his sudden entrance.

The man sitting behind the ornate desk was smiling with such a contentment that the smile seemed frozen there permanently, being only capable of deepening or lessening a trifle now and then. But it vanished in quick order when the husky body plowed in through the door and he stared directly into the irate face of an enraged young man whose fist was shaking in the intervening space.

"All right, Your Excellency!" spat out Tod Haldane excitedly. "What about the Martian East State?"

The lean jaws of the temporary dictator tapered from thick pointed cheek bones, and again a grim amused smirk played over his mouth.

"What right have you to come bursting in like that, Congressman Haldane?" demanded Borles Marchand, arising quickly to his full rangy height, allowing the lustrex robe of high office to slip aside and reveal the fashionable knee breeches clinging so tightly to his sparse legs. His evident superiority gave him some secret taunting amusement.

"The right of a representative of the hundred thousand souls on Mars!" thundered

Tod angrily. "And the right of thousands of flesh and blood people to live. You know that the colony patrol-ship brought back an analysis of this dark nebula. It's composed of a whirling storm of particles, ferric particles!"

BORLES MARCHAND pressed a button and continued to glare coldly.

"So?" he said, arching his shaggy brows. "Well, as far as that goes, Haldane, there will be quite a rain of iron ore falling from the skies—out of space. As far as the accompanying cold is concerned, people can provide against that. And perhaps you're unfamiliar with the fact that iron resources of our planet have dwindled in the last half century to practically nothing. To me—it seems a veritable godsend."

"Yes to *you* it does!" retorted the young colonist. "To you and your power trusts. But what will it mean to those thousands of poor souls on Mars, where the air is so scarce already that it takes them months to get used to breathing it. What's going to happen when that iron dust seeps down into the atmosphere of the red planet?"

Guards came clattering into the chamber. Marchand turned his stony glance to them and lifted his finger in an imperious gesture.

"Seize him!" he demanded, and then looked at the infuriated young man in blue metalline. "Place him under arrest as a traitor, and a menace to our new government under its present crisis."

Apparently Tod heard none of these words, or if he did, it only added kindling to his fury.

"You know what will happen!" he charged. "That ferric dust will begin to rust, combining to form a thick layer of ferric-oxide. It'll suck up all the remaining oxygen from that planet, and the murder of a hundred thousand souls will stain your hands. Doesn't it mean a thing to you? They're your own people out there, and if something isn't done to stop that cosmic

storm, their bones will bleach in the red rust of the crimson planet."

The chieftain of the E. A. P. stood watching with cold, contemptuous satisfaction as the guards leaped in, seized the arms of the mutinous colonist.

"Unfortunately," he said unctuously, when grasping hands had made Tod Haldane secure, "there is little any one could do about it. Ever think of that, Haldane? What could one man do, to stop the approach of a cosmic cloud millions of miles across? No, the mere thought of such a feat is ridiculous! It is insane! As such, I will prosecute your case. An attack has been made by an insane man. And of course you will die." He shrugged. "That's too bad! You won't even be here to see the revival of the power trusts when there's a good thick coating, waist deep, of iron dust, all over the surface of the earth, waiting and ready to be scooped up and reconverted. No, it's regrettable! You won't be here to see that."

For the moment, Tod Haldane was motionless in the arms of the guards, but his expression was so ferocious and hating that the angular Marchand retreated a step, flinching before the threatening demeanor of a man suffering for his people, even though the man was helpless.

"Don't worry about me, Marchand," he grated out. "I wouldn't be so certain of all that, yet."

Unnoticed, his body shifted. Suddenly sparkling streamers of energy shot from his metallic tunic. Blue incandescence seemed to limn his figure, and the guards were hurled backward as though by a violent force, falling in paralyzed heaps on the floor. Some of them were jerking at their holstered caustin guns, but by the time their awkward fingers had pulled the weapons free, Tod Haldane, representative from the Martian State, had turned and raced through the doors into the outer corridors.

By the time the outer alarm was given and a search was conducted, no trace of the

colonist could be found, though Borles Marchand commanded that the search must not be given up until every inch of surface was combed and every wall probed as a possible place of concealment.

CHAPTER TWO

TEMPORARY ESCAPE

AFTER a hundred years of sporadic growth upward, London had never escaped ocean fogs, and from the upper spires of gigantic buildings, it looked as though an amoebic growth was advancing in from out of the ocean, choking over the bases of huge edifices, and looking like an unbelievable pile of drifted snow in the dying light of the setting westerly sun.

Even at that, indomitable drivers of flying craft were emerging from the foggy lower levels, guided by the infra-red riding beams that radiated from upper beacons, climbing finally to where visibility was possible by means of head-beams in the thickening dusk. From above, the faint reddish glows moved around like aquatic monsters stirring in the deep, emerging suddenly to throw glaring circles of intense light around the glittering nuclei of the climbing vehicles.

The landing fields of the Terrestrial Congressional Building were like a serried row of gigantic shelves, each shelf being a spacious landing zone from which rampways led. Sleek silvery craft, like darting midges, were coming and going endlessly, and when moveless in the red zones, the ten-planet emblem of the Earth Aerial Police was visible, painted in conspicuous places. On other regulated zones, overlooking the fog and the metropolis, private craft came and went.

From an upper corridor, Tod Haldane stared quickly through a window, his keen eyes searching the third landing shelf, even as he had searched the lower ones unsuccessfully. His own air speedster was moored on the bottom shelf, hopelessly pinned in by police ships. The second landing stage

had likewise been so crammed full of various aerial vehicles that take-off was virtually impossible unless attendants wheeled the individual ship before a small rampway, and by this time he suspected that the attendants would be answering warnings to be on the lookout for a certain young statesman from Mars.

A GLITTER of hope came into his features, and placing his hands on the sill of the window, he pulled. At the second heave, it swung high in his hands and he crawled out over the sill, let go, and kicked himself out for a twelve foot drop to the rounded top of a small passenger multi-vane.

Dropping to his hands and knees, he cushioned his fall, then slid deftly between the craft and the wall, hoping that no official had chanced to see this maneuver. Without warning, a door swung open from the cabin compartment, sending out a fan of light, and a woman's golden-crowned head was outlined, her shaded eyes blinking into the outer shadows.

Moving in swiftly, he slammed the door and stood confronting a young woman in slacks, who had been interrupted while powdering her nose.

"Don't scream!" he commanded harshly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The young woman was opening her mouth to scream, without regard to his warning, and as he leaped for her, it fell shut in surprise and she gasped:

"Tod Haldane!" she ejaculated limply. "My goodness, you almost scared the life out of me! What do you mean, breaking in on a lady like that?"

"Oh, it's you, Lea!" he cried out, recognizing the other with more than a twinge of apprehension. Although he was on good terms with Lea Marchand, and she was a very lovely blonde-headed young lady with whom he had spent many pleasant hours, he was in no mood to be in contact with anyone belonging to that particular family.

His first thought was to retreat, and he recalled as abruptly that it was only in this direction that escape could lie. So he spoke hurriedly.

"Listen, Lea," he spoke anxiously. "I want you to do me a favor. Never mind why! Just do as I say. Get to the controls and take out over London, heading for the mainland."

"Say, what is this, a gag?" demanded Lea Marchand, wiping the powder streaks from her nose.

"Sure," answered Tod, forcing a grin to his squarely cut mouth. "Sure it's a gag. That's it. Will you do it, Lea?"

For answer Lea smiled mischievously and strode to the controls, turning to wink at him.

"Well, I was waiting for father, but—okay, Tod," she agreed. "Anything for a pal. But you'll have to let me in on the joke."

"Sure thing, I will," answered the colonist breathlessly, and he crouched behind a projecting curvature of a metal seat. "I'll do that all right." He heard the motor leap into life, felt the vehicle crawl forward with annoying slowness, and heard an attendant shouting in answer to Lea's demand to be wheeled to the take-off rampway. From where he crouched, their words were indistinguishable as the motor gathered power.

Finally the multivane leaped forward, launching itself into mid-air, descended for the briefest of intervals, and with mounting power poised and gradually began a steep ascent. When Tod finally dared to come out of hiding, it was darting high over an ocean of drifted fog, and the girl was lighting a cigarette nonchalantly with one hand.

Tod's big face broke into a thankful grimace.

"Thanks, Lea," he said, heaving a vast sigh of relief. "By golly, you don't know what you've done for me."

The girl was turning her attention to the controls, but cast a searching glance in his

direction as he made himself comfortable at her side.

"All right, Tod," she said curiously. "I've done my part. What's the joke?"

He was stretching his cramped arms over his head and gazing backward for possible signs of pursuit, but the particular intent of her words caused him to snap to attention.

"Joke—joke," he repeated, wetting his lips. "Of course. Well—"

"Maybe I can help you out," she continued calmly, jarring the steering rudder slightly aside as a higher cloud loomed. "The lieutenant was searching all the ships that were leaving. Of course he didn't search mine. But he said he was looking for a certain mutineer to be placed under arrest. He mentioned Tod Haldane. You should have seen me glare at him when he suggested you might be in here."

"Oh, Lea!" exclaimed Tod, suddenly overwhelmed with conflicting emotions and at a loss for words. "You—you—"

"You mean I shouldn't have," continued Lea Marchand without perturbation. "I think I agree with you there. Yet we've come to be pretty good friends, haven't we, Tod? And I do trust you! Somehow I can't believe you'd do anything so terribly wrong. So you see, I've trusted myself with you."

"Thanks, Lea," choked out Tod, whose terms with the radiantly pretty girl had been on the verge of outgrowing the friendly stage before the advent of the cosmic cloud. "You've done it now, and maybe you'll wish you hadn't. Perhaps when you find it's your father who ordered my arrest . . ."

"Who else would?" she demanded. "Or could, for that matter? Of course I realize he's been maneuvering himself into power ever since the World Congress was realized a decade ago."

SHE was looking at him now and there was an implicit depth to her sky-blue eyes that tore at his heart and made him gulp. More than once he had felt impelled

to throw himself and his fate at her tiny feet, but always the grim spectre of the world leader, Borles Marchand, granite jawed and implacable in his quest for power, had arisen between them.

"You know then that your father's finally got himself into a position of virtual dictator, through the world military control of the E. A. P.?" he queried.

"Who doesn't?" retorted Lea, unmoved. "The street levels are filled with emotionalistic people who are tickled to death about it. It only seems right, when you consider the menace of the cosmic storm coming from space."

"Then perhaps you don't know," continued Tod grimly, "that the power trusts behind him are going to sit with their hands folded, doing nothing, and that this storm of ferric particles will be allowed to cover the Martian planet, where it will do terrific damage, and mean death and destruction there."

"I think I knew that too, Tod," she returned gravely, "or guessed as much. I'm afraid I've been more than aware of a lot of father's plans, and of the intentions of certain of his questionable friends for some time. And it seemed fairly certain that you would be just hot-headed and foolish enough to try and resist—"

"Try and resist!" exploded Tod, doubling his fists and glaring into space. "As if you thought I wouldn't! Do you know that it would mean slow and horrible asphyxiation, there on Mars? that such a layer of iron particles would oxidize completely in a few short days, sucking in all of the remaining oxygen at the polar regions, which God knows, is little enough! Don't you know that there's no chance of saving that many people because of no available space-ships, and mainly because your father is too cowardly or too fearful to make the world aware of their plight? Don't—"

His outburst of passion subsided somewhat, and he peered around fearfully at the

girl by his side. He had quite lost himself for the moment, and his position and intentions must be quite clear by this time. Yet, strangely, she was unmoved, and more strangely still, something in her eyes had not changed.

"You," he choked, "realize all that, Lea? That I'll do anything in my power, die trying, if necessary, to fulfill the trust placed in me by those brave people facing extinction out there alone?"

For answer, she looked attentively at the mechanisms, glanced at the sea of clouds below, and then looked up.

"We're over France now," she said. "I suppose you're trying to get to your spaceship, hoping to get a chance to take off into space before pursuit gets organized."

"That's right," he agreed frankly, abruptly alert and aware that every minute counted. "I ought to be able to catch their guiding signals here. Let's see, where are we, according to latitude and longitude? I'll take the controls, Lea. If I can win out, the heartfelt gratitude of a hundred thousand people will go out to you. You'll realize that then, Lea."

Clouds were coming up, obscuring everything. Only the ultra-sonic surface-finder on the control board guided him now, and his attention became entirely occupied. Before they knew it, the ground loomed, a relay clicked, and the multivane settled with a lurch.

Instantly they glimpsed the huge spacer with lights gleaming from ports and control visor. Indistinct figures were hurrying forward. Space mechanics in bulky metal-line resolved from the fog. It was the colony supply ship.

Clambering to the ground hurriedly, the young congressman from Mars turned to say farewell, only to see a lithe figure poised on the outer sill of the doorway, leaping agilely to his side.

"Goodby—" he began, but she was standing close to him now, her arm interlocked with his own. "And—"

"Don't be a fool, Tod," she said crisply. "You're not going to leave me. I'm going along with you."

Then the fog swirled around, men were shouting orders for a quick get-away, and they were hurrying forward. Every moment counted if they were to blast out into space in a desperate effort to avert the dark cosmic cloud that drifted nearer with every second, but even in that desperate hurry, they found time to snatch one desperate kiss. With his throat burning and his emotions blurred, Tod Haldane knew that with her, at least, his understanding was eternal and complete.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MARTIAN COLONY

A MUSHROOM of flames was born in the fog, sending dim refractions along the sleek bullet-shaped spacer, and with a roar of increased explosions, the spacer surged away and left the fog dangling behind. The earth, too, was slowly sinking away, and Tod stood grinning appreciatively from the door of the connor room, where busy spacemen were hurrying to and fro, intent on the business of making a fast exit from the terrestrial gravity influence.

"Now that that's done, what next?" demanded Lea Marchant, and the words were hardly out of her mouth when Tod pointed out where the sprinkling of stars was obscured by a gigantic cloud.

"That's the cosmic cloud," he said grimly, and led along a plankway before the glassite for a better view. "Moving at about ten miles per second, too. Good thing it isn't making for a head-on collision, or friction with earth's atmosphere would cause a giant conflagration, like myriad meteors at once, and the world would be burned to a crisp."

For a time they were silent, staring at the bulging, almost spherical blob of blackness, a thunder-head that seemed to be ab-

sorbing matter from the space into which it expanded. Yet that was an illusion, for it was nothing more or less than a whirling cloud of ferric dust.

Feeling the need for food, they went into the lower dining compartment, and satisfied their hunger with synthetic foods, molded in all sorts of appetizing shapes and colors. Imitation fruits, thoroughly edible and deliciously flavored, were brought and placed in the middle of the table as it was cleared away, and while they sat chatting a swarthy, elderly man in the recognizable uniform of ship's captain came and saluted. It made Tod remember that his authority was exerted on board the colony ship, as in fact it was extended over the entire Martian colony.

"Your Excellency," said the captain gravely. "We await ze ordaires." Space Captain Jules Marquette displayed his Corsican blood in his accent, in his swart sturdiness, his carefully tended jetty mustache, and the marked deference with which he addressed his superiors. Even after long hardening years in space, the savage pride of his race glistened through his leathery countenance.

"Thanks, Captain Marquette," returned Tod. "I appreciate your loyalty, and it looks like we'll need lots of it. Steer the ship directly for the cosmic cloud, then pull up alongside. It will take several days to approach it, and in the meantime we will make some sort of a plan."

"Veree well, sir," returned Captain Marquette, saluting again and walking away.

"Your men admire you very much," said Lea, watching him go. "I believe they would die for you."

TOD nodded and his knuckles whitened as his hand clutched the table top.

"I can't let them down," he whispered. "They've got wives and families on the Martian colonies. You can see why they'd obey anything I said, even if I asked some-

thing that, as you say, called for them to die."

Quarters were allotted them, the captain vacating his own cabin for Tod Haldane, and one of the better compartments given to Lea. The more scientific-minded officers of the crew volunteered to discuss any possible solution of the problem confronting them, but Tod put them off until his mind could rest with a good sleep.

They had flashed past Mars when he awoke and came yawning into the corridors. Men in blue metalline were gathered in knots about the port-holes, their faces stern and blanched. Many an eye was watery as they stared for what might be their last time upon the great canal-slashed sphere of crimson dwindling in the rear.

When they noticed Tod Haldane watching them, they turned and hurried to their tasks. It was a touching sight. After eating again, he called the officers of the ship together for a talk. Lieutenant Melvin Croft, a small man with piercing colorless eyes and nervous actions, was something of a scientist.

"My idea of the cosmic cloud," he began jerkily, "is that it was formed—or born—somewhere in space. Otherwise it would have coalesced into solid form. It's just like taking and throwing a bucket of water out of an airlock. If it's on the earth, mutual attraction would cause it to fall in a big blob, more or less, but in the free gravity of space, it will be likely to disperse to misty droplets."

"But, *Mon Ami*," protested Captain Marquette, stroking his mustache absently. "Ze gravitee, or ze mutual attraction, ees en space also!"

"That's right," agreed Lieutenant Croft respectfully. "And so the water, in free space, will draw together again. So will the dust particles, providing no other force is pushing them apart. Now, since this dust cloud comes from the depths of space, we can discount the feeble attraction of stars and planets, which is negligible."

"To surmise just what kind of an explosion created the cosmic cloud would be to go beyond the realms of conjecture. Perhaps it is a trail of explosive matter following a nova. It might even be a gathering of particles that were created when all matter was created and began to expand. Yet this original explosion must have imparted a whirling movement to the cloud, and the centrifugal force of its whirling keeps the particles from drawing together and forming a central ball of matter."

"As I see it," interjected Tod, "our problem will be to bring to a halt this whirling movement of the dust particles, thus destroying the centrifugal force in motion."

His confirmation came with a jerky nod. Lea Marchand had just appeared from the dining room corridor and she looked fresh and invigorated as she came and sat silently by Tod's side.

"I think it would be out of the question," continued Lieutenant Croft, "in fact, virtually impossible, to cause an internal explosion that would act to disperse the cloud radially. So our one remaining possibility is to impose a braking effect upon its revolution, acting to condense it into a nucleus form.

"*Sacre mundo!* Soch a gigantic task!" exclaimed Captain Marquette, fully aware of the monstrous dimensions of the dark nebula. "Nitro, if we once had it, might turn the treeck, an'—"

"The answer, if there is one," put in Tod Haldane grimly, tugging at his lips, "is in electrical field resistance—"

"There!" expostulated Lieutenant Croft instantly and eagerly. "As I myself was about to say, sir. But please go on. Pardon my interruption."

"Perhaps you'd be better acquainted with the situation," returned Tod amiably. "And if you—"

"If we can build up a powerful magnetic flux throughout the region of the dust cloud," went on the lieutenant, his excitement now manifest, "then there would be

a braking effect. The passage of these particles through a magnetic field would tend to generate other fields, around the particles themselves, and it is the friction of these fields which can turn huge motors on earth, and which for the same reason would be intensely magnified here in the comparative remoteness from other bulky masses in its braking force."

"And you're equipped to create such a field?" queried Tod Haldane. "And on such a gigantic scale?"

"We can be, in twenty-four hours," cried Croft eagerly. "Electrical fields are illimitable, in the depths of massless space, and with the small mass embodied by the dust particles, I think we can do it. The anti-gravity repulsors can be used, and I've a notion we can generate charges of duo-static electricity and hurl them like bombs. In fact we will use a metal twin-insulated nucleus to carry the electricity and disperse it. The fields thus created will be opposite, chaotic by nature, but should be enough to generate friction fields around the iron particles and disrupt the centrifugal balance."

SO IT was agreed, and Lieutenant Croft was more than glad to assume leadership over the workmen assigned to the task of creating and installing the super-magnetic bombs of energy-dispersing nature to be hurled pellmell into the spinning cloud of ferric-dust particles.

Due to minor accidents, the equipment, which now replaced the giant space-depth guns in the front prow of the ship, was not ready for more than forty hours, and when finally in place, the cosmic cloud loomed so huge and ominous against the universe that it seemed virtually upon them. Traveling at about 10 miles per second, it was speeding through space an approximately 876,000 miles per day, though nearing earth at an angle.

At last the huge ovoid craft nosed down into striking distance. The cloud blotted

out half of the universe and formed a strange horizon at its edges. The strange projector mounted in the prow was pushed along a steel runway into a massive airlock, which when sealed from the inner hull was opened on the outer side to space, while men in space armor prepared to place it in operation. Every inch of the long outer muzzle was covered with thick insulating material, and it had scant resemblance to a weapon of any sort.

Standing in the control turret, Tod could see down over the opened aperture where Lieutenant Croft, one of the men in space-toggings, awaited his signal.

"Here goes," said Tod with an apprehensive sigh, and Lea pressed his arm with warm sympathy, as the signal was given.

Seconds passed slowly. The lieutenant was waving to the space-clad men to stand back, and he approached a lanyard.

Abruptly the entire ship recoiled slightly, and a bluish emanation made a nimbus of light around the front of the muzzle. The imprisoned cosmostatic discharge, hurled forth on the nucleus, had flashed out into space in an instant's time, with hardly a blur to mark its passage.

A long moment followed. Then another. All at once a light burst in the huge cloud, a tiny light, to be sure, but the traceries of electrical energy dashed out in a million spluttering ribbons and streamers, and from that portion of the whirling nebulae a huge blister of particles erupted, shooting a geyser up for thousands of miles into space, describing a long graceful billow that must have been incredibly speedy, then subsiding.

Again a cosmic bullet was hurled. In a way it was dreadfully beautiful, to watch the furling wave of dusty particles ripple, then gather in a knot and plunge up in a seething maelstrom. Four such missiles were flung, and after each came an eternity-long period of waiting, watching for signs that the huge cloud would collapse.

"It's shrinking just a bit, quivering now,"

muttered Tod exultantly. "No, it's halted! A few more charges and—"

But suddenly dark shapes came sliding out of the void from every direction, obstructing the aim of the improvised electro-cosmic weapon. Signals began chattering from the control board. Captain Marquette leaped toward the radio-beam, his face death-like.

"It's the Aerial Police!" cried Tod in an anguished tone. "And their space squadron!"

The etherphone audiocast blared forth with loud commanding tones, "You're under arrest, Tod Haldane, by order of the Chief of the E. A. P. Instant surrender is necessary, or we'll set loose the detonator bombs. And cease your firing of the strange weapon, or by—"

It was hard for Tod to admit defeat in that precious instant, when victory might have been so near, but the guns of the circling ships were trained upon them, and the space-clad men on the static hurler were weaponless. Indeed the colony spacer had been hopelessly crippled by the removal of defense weapons from the prow.

He could see Lieutenant Croft watching from below, ready to risk instant annihilation if he saw fit to signal that the cosmic bombardment was to be resumed.

"Okay," answered Tod Haldane shortly. "Call off your dogs! We couldn't put up a fight if we wanted to."

"Stand by," came the returning order, "while a boarding party of commanding officers and men are being sent across to take control of your ship."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DESIRE FOR POWER

MAGNETIC grapnels were shot from the lead patrol ship, and presently a stream of armored men came sliding down into the open mouth of the starboard airlock. The commanding officer was young, clean cut, with

wavy chestnut hair jutting below the brim of his uniform cap. Tod Haldane and Captain Marquette surrendered in the main quarters. From the moment he saw the young officer, Tod felt there was something familiar about him.

"So we meet again," he said to the other.

"Not that I know of," retorted the officer cheerily. "I'm certain it's our first meeting. My name is Captain Langhorn, and it's my duty to place you under arrest, Tod Haldane. Where's the girl?"

"What girl?" retorted Tod.

"You know what girl," returned Langhorn. "We're arresting you for kidnapping in space, and you know what that means."

For the first time, Tod realized that Lea was no longer with them, nor could he have guessed in which direction she had gone.

"So Marchand changed his mind," he snapped, "about arresting me for treason. Maybe it wouldn't be so good to put me out of the way for treason, when it happens that the blood of thousands will be on his hands, and I was trying to prevent it from happening."

"Don't be funny, Haldane," retorted the young officer. "We just got orders to arrest you for kidnapping Lea Marchand. And if we find her on board you'll get a quick space trial—and a quicker conviction and punishment, I assure you."

The crew in the blue metalline of the colony was herded into an aft hull and a guard was placed before the main quarters while the boarding party departed to search the ship for the girl.

"*'Sus Maria! Keednapping, non?'*" croaked out Captain Marquette, his mustached mouth twisting with sardonic humor. "So zat ees ze sharge! *Sacre! What a femme!* Let them prove so crazee a thing! While zey were boarding, I was watching ze sun. Ze sun flicker' jost once. Lak lifeboat, sneaking off into blindin' rays."

"Good grief, you don't think Lea's gone,

do you?" demanded Tod anxiously. "That's a long trip, and a dangerous one."

Captain Marquette laid a rough hand on his arm and admiration glittered from his beady eyes.

"What a *femme*, that Lea! She's got what you call plock! Very plocky! A terribl' journeey, but zat woman will make it," he went on. "*Sapristi!*—she ess lak the women of zee ol' days! Jus' to theenk she ees the spawn of zat *diable!* Perhap' she went for help!"

FROWNING his perplexity, Tod paced the floor like a caged beast, tortured by the thought of the cosmic cloud that was coming closer to the planets with every second.

Captain Langhorn came after an interval, scratching his curly head in frank bewilderment.

"The girl's not on board," he admitted sheepishly, "But I guess I'd better hold you anyway."

"Did you get any orders to that effect?" demanded Tod wonderingly.

"Well, no," admitted Langhorn reluctantly. "But Marchand seemed so certain you'd run off with his girl—"

All of a sudden Captain Marquette burst out with a loud guffaw that revealed his strong white teeth.

"*Sacre mundo!* Zen you've no authoritee to seize ze sheep!" he announced in a triumphant manner. "An' since ze searchin' ees over, we must ask you to leave. *Mon Capitaine*, you know zee interspacial laws!"

That Langhorn was wavering was certain, but he waved them back with a peremptory gesture.

"We're under a special law now," he told them. "I'll contact Borles Marchand for instructions."

"*Bien!* An' while doing so," remarked Captain Marquette, "tell him zat his daughter, ze so brave and beautiful *femme*, ees not on the sheep, but ees right now on ze planet Mars!"

"What!" Tod whirled upon the colonial officer savagely, and even Langhorn stared his amazement. "How did you know? She'll die there, die like a rat in a trap with the rest of the colonists with—"

"*Madre de Dios!* Wher' else?" returned Captain Marquette. "Non' of ze lifeboats have fuel for beyon' Mars. Where you theenk your plocky *querida* head for? You see, *amigo*, eet shows up ze han' of ze *diable!* What you theenk Marchand do now? Lea's on Mars, an' he most protect zat planet now, or realiz' 'is own daughter will be doomed with ze rest."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," broke in Langhorn. "He'll probably merely give the orders to make a landing there and pick her up, whether she wants to or not. As far as I can see, it wouldn't make much difference whether she were left there or not."

Meanwhile an auxiliary crew had been established at the posts in the colony ship and the entire squadron was ordered to proceed in the general direction of the planet Mars. Tod Haldane and Captain Marquette were placed in the cell room known as the brig.

An undetermined number of hours passed, and a quick step sounded on the outer corridor. The lock clicked and Langhorn stood before them, slightly less immaculate now, and his face wrinkled with an expression of worry.

"Look here, Haldane," he broke in without preamble. "I didn't quite get what you were talking about a moment ago, as regards to the Martian planet being doomed. You see, I've some relatives there—"

"Of course!" exclaimed Tod, suddenly recognizing the resemblance. "George Langhorn! He's the planetary food commissioner! And you've sealed him to certain death."

He hurriedly explained how the ferric dust would gather in huge drifts on the red planet, would absorb the last vestige of oxygen around the polar regions, and would quickly act to deprive the colonists of life.

Long tortuous days would ensue in which the entire planet would be smothered slowly. As the meaning of his words trickled into the mind of his captor, Langhorn looked horrified.

"Great Heaven, man!" he exploded. "I can't believe it's that bad. It would be inhuman! No man could do that. If it is true, there's no chance for the colony ship to escape now, even if I mutinied with the entire crew. You see, it's completely surrounded, and we're nearing the Martian port."

"Then there's only one chance," returned Tod grimly, "and that is the chance that Borles Marchand has enough humanity about him to hesitate before sacrificing his own blood and kin. Knowing him as I do, I doubt if even that will swerve him from his mad desire for world power."

CHAPTER FIVE

MOON OF IRON

THERE was a tiny barred port at the end of the prison cell through which Tod Haldane could peer. The spacer had come to rest in a circular expanse of black lava-basalt, while in the distances he saw the red compo-roofs of the clustered space colony. Over everything hung the blackness out of space, a tentacular devil-fish, amorphous in shape, that was growing larger so rapidly the eye could almost follow its movements.

Colonists were running wildly about the streets, and now he saw a crowd of them making a break for the moored space liners. It wasn't long till the outer hull was surrounded by a vast wave of fear-crazed humanity, hammering at beryllium airlocks with fists, sticks, and any kind of implements that happened to be handy.

"I can't stand it!" groaned Tod helplessly. "Poor devils, they'll be like that, after darkness comes with sifting dust. Darkness and cold. And finally, they'll smother. . . ."

Captain Marquette wiped the sweat from his brow and hid his eyes from the sight brokenly. "Zat Marchand ees no man!" he groaned. "A beast, a *diable!* Me, I'd geeve my soul for his neck in my han' right now! *Dios!* Geeve me that, no more!"

But with the gathering gloom of the last dusk came a period of mind-shattering waiting. When Captain Langhorn appeared with food rations, he seemed to be trying to hide the fact that he was sick at his stomach.

"We can't find the girl anywhere," he said. "She must be hidden somewhere in the colony. And there's no word yet from Marchand. I'm afraid there's no hope in that direction."

When he was gone, Captain Marquette looked after him disbelievingly.

"There's na blood in 'is veins," he said gravely. "Not a seengle drop. Eet's all wataire! *En verite*, nevaire hav' I seen such a man! 'Is own brother, dying out there. Dying ze thousan' deaths because he knows ze death she ees stalking Mars! Eet's not natural, Tod."

Tortured shrieks and groans from the outside came faintly, and the hammering upon the hull never ceased. Tod Haldane had sunk into a lethargy of hopelessness, but was aroused by a slight movement at the bottom of the cell door, where a dark fluid was oozing. It was too thick and dark to be water and when he dipped the end of his finger across the trickle, it came up crimson.

Someone lay dead beyond that door. His thoughts whirled rapidly, and as they revolved, a metallic gleam came from the edge of the crimson. He knelt swiftly and picked up the thing, wondering what it could be. It was a key.

Aroused from the helpless inertia of waiting, Captain Marquette was at his side when he tried the key in the cell door and whirled the tumbler. Then he jerked the door back. In the outer gloom of the corridor there was nothing living—only two bodies, slumped at their feet. The guard was dead,

his head smashed in by a metal bar, and the man lying over him was Lieutenant Croft, half of his body torn away by the blast of a caustin gun.

"'Sus! Zee *bien* Croft!" Captain Marquette was whimpering with emotion. "'E had zee pass keys in 'is pocket, and zey must not hav' found zem. Escapin' zee hull, 'e made a way here, zen fought lak a hero! Silentlee. Deadlee. With 'is dying effort he shov' the key beneat' zee door. Ah, he was zee brave man, Croft."

"We'll have to be worthy of that sacrifice," muttered Tod, biting his lips. "And we'll do it, Captain."

MARQUETTE'S face was hard as granite now, and there was something murderous in his manner. Kneeling, he wrenched the caustin gun from the dead guard's hand.

"Back to zee hatch," he growled. "There'll be othaires down zere. Croft must have left zee way open."

They were headed down into the hull of the ship when a man in officer's uniform rounded the turn. He didn't know what struck him. The perplexed look on his face was melted with the rain of deadly caustin rays. Presently they found the loose ventilator through which Croft had managed to escape. Tod started to parley, but Captain Marquette had not hesitated for one moment.

Walking stiffly erect, he went toward the rampway descent leading to the storage hatch. Two guards stood there, gossiping and smoking cigarettes. These also made futile gestures toward their guns and died silently, cleanly, leaving two more available weapons lying on the floor. A few minutes later the startled though determined members of the crew came blinking up from the dark passageways, their excited whispers of curiosity being silenced instantly by orders from Captain Marquette.

There were three catwalks leading to the conning room. Splitting into as many

groups, each equipped with one of the caustin guns in the hand of a lead man, they parted along branching ways.

Captain Langhorn was busy writing in a ship's log, his furrowed brow concentrated as though he didn't like the job very well. All of a sudden he froze to immobility, for the shadow of a man and a gun had fallen across the page.

"Get up," ordered Tod in a chill tone. "You've got company here on Mars, Captain Langhorn. You're going to visit your brother."

"No, not that," pleaded Langhorn, peering about and seeing that his officers had raised their hands before the wild visages of men in the blue metalline of Mars. "You can't do that! You can spare us that! We're not responsible for what Marchand does. We're taking *his* orders."

"Neither are *they* responsible," decreed Tod, gesturing toward the outer hulls where the clamoring was audible. "They're under his orders, too, but won't be for long."

With the suddenness of a snake, Langhorn ducked and bored in with a terrific blow, flinging Tod's gun aside. Eyes flickered to the scene, and in an instant men were moving, fighting and cursing. Taken unaware, Tod Haldane lurched back against the wall, fighting to keep the hands from his throat. Twisting aside, he managed to get a deft wrestling lock on one of Langhorn's outflung arms and swung suddenly.

Langhorn plumped into the floor, then came dazedly to his knees, but a short upercut knocked him flat and senseless on the decking. In the meanwhile caustin guns had jabbed short death-dealing beams and the fact that Captain Marquette had been ready and vindictive quickly turned the tide of struggle, although three of Langhorn's officers had been seriously wounded.

"Kick them out," ordered Tod, "and pick up the first able-bodied men you find to take their places. We'll try to blast out

of here before the other ships know what we're doing."

When he looked through the conner he found that the cowardly Langhorn had lied about the spacer being surrounded by patrol ships. Evidently a fear that the colonists might break in some way had sent the remainder of the squadron scuttling for earth. Small wonder that they quailed before the jetty nebular blackness that was encompassing space in an inexorable advance and would presently be sifting down upon a darkened earth.

Captain Marquette came from below, his face wan and drawn.

"Eet ees too late, *non?*" he asked.

"Not yet. Blast out to space, Captain," returned Tod. "There's a slight possibility that we can beat the cosmic cloud yet, if we hurry."

"*Bien!* Zose yellow-bellies have scar' ze rest," grunted Captain Marquette, glancing through the glassite. "Zey are pushing back from ze blast range."

The signal was given and the colony ship staggered from a side blast, reared on its end, and lurched up as a lower cushion of solid flame scorched the basalt. As a last memory, they had a glimpse of a solid mass of terrified people screaming and flinging their hands supplicatingly at the stars.

A GAIN the electro-cosmic gun was manned, and Tod Haldane held himself sternly in abeyance as he waited for the space-clad men to get ready on the outer cleft. As he watched, a slow black silt began to settle before the glassite, began piling up over the edge of the outer rim. Black snow!—arranging itself in little patterns over the outside hulls beneath which the magnets of the degravite screens lay!

"The cloud is here," he told Captain Marquette. "The edge of the cloud is here." Then he gave the signal. The spacer lurched from the recoil, and almost from the front

of the metallic projector the jagged tracers of lightning climbed along atomic paths from dust particle to dust particle.

Instantly the outer spaces were seething with a turmoil of blackness, puffing out and vanishing instantly in a high wave. The space-clad men were like black soot-covered demons now, and were wiping their visors free, staring upward for command. Again Tod's hand descended, and again the terrible discharge began along outer furlers of the dense approaching cloud. Now, however, the fringes had been beaten back and were noticeably more distant.

He could see the men in space-suiting jumping around like mad jumping jacks, and when he turned, Captain Marquette's face was cracked in a bewildered, disbelieving grin. Before them an astonishing sight was transpiring.

Contracting in upon itself, the vast cloud of dust was becoming smaller and smaller, its deflating fringes disappearing like drawn curtains to reveal the hitherto hidden stars of the old familiar universe. Tod Haldane was shouting too, crazy thing he could never remember, for he sensed that they had really won.

Incredibly, with amazing swiftness, the blackness was contracting, diminishing to unbelievable smallness. So rapidly was its vanishing, it seemed that it was to disappear forever, but finally a ball of solid substance emerged, a sphere of coagulating iron, and as they watched, the solidified spacial body curved slightly in its path, and began racing in a retrograde manner around the planet Mars.

"There's your miracle!" explained Tod Haldane joyously. "And perhaps there's your answer as to how retrograde satellites come into being. The gravity lines of the solar system must have helped halt the whirling movements of the dust particles, as well as the physical masses of the outer planets, already in the rim of the rotating cloud."

"Ze moon of iron!" gasped Captain Mar-

quette with an air of unbelieving jubilation. "*Mon Ami*, who could weesh for mor'? Now Mars she's got ze iron, ze buildin' stuff of ze universe, and ol' Marchand will talk ze business to our colonee now. Mor' iron zan he evaire dream of!"

It was quite a different Martian planet than the one they had left. A newly dawned sun was shining brazenly across the red plains as though to deny its participation in any events of the previous day. A great multitude was gathered about the landing fields, but now they were rejoicing.

A vast hush fell over them as Tod Haldane appeared, calmly and without ceremony, and raised his hand for them to listen.

"People of Mars," he said simply. "It is the grace of God that your day of extinction is not come. I know that within a few years, mechanisms will be devised that can extract the precious oxygen from the ferric oxide that lays in vast deserts around Mars. I know, too, that enough hydrogen, in an invisible form, is present around our planet to recreate lakes and streams, to make a verdant paradise out of Mars.

"To that I, as your elected representative, have dedicated my life. Already our scientists are bordering on this great discovery. The fears of the moment are past, and a glorious future lays ahead."

He paused and a thunderous roar of approbation greeted his words, but again he quieted them.

"You have not heard everything yet," he continued. "The people of earth are not as brutal and selfish as you may have thought in your hour of darkness. Only a few of their leaders were heartless enough to have doomed our remnant of their own race to death for reasons of personal avarice. I have just been in radio contact with the World Congress.

"During the short interval in which the knowledge of your fate has become known to the vast millions on earth, a revolt, tremendous as it was uncontrollable, came

into being. So tremendous was the discord that nothing could prevail against it, and the short despotic rule of one who schemed to be dictator has ended. The World Congress has just exiled Borles Marchand."

IN THE astonished calm that followed his announcement, Tod Haldane leaped down the steps and took the hand of a girl who was standing there, gazing up at him. Dodging quickly from the crowd, they bounded up the airlock and watched as the cheering populace bore Captain Marquette down the main thoroughfare on their shoulders.

He led her quickly into the connor tower where the vast roar of the celebrating colonists was almost inaudible. Even the crew was gone from the spacer. Down below, the men in blue metalline were being lifted on shoulders of the exultant people, were being carried by a solid wave of humanity into the greatest city of colonized Mars.

"I'm sorry, Lea," said Tod, not meeting her eyes. "That's not all there was to tell, but there was no use in informing the crowd below. They'll know it soon enough. In their sudden deliverance, they would be unfeeling."

Lea Marchand bit her lip suddenly and hid her wan face on his shoulder.

"I know what you're about to say," she sobbed. "His entire life was built upon power. And without that power, there would be no use to keep on living. Not for him, Tod."

Without power! Strange, Tod Haldane was thinking, as his eyes caught the merest flicker of a new black satellite, eclipsing one of the brighter Martian moons that hung low over the pale horizon—a new satellite, of pure iron. Without power? Why, locked in that black ball of iron was more power than the solar system would ever need, and because it had been so plain before his eyes, Borles Marchand had never seen. Small wonder that life had become unbearable to his bitter, unenlightened eyes.

Tod Haldane, the first representative from the Martian East State, suddenly was feeling tremendously awkward in the remote seclusion of the connor tower, alone with the sobbing beautiful girl. His hands moved to her shoulders, and they were so stiff they felt like claws. For Lea Marchand was as lovely and feminine as any girl in that ultra-modernized age of 2093. And from time immemorial, a weeping woman has been enough to shatter the heart-string of any enamoured man. Yet Tod was abruptly aware that he did not know just how to go about making love.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes I did—Actually and literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy as can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 130, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 130, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

Ship of Cold Death

by D. J. FOSTER

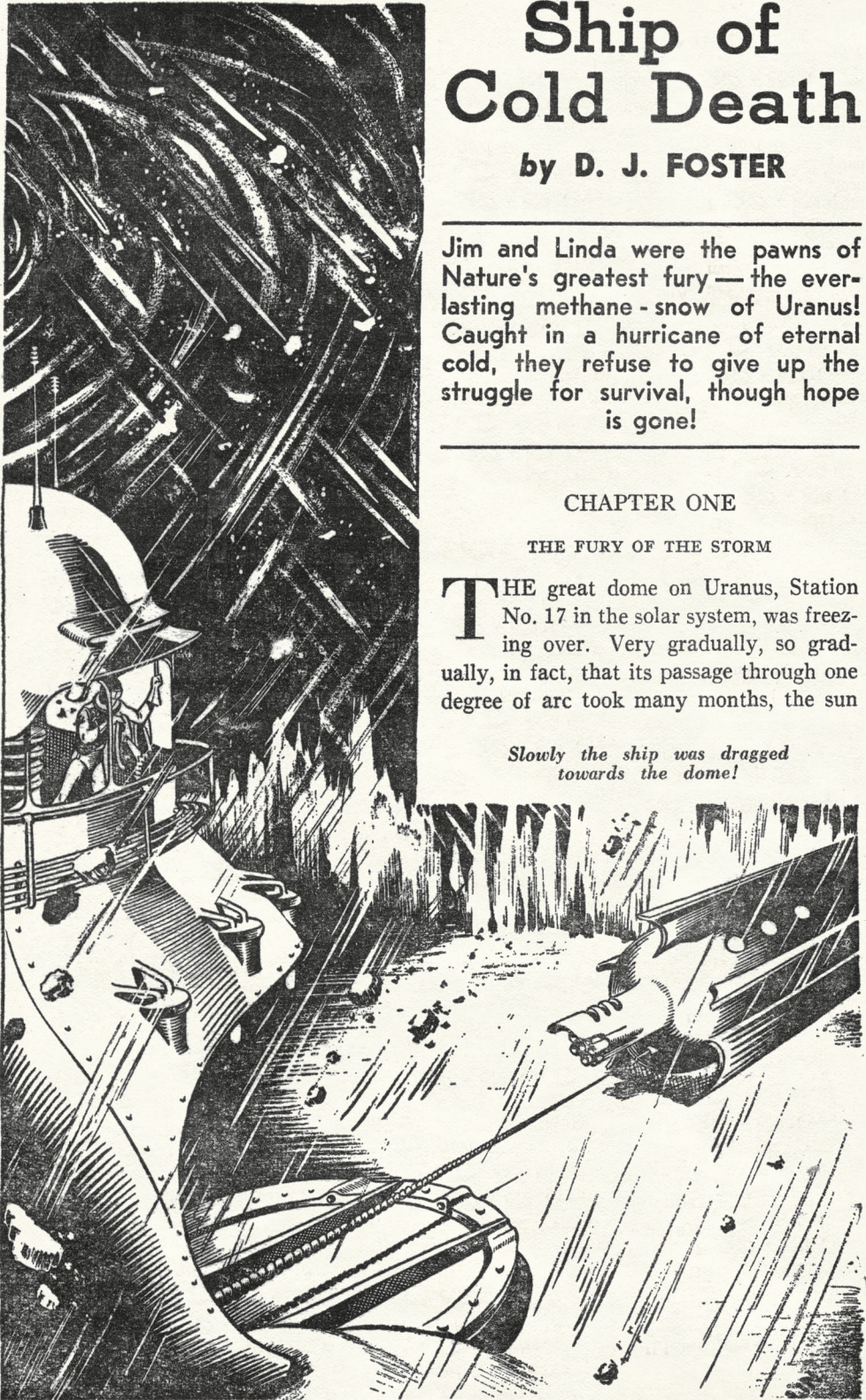
Jim and Linda were the pawns of Nature's greatest fury—the everlasting methane-snow of Uranus! Caught in a hurricane of eternal cold, they refuse to give up the struggle for survival, though hope is gone!

CHAPTER ONE

THE FURY OF THE STORM

THE great dome on Uranus, Station No. 17 in the solar system, was freezing over. Very gradually, so gradually, in fact, that its passage through one degree of arc took many months, the sun

Slowly the ship was dragged towards the dome!



had been sinking lower and lower in the sky, a weird dwarf sun that danced crazily in a pitch black sky and set up fantastic mirages in the crystal clear atmosphere, so that for all the clarity of vision and sharpness of detail, the packed white wastes had a ghost-like look to them.

Jim Carlton stood by the big oval window, gazing out at the picture of utter desolation with steady grey eyes. He saw the layer of white flakes stir as the wind caught them, then whirl up in a flurry, only to subside again, quiescent, before repeating their frenzied gyrations under the impulse of an even stronger gust. Presently he looked down at the strip of paper he was holding in his hands and read it again. It was brief.

PACK UP AND QUIT. WORK FINISHED.

He looked out again at the weird scene, and a smile touched his lips.

"Well, that's that," he murmured. "Now to see about leaving the sinking ship."

A tremor shook the floor, and even through the massive steel and concrete walls, the unearthly howling of the giant wind penetrated to the quiet of the room. It was a sinister sound, and a frown crossed Carlton's face as he heard it.

"They're backing," he soliloquized. "Hell's own weather, and the Devil's at the reins!"

The frozen wastes outside lifted in a shower of white flakes and flung itself past the window in a solid sheet, blotting out the flickering sun and the black sky. Carlton knew that he would have to start very soon, or he would never get back to the base. His ship was only a small patrol vessel capable of carrying two people, and its strength was limited.

He had been working in this great dome for nearly two years, as time is judged by earthly standards, and until recently he had had five other men to keep him company. They had worked in shifts, sinking the deep

shaft into the interior of Uranus, always trying to find minerals to work . . . and never finding them. Nor had the men before them been able to find any, nor the men before *them*, and now, he knew, they never would. It had been the same for nearly three complete generations—ever since, in fact, man had come to Uranus. That desperate search for minerals, for, in fact, solid rock of any description, had gone on year after year, decade after decade, and always they were faced with the same bitter results. Ice, ice, ice! Methane, carbon dioxide, ammonia, hydrogen—frozen layers that sank for miles on and below them, but of rock there had been no sign, not the slightest vestige.

NOW at last it was to end, this useless bitter fight, and Jim Carlton was glad, for the waste in expenditure was appalling. If indeed there was a solid core, it lay far below the packed masses of ice, lost forever in the centre of the great 31,000-mile diameter sphere.

He set about making the necessary arrangements for his departure. Methodically, he gathered up the pile of notes that remained, all of them neatly filed and referenced—notes, that, at any rate, possessed a certain value, despite the negative results of the expedition. There were also some valuable instruments to be taken, though the majority of these had been removed when his five co-workers had left, leaving him in sole charge of the dome. A few personal belongings he also packed into the little vessel that lay in the cradle before the airlock, mostly books and movie cameras. Then he checked up on the fuel supply, for it would never do to run out of fuel out there in the hideous wastes, where nobody would ever find him, or hear his faint radio calls for help. The air reserves, too, came in for their share of inspection, and lastly the food, this being among the least important items.

The wind outside had now risen in

strength, and it constantly smashed with terrifying violence against the smooth sides of the dome, setting up recurring vibrations that shook every article in the room. Carlton felt worried about this, for the wind should not have achieved such strength yet. The depreciation of atmospheric conditions on Uranus was a thing that took place gradually, not in leaps and bounds, yet already the gale was approaching a point at which it would be a herculean task to control a ship.

He walked over to the window again and looked out. Great masses of the ice "floor" had been torn away in chunks and were being thrown about by the wind as if they were pieces of paper. One such jagged mass, a clear couple of tons in weight, sailed out of the mist of flying particles in a majestic manner that suggested a galleon in full sail, and smashed itself against the wall of the dome with frightful violence.

"My God!" muttered Carlton. "A few more of those beauties, and the dome will begin to feel sorry for itself.

A deafening crash from the other side of the room announced the impact of another ice "shell," and one of the hanging lights went out. Carlton glanced at the dial on the wall that recorded the strength of the wind, and whistled. The needle flickered at "650," and as he watched, it climbed a little further over the graduated dial face—650 miles per hour, and the wind had only just commenced to blow with more than its usual violence. He would have to start now, if he were ever to make the base with a whole skin.

But just as he was about to turn from the window, he saw something that froze him with amazement and horror. Out of the swirl of flying ice splinters there swept a black object that dived and soared, dipped and wheeled, fighting against the savage blast that threatened to hurl it to destruction on the packed floor beneath. It was a small space-ship, and Carlton groaned as he watched it, for it was evidently partially out

of control, and only a miracle could prevent it from being dashed to pieces within the next few moments.

"Get it up, man," he shouted, though not a soul could have heard him. "For the love of heaven, get altitude, or you'll be done—ah!"

It was as he had feared. The little vessel swept around drunkenly two or three times, and then shot downwards and buried its nose in the ice. At once the wind seized the upright tail and began tugging it round. In another moment it would have it out of its anchorage and would hurl it away over the uneven surface until it was a shattered riven wreck, the air gone.

Jim Carlton left the window and ran madly down the corridor. There was just a chance that the ship might be saved, but it all depended on how quickly he could move.

He arrived at a curiously shaped airlock in which reposed a heavy gun, fully as large as a six-inch field piece, while in racks were placed many cartridges and coils of wire. It was intended to be used for just such a purpose as this one, but with the difference that a 650-mile-an-hour gale was not one of the conditions included in its use. . . .

"If this wire holds," he muttered, "it'll be a living miracle."

He swung the gun around, and with it, being part of the entire mobile assembly, swung the curved outer part of the airlock. It was an airtight gun nacelle that revolved on ball bearings. Carlton squinted along the telescopic sights, and revolved the gun until the wrecked vessel came into the field of view. The wind had twisted it around, so that the bunch of projectors at the tail faced him. Elevating the muzzle, he flung a coil of wire into the drum, and slammed home a charge, closing the breech smartly. Sighting the gun on one of the projector tubes that faced him, he flicked down the firing lever. There was a sharp smack, the

barrel recoiled, and the drum sang wildly as the wire payed out.

THE shot missed. Cursing, he repeated the operation, but waited this time until there occurred one of those freak pauses in the wind, then slammed down the lever. This time there was no error, and he saw the projectile streak into the rocket tube. There was a momentary flash of incandescence as the charge burnt fiercely, and then the wire was securely welded to the inside of the ship's projector tube.

Then he put the winding motor into operation, and the wire tautened. Gradually the ship heeled over under the pull of the powerful motor, and then it was free. At once, the wind took charge and swept the vessel around, over and over, buffeting it mercilessly. If that wire broke—

It did not break, and Jim Carlton sent up a silent prayer of thanks to the Powers That Be. Slowly the ship was dragged towards the dome, stern first, like a bob on a plumb line, swinging back and forth as the gale seized in a mad fury. At length it was held firmly against the gun nacelle, and now started the worst part of the job. The entire nacelle had to be moved backwards in its own airlock, drawing the ship in with it, and to do this, Carlton had to don a space-suit and work from behind the nacelle itself.

He had not performed this operation for a long time, and he had to take considerable care that no mistake was made. The forces had to be balanced exactly, or the moving mechanism would jam, and leave the ship and its occupant trapped half in and half out of the airlock.

Slowly the nacelle retreated, while Carlton frantically sluiced the runways and bearings with gallons of oil, until at last the ship lay within the walls of the dome, and with a single movement, he brought down the outside door that sealed the entire airlock and containing nacelle from the deadly poisonous atmosphere without.

He was bathed in a fine sweat when he had finished, for the operation of the mechanism was not a one man job, and he had had to move with considerable speed during the process. He went forward now, and removing his cumbersome suit, set about opening the airlock of the badly battered ship with an atomic blast cutter. The job was quickly done, and slipping into the interior, he made his way forward to where the figure of the pilot lay sprawled across the control panel in an ungraceful heap. He seized the figure by the shoulder, pulled it back into the chair, and—

"Well, I'm damned!" cried Jim Carlton.

The girl stirred and opened her eyes, and for a moment she looked at him in amazement. To his intense relief, she did not ask where she was, or utter anything else that could be called a traditional remark, but just said "Thanks," and promptly fainted again.

Carlton lifted her from the seat and took her into the dome's main room, where he laid her on the couch and went in search of brandy. When he returned she was awake again and sitting up. She meekly allowed him to pour a stiff dose of brandy down her throat.

She was really quite pretty, Carlton observed with approval. She had very nice blue eyes, masses of dark brown hair, and a perfect complexion that was not spoiled even by the smudges of oil that adorned it. But the whole thing was utterly beyond understanding—a girl out there on Uranus, hundreds of millions of miles from anything that even remotely resembled civilization!—and in a tiny ship whose strength could hardly cope with the strain of an earth-born storm, let alone the fiendish winds that swept this planet!

Her next words helped clear things.

"I should never have left my uncle's ship," she said. "It was a mad thing to do, but I did want to see the planet, so I just took the small boat and dropped off without telling him."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes, he's the mining director, you know—Charles Benning."

Carlton's eyes opened. Who had not heard of Charles Benning—he who owned most of the Lunar mines, and held the largest share in those of Jupiter as well? His name was a by-word in the commercial spheres of the solar system, and he was rated as being the fifth most wealthy man living. And this was his niece!

"My name is Linda Benning," she said. "I've got a lot to thank you for, Mr.—"

"Jim Carlton. Look here, Miss Benning, I don't think you realize what you've run into. Your ship's pretty nearly useless now, you know."

She shrugged prettily. It seemed a matter of small consequence to her.

"Oh, that's all right—my uncle will send down another ship to pick me up as soon as he knows I'm gone. You've got a radio, I suppose?"

Carlton's lips tightened. Why in the name of all that's wonderful were girls like this allowed to run around in two-cent lifeboats and get themselves into a mess? It was crass insanity of her uncle not to have kept a closer watch on her, for he must have known she was bound to do something like this. Carlton hated having to say it, but it had to be done.

"I'm afraid, Miss Benning, that you're beyond anyone's aid now—even your uncle's. You would have been ten thousand times safer if you had remained in space, in your uncle's yacht. Anything's safer than Uranus at a time like this. Look through that window—do you see that?"

The flying particles were a solid sheet that swept past the window without a break. Every now and then came a heavy thud as a large block of solid methane burst into fragments against the wall of the dome.

"That wind out there is close on 700 miles per hour, and it's rising. The temperature's standing now at —195 degrees Cen-

tigrade. See that white scurrying stuff? That's methane snow, millions of tons of it, and it's going to snow like that for another ten or fifteen years, until this dome is buried for miles under packed masses of it. And if this dome doesn't get buried within another two months, the wind'll be strong enough by then to tear it out of its foundations and throw it about until it looks like a bit of scrap tinplate. Nobody's going to send ships down from space into that to try and look for a tiny little vessel that, for all they know, is probably buried under two hundred feet of methane snow by now!" He added as an afterthought: "Not unless they've gone nuts, that is."

CHAPTER TWO

STRUGGLE WITH NATURE

THE girl's face had gone deathly white. It was clear that she had had no conception of the real nature of Uranus and its mad weather, or of the utter extremes of temperature that prevailed.

"What can I do?" she asked, now thoroughly frightened. "I can't stay here."

"Neither can I," replied Carlton grimly. "You'll have to take your chance with me, Miss Benning. This dome is being scuttled, and I'm leaving at once. In fact, I was just about to quit when you turned up."

She stared at him, trying to understand what he was saying. "Scuttling? Do you mean you're going to leave all this?" She waved her arm rather helplessly towards the equipment that covered the floor, and Jim nodded.

"You bet your Aunt Sarah we are," he said warmly. "Winter's coming, and frankly, I'd rather take the chance of finding a cool spot on the sun's surface than stay here during the winter." He became matter-

of-fact. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

She nodded dumbly, and Carlton felt a bit sorry for her. It must have been an awful shock to her, realizing that she was in a very awkward spot. And it was clear that she was just beginning to appreciate, too, that getting away from it was not going to be an easy job, either. For if a properly equipped rescue ship could not make the journey to the dome, what chance was there for them in the little two-seater of Carlton's, which she could see plainly, sitting in the cradle before the airlock? And it was a fact that Carlton himself was well aware of. Things had been left just a trifle too late for comfort. The winter gales had arrived before schedule, and conditions were terrible.

Carlton busied himself with the coffee. He had achieved his object, and had made the girl realize her position, and he did not wish to alarm her further. Idly he asked her questions about her uncle, and the ship, and what the trip was for.

"My uncle came out here to see if there really were any mineral wealth in this system," she said. "The reports have been very meager, and he has always preferred to see things for himself."

"Well, now that he's seen it, he'll probably scatter back in a number one hurry," said Carlton drily. "It's hell's own paradise, and that's praising it. This your first trip?"

"No, I've been to Mars, and of course, quite a lot to the Moon." She looked out at the sweeping white flakes. "How long did you say it would snow—fifteen years?"

Jim nodded. "Just that. This winter here's longish, you know—about forty-two years, or thereabouts."

"Forty-two years!" She was amazed. "I know nothing about Uranus. I guess it's always been more or less a name to me, and nothing else. I didn't know it was quite so bad here."

"It's worse than bad," said Carlton solemnly. "It's plumb awful."

SHE seized his arm and looked straight at him.

"What would have happened," she asked, "if one of my ports had burst while I was out there in the ship?"

He didn't reply for a moment, then:

"You would have died," he said quietly.

"Even before the methane gas got to you—frozen solid, without knowing what had happened to you."

"I see," she said softly, and then, "I think I've been a fool. I guess I deserve what's coming to me."

"You couldn't know," he said uncomfortably. "There aren't many folks who realize what a hell this place really is."

She stood for a moment gazing pensively at a selector panel, and when she spoke again, her voice was changed.

"Tell me all about it," she said. "About the planet, and what you've been doing out here."

"It's a strange planet," said Jim. "Its axis is set at only a few degrees to the plane of the ecliptic, which means that it's virtually lying on its side. Instead of spinning around its orbit like a gyroscope, it rolls around like a ball. There's only one place where you get an appreciable day and night, and that's at the equator, and then you don't notice the difference very much. It means that the sun drops down below the horizon for about five and a quarter hours, and then pops up again for another five and a quarter. But here, at the north pole, there's perpetual day for forty-two years, and then night for another forty-two. You get a bit of day and night sequence during autumn and spring, of course."

He pushed a steaming cup in her direction.

"What's it like during the summer?" she asked, sipping the coffee.

"Well, strictly speaking, you couldn't call it sweltering. The temperature rises to about —180 degrees Centigrade, and the methane snow evaporates—it sublimates straight into vapor. Of course, that sort of

thing sets up a bit of a disturbance in the atmosphere, and you get the methane screaming round the planet to the other side, where it promptly freezes again and settles as snow. That's what's happening here. The south pole is turning towards the sun, and the methane, which has been lying in a glacial mass for forty-two years, is subliming, and it's being swept around to this side."

At that moment there was a terrific crash from one side of the circular room. It was followed by a wild screaming, a series of thuds that shook the floor, and a second crash.

"What was that?" asked the girl, fearfully.

"That," said Jim Carlton, "was our safety valve blowing off. We've got three or four large airlocks situated around the circumference of the dome, and they're built in pretty hefty spring frames. You see, an airlock constitutes a weak spot in the structure of the dome, and the trouble is that, strong as you may make it by reinforcing, you will always have a fixed 'breaking point.' So they designed these with a shock absorbing device, so that if they are subjected to a very great wind pressure, they lift inwards on the 'cushions' and take off the brunt of the shock. This wind's like a five million ton steam hammer when it hits good and hard."

The dome was being shaken every second now by the raging tornado outside, and the drumming of the colliding masses of methane ice was becoming a steady roar.

"Are there any more of these stations on the planet, apart from the one you call the base?" she asked.

"There are six, around the equator," he replied. "X, XB, D, DY, N, and VJ. We're scuttling the lot. The base is near XB, in fact, the two domes are almost touching. We've got to make the base by compass readings alone—there are no landmarks on this planet; or none that last longer than two or three minutes."

He got two space-suits and gave one to the girl.

"Put it on," he directed, and showed her how to fix the heavy helmet so that it was perfectly airtight. When they had both clad themselves in these, he swung open the circular door in the side of the space ship, and stood aside for her to enter.

THE last thing he did before entering was to close the knife switches that operated the dome's heating and lighting units. There was a slight splutter from the switches, and the almost imperceptible humming from the units died to silence. The lights went out, and the only illumination that remained came from the dash light in the ship. The whole effect was one of the uncanny, and it was with an unpleasant sense of foreboding that Carlton dropped into the ship and closed the airlock door. Settling himself in the bucket seat, he pressed the contact that slid the vessel into the great airlock and automatically closed the door behind it.

"Now for it," he said, his voice strangely muffled in the helmet. "And remember, this is going to be a fight."

The girl nodded, and sat looking expectantly at the airlock door in front of them. She certainly was game, Carlton reflected. Without hesitation, he moved the switch that opened the outer door. The airlock was one that faced in the direction that the wind was blowing, and Carlton knew that when it opened, there would be a wholesome vacuum created in that lock.

As the door swung open, he put on full power, and the ship left the lock with a speed that took it in a straight line for a full two miles before the wind seized it and twisted it. Then it was thrown about like a piece of paper. So violent were the eddies, and so swiftly did their mood change, that Carlton had no sooner corrected a dangerous swing in the ship's course than he had to jerk it from twisting in the opposite direction. Control became

a farce; there was no control. He simply had to let the wind take them, and take them it did. Again and again it seemed as if they dropped for hundreds of feet, and when they did drop thus, he put full power into the under jets, lest they be hurled on to the glacier-like surface beneath and be dashed to pieces. He could not tell their height, for the altimeter would not register below three hundred feet, such was the insanity of its construction, and every drop was to him an agony of apprehension.

He tried to calculate how far they had traveled, for it was evident that he could no longer count on making the journey by means of the compass—their direction changed every second, and the compass was behaving like a totem. But he gave it up, for the wind was the opposite of constant, and they did not maintain a set speed for two minutes on end.

It began to get bitingly cold in the little vessel, and he shouted to the girl above the screaming of the wind.

"That lever there—it's the heating control—move it over to the left a bit—that's right."

Warmth returned to their chilling limbs, and the hoar frost that had formed on the bow part evaporated. Twice the wind flung the ship completely around, and each time the port was instantly covered with a deep layer of snow, and until it melted from the internal heat of the ship, they were flying blind—not that they could see anything when it was clear except the eternal mist of methane snow. But even to see that was comforting, in a sense.

Suddenly a mass of whiteness sprang out of the flying mist, and Carlton shouted. He threw on full power to the under jets, but they refused to lift the ship against the 800-mile an hour wind. They struck hard—and held.

"A drift!" cried Carlton. "Thank God it wasn't ice!"

But the situation was desperate. Even

as they watched, the methane snow piled up against the hull at a tremendous rate, and in less than fifteen seconds the window was totally covered. Carlton pushed down the underjet lever as far as it would go, but the effort was useless. He set it back to neutral, and gazed at the wall of snow in despair.

The ship sagged with a loud "scrunch." The weight of the rapidly accumulating snow above them was cementing them further and further into the drift. Born of desperation, an idea flashed into his mind.

He left the seat, and tracing the leads of the heating unit to its panel selector, he altered the wiring in a certain way. The girl watched him closely, and seeing what he was doing, she left her seat and came closer.

"Follow?" said Carlton, and she nodded. "It's all going to depend on the capacity of that unit—which is a Martin-Thaboult, so it should be able to do it."

He returned to the control seat, and moved the heating unit lever over its slide unit it notched against the farther stop. Gradually the internal heat of the ship rose until it became uncomfortably hot. The whole ship was being heated now—he had altered the wiring in such a manner that the coil of wire that ran the entire length of the hull—it was merely a structural wiring—took the full load from the atomic heating unit.

"This ought to heat things up a bit," he said grimly. "And it should move that stuff above us like nobody's business."

It did. In that incredibly low temperature, the results of a rapid rise in the heat content of the vessel's hull was amazing. The methane in the immediate neighborhood of the hull sublimed instantly, and finding no outlet, it naturally created one for itself. There was appalling shock, and Carlton got a glimpse of flying methane snow. At the same time, he opened the throttle, and they shot out of their tomb like a high-powered shell.

HE HAD time to note that there was a strange lull in the storm, and keeping the ship on the climb, he gained a considerable height before the calm broke violently. The altimeter was flickering at "750."

Reaching over, he pulled back the heating unit lever, for the heat was now stifling. In fact, it was not until the girl had stirred beside him that he realized she had fainted.

"If I can only get above this wind," he muttered. "We'll never get to the base if we don't; we're miles off our course as it is."

But they got to the base, and when they least expected it. For two hours they had striven to make height in the frail little craft, and Carlton was despairing of ever reaching their destination without again being dashed to the ground—this time on ice, probably. The altimeter was no longer functioning, a sinister fact. Carlton expected every second to see that dreadful white "floor" rise to meet them. He was weary with the perpetual battling, his hands numb with holding the levers.

Suddenly the two dark shapes appeared ahead, less than two hundred yards from the bow, and desperately he attempted to lift the ship before it struck them. They skimmed over the tops of the rounded masses, and he saw them distinctly. Just for a moment everything was startlingly clear. He could see the airlocks in the sides of the domes, the searchlights in their sunken housings, even the rivets of the metal plated sides.

Then the domes were gone, and Carlton was struggling to turn a ship that was immovably fixed in the grip of an 800-mile an hour wind, a ship that refused to obey the helm, but plunged on helplessly in that screaming holocaust of driving flakes, away from safety and humankind, everything that its two passengers had fought so desperately to reach.

"We missed it!" cried Carlton hoarsely. He seemed stunned, and repeated again and again, "We missed it, we missed it!"

"Turn the ship!" Linda Benning said frantically, "We *must* get back there— we *must*!"

"I can't—it won't turn." He had the levers down to their lowest positions. "Oh, my God, it won't turn!"

The nose of the ship lifted drunkenly, as if it were a soggy-helmed cargo ship that had run on to a sandbank. It shuddered from stem to stern, a tortured, wracking shudder. Quite suddenly it commenced to rise, and continued to rise at an enormous speed. The needle of the altimeter traveled over the dial face until it reached the further pin; the feet recording numerals slotted back and the graduated face of the "miles" dial slipped into place. The needle swung back to "0" and started to move over the dial again.

Carlton counted mechanically, his brain so dazed that he hardly knew what he was saying: "Five—ten—fifteen—twenty—twenty-five—thirty—thirty-five—"

The flying mists of methane snow thinned, were gone. Above them were the black heavens, the flickering bright star that was the sun. And still they continued to rise, continued until the sun ceased to wobble back and forth in the sky, but remained steady—until the wind no longer screamed past the hull in demoniacal fury, but whispered in gentle tones with the softness of a summer breeze—until at last it vanished, and there was silence and stillness, and the ship rode with a rock-like steadiness that was weird.

Below them raged a white holocaust, unheard now, and unfelt. So distant did it seem, so different was the utter quiet that now encompassed them, that already it appeared to them as a part of some other life, that hideous fight with the demon of Uranus' storms. They were safe, and as Carlton saw the altimeter, with the needle gently moving past the "450," he knew

that they had lifted above the winds, above the atmosphere itself, and that they had been saved from the almost certain death that had faced them.

CHAPTER III

MOONS OF URANUS

CARLTON reached down and picked up the thermos flask that was clamped to the hull at his feet. They opened the faceplates of their helmets, and took long drinks of the hot coffee.

"Where are we now?" asked Linda Benning, handing the flask back.

"In space," said Carlton. "That up-current took us right up to the top levels of the atmosphere, and from there it was an easy job for the motor to carry us the rest of the way."

He took the dial readings, and a few moments work with a slide rule enabled him to put the ship in an orbit around Uranus. That done, he plugged in the radio, and sent out a long call to the base.

But there was no reply. He tried several times, but the receiver remained silent. He then switched to inter-ship wave-length, and sent out another call. Somewhere, circling about the planet, was Benning's space-yacht—they would surely hear. But after fifteen minutes, Carlton gave it up. It was possible that the ship was on the far side from them, and mighty Uranus was distorting the signals. Perhaps. But Carlton felt vaguely disquieted. It was understandable that the base could not hear his relatively weak signals, but surely Benning's yacht...

An entirely fresh danger became apparent. The little patrol ship was built only for short journeys, and its fuel and air capacity was limited. If neither the base nor Benning could hear them...

"We're in a rummy spot," he said, his eyes roving the heavens. "At present we're out of touch with everybody, and until we get a message from the base, we shall re-

main out of touch. Even then, we shan't be able to reply, because this transmitter can't reach them."

The girl stared. "Do you mean we're—we're isolated?"

"Sort of," Carlton said quietly.

"We could send flare signals"—hopefully.

"No good—they wouldn't see them, even if they were looking for them, which they're not. They can't see anything through that storm, anyway." He thought for a moment, then asked: "What about your uncle's ship? Is it stationed far out?"

She nodded. "Yes, more than seven hundred thousand miles from Uranus."

Carlton groaned. "No wonder the radio wouldn't reach them."

"Couldn't we go out and . . . sort of . . . look for them?"

Carlton fluttered his hand wearily.

"Look for them in several thousand billion cubic miles of space? Kid, we've got to be realists—we wouldn't have a chance."

He checked over the dials. "We've got enough air for seven days," he said. "But we'll have to go careful with the food." There was not very much water, either—perhaps enough to last them for four days. "I'm sorry . . . sorry you had to be in with me in this."

"Don't be silly," she whispered. "You don't have to be sorry about anything; it's for me to be sorry. Perhaps if I hadn't added extra weight to the ship, you could have risen above the storm and got to the base sooner."

"With you or without, I couldn't have turned the ship in that wind," he said. Thereafter there was silence for a spell. At length she placed a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Carlton—Jim—what chances have we got of getting out of this?"

HE LOOKED at her gravely for a moment, then,

"You can take it, can't you?"

"I can take it," she repeated quietly.

"Then—they're very small. Very small

indeed. Grayson, at the base, doesn't know where we are. He will be leaving within twenty-four hours now—it would be impossible to stay longer for fear of jeopardizing the safety of the entire expedition. Our only chance to contact him will be when he rises out of the atmosphere—and then, he will not be able to stop. It will be a matter of two days before he could turn the ship on a re-plotted course, and come back to search for us. Let us say five days in all before he even got back to Uranus. And then he would have to find us. You see, in space, one works to a pattern. We've—slipped out of that pattern."

The hand on his arm clenched a little, but she braved a smile.

"It humbles one a good deal, doesn't it? I guess I always had my own way—in most things; and I must have thought that nature would just stop and let me take a look at her—down there. Funny that I should have got a fresh angle on things—this way."

The next six hours passed slowly. Linda Benning slept most of the time, dead tired. Carlton was as weary as she, but he dared not sleep for a moment. Continually his eyes searched the heavens, anxiously, vainly, for the silver speck that would denote the yacht. It seemed incredible that Benning should not make some attempt to search for his niece. Yet the continued silence of the radio could only mean one thing—that the yacht was still so far from the centre of the Uranian system that it was beyond the range of any radio call.

When the girl woke, they shared some food, and drank sparingly of their precious stock of water—the coffee was cold now, and undrinkable. Carlton kept it, however. When the water became exhausted, they would be glad to drink anything.

One of Uranus' moons slipped around the limb of the giant planet, a silvery crescent, mottled with dark streaks and irregular ivory-tinted patches. It was Ariel, the innermost moon. Linda Benning gasped

with delight as she caught sight of it, for it was a beautiful thing.

"How many satellites are there?" she wanted to know.

"Four," said Carlton. He pointed to the left of Ariel. "There's another up there—Titania, I think. The other two are Umbriel and Oberon. They're pretty right enough, but useless hulks—just ice-cold masses of worthless rock conglomerate. They're none of them more than a thousand miles in diameter, and Ariel is only about 550 miles across."

Talking about them helped to take his mind off the grimness of their position—and it prevented the girl from dwelling too much upon it. She seemed fascinated by the satellites, and sat gazing at them with her hands clasped around her knees.

Carlton took the opportunity to study her more closely, and found the results satisfying. She was not only pretty—she had character, and plenty of it. She was something of a new type to him; he found her, in many ways, intriguing.

She turned her head to find him looking at her, but she did not seem embarrassed by his scrutiny.

"You're not very much like my picture of a colonial pioneer," she said with a smile.

"Aren't I?" Carlton was amused. "What did you expect, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. You're—well, you're too matter-of-fact."

"You mean I'm not rugged enough to fit the pattern?"

"Something like that," she admitted. "I always did imagine that pioneers looked—well, pioneers."

"And instead, I'm more like a chicken farmer." He sighed, and gave her a look of mock pathos. "How hard it is to achieve fame!"

"You're laughing at me," she accused, and he became penitent.

"Not really," he said gravely. "But would you rather I looked rugged and bristly, and properly he-mannish?"

What reply she was going to make to that, Carlton never knew; he caught a glimpse of the great black sphere, edged with the purest silver, bearing down on them with a sort of inexorable majesty, and his hands moved to the controls with lightning speed.

CHAPTER IV

STRANGE DREAMS

HOW they escaped being crushed to impalpable dust, Carlton was ever at a loss to know. Swiftly as the little vessel responded to the controls, it seemed as if the flying mass of rock could not fail to strike them fair and square in the bows. He got a fleeting glimpse of a rough, treacherously jagged surface speeding not three yards above the upper limits of the curving window. The girl screamed once in utter terror as the thing seemed about to hit them, and then the heavens were clear, and Carlton was pulling the ship back to its orbit, which it had left with such violence.

The suddenness of the whole affair had quite unnerved him, and left him trembling and sweating. It was only after several minutes that he was composed sufficiently to turn in his seat and look through the rear window after the retreating sphere. Its surface presented a dull silver appearance, with occasional blotchy markings of indistinct shape and size.

"Merciful heavens!" breathed Carlton. "Unsuspected and undiscovered, and we had to charge right into it!"

"What was it?" The girl's voice shook a little.

"Satellite number five," he replied. "So near the primary that nobody ever found it. About twenty-five to thirty miles in diameter, at a rough guess." He seemed to be debating something in his mind, and glanced at the fuel meter. At length: "We've got ample stocks of juice—I'm going after it to give it the once-over."

He turned the ship on its axis, decelerated to zero orbital speed, veering out in an arc at the same time to avoid a severe drop as Uranus pulled them down. In a few seconds he had regained orbital velocity in the opposite direction, and was catching up on the fleeing satellite. Maneuvering up to it proved difficult, but he eventually jockeyed the ship into such a position that he could throw out anchor lines that held fast to the uneven surface. Clamping his helmet faceplate to, and ordering the girl to do the same, he left his seat, and unscrewed the airlock door. The imprisoned air swung it open, and taking with him a heavy pick and an atom blast gun, he climbed out and thrust himself on to the surface of the diminutive moon.

The gravitational pull was so slight that he had to exercise care in order that an injudicious movement of his legs should not lift him right off the surface. He paused to examine the rocky terrain every few feet, but saw nothing to excite his interest. It was uniformly similar—a sort of brown sandstone, with outcroppings of darker rock.

But then he found something entirely different. There were streaks and patches of a dull silvery color, so dull in some places that they appeared gray. As he advanced over the ground, he came upon countless numbers of these patches, and eventually, selecting one of these, he commenced to blast away the rock with the atom gun. As far as he could go down, and he managed to penetrate to quite a respectable depth, about fifteen feet, he found the greyish material predominating in the conglomerate.

HE HAD to give it up in the end and return to the ship, for the limited air supply of the space-suit was running low; but he had seen enough. He could tell platinum when he saw it, and if the cross-section of rock he had taken was any guide, he was a millionaire from that mo-

ment. He lost himself returning to the ship, probably because he was too dazed with the excitement of the discovery to follow the trail he had blazed on the rocks, and when he found the ship eventually, he was gasping painfully for breath.

He closed the airlock door, and opening the air valves, sucked in great gulps from the hissing jet. Then to the girl he said: "Platinum! platinum! There's miles of it! I'm made—made!"

He sank into the seat, shuddering violently from the effects of the exercise of digging and crawling, hardly heeding the many questions that the girl put to him. He seemed drunk at that moment; drunk with the vision of wealth that literally stared him in the face—a wealth that seemed fantastic in respect to the comparatively humble living he made for the previous ten years. There would be an end to all that now—an end to the daily drudging for a forty dollar a week pay envelope. He would be able to do the things he had always wanted to do, without being chained down by lack of sufficient money—a decent ship of his own, properly equipped for a prospecting expedition; a fully appointed metallurgical laboratory; and above all, an assured future.

Swiftly came the reaction, and it was bitter, terrible. An assured future—he was a doomed man! With this wealth, these treasures of Tantalus, facing him with mocking reality, he had but four or five days in which to live.

With this realization came, too, the appreciation of his selfishness. Beside him was a girl who had everything in life before her, to whom the facing of such an end would come harder than to him. That helped to restore his sense of balance a bit, and it was with a calmer mind that he turned the ship away from the satellite, resolutely putting out of his mind all thought of its latent wealth. To her questions about it he replied:

"It's not much use to us at the moment;

we've got to think of more practical things."

He divided some of the food, and they ate, also drank some of their precious water supply. The silence that wrapped the ship like an invisible cloak weighed heavily upon them, making its presence felt almost as if it were something tangible. In that deathly stillness, Carlton could even hear the beat of his own heart, while his breathing seemed like a tremendous rushing wind that fanned his face within the oppressive helmet. It became so close and stifling that he eventually opened the face-plate again. Thereafter he felt better, though his face was bathed in perspiration that ran down unchecked, trickling into his eyes and stinging them, and seeping into his clothes, making them damp and uncomfortable.

Three days passed by his chronometer, three featureless and monotonous days. Several times he sent out radio calls, only to receive a dead silence in answer. It was as if there were not a soul left alive in the universe but they.

"Grayson must have left by now," he said once. "He may circle back and search for us." But this he did not believe himself.

He opened their pannier of food and shared out their last rations—four biscuits and two small bars of chocolate apiece. There were about two pints of water left, and he doled this out with infinite care.

They entered the night side of Uranus, and two days went by before they swung out over the lighted limb again. Both were now feeling the pangs of hunger acutely. Judicious drafts of water served to ease the emptiness somewhat, but not very much.

Carlton kept a constant watch on the smooth white surface of the planet. It was just possible, he continually consoled himself, that Grayson had delayed departure all this time. It was a forlorn hope at the best. The expedition had been scheduled to leave the planet at a precisely determined time, and delay would incur a great amount of re-plotting of the course. Further, and this was even more vital a con-

sideration, the weather conditions on the planet were worsening far more quickly than had been anticipated.

YET Carlton still watched the planet, though it was highly doubtful whether he could have seen a capital city at 70,000 miles distance, much less a space-ship only the length of a block . . . Big as the expedition ship was, nature in her immensity dwarfed the humble works of man to a mere speck.

When, therefore, he finally did see the ship, he could do nothing, at first, but stare incredulously. Then, blundering from his seat to seize the signal flares that hung on the racks behind him, he cried hoarsely: "It's the base ship! Look—don't you see it—the ship, Linda!"

She searched for it, and at first did not find it; then he saw the tiny sliver of black, moving swiftly over the broad white disk, trailing behind it an almost invisible streak of flame. It was rising at an acute angle, in fact, from where they viewed it, the ship seemed to be standing on end. It could not have been more than twenty miles away from them.

His fingers trembling, Carlton thrust three signal cartridges into the gun; pulled the trigger. A vivid flash lit up the heavens and lasted for about five seconds. He had used half their stock of flares; now he put the remainder into the gun and again pulled the trigger—another terrific flash, that hung for a few seconds, then died. Scrambling madly over the motor leads and transformer housing to the window, he gazed out anxiously at their last hope of rescue.

He watched the tiny fragment of blackness rise, followed it until it slipped out of the planet's disk. For a moment he saw it flashing as the sun caught the metal sides and illuminated them, and then it was gone, lost forever in the depths of interplanetary space.

"They did see it, didn't they?" cried the girl, a sort of desperate pleading in her

voice. "They must have seen it—oh, they *must* have!"

Carlton was still gazing from the window. He did not turn his head as he spoke.

"No, they didn't see it," he said in a surprisingly calm voice. "They weren't looking, you see, so they missed it."

A sob from the girl brought him around. She had buried her face in her hands, and he thought she had broken down completely under the shock; but when she raised her head, her eyes were dry. Carlton took her arm and held it, not knowing quite what to say; unable to voice the words, even if his numbed brain had responded intelligibly enough to conceive them. There was no hope now, not the slightest scrap of hope, for the radio batteries had at last run out, and there was no means of recharging them.

He realized that it was getting colder, and inspecting the atomic heater, he found it would not function. Still moving rather automatically, he traced the trouble back to the main atomic generator that also supplied the power for the engines, and there he found that the fuel had been exhausted. They were immovably locked in an orbit around Uranus.

Radiation was slowly sucking the heat from their little craft. It would only be a matter of time now before they froze to death.

Sinking wearily into the pilot's seat again, he stared dully ahead, wondering if there were not something he had forgotten, some little thing that might give them even a ghost of a chance . . .

The increasing cold was becoming numbing. He removed his suit, and placed his jacket and sweater over the girl's suit to give her a little extra warmth. She had fallen asleep from utter weariness, and at his touch, she awoke. At his suggestion, and against her own protests, she took off her suit and, putting on his discarded clothes, replaced her suit again.

The blue oxygen cylinders in the racks caught his eye and seemed to mock him.

Long before they ran out, both of them would be dead—frozen. Ironical that they should have more oxygen than they needed.

...

Oxygen.

The word revolved slowly in Carlton's mind. It seemed to hint at something familiar, something that, in the face of the tragic disappointments of the last few days, had got overlooked...

He struggled out of his seat, his hands so dead with cold that he could hardly feel the articles he touched. Now he had remembered. There *was* something he had forgotten; something that would give them a chance of life. If only he could find some means of ignition. Their power was gone, the signal flares exhausted. Then his eyes fell on the atomic blast gun that he had used on the platinum moon. With stiff hands, he jerked out the clip reservoir in the butt, and tested the potential on a meter; it registered three-quarter strength.

THERE was a pipe leading to the outer hull through which the air in the ship could be exhausted in an emergency. This he connected up to the row of oxygen cylinders, which were pipe-linked in series. He now had to use up a small amount of the atom blast's reserve of power, though only a tiny fraction would be needed. Replacing the clip in the butt, he regulated the tool to its lowest power output, and played the faint, sizzling beam on the cylinders. Liquid oxygen does not take long to boil, given the slightest encouragement, and in less than half a second, a fierce hissing came from the jury pipe running to the outlet. Carlton blessed the designers of that outlet pipe, for it did not emerge as a blunt tube end, but was fitted with a flat cowl; in fact, it was almost flat with the hull, so that it would not offer any obstruction to any atmosphere through which the ship might pass. The gaseous oxygen would spray out in a fine cloud over the hull.

In a matter of seconds, the entire reser-

voir of cylinders were empty of oxygen, and Carlton slipped the atom blast cartridge from the butt again, throwing the tool aside. He would need it no more.

He fitted a detonator to the clip, and to the coupled units he fastened the end of a coil of wire. The other end of the wire he fixed to a low tension battery, a unit quite useless for the radio, but possessing sufficient power for this purpose.

He groped his way stiffly to where the girl sat, and motioned her to close her faceplate, and use the suit's oxygen supply. Then he opened the inner door of the small emergency airlock used for the dropping of messages, and thrust in the coupled unit. He could not quite close the door, the wire holding it open a millimeter or so. This was why they had had to use their pressure suits. Then he released the catch of the outer door, and as the air commenced to whistle out, it seized the light unit and took it with it. The wire paid out jerkily.

It was some minutes before the almost non-existent gravity pull of the ship took effect and drew the unit towards it. The air had quite gone, and Carlton placed his gloved hand on the wall. Presently he heard the faint clang that told that the unit had struck the hull of the ship. He turned to the battery to which one lead of the wire was connected, and taking the other lead, he closed the circuit.

There was a hard thud as the atomic unit blew up, and the next moment the ship was wreathed in fire. Great blue flames roared over the windows, twisted in weird shapes, shot out in spirals hundreds of feet into space.

Carlton jerked at the wire. It broke, and hauling it in as fast as his numbed arms would move, he closed both doors of the small airlock, and staggered back to the control seat.

The flames hid all view of space. They formed a blue curtain that writhed and billowed like a thing alive. A warmth beat into the chilled interior of the little craft, a

warmth that brought intense pain to their reviving limbs.

Carlton felt himself slipping. He had done all he could, and now utter exhaustion was taking effect on him. He began to lose grip on his senses, and with the approaching insensibility came confused and erratic dreams—strange mixed dreams in which alternated pictures of the dome, with swirling clouds of methane snow driving against it, pictures of the warm, life-filled base station, with Grayson as the predominating figure—of the great space-ship that was carrying the expedition back to earth, and pictures of people he did not recognize—men in blue uniforms, and others in civilian dress, who clustered around him, looking at him with eyes full of wonder, and talking in tones of amazement. They puzzled him, for he did not know them, though they seemed to know him. They called him by name, and talked about him incessantly, and then he felt their hands on him—strong, friendly hands. Then all these thoughts and pictures faded, and in their place was only a deep blackness and a pleasant sensation of floating, quite effortlessly, as though he were supported upon a blanket of the softest texture . . .

CHAPTER V

THE QUESTION ANSWERED

“**Y**OU’LL do,” said the doctor complacently. “But it was a near thing. Frost-bitten. Thought we might have to take off one of your hands, but it’s healed nicely. What was that signal of yours? It made a pretty flare.”

“Methane,” grunted Carlton. “And a little oxygen. How’s Linda—Miss Benning? And where is this?”

“Miss Benning’s doing very well—she got off more lightly than you, thanks to you giving her some of your clothes. This is Mr. Benning’s ship.” He scratched his nose thoughtfully. “Methane and oxygen, eh? Where did you get the methane?”

“We picked it up on the way out,” said Carlton humorously. “We had about half a hundredweight coated over the hull. I reckoned that with a bit of oxygen mixed with it, it might light up somewhat.”

“It did,” said the doctor drily. “Do you—er—want to see Miss Benning?”

Carlton informed him gravely that he did. A few minutes later the girl entered, and looked pointedly at the doctor until that worthy left, chuckling under his breath.

“Seems hard to believe, doesn’t it?” she said as the door closed. She seated herself on the edge of the bed.

“Jim, I had to do a bit of fibbing about that moon. I mean, uncle talked an awful lot of bunk about your not being able to claim it, on account of your not being a free lance, but a member of an expedition.”

Carlton tensed. “What did you say to that, Linda?”

“I told him I’d staked my claim on it first, so it wasn’t yours anyway. See? Then under International law, the claim can be transferred in three months’ time—to your name.”

His eyes were shining as he took her hand, and though he held it somewhat tighter than was really necessary, she made no move to withdraw it.

“That was swell of you,” he said huskily. And then, still holding her hand in his, he said: “Do you remember, when we almost hit that bit of rock, that I’d put a question to you, and you didn’t have time to answer it?”

“I asked you whether you would rather I was really like your imagined pioneer—all rugged and bristly; in fact, properly he-mannish?”

For a moment she did not answer, then,

“I think, Mr. Carlton,” she said primly, “that I like you a whole lot better just as you are.”

And when the doctor entered a few minutes later, he hurriedly withdrew, for he could see that his presence was neither desirable nor necessary.

The Mad Moor was the roughest, toughest spaceman in all the Universe, but even his powers were taxed beyond endurance on that strange Rock of the void, where spirit voices spoke their warnings out of the nothingness and intangible terrors sprang up with the speed of thought!

WORLD OF ILLUSION

by JOHN COLERIDGE



Lads, How We Fought That Day!

THE setting sun threw the mountain-tops to the ground in long, jagged shadows. On the slope the cabin was lost to view in the growing gloom. The lone, lighted window on one side glared red and baleful like the Planet Mars.

It was a warm summer evening. In the darkness outside sat Mad Moor. The smoke from his pipe writhed straight upward. Not a breath of air was stirring. On a small table before him was a huge jug of Yanson ale. To the right of him were

some empty chairs.

Three young space officers had promised to spend this night with him. This hideout in the mountains was their secret. A solemn promise had been made by them never to reveal it, or the existence of the man who lived there. They thrilled to the adventure of it all. They always came in the dead of night and by Wacon Chart. A great secret it was, too, for *Mad Moor was a legendary hero to the rest of the universe!*

The old space captain stared up into the night sky. How those blinking stars beckoned to him! But his days of adventure and exploration were long since done and over with. Space-travel was no longer hazardous. Super-science had made it as safe as a baby's cradle.

The hours sped as he smoked and dreamed. The jug of Yanson ale was lifted periodically.

He stopped his puffing. A pin-point of light was sweeping in a great arc in the vaulted blackness. His teeth clamped tighter on the pipestem as he watched.

Some minutes later the glaring beam of a rocketbus stabbed the darkness. It was searching for its usual landing place. Like some monstrous night-bird it came down. Silently it glided to rest on the sward a short distance from the cabin.

Bob, Dick and Bill raced up the slope. They were all but breathless from the effort as they stood before Captain Moor and saluted. "Reporting for duty, sir," they chorused and then burst into merry laughter.

"Aye, lads. A duty more willing to the heart than ship's chores, I'll warrant." He winked at them.

Bob Andrews dropped into a chair. The other two followed suit.

"There's the Yanson ale, lads. Help yourselves. You'll go thirsty waiting for my manners. It is the only thing I know of that takes the sky-air out of the system properly. By the Tarps of Titan, it warms not only the innards but the very soul of a

man. You'll agree with me on that score?" He looked from one to the other.

THEY nodded in unison as they drank. Their eyes sparkled in the glow of light that fell across the table from the open door of the cabin. The silver braid of their neat, green uniforms glistened, and the old captain could not help but admire their trim looks and bearing.

"If you're comfortable, lads, we'll start with the yarn. Is there anything . . ."

"Yes, Captain," Dick broke in eagerly. "I've been on a furlough for two weeks. I went Titan-way and visited the Brongel Memorial. Did you know that great scientist in your day?"

Mad Moor brought a fist down with such force it made the jug dance. "Did I know him!" His booming voice shattered the stillness of the night. "Eric Brongel. 'Doc,' we called him. Those few of us whom he called friend. You've read of hermits, recluses and the like of centuries past. By the Jeets of Luna, Doc was a whole bundle of them wrapped in one. I never knew a mortal in my day so stingy with companionship as he was. I guess it was his great mind. He had too much to think about to be bothered with 'flies,' as he always called the rest of the peoples of the universe. Lads, I'll tell you a yarn about this Doc that'll make you think the Yanson ale has addled my brains." Captain Moor restuffed his pipe. Over the flame he squinted at the three space officers as they made themselves comfortable. His cold, penetrating eyes cradled hidden fires as he began to recall his old space-days when exploration in the cosmos meant signing a contract with death. . . .

MAD MOOR'S STORY

IT WAS in the fall of 2238. Now mark me, lads, I might be a trifle leeward on some of the dates. It has been a mighty long time since the Black Comet blasted in the void.

We had just gotten in from a trip out Saturn-way. And a misbegotten voyage it had been. By the horned Jooras, everything had gone wrong from the start. We hadn't been out three weeks when a small meteor ripped a compartment wall. I lost three men before the safety panels closed and we could don our space-suits to repair the damage. On the way back, over half the crew was in their bunks. They had contracted a strange malady on one of the moons we had visited. And to top it off, my relief pilot made a bad landing. I was fit to be tied and madder than a bull.

After hours of incessant work attending to the needs of my men and ironing out the confusion rampant on board the Black Comet, I wearily retired to my hotel. Before I left, the medicos assured me that the crew would soon be on their feet.

I had scarcely gotten to my quarters and in my much needed bath when the bell rang. My nerves were as raw as the jagged edges of a wound. I was over-tired. My mind was black with rage. "Come in," I thundered.

Seconds later an officer of the U.N.A.* stood before me. His outstretched hand held a message.

"Read it," I roared. I had a reputation, lads. The officer fairly trembled before my wrath.

"Commander West desires your immediate appearance at Headquarters," he read.

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, tell him . . . The officer snapped to stiff attention. It choked the words in my throat. I cooled down. I realized not even Mad Moor could get away with that. I knew Ira West well. I might be as brusque as I pleased to his face. But to an officer of his army it was a matter of ethics. "Tell Commander West I will see him as soon as I am finished here."

"You are to leave with me, sir. I have an army plane waiting for you," he said

politely.

"Good. Make yourself comfortable, lad. I'll join you in a quarter of an hour." He saluted and left me to finish my bath.

Three hours later I was ushered into the Commanders office. Ira West was a fine specimen. The lines in his face, the gray streaks in his hair only, showed that the mammoth responsibilities of his high position took a relentless toll.

"Sit down, Moor." The corners of his mouth broke into a smile. We were both fighting men and admired each other.

"What's up, Ira?" I said, lighting my pipe.

"You're blasting Saturn-way . . . *tonight!*"

I SPRANG to my feet. "By the Horned Jooras, I just came from there!" I thundered.

"I know. But you are going right back," he commanded sternly.

I reached such an extreme point of wrath that it burned itself out in a flash, and I calmed down. "Look here, Ira. Why do you always pick on me? I'm busy. I have a lot of things to do. You have a whole damned army to do your bidding, but still you call me in. Why?" I almost pleaded.

"Because my whole damned army is not Mad Moor," he spoke up candidly.

Well, lads, I wouldn't be a human being if a compliment from a man like Ira West was not to fall in the right spot. "All right. You win." I growled nevertheless. "But I've had the worst trip of my career, Ira. Sick crew . . . bad landing . . . and a meteor had part of my number and nearly . . ."

"Good!" he said so vehemently that it irked me.

"Good!" I cried; "to lose three men and face certain . . ."

West's laugh cut me short. "Why, you hell-larking rascal, I didn't mean it that way. Now let's start at the beginning. Have you heard of a man by the name of Eric Brongel?"

*United Nations Army.

"Went to school with him. Why?"

"That was quite a spell ago, right? You haven't seen him since?"

"No. But I heard he has built himself quite a reputation as a scientist and an inventor. Likes to be left alone, I hear."

"A regular phantom. Hops from one moon to another to keep his whereabouts a secret." Ira West shook a finger in my face. "But we need the man. He is a genius. And you have got to find him for us."

"Oh, just like that!" I burst out, snapping my fingers.

"Hardly. It is a tough assignment and that is why I called in the only man who is capable of doing it. That's *you*!"

"Must be something mighty big," I shot back.

"Exactly. That was why I had said 'good' when you told me of your mishaps. Two months ago he announced that he had invented an Electro-repulsion Screen and then vanished into thin air. Up to his old tricks as usual. Calls the rest of the humans pesty 'flies.' We have to drag him from his lair, cajole and sometimes threaten him to let us use the results of his brilliant mind. Do you realize, Moor, what that invention of his means to the universe?—*the dangers of space travel cut at least eighty per cent!*" His eyes bored into mine.

I sat silent—in deep thought for some moments. By the Seven Suns, beads of sweat stood out on my forehead as I recalled those horror-filled moments when a meteor rips a ship's hull. I have been inside of such wandering derelicts out in the void—steel coffins filled with dead! Lads, it is a ghastly sight! It stabs a nameless fear into the most courageous heart. The rest of the dangers of space-exploration in those old days were a mere bag of shells to us adventurers, compared to this one outstanding disaster which constantly faced us. And now . . . " I banged a fist down on the desk. He can't get away with that, by the Jeets of Luna!" I roared. "Why does

the rascal announce these inventions and then . . ."

"Egotism, Moor, egotism," Ira West cut in. "And he *can* do it."

"The hell he can!" I stormed.

"Now let us look at this thing in a rational light. With the announcement he also sent a warning to us. He said, 'Let the flies beware if they try to use their high-handed methods with me in the future. I have a new weapon!' Now then, Moor, you can see why I am sending you and not the Intelligence Service after him. I cannot let the man become a murderer and an outlaw. He is too valuable. And men of his type can become as destructive in their whims as they are beneficial to mankind by their superintelligence. Do I make myself clear?"

I nodded. I could see, lads, that Ira West was right. I was always a man of action. But I also had the luck to be born with a "clear head" at all times. It is a great combination and always makes a man a leader among them. It *was* a tough assignment. Caution and foresight would have to outweigh all other methods of approach. Ira West could read that in my eyes. The corners of his hard mouth turned up. The confidence which shone in his eyes, lads, made me feel mighty grand.

"So he it out Saturn-way?" I said half to myself.

"Right. And if you find him in that ocean of moons, history will undyingly proclaim that there never was or will be a second Mad Moor!"

I gripped his extended hand. "By the blasted stars, Ira, your job is bigger than mine. Why, I'm just a hell-larking rascal and doubt if history will waste one word on me," I said in all earnestness, as I punched the Tel-Ra dial on his desk and called Ruk-Sara. I ordered him to have the *Black Comet* ready to blast off at the second hour of the night-period . . .

An hour later, after having shared a beaker of Yanson ale with Ira West and

going carefully over plans, I left the U.N.A. headquarters and embarked upon one of the weirdest adventures that ever befell mortal man. . . .

DISEMBODIED SPIRITS?

DAVIDSON, Crocker and Ruk-Sara were the only members of the *Black Comet* in whom I confided. No matter what our undertaking was, they always assisted in it from start to finish. The rest of the crew never asked questions. Where Mad Moor went, they were glad to go. Hell-larking rascals they were, lads, who knew that the sauce I dished out was usually overspiced. By the Horned Jooras, I have seen more than one of them die with a smile on their lips, and a look in their eyes that said, "I did it all right, didn't I, Captain?" I was proud of them, lads, mighty proud. . . .

For five weeks we hopped from one Rock* to another. I felt certain that Bron-gel would pick himself such a nest. The hundreds which we explored were mostly Spinners and Duds and so uninhabitable. The days dragged because of the monotony of it all. Despair began to grip us. The crew grumbled. I hardly blamed them. Inactivity is poisonous to adventurous men.

Ships seldom traversed the Inner-ring. It was too dangerous and unprofitable. An overwhelming loneliness drenched the very core of our hearts. And Saturn, like a huge unblinking, baleful eye, mocked us constantly. We were a lost ship in a maze of astral islands. It took iron nerve, lads, to stand up under such physical strain. On and on we blasted . . . And then it happened!

At the end of the sixth week, we were blasting towards a Rock that seemed isolated from the myriads which engulfed us.

The passing years, lads, have robbed my

memory. I cannot recall what our height was at the moment when the *Black Comet* suddenly acted like a ship uncontrolled.

It was fortunate for us that Ruk-Sara was in the pilot seat at the time. He was incomparable! I had taught him all I knew, and then he surpassed his master. By the Seven Suns, they acclaimed me the greatest pilot in my day, but, lads, this strange alien being from the Planet Mars rightfully owned that title.

Ruk-Sara fought that day! Davidson and I stood at his back with sweat rolling down our faces. He used all the tricks of the trade and a few of his own as he battled the unknown force which gripped the *Black Comet* and hurtled it downward towards the surface of the Rock. For gruelling minutes, death laughed in our faces, and we knew it! But we were fighting men, lads, and laughed back!

Ruk-Sara blasted, spun, side-slipped, blasted . . . blasted . . . to brake that plunge of certain destruction. From the outside, the *Black Comet* must have had the appearance of a dozen volcanoes erupting. The roar of the rocket-blasts was deafening. The magnetic force clamped us to the steel decks. Hardened and experienced as we were, the gyrations made our seasoned heads swim. By the Jeets of Luna, those were anxious moments until the steady drumming of the forward rockets told us that the battle was over and we were coming in to land. . . .

The ship came to a jarring rest. We looked out through the ports. Amazement must have been written on every face of the crew. We were in a valley, and as far as the eye could see, the ground was verdant with flowers and grasses. It seemed incredible! We thumbed through the Saturn-maps but found it an uncharted Rock.

After taking the usual observations we were still further amazed. *For we found this to be a miniature replica of Earth . . . gravity, atmosphere, rotation, and botanical makeup were virtually identical!*

*A reference made to all but the major bodies of space.

WE OPENED the F-locks and stepped forth. In just such a valley in Indiana, Vermont or any state of our homeland could we have done likewise. It was eerie! We were millions of miles from there! If our mission proved fruitless, at least we could chalk up another victory on our already famous slate of exploration. This *Little Earth*, so strangely transplanted, would forever be a wonder to the peoples of our planet. The only thing lacking to make us feel right at home was the bright sunshine. Here was only the coppery-glow of Saturn-light.

Detailing eight men to remain and guard the ship, the rest of us set forth. About two miles from the ship we had espied a small structure. Towards this we headed. We were well armed—two Woolson guns to each man and long-dirks dangling at our sides. The latter were destructive weapons in hand to hand fighting. They are obsolete now, lads, and you can see them only in museums. But by the Tarps of Titan, they served their purpose in my day.

Ruk-Sara, Crocker, Davidson and I led. Behind us, single file, followed the crew, a score of fighting rascals any captain might be proud of. I could tell by the looks in their eyes that this was what they craved. Once more they had landed on an alien world. Once more they had to face the unknown. Once more (if any returned) they could boast of fighting side by side with Mad Moor. It was the salt of their life. . . .

As we approached the dwelling, for such it turned out to be, we halloed. No answer. Thrice we did it. And thrice silence was our only answer. We looked into one another's eyes. What strange mystery lay here? Surely that stone hut had been built by an intelligent being! Was time to rob us again of the knowledge as to who its creator had been or what race of beings had lived here, as it had done on so many other worlds which we had explored?

Its only door stood ajar. We entered. There was but one room about thirty feet square. Along two of the walls were ranged double bunks. In the center was a large table. Long benches faced its four sides. It all appeared like a miniature barracks. Where were the beings who once occupied it? That question was uppermost in every mind. And by the Jeets of Luna, it could not have been very long ago. The general appearance of everything did not show a very great age. Could it be the lair of a spacateer? Was he and his crew out at the time, plundering the space-lanes?

I shouted orders then, lads. I sent eight men back to reinforce the guard in the ship. Two I posted as guards outside. The remaining force sat down at the table to talk things over. And since we were all hungry we unslung our emergency packs. We ate and quenched our thirst with Yanson ale.

"Captain, could this be the nest of the *Silver Dart*?" One of the crew spoke up.

"Might be, Roger," I answered. "And if it is, lads, you know we have a score to settle with that renegade."

"Aye, captain." They chorused and laid their Woolson guns on the table in readiness. The *Silver Dart* and its unknown leader had been the only spacateer able to claim a victory against us. It had been in the uncharted wilderness out Pluto-way. We had limped back, the *Black Comet* crippled and almost out of commission, and over half of my crew were dead or wounded. It had hurt, lads. From that day of defeat, I had vowed a death revenge on the *Silver Dart* and its crew . . .

MY MEN burst into a familiar song. Crocker had composed it. Many times it helped to while away the long hours out in space. The words are still engraved in my memory. I sing it often here. Mad Moor burst into song. His rich, booming voice reverberated from the mountain sides. Bob, Dick and Bill sat spellbound.

*There is no place that we call home,
For we have made a vow to roam
Until we find a ship to blast . . .
And blast . . . and blast . . . and blast . . .*

*Now we have heard it might be far—
Perhaps out to an unknown star!
We'll keep our rendezvous and go . . .
And go . . . and go . . . and go . . .*

*Now this will be no pleasure tour
I'll warrant you. For Captain Moor
Picks rascals who know how to fight . . .
And fight . . . and fight . . . and fight . . .*

*Tho' nights are long and cold the day—
The Silver Dart must come our way.
And then to battle, lads we will . . .
And kill . . . and kill . . . and kill . . .*

*We are the scourge of Spacateers!
We'll rid the space-lanes . . .*

Mad Moor stopped singing so abruptly that it startled the three.

"Silence!" I roared at my men in the midst of their singing. In the sudden stillness, every eye was turned to me. There was no sound of any kind. Yet we all felt it—a soft, mysterious vibration filled the air. It made our scalps crawl in a peculiar sort of contraction. We sat tensed. Each man gripped his Woolson guns, ready for instant action . . .

"Go . . . go . . . before it is too late!" A spectral, droning voice shattered the stillness like an exploding bomb-shell.

We all leaped to our feet as one man. We looked around. We saw nothing. Yet that voice had dropped in our very midst. We stood hesitant. Men cannot fight a thing unseen. "It's a trick, lads. And by the Seven Suns . . ."

"This is the abode of the dead!" The voice cut short my sudden outburst. "Go . . . go . . . or join in death those who came before you and dared to stay. We of the Legion of Death, live in death, and can de-

stroy in death. Go. . . ."

My thundering oaths drowned the spectral voice. The crew shrank back before my enflamed rage. "Whoever or whatever you are, we defy you!" I roared.

"Go . . . go . . . this is the abode of the dead!"

I stood aghast. The sweat poured from my face. Still I refused to accept it as anything but a hoax. By the Jeets of Luna, was Mad Moor to become a believer in ghosts?

"Go. . . this is our last warning, or you will never reach your ship alive."

I stood firm. I trembled in defiant rage. If it were only something tangible! Man, beast or monstrosity, I had fought before. But this. . . . I looked at my crew. They stood calmly awaiting a word to do my bidding. But what could I bid them to do? It was uncanny, incredible. . . .

"Leave the hut," the voice commanded.

I GAVE the signal. We strode from its confines. There was no other alternative. Perhaps by acquiescence, I thought to myself, I might yet get to the bottom of this insane predicament, or get an inkling through which I could plan an attack.

Outside, I called for the two men I had posted as guards. My command died unanswered. Consternation now shown in our eyes, lads. Were the evil forces of the so-called Legion of Death already at work? By the horned Jooras, had I overplayed my hand for once?

"The place is haunted!" One of the crew said.

"Easy lads." I said. "Hamlin and Block could not have vanished into thin air." I shouted their names. Silence. An appalling, deathly silence was my answer. "Let's go back to the ship." I ordered resignedly.

We had taken but a dozen steps.

"It is too late!" The voice stopped us in our tracks. It continued. "Look towards your ship. See it glistening! You shall

never reach it! You have dared to defy our powers. Yet we of the spirit existence admire courage. You shall be given one more chance—for two reasons: to prove our powers and existence (which your minds refuse to accept) and to test what mettle creatures of your ilk are made of . . . *now . . . gaze out over the expanse separating you from your ship. From the ground shall spring a sea of weeds . . . red, writhing, leafless tendrils, taller than you are and with the strength of cables. Fight your way through them or die! Look!*"

The grasses and flowers vanished. Our ship was lost to sight. Before us was a forest of squirming, snake-like weeds. By the Seven Suns, lads, that sight tested our courage. We stood hesitant only a second until I roared, "Come on, rascals. We've fought more than this in our day." With a lusty shout we were in the thick of them.

Lads, how we fought that day! Our Woolson guns became hot to the hand as we blasted a passage through that evil creation which seemed possessed with an evil intelligence. The tendrils entwined on our ankles. . . tore at our wrists . . . twisted around our throats . . . as we blasted and slashed with our long-dirks. Thick, choking clouds of dust engulfed us as we stamped the ground with our boots. But our ship lay ahead! We had to reach it or die!

ALL IS ILLUSION!

HOURS must have passed as we fought on. We were determined to win through if our strength lasted. But this seemed more than we had gambled for. We were but in the middle of that ocean of weeds and found ourselves weary and dust choked. We were all but completely exhausted. Lads, have you heard brave men actually whimper from fatigue? Well, I did that day.

I realized that something had to be done. Shouting encouragements, I led them on, fighting every foot of the way. Seeing they

needed more than that even to win through, I thought to use a ruse.

"Look, lads, the weeds are thinning out," I roared as I leaped forward. Anything to keep them going. And in the next instant I withheld a stroke of my long-dirk in mid-air. What I had intended to be a ruse was *actually taking place before my eyes!* Shocked though I was, I thundered, "They're thinning, lads, thinning!"

They took up the cry. They sprang to the assault with a fury unbelievable of tired men. And as we shouted and fought, the weeds thinned out completely. With a triumphant shout, we sprang free of the last of them. We had won! We fell to the ground in utter exhaustion. Nothing was so stirring to our pounding hearts as the sight of the *Black Comet* about a mile before us.

I took stock of our losses. Not a man was missing. But we were a sorry sight. Our faces were grimy from sweat and caked blood. Our uniforms were in shreds. Our wrists and faces showed slashes of long-dirks where we had cut too closely. I was thankful that our injuries were not more serious, and somewhat mystified too. But I was taking no more chances. I gave the order to move on. I was hard-headed in those days, lads, but somehow the proof of our experience weighed somewhat in the scale of conviction. Perhaps such things did exist in our universe. In that moment, I was not one to contradict it.

We had advanced about a quarter of a mile when Crocker spoke up. "Notice anything, Captain?"

I looked puzzled for a moment. Then it dawned on me. The skin of my scalp did not have that sensation of contraction. And the mysterious vibrations had ceased.

At the same instant, Ruk-Sara had turned around. He stood rooted as he called our attention. "Look. The weeds have vanished!"

Dumfounded, we looked. The expanse between us and the hut was again beautiful

to see in the ruddy glow. The valley was all grasses and flowers once more. For us there was no answer to it all.

"The blasted place *is* haunted. Let's get out of here," growled Davidson.

"Aye," chorused half the crew. We hastened our strides and soon reached the ship.

Not a guard was seen about the *Black Comet*!

I was the first to leap up the ramp to the open port. My guns were drawn in a flash. The crew hard on my heels. As I rushed through the opening to the A-deck I stopped so sharply, the men in the rear crowded me in confusion as they attempted to brake their rush. Open mouthed we stood and stared.

In two rows, lying on their stomachs, was the whole ship's crew. They were trussed up and blindfolded. Only one of them stood. His face was turned to a wall. His hands were above his head.

"What is all this?" I roared.

THE man at the wall whirled around. *It was Hamlin!* Then I noticed that there were eighteen, all told. And sure enough, I espied Block amongst the trussed up group. . . .

"Where's the Spacateer?" cried Hamlin, and further added to our consternation.

"What Spacateer?" I shot back.

"The hellion who put his guns on us and made me tie up the crew and told me to face the wall and stay that way or get blasted!" Hamlin stormed. His eyes glared in pent up anger.

By the Tarps of Titan, the man was too sincere for me to doubt his word. "Thompson, Blackhurst, Ewald, give the lads a hand and untie them," I ordered. "Dunn, Brill, Jackson and Hacker, stand guard outside the ship," I snapped to the men in my rear. If it was Spacateers I had to deal with, it was sauce I specialized in. I turned to face Hamlin.

"Now, lad, you are two jumps ahead of

me. Let's start from the beginning. Why did you leave your guard-post at the hut?" I demanded sternly.

Hamlin turned pale. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. His big frame shook. To desert a guard-post meant death!

"Speak up," I roared, my patience at an end.

"Well, Captain, it . . . it was your orders," he stammered.

"I . . ." Sweat stood out on my forehead. I controlled the sudden rage which possessed me. Why should I doubt this man's word? I had fought weeds and seen these same weeds vanish! Here was more of this devilish work for which a rational mind could not find a single answer. "All right, Let's have the story," I said calmly.

"You came out of the hut, Captain, and motioned to Block and me. You had a packet in your hand and gave it to me with the instructions that the two of us should return to the ship. The packet I was to put in your cabin . . ."

"If the packet is not there, Hamlin, it will go hard with you. You know the penalty. Go on," I said.

"Block and I came back to the ship. I went to your cabin and put the packet on your desk. As I was doing that, a voice behind me cracked, 'Don't turn around; my guns are on you. Do as I command, or I'll blast you.' He ordered me to the A-deck. There I saw Block and the others lying on their stomachs. The voice told me to tie and blindfold them. In the meantime, the hellion told me what a notorious and blood-thirsty Spacateer he was. The slightest show of a false move on my part would mean instant blasting. He said you and the others at the hut had been taken prisoners, too. He told me to face the wall and stay that way. And that, Captain, is how you found me. . . ." Hamlin stood sweating. Perhaps he thought we doubted his word.

Without a word, I spun on my heels. Each man knew where I was going. En-route to my cabin I decided two things. I

had been hasty in threatening Hamlin, and for that reason he would go free. But I had to go through with this part of the show. I was the captain of a spaceship. The stern code of space could not be flaunted under any circumstances. I strode down the corridor, waited for several minutes, and without entering my cabin returned to A-deck. I knew there would be no packet.

My men stood in a disordered group, silently awaiting my return. I faced them. I patted a breast pocket of my tunic. "Hamlin, there was a packet."

The words broke the strained tension. The crew shouted a lusty "hurrah" and wrung Hamlin's hand. Ruk-Sara threw me a crafty look that said "Thanks." Perhaps those of them who had been with me to the hut had the same inkling. They liked me the better for it.

Crocker advanced towards me. He said, "Captain, let's leave the blasted place, while we yet have our right minds. Besides, we have a commission. Every minute we delay here, we are jeopardizing its success. We all know how you feel about this." He put a hand on my shoulder.

I walked over to a port and gazed out. Here was a mystery I would like nothing better than to solve. It irked me to think someone was making a fool of me. Real or fantastic, I would like to see it through. It was hard for me to make a decision. But the commission must come first. There would be other days and if the men were willing, we would come back. I turned and faced them. "To your posts, lads. We're blasting off."

THE men sprang to action. There was a satisfied look in their eyes. At a signal from me, Ruk-Sara recalled the guards. Some minutes later, the F-ports clanked shut. With a thunderous roar, the *Black Comet* tore away from this strange little world and an unsolved mystery. . . .

I retired early. I was fatigued mentally and physically. With weary steps, I en-

tered my cabin. In the act of removing my tunic, I happened to look towards my desk. I stared and blinked in unbelief. By the Seven Suns, was I to be accursed to my dying day for having visited the haunted world! *On the desk lay a packet!* Was I never to trust my sight again? Would it, too, vanish as did the weeds, the voice, the vibrations, and the Spacateer?

With a voluble oath, I strode to the desk. My hand snapped for the packet. I was startled to hear the crackling of paper in my clenched fist. *It was real!*

I turned it over several times. Any second I expected it to vanish into thin air. Nothing of the kind happened. I scrutinized it more closely. My breath whistled from the sharp intake. It was addressed, *To Captain Moor. To be opened enroute.*

I tore it open savagely. By the Jeets of Luna, what tom-foolery was all this! A glance at the contents prompted me to immediate action. I punched the Tel-Ra. "Ruk, get Davidson and Crocker and come to my quarters immediately," I said, as the face of my first mate glowed in the oval screen.

The three of them overheard my orders to the pilot-room as they stood in the open doorway some seconds later. "Change your course and return to earth," I had instructed the pilot.

They stood and stared. I guessed what was going on in their minds. It made me laugh. "Come in . . . come in, you rascals, and sit down. No, your captain has not lost his mind, nor has he gone soft. But by the Tarps of Titan, I should put you all in the brig for a day, for so much as thinking it. Sit down," I said.

I ordered Crocker to bring a beaker of Yanson ale before he sat down. A lusty draught of it warmed us all up. We sat down in comfort and contentment. "I feel that you lads are entitled to share the contents of the packet which Hamlin delivered here," I said.

Ruk-Sara straightened in his seat. "There

is a packet, then? I thought you were . . ."

"Exactly. I had done just that out there on A-deck. I had not gone to my cabin for reasons each of you understand too clearly. Besides, Hamlin and Block are good men. In the face of all that had transpired, they were blameless in deserting their posts. This proves it. Now listen while I read it to you." I drew a letter from the torn envelope. . . .

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

MY DEAR Captain Moor:

Greetings and salutations to a noble fighter and one whom I shall always be proud to call friend.

I will not bore you with a lengthy mis-sive. It will be just long enough to clarify certain incidents that have befallen you.

Let us begin with certain peculiarities of my nature. I have sought seclusion all my life. It is essential to my work and my very existence.

Three years ago I chose a place in which I felt certain I would be free from molestation. With the unlimited wealth and super-science which is fortunately mine, I renovated it. Tremendous forces were set at play to make it a miniature replica of my homeland, the planet on which I was born. I knew I would always have a soft spot in my heart for its green fields and flowers.

Several months ago I made a premature announcement before the N.S.A.* I say premature, because shortly after that, in going over the plans for my Electro-repulsion screen, I found certain discrepancies in my calculations. I realized it would require a week or more of intensive work to right them.

I informed Professor Nimer of that fact. But the "flies" (with all the greed and impatience of the insects I class them with) wanted it immediately, despite all that. My reputation was at stake. That made little

difference to them. So in rage and disgust, I fled and retired in secrecy to my hideout which had but recently been completed.

In the low range of hills beyond the valley in which your ship landed, are my laboratories. They are the finest in all the universe. They are underground, and so out of sight of prying eyes. Their equipment is complete and incomparable.

Before leaving earth, I had informed Commander West that were I to be molested, I would not hesitate to use a new weapon of my invention.

For over a year, I had been experimenting with alpha waves, the energy emitted by the human brain. I will not go into detail. The scientific phase of it would be too lengthy and tiring to anyone but a man of science. Suffice to say, I built an apparatus for my research work. A phenomenon took place purely through accident. Building up electrical vibrations to an unheard-of pitch with this machine, I was amazed to find that the alpha waves played or made direct contact with the optic nerve. Any mind within a radius of several miles would instantaneously have its *thought transformed into a concrete vision!*

Can you imagine my inestimable joy when the opportunity occurred to experiment upon a man of your calibre? And then, to realize the complete success of my *new weapon!*

I fear no molestation from the "flies," in the future. You have proven the worth of my new weapon. Besides, I am happy in the conviction that you will not reveal my secret or hideout to the world. For good or for bad, Nature has endowed us all with a certain amount of egotism. And for that reason I am sure, you, my dear friend, *would not let an adoring world know that Mad Moor and his fighting crew of hell-larking rascals battled nothing more than figments of their own minds!*

My assistant Pliny, cleverly disguised as yourself, delivered the packet to your guards while you and your men were sing-

*National Science Academy.

ing so lustily inside the hut. The crew at the ship saw a spacateer in the same manner in which you saw and fought the weeds. As to the voice, have you forgotten Alvan Thornton's invention of ten years ago, which he so cleverly demonstrated to the N.S.A.? I used one of his machines. It played an essential part in the renovation of the Rock. I did not want the crew of laborers and mechanics I had hired, and who lived in the barracks, to know for whom they worked. They had come in secrecy and departed likewise when their work was done. I am sure this explains all.

I shall expect a visit from you in the near future and an inspection of my laboratories. *But do not come armed, for I have a new weapon!*

Always your friend,
Eric Brongel.

WELL, lads, the subtle sarcasm of it hurt us to the quick for a fleeting moment. The fire of it that scorched our pride smouldered and then burned itself out. And by the Seven Suns, the confines of my quarters shook from the hearty laughter which rocked the four of us.

"But why back to earth?" Ruk asked after a while.

"Here. This was in the packet, too," I said. I handed them a sealed envelope which they passed from one to the other. It was addressed: *To the N.S.A. . . . The plans for the Electro-repulsion screen. . . .*

Lads, I see the dawn will soon be breaking. I will look forward happily to your next visit. And so, until then, I bid you a fair good-morning.

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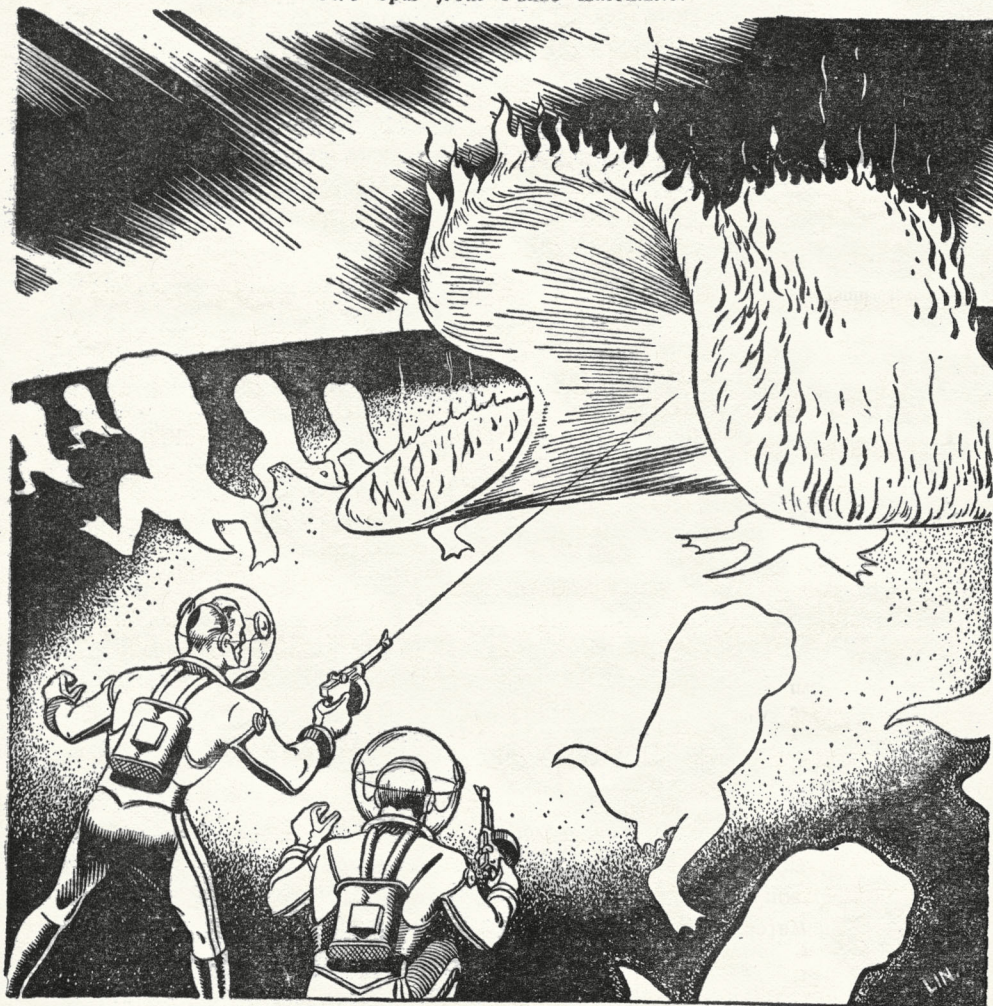
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THE FLAT FOLK OF VULCAN

by DENNIS CLIVE

An accidental landing upon the fiery planet Vulcan is a horrible enough fate, but at least it's better than a plunge into the sun! Paul and the Professor find themselves in the midst of a weird adventure amidst the outlandish beings of the planet nearest old Sol!

Fire Spat from Paul's Automatic!



“**V**ULCAN ahead, Paul—we’re landing there instead of dropping into the sun!”

Professor Jeffords, skipper of the space-

rocket *Hope* that had tried for Venus and missed, relaxed his grip on the control levers and gazed even more fixedly into the periscope. The sun’s great, glowing disc almost

filled the vision screen and, in the center of it, like an inkblot upon a mirror, showed a black, circular shadow. Jeffords nodded his lean, gray head with the impersonal satisfaction of a scientist checking an observation.

"Vulcan," he repeated. "A dozen astronomers claimed that such a planet existed, Paul—a planet even closer to the sun than Mercury. They took the trouble to give it a name, sight unseen—Vulcan, after the sooty blacksmith—god of the Hellenes. But the thing wasn't visible by day and it set with the sun at night, so it's taken us, sailing past Venus like a wild arrow, to discover it." His tone took on enthusiasm. "And we've not only seen it first, we'll land on it first!"

His nephew, Paul Jeffords, also bent above the vision screen to study the images of the sun and its innermost planet. Paul was a well-knit, blond youth. His clear blue eyes were shrewd as they took in details of the reflection.

"Our cross-hairs are exactly on that little black spot, sir," he agreed. "That means we're steering dead at it. But is it really a planet? It seems mighty puny."

"A planetoid, let us call it," amended Jeffords. "About twenty miles in diameter, I judge—the old scientists computed that it wouldn't be much more than thirty at most, and they were right." He glanced at the instruments on the metal bulkhead beside him. "So far as I can figure, it's solid, with little or no atmosphere or water, surface gravity about an eighth of Earth's—"

"An eighth?" echoed Paul, amazed. "Why, that's nearly as much as the Moon has, and you say that Vulcan is only twenty miles through? But there are asteroids bigger than that, sir."

Jeffords smiled. "Where's your astronomy, youngster? And your physics? Size isn't everything; there are mass and density. Isn't a lump of lead heavier than a piece of cork many times its volume?"

Comprehension dawned into Paul's young face, and Jeffords continued:

"We haven't time to go into higher mathematics just now, but Vulcan, small as he is, must have the substance of a world much more sizeable." He glanced again at his instruments. "It's only that he's been hammered down, so to speak—shrunk and concentrated upon himself in the laboratory of the universe."

"In other words, Vulcan is made of something denser and heavier than rock or metal," added Paul, eager to develop the idea. "A handful of Vulcan's earth might weigh a ton or so." He whistled. "What a place to go for geological samples!"

He and his uncle grinned at each other over the thought, grinned their comradeship and understanding as they faced each other in the tiny metal-walled cabin of the rocket. That comradeship, that understanding, had been well tried—tried in figurative fires as fierce in their way as the literal heat of the threatening sun. First had been the weary days that followed the departure of the craft from Earth en route to Venus, the pioneer attempt of man to reach another planet. Then had come the sudden transition from boredom to consternation as they found their course faulty and the *Hope* carrying them past their goal, sunward. Followed almost maddening despair, new days of it, while they contemplated their seemingly inevitable finish in the destroying flames of Old Sol. Yet never had they quarreled, blamed each other, or collapsed in horror.

And now the sudden dawning of a chance for escape, however fantastic or unforeseen, gave them new strength, new cheerfulness. Their smiles grew broader.

IT WAS hours later. Slowly, gingerly, the rocket craft lowered itself toward the dark face of Vulcan, stern down. The flare of the rear tubes lighted a smooth, lead-colored plain below. Jeffords, his eye ever on the vision screen of the now reversed

periscope, shifted one control lever, then the other.

"What does the elevation magno-gauge read?" he demanded crisply.

"Surface at hand," reported Paul, checking instruments. "Elevation six hundred feet—four hundred—three hundred fifty—better slow down, sir."

"Slow down it is," Jeffords called back, pulling more levers. "Sound off at elevation one hundred."

Silence for full half a minute. Then, "Elevation one hundred," reported Paul. "Ninety — eighty — seventy — sixty — fifty—forty—thirty—"

"And down!" almost whooped Jeffords, lifted out of his usual quiet dignity by triumphant relief as the impact of landing jarred the craft to its rivets.

Paul, too, was delighted. He skipped halfway across the floor in a joyous jig.

"So this is Vulcan!" he cried. "Prepare to receive welcoming committee!"

"Put on your space-overall and we'll arrange our own welcome," directed Jeffords. Stepping to a locker, he slid back its metal door and drew out two clumsy-looking suits of air-proof fabric. One he handed to his young companion, then commenced struggling into the other. A few moments later they had fastened themselves in, adjusted their radio head-sets, put the oxygen feeders in action, and finally regarded each other through the glassite windows of their helmets. Paul stared a little. His uncle was strapping a rectangular case, with dials and levers, to the front of his suit.

"Hey!" said Paul, the radio carrying his surprised voice to Jeffords' ear-phones. "Isn't that the thought-interpreter? The thing you use to talk to monkeys and dogs and record stimuli on plants, and so on? Do you really expect to find and converse with life here—intelligent life—when the gauges say no oxygen or water?"

"Hold on," replied Jeffords, "all the old-fashioned scientists made that mistake. They were so busy in debunking the theory

that life might exist on other planets, that they let their own vision grow narrow."

"What do you mean?" demanded Paul, still perplexed. "Isn't oxygen necessary to life? And water?"

Jeffords drew tight the straps that held the thought-interpreter to his chest. "Look at it this way," he appealed. "Life came to Earth, we know not how. It found a planet nearly covered with water and completely enveloped in an oxygen-bearing atmosphere. Stop and think. Did life appear because of these things, or did it adapt itself to them?"

Paul shook his head inside the helmet. His face behind the glassite pane creased in bafflement.

"I don't know," he admitted.

"Neither do I, nor anyone else. So I go prepared." Jeffords tapped the interpreter case. "And you carry the sample pouch and that big canteen."

Paul was more mystified than ever. "Water?" he almost gasped. "What will we be doing with water? We can't drink, with our helmets on."

"No, but you yourself spoke of how heavy a sample might be. We may have to carry infinitesimal particles, picked up in a solution of water."

Paul rummaged in the locker, slung the sample pouch like a musette over his shoulder and tucked the carrying strap of the four-quart canteen into his belt.

"All right," approved Jeffords. "Let's go."

Paul opened the panel of the air-lock and both crowded into the tiny compartment. There was just room for both, side by side. Closing the panel behind to save as much of the cabin's oxygen as possible, Paul opened the outer valve-door. A small volume of air rushed from around them and out of the lock. The youth pressed himself sidewise.

"After you, sir," he said. "You're senior—you should have the honor of being first to set foot on a strange world."

"Thanks," acknowledged the professor, and swung through the opening and down the succession of grab-irons that were clamped like a ladder on the hull. Paul followed, descending toward the base of the craft. Once out of the ship's interior and its field of artificial gravity, they felt as light as squirrels, for all their cumbersome garments and burdens.

"One-eighth the gravity of Earth," Paul reminded himself as they came to a stand at the bottom. "Well!" he added aloud. "This is a sight, eh?"

Standing together beside the great erect cigar of their ship, they looked their first on the landscape of Vulcan.

CREATURES OF TWO DIMENSIONS

IT WAS as though they stood upon a great, smoothly-curved mountain top.

Overhead showed the black of space's night, with the hard glow of all the myriad stars, like spangles sewn haphazard in strings and clusters upon black velvet. At twenty degrees from zenith glowed the little orb of Venus, a silver farthing shedding soft white light upon them, and farther away and almost overhead the green dab that was Mother Earth. By Venus-light they made out the flat gray uniformity on which they stood and which extended around them and their craft on every hand—shaping into a smooth arc as it gained distance, without a dint or hummock to relieve. Away and away it curved, for furlongs that seemed small for the clearness of vision and lack of surface-modification, until it was lost in light.

Light—an unbroken circle of it, pinky-red as blazing coals upon a home hearth. The mountain in space on which they seemed to stand was ringed about with that pink radiance. It was as if the sun were about to rise, no matter which way you looked—rather an unbroken ring of suns, ready to move forward and upward as one around the full sweep of the horizon.

The professor stood at gaze like a shrouded, helmeted statue in his space-overall, motionless in concentration. Paul, younger and less raptly scientific, swung around and around on the pivot of his metal heel, trying to see every point of the glory at once.

"What is it, sir?" he asked at length.

"The sun," replied Jeffords.

"The sun?" repeated Paul. "Oh, I understand. We're at about the center of the dark face of Vulcan, and that's the light that overflows from the other half."

"Right," said the professor.

"But how can sunlight be refracted and diffused into the range of our vision without an atmosphere?" Paul pursued.

"There is no gaseous atmosphere," said Jeffords, as casually as though lecturing to a classroom. "But space here isn't empty, after all. There seems to be a cloud of particles around Vulcan—countless specks of dust, I would say, each whirling about the planet like a tiny satellite. That cloud catches and carries the sunlight around the edge."

They returned to their observation of the scene. Neither spoke for some minutes—the boy silent in awe, the scientist in mental note-taking.

"Well, I say it's worth it," pronounced Paul at last. "Worth the wait and the worry and the danger. The trouble is, I'll find it hard to remember—it's all I can do to believe it while I'm looking at it." He paused again. "We're on top of a flying island, it seems, with tides of light washing up all around. If this is the dark side of Vulcan, what's the bright side like?"

"Like a furnace of the angry gods," his uncle answered at once. "As far as I can make out, Vulcan revolves once on his axis to one turn around the sun. Therefore one half is always sunward, and the other—this one—always away—like a roast before a fire, with nobody to turn it."

"One side burnt and one side raw," supplemented Paul. He stamped a metal shoe.

"Hmmm! The ground's harder and smoother than ice."

Both stooped to examine this wonder. Jeffords tried to kneel, but his knee slipped sidewise and he almost fell flat. "Careful," he cautioned Paul. "Keep to your feet—those magnetic shoes will hold you steady." His gloved forefinger tested the glassy surface. "It was bound to be like this. Ice, you say? Rather super-adamant."

"And polished," Paul added, feeling in his turn.

"Yes, polished, but not by rubbing. Didn't I speak of a great density, a concentration of substance in the laboratory of the universe?" The older man gazed about him. "Vulcan is so hard—look, Paul, not even our rocket blasts scarred his surface. We haven't the tools or the chemicals to test Vulcan's makeup."

"Not even diamonds?" suggested Paul. From the sample pouch he drew a chisel-like rod, on the tip of which a diamond twinkled softly in the Venus-light. Stooping, he bore down on the smoothness with all his strength. A moment of effort, and something gave. He lifted the tool and examined its marred end.

"No," he answered his own query. "Not even diamonds." But his quick eye caught a new marvel. "What's that little patch of light, sir?"

"Eh?" said Jeffords, and then he, too, saw it—a moving shimmer of orange that seemed to play around their feet like a beam from a colored lamp.

FOR a moment, it paused at Paul's toe and they made out its shape—a sort of luminous tadpole, a little oval the size of a pigeon's egg with a vibrating steak like a tail. Then it was sliding quickly around the entire metal sole of the shoe, and finally away.

"It's alive, intelligent," exclaimed Jeffords. "Follow it."

They ran, light and sure-footed on their magnetized boots, but the beam easily kept

ahead, taxing their utmost powers to keep up. More moving lights seemed to break out ahead.

"Look, a whole swarm," panted Paul, and a moment later their little guide was lost among its mates. Pausing on the edge of the bright, dancing array, the two Terrestrials stared in uncomprehending wonder.

There were scores, perhaps hundreds, of the bright little tadpoles, each moving independently of the others. Paul stooped and tried to pick up the nearest of them. It struggled under his pressing fingers, then slipped away as if greased.

"It hasn't any substance," reported the youth. "It's like light, or a moving stain of color. What are they?"

"Living, intelligent beings," repeated Jeffords, also genuinely excited. "Look at those diagrams yonder."

He pointed. Several steps away stretched a row of rectangular figures, like sketches or geometrical designs. Each was perhaps three feet long by two wide, and each had one or more breaks in its boundaries. Through these breaks as through doors, the little tadpole-creatures flickered in and out. Carefully skirting the excited throng of beams, Paul and Jeffords approached the rectangular delineations.

Beyond the first row, they now saw, were other rows, drawn in purple, lavender, green, red—all colors, some shining as with phosphorescence, others reflecting the soft radiance of Venus overhead, still others flat and dull.

"What are they? What's it all about?" asked Paul, a helpless note in his voice.

Jeffords did not reply. He was fiddling, his fingers clumsy inside their gloves, with the dials of his thought-interpreter.

"Why, sir!" cried Paul, newly astonished. "Do you truly think you can communicate with those little bugs?"

"They're intelligent," his uncle insisted firmly. "These geometrical diagrams of theirs show that. Look, there in the thickest push of the things—apparently the little

scout we first saw is telling them all about finding us."

The motor of the interpreter began to hum.

"I have the psychic beam directed into the thickest of them," announced Jeffords. "I can get thought-impressions, excited ones. I'll try to get across to them."

A switch moved under his fingers.

"Hello, hello, I say," came Jeffords' voice, slow and clear. "We have come from far off to visit you. We are friends." He spoke to Paul aside. "Tune in on my frequency if you can, and you'll get any answer that may come."

"Right," agreed Paul breathlessly, his eyes wide.

Silence a moment. The churning scurry of the tadpole-beams was slower. Then both felt, rather than heard, a response in the machine:

"Friends. We understand. I speak for the others. What are you?"

"We have one of them!" shouted Paul wildly. "He's answering—"

Jeffords waved unceremoniously for him to be silent. "Yes, friends," he repeated clearly. "We are men. From another world. Can you see us?"

"Friends," came back the thought-response yet again, spelling the idea into the consciousness of both explorers. "You are—men." The word-idea repeated itself rapidly, indistinctly. "Menmenmenmenmen. We do not know—men."

Jeffords groaned disappointedly, then made another attempt. "We are living things, as you are. We think, move, take nourishment. We come from another place, another world, as I have already said. Can you not see us?"

"Again we understand," came the answer, readier this time. "You live, think, eat." Then, a trifle hesitantly, "You won't eat—us?"

"Poor little devil!" muttered Paul, and Jeffords made haste to say, "No, we won't eat you."

"Friends, then," was the more assured rejoinder. "Yes, we see you. You are like this."

THE throng, almost quiet, stirred to action again and opened a space in its center. One of the bright tadpoles moved into the clearing. It moved suddenly erratically, but decisively. A trail of green, luminous color appeared in its wake.

"It's drawing for us," whispered Jeffords.

He was right. In less than a quarter of a minute the tiny creature had finished its task—a simple but unmistakable outline, accurate in both shape and size, of Paul's shoe-sole.

"Look!" Paul cried. "That's the one that swung 'round my foot, all right. But he never bothered to look up; he thinks I look like that."

Jeffords spoke again, into the thought-interpreter. "We see and comprehend, he informed the little artist. "You have drawn only our foot plan, however. Up above—"

"Up above?" came the quick repetition. "Aboveaboveabove . . . I do not understand." The thought-images became plaintive. "We are aware of you, beside us. That is all."

"They *can't* see up, then," said Paul decisively.

"Our feet are beside you," Jeffords explained patiently. "They are like what you have drawn. But there is much more of us, stretching up and overhead."

"Overhead?" again the plaintive note. "We cannot understand."

"Yet you understand *beside*?" prompted Jeffords.

"Yes, we know beside—behind—before. But not those other things. Not above, not overhead. . . ." The thoughts became vague.

"There are many of you?" Jeffords tried a new tack. "Many individuals?"

"Oh, yes. This is only one community, not the largest."

"You live long? Happily?"

"Not always happily." A tremor came

into the thought-reply. "There are the fire-things."

"Fire-things?" Jeffords repeated.

"They are large, very bad." The little informant's mental voice trembled. "They live in the hot zones and feed upon our lives."

Both Paul and Jeffords felt a thrill of interest at this piece of information. "What are the fire-things?" asked Jeffords eagerly. "Anything like you?"

"No, not like us." A moment of hesitation, as if summoning powers of description. "More like you."

"How like us?" Jeffords insisted.

"Wait." It was a desperate plea. "Wait where you are. A wise one will come and tell you everything."

"We shall wait," promised Jeffords, and shut off the precious power of the interpreter. Then he spoke solemnly to his nephew.

"Youngster, do you realize? Do you appreciate?"

"A little," said Paul thoughtfully. "They understand front and back and sidewise, but not up or down."

"They are two-dimensional, Paul. They *live flat*."

More silence. Finally Jeffords spoke again. "How does that realization make you feel?"

"Stunned," confessed Paul. "It's too much to grasp at once, sir. Fate let Columbus down easy. He only thought he'd found India's back door. He couldn't have realized the significance of a new continent." He gazed down at the moving, eddying color-blobs. "Think how *they* must be agonized at our mystery!"

"The square and rectangular diagrams must be their houses," went on Jeffords. "With no knowledge of height or depth, a pencil mark would be to them as an eternal wall of graphite."

"But they live on a curved world," pointed out Paul. "Can't they see the curve?"

"To their viewpoint it is flat. The belt

of fire keeps them from circumnavigating the globe. Vulcan is to them what space is to us—you know, we used to think that space stretched straight away—only until Einstein and others demonstrated that it curves—here, what are they doing?"

THE FIRE-BEING

THE tadpole-blobs had marshaled themselves into orderly ranks, some hundreds of them, a brilliant, many-hued carpet. One, a little larger than average and as pure white and brilliant as a sunbeam, was pushing forward.

"That's the 'wise one' they promised us," ventured Paul. "Quick, sir, get him on the line."

Jeffords switched on his thought-interpreter. "Hello," he called once more. "Hello. Will you speak to us? We are friends."

A stronger reply than before came back to them: "I greet you. I think that I appreciate something of what you have been trying to tell these others. You are—" Hesitation. "You are more complex beings?"

"We are three-dimensional." Jeffords put all the meaning he could into the statement. "Do you know what that signifies?"

"Yes." Another pause. "To some of us, to those who study and think most, it is evident that there is a third dimension."

"I congratulate you, my friend," Jeffords almost cried in his delight. "We are travelers, then, from another world, a world of the third dimension. We come in peace, we wish to exchange good-will and knowledge."

"Knowledge." They felt the yearning in the repeated thought. "Teach us, please. Teach us of the third dimension."

"I will try." Jeffords sounded daunted. "Please realize that there are others of my kind who are wiser and clearer of thought. I am only a traveler and a minor scientific observer."

"Teach us," again pleaded the little creature at their feet, and its whole being seemed to vibrate longingly.

Jeffords waited a moment. "I will try," he said again, "though it is like telling of a color to a blind one. You know that a creature, like yourself or like us, might possibly be confined to one dimension only."

"Yes. It could move forward or backward, not sidewise," was the quick elaboration.

"If it came to an obstacle it could move only backward," pursued Jeffords. "But you and your kind, knowing and operating in two dimensions, could go to one side and so around the obstacle."

"If it were not too great," qualified the tadpole-savant heavily.

"But the object blocks only two dimensions," Jeffords continued. "Perhaps in a third dimension an individual can move past it, around the corner, so to speak, of its substance."

"We have surmised that." The transmitted thought seemed tinged with impatience. "We know that such a thing can be. What we want is the knowledge itself, not the assurance of the knowledge—wait! *Danger!*"

"Steady, sir," said Paul at the same moment. "Something's coming—something big and three-dimensional."

Both he and Jeffords looked away across the little diagram-city. It was in the middle distance, a great moving lump like a legless elephant in size, and shining as with brick-red inner flame.

"The fire-thing," came the quick, worried warning through the thought-interpreter. "It feeds upon our lives—we must flee. You say you are friends. Take friendly warning, then."

Paul's hand slid to his belt and caught the handle of his holstered automatic. His young eyes were fearless as they watched the approach of the new creature. Jeffords gazed also, the contemplative scientist as usual.

The details of the shining shape were clearer now as it came humping and hurrying closer. It had no head or legs, unless the sheeny rippling of its underside was a succession of limb-motions too fast for eye to follow. Its bulk swelled upward, like a fiery tortoise-shell, but seemed to bend and quiver like jelly. The inner light waxed and waned as if to the pulse of a powerful heart. The glow it shed lighted up the gray, smooth plain for many yards around.

"Look," said Paul tensely. "It's at the other edge of the city—eating those poor little bugs!"

IT WAS. A scurrying little pool of colors showed where some of the tadpole-people had been overtaken. The front of the blister-like nemesis swelled and elongated, like the pseudopod of an amoeba. The extension wiped an end across the middle of tiny fugitives, and they were no more.

"Say," choked Paul, "I can't let them go like that."

He was suddenly running in a curve, skirting the corner of the flat city as though he feared to hurt it by treading upon it. His automatic was in his hand.

"Watch out, lad," called Jeffords quickly. "You don't know what you're getting yourself into!" A moment later he ran after his nephew.

Fire spat from Paul's automatic, spat again. The glowing carapace of the fire-thing quivered, as if under impact, then grew more lurid—green, red, violet, livid. It swung away from the edge of the city, lumbering toward Paul.

"Shoot again!" yelled Jeffords, and brought his own automatic into play as he ran. Bullets rained from the two guns, and again the monster quivered, but slackened its advance for an instant only. Gaining Paul's side, Jeffords sped one more shot. Then, as the fire-thing loomed fairly upon them a dozen yards away, he flung his pistol at it.

For an instant the weapon showed in silhouette against the fiery bulge, then it exploded in a white glare. At the same moment a long, red streak of substance struck out from the very midst of the thing. It jabbed at Jeffords like the long, darting arm of a boxer. He staggered back.

"I'm blinded!" he yelled in dismay.

Paul had dropped his own useless pistol. He fumbled at his waist for something, anything that might be used in defense of himself and his now helpless uncle. A strap met his gloved fingers, the sling of the big canteen. With a jerk he freed it from his belt, swung the thing around his head, then hurled it at the enemy.

Again an explosion of white fire—and a sudden blot of blackness, a growing blot upon the incandescent rind of the creature! The round grossness seemed to shrink backward, to shudder as if in agony. It writhed, turned with clumsy speed and went wriggling and hunching away.

Jeffords still pawed at the front of his helmet. "Are you safe, Paul?" he quavered.

"I'm all right, sir, and the fire-thing's on the run." Paul caught his uncle's trembling arm in a reassuring grasp. "I threw the canteen, and apparently water is poison to the fellow—as it is to fire in general." He gazed after the swiftly decreasing blob of flame. "It's headed home to the sunny side of the planet."

He thrust his own head close to Jeffords, gazing intently at the scalded-looking helmet of the professor. "You're all right," he reported. "That streak of fire melted some of the metal, and it ran down over the glassite."

"Yes, my eyes are all right," answered Jeffords. "They're getting used to the dark; they can see a little." He felt his way over the dials and switches of the thought-interpreter.

"Friends," he spoke into it, "we have driven away your enemy. We have a material that can damage and pain it. When we come again we will bring more."

"Thank you," came a response, not from one mind, but from many. Jeffords shut off the device once more.

"Lead me back to the rocket, lad," he directed. "We've had enough of Vulcan for the time being."

A GAIN in space, course laid for Earth and their ship trained upon it, uncle and nephew relaxed and faced each other.

"We started for Venus," summed up Paul, "and we landed on Vulcan. We took a walk, found a race of things that were a dimension short, had a turn-up with a creature that shook off bullets but ran from water. Interesting—but where's the profit?"

"The profit will come," Jeffords answered, more seriously. "We'll return, and bring along a real scholar to teach our friends about the third dimension." He grew thoughtful. "In teaching them to leave the flat life and enter the full, we ourselves will learn new things."

"We'll learn—" began Paul, and then he laughed, not in amusement, but in exultation. He spread his arms, as if in greeting and approach to a greater universe.

"Fourth dimension," he cried, "here we come!"

LOOK FOR THIS SIGN



FOR THE MARK OF BETTER FICTION

THE POWER AND THE PEOPLE

by ARTHUR R. TOFTE

A Circle of Blue Sparkles Sprang Up!



Steve Cannon, leader of the labor front, and Dr. Gunderson, the world's greatest scientist, find themselves in opposition in deciding the fate of Man—for the discovery of atomic power threatens to throw the world's man-power out of work! But science will not be stopped . . .

IN THE great, cold, sterile laboratory on the New Jersey flats where Torkild Gunderson, recluse inventor, had only recently discovered the secret of atomic

power, a young man and a girl stood at the open doorway looking across the deserted fields, and in the girl's mind was a fearful wonder for what the next few hours would

bring.

Neither spoke for some time. Then Fley Cannon, the inventor's lovely, though completely efficient secretary, murmured, "The trouble with Dr. Gunderson is, he's all brain and no heart."

"Well, it took a lot of brain to find atomic power. It is something no other brain has ever solved," tall, youthfully lanky Alan Pierce declared with warm conviction.

"Yes, and what does all this new power do to us?" Fley asked, shaking her soft brown hair with indignation. "What about those millions and millions of people out there who are going to be thrown out of work because we can now have cheaper power than man has ever known before? Has Dr. Gunderson thought of them?"

Pierce smiled as he looked down into the provocatively angry face of the girl beside him.

"Personally, I think it is the greatest thing that has ever happened to mankind," the broad-shouldered young assistant of Dr. Gunderson stated. "It means that man need never again lift his hand in menial labor. It is the thing that scientists since the days of ancient Egypt have been striving for. You say Dr. Gunderson hasn't a heart. Perhaps he hasn't. But I, for one, am proud to have worked with him."

"But those millions of people out there?" the girl cried with exasperation. "They are not ready for it yet. Dr. Gunderson should never have announced it as he did last week. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Those poor people out there . . . not knowing how this new power will affect the whole present-day economic system."

Fley looked up at Pierce. "You don't understand," she said softly. "You are too much like Dr. Gunderson yourself. You've spent too much time in the laboratory. You don't know anything about how people feel deep inside them."

The gray eyes of the young man sparkled

with a mischievous thought. "I know how I feel about you—deep inside me," he said as he put his arm around the girl's slim shoulders.

Fley slipped away from him and shook her head violently.

"I told you that you don't understand," she cried. "This is serious, even if you are so blind as not to see it."

The young man's face grew suddenly grave.

"What is serious?" he asked.

For a moment the girl said nothing, merely wrinkled her broad brow and looked unseeing across the flats.

"I guess I'm a fool to love you, Alan," she said bitterly. "But you are so blind to life. And I've got to warn you."

Pierce grinned with pleasure. "I don't know what all this fearful danger is you speak of, but I'm all for it if it makes you love me. It's the first time you ever admitted it."

"Well, I do love you," Fley said as her chin went up, and then she smiled wanly. "And just as soon as you give me a kiss, I'm going to tell you something that will make your hair stand on end."

"I've waited a long time for this," Pierce said as the girl slipped into his arms. Then he added, "Now you can tell me what is frightening you. I won't let anything in the world hurt you or take you from me now."

FROM the depths of his protecting arms, Fley looked up at the handsome young scientist's lean face and smiled hopefully.

"Let's get out of here at once," she said softly.

"And leave Dr. Gunderson now when he is on the threshold of the greatest thing that has ever happened to man?"

"I mean just that, Alan," the girl replied. "Let's go away . . . and never come back."

"But why?" the lad cried. "Why?"

"Listen," Fley said, "if we don't leave soon, it will be too late. You know that

my father, Steve Cannon, is a leader in the labor movement. Last night he told me that I ought to get out of this place . . . quit my job with Dr. Gunderson. He said there were ugly rumors, talk among the men that they were coming here to get Dr. Gunderson today and destroy his laboratory and the atomic energy machine. They may be on the way now!"

Pierce patted the girl's smooth cheek. "You are imagining things. And anyway, it wouldn't be sporting to leave."

Fley looked across the flats again and pointed. "Does that look like I am imagining things? There is the mob now!"

The young scientist followed the direction of her finger and saw, coming across the level ground, a motley crowd of several hundred men. There was no mistaking their destination nor their temper.

Without a second's delay, Pierce hurried to the telephone that connected to Dr. Gunderson's subterranean secret laboratory. Quickly he pressed the signal for the scientist to answer.

"Dr. Gunderson," he said, when connection was finally made. "You had better come up at once. Something has happened."

When Pierce turned around, the girl seized his arm and tried to pull him out through the doorway.

"Please hurry," she cried, half hysterically. "Those men will kill you when they get here. We have just time to run the other way. Perhaps we can get away in time."

"But I'm not going to run," Pierce said. Dr. Gunderson will talk to them. And then everything will be alright . . ."

A low, deep voice broke in behind them, a voice that was harsh and brittle. "I will talk to whom? And what will be all right?"

"Dr. Gunderson!" cried Alan Pierce with relief. "There are several hundred men coming across the flats, headed this way. Miss Cannon says they are laborers who don't like the idea of your new atomic energy machine. They think it will throw everybody out of work. You see, her father,

Steve Cannon, is a labor leader, and she has learned from him they intend to kill you and destroy your machine."

Torkild Gunderson, his steel-grey eyes barely visible below huge, bushy eyebrows, his long thin nose itself like some misshapen laboratory beaker, his thin straight mouth uncompromising in its firmness, turned, went to the door and looked out at the oncoming horde.

"Fools," he muttered to himself as he closed and bolted the door. Then he turned to the young couple. "I knew this would happen some day. I am not unprepared. There is no danger."

Coldly and dispassionately, as though it were an ordinary occurrence, Dr. Gunderson went to a large flat table before a window which looked out over the flats. Pulling a key from his pocket, he lifted back the table top, revealing below, a neat orderly row of levers—seven or eight of them.

He threw in one lever and picked up a hand microphone which hung on a hook at the side. He began to speak and his voice boomed across the Jersey flats.

"Stay where you are," he warned the oncoming crowd of men, now only a few hundred yards away. At once there went up a roar from the men and they broke into a stumbling run toward the laboratory.

"Stay where you are," Dr. Gunderson repeated, his magnified voice drowning the yells of the men. "I warn you to stop where you are . . . if you value your lives."

Some of the men in front came to a hesitant halt, with those in back pushing forward.

"I warn you," the scientist said calmly, "that anyone who come closer will die in his tracks."

Pierce and the girl, looking through the wide window could see the men hesitate. Then a half dozen, bolder than the others, rushed forward.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Dr. Gunderson reluctantly pulled one of the

other levers and at once Pierce saw the half dozen men stumble and fall awkwardly, twisting and writhing as though in great agony.

"You can't do that!" Fley cried. "That's murder!"

DR. GUNDERSON looked up at her quizzically. "Science," he said slowly, "is bigger than you or I or those men out there. I do not intend to let a mob of madmen cheat the world out of my atomic power machine."

"But those aren't madmen out there," Fley pleaded. "One of them is my father. They are just desperate about their jobs. Talk to them. Talk to my father. His name is Steve Cannon."

Dr. Gunderson picked up the hand microphone again.

"If Steve Cannon is in the crowd, let him step forward."

The three watched as Fley's father strode forward, a burly figure with broad shoulders and thick arms, a man who looked and walked like a leader of men. His full shock of gray hair was flying over his head like a crusader's banner.

At fifteen paces from the chrome-steel shell of the circular-shaped laboratory, Steve Cannon stopped.

"We have come," yelled in a voice that was strangely high-pitched for so powerful a man, "we have come to get your new machine that is supposed to take away all honest work from men."

"You are mistaken, Steve Cannon," Dr. Gunderson said. "My machine belongs to science. And I advise that you and your men leave here at once."

"Dr. Gunderson," the high-pitched voice of Steve Cannon shouted, "You are a fool of a scientist. And unless you give up your machine, I won't answer for what these men might do."

Gunderson laughed mirthlessly. "I shall keep my machine. You and your men can do nothing to me. You had better leave before

you all get killed."

At these harsh, unfriendly words, the crowd shouted its disapproval and surged forward in a mad scramble toward the tower.

Smiling at the easy absurdity of it, Dr. Gunderson pulled a third lever, and at once blue sparkles like a million tiny bolts of lightning, sprang up in a circle about the laboratory in front of the oncoming men. Only Steve Cannon was on the inside of the circle of spitting flashes of electricity and he seemed in confusion as to what to do.

Dr. Gunderson's voice boomed out again. "It is instant death to try to cross through the electric barricade I have just turned on."

Then he turned with a smile to Alan Pierce who stood beside him, the lad's eyes wide with surprise, his cheeks pale. "This is the advantage of unlimited power," he said. "That much electrical energy ordinarily would require more power than could be supplied by ten power plants the size of the Lincoln Dam. My atomic energy plant, down in the sub-basement, is hardly bigger than this table—and I am barely touching its capacity."

A tinkle sounded at the window. Dr. Gunderson looked up at the spot.

"They are firing at us."

Then his face grew stern again.

"I think it is time I showed them that Science is greater than they are . . . or their little guns."

He looked again at the crowd of men outside. One had thrust a foot through the wall of blue sparks, and some of the men were carrying the man away, his screams of pain echoing even across the distance.

Dr. Gunderson pulled another lever.

At first it seemed as though nothing was happening. Then to their ears came a faint hissing sound. In a few minutes, a mist, deeper and thicker and more opaque than any they had ever seen before, began to roll out from the base of the circular laboratory. It gathered on the ground and

crept, like some living thing toward the wall of blue flashes and through it as though it were not there. Soon it was up to the windows, and a moment later all sight of the outdoors was blotted out as if some huge black blanket had covered the laboratory building.

Alan Pierce reached over and switched on the lights in the laboratory, as Fley's hand sought his protection.

Dr. Gunderson pulled back the table top, locked it, and put the key back in his pocket.

"The lights won't help you long," he said. "Soon the fog will be in here too. And then not even the lights will show. Rather effective weapon of defense, don't you agree, Alan? And as a scientist yourself, you may be interested in what makes the mist so black and dense. It's a simple thing—merely a suspended colloidal solution issued under tremendous air pressure. You know how silver ammonium iodide blackens as soon as the light strikes it. That is the way with my solution—and it just doesn't precipitate in air. As simple as that. And very effective!

"And now, my dear young people, I leave you for awhile. I have work to do below. You know how to reach me on the phone, Alan. Don't try to come down. It can't be done unless I let you. I think it will do those men out there good to be in the dark for three or four days."

"For three or four days?" Fley cried. "You aren't going to let this go on for three or four days?"

"It will give them time to come to their senses," was Gunderson's cold reply. "In the meantime, you may have noticed that it is getting rather thick in here. There is food and water in that desk over there. I don't imagine you young folks will mind being alone for a time. It may even interest you to listen to the radio reports from outside. I promise you they will be interesting. People get so dramatic when anything unusual happens. They lose their

heads so easily! Yes, I almost wish I could stay and listen with you, but I have work to do. Don't try to get out of here. The doors are locked and I have the key. And anyway, you couldn't get through the wall of electricity. You would only die . . . and then I would have to get a new secretary and a new assistant."

LAND OF THE BLIND

THE voice died as the old scientist backed out of the now extremely limited range of vision of the young man and girl who were clinging together. The lights above them were now mere blobs of dim whiteness, and around them, the black mist became perceptibly thicker and heavier. And then . . . It was dark!

Fley cried into the young scientist's shoulder, "He's mad . . . insane! Those poor men out there . . . dead! What can we do?"

In the pitch blackness, now tingling to the senses in its unnatural impenetrable heaviness, the lad reached down and pulled the girl's chin up.

"Get me out of here," Fley cried hysterically, "get me out of here before I go mad. My father is out there somewhere. I want to go to him."

Alan Pierce turned with the girl, and fumblingly went toward where he thought the door would be. Searching with his hands on the wall, he found the closed doorway and tried the handle and bolts. But they were, he knew, beyond his efforts to open.

"If I knew how to get out of here, I would, dear," he said. "But I know this door. And I know I couldn't open it without Dr. Gunderson's keys, in a hundred years."

"I can't stand it," the girl shrieked. "I can't stand this darkness. I'll go raving mad."

Pierce pulled the girl over to a seat and sat down beside her. He stroked her arms and tried to soothe her. But for a long

time she cried hysterically against him.

Finally, hours later, he let the sleeping girl slip back gently into the seat, and he started to find the desk containing the food. It took him some time. Then he had to feel each thing to determine what it was.

Queer business, this. He never realized how it must be to have no eyesight, to be totally blind. What a horrible fate, he thought. Even in walking, he felt unsteady, afraid of the black silence.

THEN, with a jug of liquid under one arm and a package of what felt like biscuits under the other, he sought again the seat where he had left Fley. Sense of direction was all gone, and for a time he felt desperate, panicky. He wanted to shout her name, to be sure she was there.

Suddenly he stubbed his foot against something. It was the chair, and the shock awoke Fley.

First he heard a whimper of fear and then a cry of fright.

"Alan! Alan! Where are you?"

"Right here, dear," he said as he slipped into the seat beside her. "I went to get us something to eat. I don't know what it is, but we should eat something."

The biscuits were strangely tasteless but palatable and seemed to have unusual revitalizing properties.

"It must be evening at least," Pierce said. "Let's find the radio and hear what they are saying about this in the world outside."

Together, holding each other's hands they groped through the inky blackness of the laboratory. Finding a familiar object, Pierce was soon able to lead them to the special radio which Dr. Gunderson had built himself and installed in the laboratory. Pierce ran his fingers down the familiar keyboard and pressed one of the station buttons. A news announcer was speaking—

"... Elizabeth, the Oranges, Paterson, Newark, all report the fog has reached them. In Jersey City the lights are dim.

So far, in New York it is no worse than an ordinary fog.

"A call just came in from the Battery. They can't see the light on the Statue of Liberty . . . they say the fog is crossing the lower Bay. People of Greater New York—go to your home and stay there. In another hour it may be too late. This is no ordinary fog. New Jersey cities report you can't see an electric light burning six inches in front of your eyes.

"A call from Trenton . . . the fog has not reached there yet. New Brunswick is under.

"In New York, theatres and other public places are being emptied. The subways and trains are jammed. There are no taxicabs available.

"We don't know yet what is causing this unusual fog, but we have chemists analyzing it now.

"No one seems very excited. A reporter just came in. He was laughing and said most people were laughing over their difficulties. Of course these people haven't seen the real fog yet. It is still thin here in New York. Men and women seem to be hurrying more than ever, that is about the only . . ."

Pierce touched another button on the radio and the calm voice of the New York announcer was replaced by a hoarse, half-shouting voice from a local broadcasting station less than a score of miles away—

"Don't lose your heads, folks. It has been pitch black for more than five hours now and we don't know yet what is causing it. Not a thing can move. All transportation has stopped—trains, autos, planes. It's worse than a blizzard or a hurricane.

"You can't see a thing. I've been talking into this microphone for three hours now and I don't even know if it is working. I can't see the control engineers. They can't see me.

"All I can say is—keep calm, stay in your homes and keep your radios tuned in. Perhaps in the morning the fog will be

gone; like a bad dream—like a . . .”

Pierce touched another button and the voice was cut off.

“I think it is criminal,” Fley said.

“I suggest we get some sleep. There is nothing we can do,” Pierce replied.

“We can shut off that machine,” Fley stated angrily. “All those people out there . . . in darkness! There will be a great many lives lost tonight if we can’t stop that mist. Think of wrecks . . . of operations in hospitals where there are no lights . . . of thieves taking advantage of the blackness. You just can’t let it go on.”

“I’m afraid we’ll have to,” the young scientist answered and then tried to pull the girl into his arms.

THE girl pushed him away angrily.

“What kind of a man are you, anyway? Have you no heart, no pity for those people out there? I’m glad I’m finding out now what a heartless fellow you really are. Don’t touch me!”

But Pierce had seized her by the two shoulders and was shaking her vigorously.

“Listen here, Fley, Dr. Gunderson’s atomic power machine is greater than those people out there or the few lives that may be lost tonight. Every great discovery has a little blood on its pages of history. My allegiance is to Dr. Gunderson!”

“And mine is to humanity,” the girl replied as she pushed his arms away from her.

“Don’t be silly,” the lad urged. “Of course, Dr. Gunderson’s atomic power is for humanity too in spite of themselves! But until they come to their senses, I must protect this machine.”

“And let thousands die?” Fley asked.

“Yes, even if millions die,” Pierce replied. “But they won’t.”

There was a moment of silence. Then the girl spoke slowly.

“Well, something has died in me already . . . my love for you. Oh, Alan, help us get

out of here! Stop that terrible mist-making machine! It isn’t right.”

“I’m sorry, Fley. I love you and I’ll always love you. But Dr. Gunderson’s atomic power machine comes ahead of everything else. Yes, even ahead of our love. You must think of its possibilities . . . of the good it can do for humanity . . . for centuries after we are gone.”

“I don’t care to hear. I don’t want to listen to you any more,” Fley cried.

There was another moment of silence.

“Let’s get some sleep,” Pierce said bitterly. “Perhaps we’ll feel differently in the morning.”

The young scientist led the girl to the seat where they had been sitting and let her curl up, with his suit coat covering her. Then he went back to an armchair near the radio.

For a long time he sat in the Stygian darkness and thought—and of more than the people out in the fog-filled area. He was thinking of Fley Cannon and her young slimness and her sweet face and brown hair, and of the love she could bring to him. If only all this hadn’t happened. It did seem harsh and unfair—all this fog, and perhaps unnecessary. There should have been another way.

But before he had any answer to his problem, Pierce fell asleep and later awoke to hear pounding.

It was still pitch black. There was no knowing if he had slept five minutes or five hours. The pounding seemed to come from across the laboratory. Could it be Fley? he wondered.

With a bound, Pierce hurried across the room. Groping awkwardly, he found Fley trying to pry up the top of the control table of the mist-machine.

Seizing her bodily, he wrenched a bar of metal out of her hands.

“I couldn’t stand it any longer,” Fley cried. “You’ve just got to help stop that

terrible machine, Alan. If you love me . . ."

"Of course I love you Fley, but I can't go back on Dr. Gunderson. Come, let's find the radio and see what time it is. I haven't the slightest idea."

"It's so dark," Fley whimpered. "I didn't know it could ever get this dark."

MENACE OF THE MOB

BY GROPING around the wall, Pierce found the radio and switched it on.

The voice of a New York announcer came to them.

" . . . as far north as White Plains, almost to Peekskill . . . as far east as Patchogue and Port Jefferson on Long Island . . . as far south as Lakewood and Trenton. That would place the center of the fog area as somewhere in eastern New Jersey.

"Greater New York is like an area paralyzed. Not a train, not a car, not a boat has moved since eleven o'clock last evening. We know that the sun shines this morning, but we here in New York are as blind as bats. Aviators flying from outside the area report that the whole district is like a huge ink spot on the eastern seaboard, a blot that is already sixty or seventy miles in diameter . . . and growing larger!

"Fortunate people who took the warning in time have managed to keep ahead of the fog's progress. But within the New York area this morning are twelve million men, women, and children who are this moment sitting in dread, waiting for the end of this terrible thing. And no one yet knows what it is . . . what has caused it . . . or when it will end.

"Last night, our telephones were the only means we had to cover the city's news. We sent our reporters out . . . but not one has come back. A few have called in by phone . . . the rest of the news has come from the people themselves.

"Fires . . . the city seemed last night to have had scores of them! Panic-stricken

people have called us saying the whole city is burning down . . . and they can't see a thing. We don't believe this is true, although heavy smoke is in the air. Men report that in lighting cigarettes they have burned their fingers, and dropped lighted matches without knowing they had a light until the rug under their feet began to smoulder. Let us again warn everybody—do not use fire in any way. You can't see it and if it starts, you can't put it out.

"Then, there are thieves, taking advantage of the fog. Police have managed to get a few men to some of the large banks. But many jewelry stores have been reported emptied of their stock. We wonder how the thieves expect to find their way back to their hideouts.

"Scores of human beings died in hospitals last night. Some died because surgeons could not see to perform operations. Others died because nurses could not get to them with their regular treatments.

"Many others died on the streets and on the highways in a desperate, frantic effort to get out of the fog area.

"Babies today are without milk. If this goes on another day, intense suffering is expected among even the most fortunate."

"Calls are coming in at the station here as fast as our operators can handle them. Panic seems to have struck the city. We've got to find a way out of this . . . the calls that are coming say it is getting beyond hope of relief . . .

"For the sake of sanity, folks, keep your heads. Stay where you are. Don't light fires. Lock your doors and go to bed. Pretend it is night . . . pretend it is night . . ."

"Shut it off," Fley screamed, and seized the young scientist by the arm. Then she cried against his chest.

"Don't you see what a horrible thing is taking place?" she pleaded. "We've just got to stop it. All those people are dying because of us."

FOR a moment, Alan Pierce said nothing, merely stroked the girl's smooth tear-wet cheeks.

"This has gone too far," he murmured, "I had no idea it would lead to this."

"Then you will turn it off?" Fley cried.

"Yes," the lad whispered as if to himself, and added, "and I hope Dr. Gunderson will forgive me."

Together they sought the control table, and with the steel bar, Fley had used previously, Pierce finally managed to pry up the top. Running his fingers along the row levers, he found the two which were out of position. With trembling hands, he pulled them back into their normal positions.

The slight hissing sound stopped at once, but for some time nothing seemed to have changed. Only gradually, after fifteen or twenty minutes, did a faint dim light appear in front of them. It was Fley who saw it first.

"See there," she whispered, and hugged Pierce's arm. But the young scientist's heart was heavy. He felt like a traitor to Dr. Gunderson . . . to science . . . to everything his training stood for. What was going to happen now? He almost wished he hadn't turned off the machine, hadn't listened to Fley's pleas. Even her caresses now seemed bitter to him. He could never love her after this, for she had made him betray his trust. He suddenly hated himself with all his being. Roughly he pushed her away.

And at that instant they heard a shout . . . then many shouts from outside. The mob which originally had laid siege to the laboratory was now awake to the fact that the mist was clearing and that the electric wall was turned off. The men were coming, and their yells were of vengeance.

Pierce then realized the full enormity of his mistake! Those men out there would kill them all, destroy everything.

There was pounding on the door, then heavy thuds as the door cracked precariously under the impact of a heavy battering ram. Through the windows he

could dimly see the crowd of wildly excited men. They had an uprooted telephone pole and were using it to batter in the door.

Another crash . . . and another! Pierce knew that it was a matter of a few seconds before the door would give in. And then what?

The young man, now calm and unafraid that the danger was almost upon him, pulled up the phone and called Dr. Gunderson. There was an answering click.

"Dr. Gunderson," he said, "I have turned off the mist-machine. The men are breaking down the door. In a minute they will be inside."

Slowly he put the receiver back on its hook. Then he picked up the bar of metal which he had used to pry off the top of the control table. He looked at it and tossed it away.

Fley was looking at him fearfully. "What else could we have done?" she pleaded, reading his thoughts.

Another crash came . . . a shivering, trembling crash! Then the door fell in.

There was a yell of triumph from the men outside. Followed this, a moment of silence. Pierce stepped to the open doorway and waited for the rush he knew was coming.

"There's the one we want," someone yelled. And an instant later, the mob was on him.

At first the men in their hurry got in each other's way. Pierce merely lowered his shoulders and held them back. But then a fist lashed out at him, and in a moment, instinctively he was fighting for his life, his head down, his arms working like pistons to hold back the front few who were within his reach.

It was like a leaky dam holding back a flood of water. It held for a moment. And all of a sudden it sprung . . . and Pierce felt himself helplessly carried back, his only idea now to get to Fley and protect her as best he could.

But in that instant he heard a high-

pitched voice boom out,

"Hold back, men. It is Steve Cannon . . . I say hold back, men!"

OUT of the corner of his eye, Pierce could see Steve Cannon and Dr. Gunderson rushing across the room toward the mob of men. Then just as he reached Fley, and knew she was at his back, something hit him on the head and he fell.

When he opened his eyes, there was a roar in his head like a thousand dynamos and sharp, piercing pains shot back through his temples. Fley was looking down at him and stroking his forehead. She was smiling, and looked at him like some angel in the heaven he almost half-expected to find himself in.

But no, he was still in the laboratory. And there, across the room sat Dr. Gunderson and Steve Cannon and three or four of the men from the mob. The others were gone.

"Everything is all right," Fley said softly as she kissed his eyes closed.

"But what has happened?" he asked.

"It's all right," she repeated, and hugged his hand. "Last night, when we were here alone, Dr. Gunderson went out and got my father who was still close to the laboratory. Then the two of them went down to his private laboratory below. And those two men, in one night, worked up a plan for the use of the atomic power machine so that humanity will be helped instead of ruined. I have only half heard the details—but there will be a committee made up of Dr. Gunderson, my father, and some other leading scientists and labor leaders. Industry will be permitted to use the new power on a royalty basis, and all royalties go to rehabilitate mankind. It's the greatest thing that has ever happened to this world. They say they can end depressions and poverty. They even think they can end warfare."

Fley looked down at him with a smile. "About the only thing it can't end," she murmured as she bent over to touch her lips to his forehead, "is my love for you."

FOR THE MOST THRILLING FEATURES

. . . READ . . .

TOP-NOTCH COMICS
BLUE RIBBON COMICS
PEP COMICS
ZIP COMICS

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS!!!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WE ARE of the opinion that the first issue of the **SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY** is a pretty darn good all-around science fiction magazine, but after all, we edited it, and we may be prejudiced, so we'd like to know what you think of it.

WE TRIED to put everything into it that we felt a good science fiction magazine should have. We started it off with a walloping good 75,000 word complete, book-length novel, then we followed up with the best novelet and short stories that were ever submitted to us in all the time that we've been publishing science fiction magazines. And to be doubly sure that you got your quarter's worth we filled up 144 pages . . . and we mean 144 full pages. **SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY** contains absolutely no advertising in all its 144 pages.

BUT LIKE we said before, **YOU'RE** the final judge of whether or not it is as good as we think. So drop us a line and let us know.

INCIDENTALLY, if you didn't get your copy, and your newsdealer can't supply you, send 25c to Double Action Magazines, Inc., 60 Hudson St., N. Y. C., and we will mail a copy to you, postage prepaid, at once.

OUR ROBOT MAID

by **BOB OLSEN**

BEFORE publishing the details of our amazing experiences with Robota, our mechanical servant girl, my wife and I wish to make one thing clear: We place no blame on the Robomaid Manufacturing Corporation, nor on Robota herself, for the catastrophe which climaxed her servitude in our home. To do her justice, we must concede that her crime—if it could justly be called a crime—was not due to any flaw in her mechanism, but was really caused by her superlative perfection. Singular as it may appear, Robota was so much like a real woman that she actually developed human emotions. Who could have foreseen that love—the mysterious force which has brought so much

grief as well as joy to human beings, would also wreck the life of a mechanical girl?

Like many couples whose limited means permit the employment of only one, poorly paid maid-of-all-work, we learned that the servant problem was almost as hard to solve as an income tax report.

For instance, we had one maid whose stupidity drove us to distraction and another whose super-smartness was not revealed to us until she had departed with our best linen and silverware. She was succeeded by a girl who was undeniably honest, but who spent more time in beauty parlors than in our kitchen. Had she been as expert with egg-beater and vacuum cleaner as she was with lipstick and curling irons, she would have been a wonderful housekeeper. Subsequently, we had maids who cooked as if they were in league with the garbage collector, maids who were more familiar with rye whiskey than rye bread

and maids who dropped cigarette ashes in the potato salad.

Finally, by a trial-and-error process of elimination, we acquired a maid who was like an answer to a housewife's prayer. Unfortunately, she was as good looking as she was competent. It was inevitable that our iceman, a handsome, husky chap, should display more than a professional interest in our model cook. We had scarcely begun

to congratulate ourselves on finding her when she eloped with the attractive brute.

After another period of gruelling research, we were lucky enough to hire another excellent maid. As a precautionary measure, we replaced our ice box with a Frigidaire; but this turned out to

be a futile safeguard. Hilda married the policeman on our beat.

On the very day that Hilda announced the distressing news of her impending marriage, my wife received in the mail a circular which alluringly advertised the recently perfected Robot Servant. Without even consulting me, the Mrs. mailed the business reply-card. Next day a high-powered salesman called and staged a demonstration. When I arrived from the office, Robota was installed in our home—all ready to go to work. All I had to do was sign the check.

For the benefit of those who may not understand the scientific principles upon which the marvelous performances of the Robot Maid depend, I shall attempt a brief explanation. I may as well admit, however, that some of the details of Robota's physiology are difficult for even an expert scientist to understand, so what could you

We offer here an object lesson to all our readers who might become victims of labor-saving machines! We are sure that, after reading of the tragedy of the robot maid, you will run in horror at the sight of even an electric shaver!

expect from an ordinary individual like myself?

As nearly as I have been able to comprehend the matter, the Robot Servant is operated by means of an extremely sensitive combination of photo-electric cells, induction coils and branching electric wires, which are comparable to the nervous system of the human body. It is a well known fact that such a circuit actually acts in conformity with the psychological laws of conditioned reflexes.

AFTER a previously determined stimulus—such as the utterance of a distinctive word of command—is followed by a series of mechanical actions, a definite path of increased conductivity is established in the system, making it necessary for the Robot to repeat identically the same series of acts each time the signal is subsequently given.

From this concise explanation it is easy to understand why a Robot Maid—just like a child or an animal—must be trained for each task it is to perform. The period of education, however, is very brief. A mechanical girl is much smarter than a living animal. Instead of requiring numerous, tedious repetitions of the actions which are to be learned, Robota acquired perfect skill with only one short lesson.

In giving Robota her preliminary education, we were assisted by the service man from the Robomaid Corporation. Under his able supervision, we easily taught her all she needed to know, for the first week at least, in about half an hour.

As was to be expected, a few minor difficulties had to be ironed out before Robota's functioning was completely satisfactory. In justice to her, we must admit that the errors which occurred were due to our ineptness, rather than hers.

This fact was well illustrated by an incident which happened on the first Sunday after Robota's installation. My wife had trained Robota to perform certain me-

thodical chores at specified periods of the day. They included cooking and serving breakfast, washing the dishes, making the beds, scouring the bathtub and a number of other routine duties.

The bed-making sequence was scheduled to take place punctually at ten A. M. Completely forgetting our custom of sleeping late on Sunday mornings, my wife had neglected to make corresponding changes in Robota's working schedule.

I shall never forget the horrible nightmare—or rather morning-filly—which disturbed my slumbers on that memorable Sabbath morn. In my dreams I was transported to the Arctic regions. Clad only in sketchy trunks, I was leaping frantically over ice floes, striving to keep ahead of a monstrous polar bear.

Awakening with a start, I discovered that part of my dream was real. My legs were bare and cold; although I was clad in my nightshirt instead of my bathing suit, it didn't give me much protection against the frigid breezes which were blowing on my exposed limbs through the open window. Bending over me was a frightful figure. It took me several seconds to realize that the apparition which looked so fearsome to my drowsy eyes was Robota. She was making my bed—completely ignoring the fact that I was still lying in it!

Shortly after this episode, we had a mid-week holiday. This time, my wife had taken the precaution to switch the bed-making sequence until afternoon; but she did not make any other changes in Robota's schedule.

Instead of sleeping late, I arose at the usual time and spent most of the morning puttering around the house, repairing leaky faucets, emptying the vacuum-cleaner bag, and doing some other odd jobs. By eleven o'clock I had gotten myself so mussed up that there was nothing for me to do but hop right into the bathtub. I was in the midst of my ablutions and was lustily warbling the toreador's song from *Carmen*

in my fog-horn, baritone voice, when the bathroom door, which I had apparently forgotten to lock, flew open and in strode Robota.

In her left hand she held a can of Dutch Cleanser. A scrubbing brush with coarse, stiff bristles was grasped in the metal fingers of her right hand.

With all the energy of her powerful electric motor, Robota proceeded to scour the bathtub. The fact that the tub was occupied by a plump, unclothed biped didn't seem to make much difference to her.

But—wait a minute—I'll have to amend that statement. My presence *did* make a lot of difference to her. Apparently she concluded that I was part of the equipment which needed scouring. Before I could scramble out of the water and escape, she seized me by the scruff of the neck with a grip of steel (and that's no figure of speech). Sprinkling me liberally with the abrasive powder, she gave me a brisk and thorough going over with that infernal, stiff-bristled brush of hers!

In vain, I struggled to escape! In vain, I remonstrated! In vain, I commanded, begged and entreated her to release me! I even tried reasoning with her, reminding her that my ancestors sprang from Norway and not from Holland, but she still persisted in scrubbing me thoroughly with Dutch Cleanser. As I write about it now, my tender skin smarts at the mere thought of the scouring she gave me.

Not until she had imparted a rosey hue to my epidermis, did she condescend to let me go. As I hastily wrapped a towel about my ample person and made a dash for my bathrobe, I fancied I detected a mechanical grin on Robota's polished, chromium plated pan. She also uttered a noise which sounded suspiciously like a giggle. Perhaps it was my imagination working overtime, but if Robota actually did laugh at me, I couldn't exactly blame her. I probably looked funny enough to inspire even a robot to mirth.

OF COURSE my wife had to bear all this commotion, and she arrived just in time to witness the humiliating climax. She laughed so hard that she became hysterical and I had to send for a doctor. Even now, after several months have passed, she can't even glance at a bathtub or a can of Dutch Cleanser without being seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

A few days after this husband-scrubbing episode, the joke was on her, however. It happened on the afternoon when she was scheduled to entertain her bridge club. Our living room was turgid with chattering club women, who were busily engaged in playing cards, swapping gossip, and munching dime store candy, when Robota barged into the gathering.

The time had arrived for her to go over the parlor rug with the vacuum cleaner and she didn't let anything prevent her from performing this task with her customary diligence.

Like an army tank crashing through barbed wire entanglements, Robota ruthlessly pushed the vacuum cleaner through the barricades of rickety card tables, wobbly chairs, and bewildered females. Soon the air was filled with screams, the room was cluttered with fragments of furniture, and the floor was littered with lipsticks, open-toed sandals, stubs of lead pencils, and colorful jelly beans. Blithely and efficiently, Robota sucked all this impedimenta into the capacious maw of the vacuum cleaner.

I arrived from the office just in time to get a few hearty chuckles out of this incident. But next day, when I received the bill for the damages, it didn't seem quite so funny.

Shortly after this, we began to suspect that Robota was developing emotional complexes. It was the evening of our third wedding anniversary. Having celebrated by partaking of a six-bit restaurant dinner, we had returned home and were blissfully engaged in re-enacting our courtship.

Of course we should never have thought of petting in public, or even in the presence of a single human friend or servant. The fact that Robota, her day's work completed, was standing in a corner of our living room, was ignored by us. Since we regarded her merely as part of our home furnishings, it did not occur to us that our demonstrations of affection could possibly have any effect upon her.

We had reached the stage when my wife was sitting on what used to be my lap, her arms about my neck and her lips crushed fondly to mine, when we were startled by a loud, sighing noise. Gazing toward the corner where Robota was standing, we were astonished to see her press both of her mechanical hands against her bulging, stainless steel bosom and roll her photo-electric eyes toward the ceiling, after which she exhaled another tremendous sigh, which sounded like the exhaust of a pants-pressing machine.

COMMENCING the following day, Robota displayed symptoms of lassitude and inattention to her duties. My wife was generous enough to blame this spell of seeming laziness on my failure to keep Robota's storage batteries filled with distilled water; but even after her accumulators had been recharged and tested, our mechanical maid continued to show signs of lethargy. Several times, on moonlit eve-

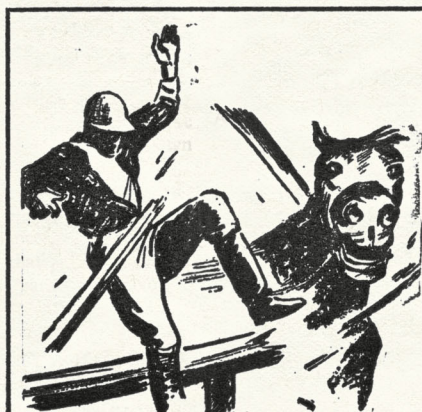
nings, I caught her moping, instead of moping, on our back porch.

It was about two weeks after our wedding anniversary that I awoke one morning with that strange feeling of uneasiness that presages impending disaster. Sitting up in bed, I sniffed and listened. Instead of the usual morning smells and sounds—the fragrance of frying bacon and the cozy bubbling of the coffee percolator—nothing but an ominous blankness greeted my nose and ears.

Hastily donning my bathrobe, I rushed to the kitchen. Usually Robota's special domain was a model of neatness. Much to my amazement, I found everything in confusion. Dirty dishes were stacked in the sink. A pile of stale garbage adorned the kitchen table. On the floor was a puddle of smutty oil.

My heart beating double time with anxiety, I rushed to the screen porch. In the space where an important, recently acquired piece of household equipment should have been, there was nothing but vacancy, which seemed to be accentuated by a pair of broken wires dangling portentously from the bare wall. Glancing outside, I observed that our driveway was littered with a trail of broken milk bottles, wilted vegetables, and left-over hash.

From these grim clues, only one deduction could possibly be formulated: Robota, our kitchen mechanic, had eloped with our new refrigerator!



TEN STORIES

10c

TEN CENTS

10c

WM. O'SULLIVAN, PHIL RICHARDS,
T. W. FORD, WALT RANDALL, ZENE
TUTTLE, WILCEY EARLE AND OTHERS

IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF
TEN STORY SPORTS

FUTURE FANTASY

**An Editorial by
CHARLES D. HORNIG**

WE DEAL with the future in FUTURE FICTION—every angle of it—even the future of the type of science-fiction and fantasy used in this publication!

What will be the future of fantasy?

We may be prejudiced, but it looks to us as though science-fiction and its allies have a very promising future indeed! Of course, the fate of any type of reading matter depends on its popularity. When the public tires of a certain kind of story, most of its future is in the past! (If you'll allow a ridiculous anachronism.)

Fortunately for lovers of fantasy, this type of literature has grown steadily in popularity during the past decade. The public has taken to it more, and is giving every sign of "going in for it in a big way."

Not so many years ago, most people ridiculed fantasy and the proposals of fantasy writers—their speculations on the wonder-world of the future.

But John Q. Public is fast losing his dislike for imaginative literature.

What has happened to bring about this change? After all, there must be a reason why new thousands are turning to fantasy every month—why cartoon strips, books, magazines, and motion pictures are ever increasing their quota of fantastic stories.

There can be only one answer to this change: people are beginning to *believe* in fantasy—and fantasy, such as we find in FUTURE FICTION and its companion, SCIENCE FICTION, deals with Things

to Come.

During the recent past, the public has seen so many Things to Come that actually Came, despite its early disbelief, that it has become inured to the constant materialization of former "impossibilities," so that today, even such things as rocket-ships for space-travel, atomic energy, and other science-fiction themes, do not meet with very much skepticism—at least, far less than but a few years ago.

Now that people are learning to believe in the World of Tomorrow, they are able to let their imaginations roam through the great realm of Future Possibility that we find in fantasy stories—they can dwell, with credulity, upon science-fiction themes.

This increasing portion of the public that is now turning to fantastic literature naturally calls for a great volume of reading matter—hence, the recent upswing in science-fiction publishing.

Old-time science-fiction fans now look with great satisfaction upon the reaction of the formerly-scoffing public—for the increasing demand for fantasy is bringing forth an unprecedented amount of good material.

For fantasy is the fiction of the future—and it provides a glimpse of the world as it will be.

And when that World of Tomorrow becomes the World of Today, and science-fiction has come to pass—there will *still* be fantasy fiction to point the way to an even more glorious Tomorrow!

HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION

by DERWIN LESSER

“SCIENCE FICTION and FUTURE FICTION specialize in the action-fantasy type of science-fiction—good adventure stories based on logical science, but minus any lengthy scientific discussions or technicalities.”

If you are familiar with the above paragraph, it means that you have already submitted at least one story to this publisher, and had it rejected for some reason. For these are a few of the words that accompany every first rejection made by the editor of these twin magazines.

It is not always very easy to explain, even in a detailed letter of criticism, just exactly what is wrong with a rejected story. Sometimes the story itself is very good, but simply not the type of science-fiction published here.

The purpose of this little article is to tell the readers of FUTURE FICTION, and particularly the budding authors, just what goes to make up good science-fiction.

IN THE first place, any good science-fiction story must first be a good story—that is, it must be well-written and up to the standards of any good fiction. The characters must be life-like—that’s the most important single requisite for a good story—the reader must be able to picture the “actors” as actually living, breathing beings—whether Martians or men.

This necessity for realism is so necessary, because no reader can truly enjoy a story that he cannot *believe*, while he is reading it—therefore, the characters must be truly life-like.

Now that we have real people in our story, we must face them with some kind of an unusual situation—and in science-fiction, there is no end of unusual situations! The leading characters must be given some problem to solve that tests their worth. This does not have to be the saving of a world, or the rescuing of a heroine, so long as the problem is made interesting to the reader, to

the extent that he is anxious to know just how the people in the story handle it.

The reader’s interest should be aroused at the outset of the story. It is important to hold the reader’s attention from the very beginning, to insure that he will not turn to another yarn without finishing it. For example, such an opening line as:

“Of course, you realize, Jones, that the Interplanetary Guard cannot be responsible for you if you insist on carrying out this mad plan of yours!”—or:

“But this thing has baffled the world’s greatest scientists, and yet you think that you have the answer!”—or:

“A fine fix!—the most cursed, plague-ridden spot in all creation—and here we are right in the middle of it!”

It is always good to begin a story with conversation, and it is essential that plenty of good conversations are placed throughout the tale—without this, the script is dry and uninteresting to the average pulp reader.

When planning the action for your hero, remember that the reader always likes to put himself in the hero’s place—so it is all-important that he be especially logical in his reactions.

Science-fiction, unlike most other pulp fiction, does not demand a formula-plot in the stories. There are thousands of plots and variations of plots that can be used—so long as there *is* a plot. A story that does not follow a definite connected thread to a climax leaves the reader dissatisfied. In fact, it is not a story if it hasn’t a plot—although it may be fiction. It will only be incident, and not a complete yarn.

There are any number of plots, but there are a few that are very overworked. Only a genius—a literary master-man—can put over a story with a hackneyed plot. Avoid the mad-scientist-plans-to-conquer-earth theme. That is the most overused in science-fiction, and is only acceptable when the author can present a novel climax or denouement.

BUT science-fiction is the most difficult type of pulp-magazine literature to write, because it makes the demands of all fiction, *plus* the special requisites that are peculiar to this classification of story.

A good science-fiction story must be based on good science—not necessarily replete with scientific facts and theories, but logically possible according to known science.

A story that presents something really novel in plot arrangement or scientific theme has a much better chance than ordinarily good run-of-the-mill material—for novelty is the keynote of science-fiction as nowhere else.

People who read science-fiction magazines are not necessarily scientists—so all long-winded scientific discussions should be omitted. Good, brief facts of science and plausible theories are not only permitted, but almost essential to the make-up of a really fine science-fiction story.

And if you are planning to write a science-fiction story for a science-fiction magazine, do not overdo your awe-

inspiring implications. Remember that science-fiction fans are calloused to space-ships, atomic energy, super-civilizations, and such ideas—so you cannot thrill them with the mere take-off of a space-ship.

This fault is particularly noticeable in the works of good authors of other types of literature who turn to science-fiction for the first time. Unfamiliar with the “atmosphere” of science-fiction, they treat every little scientific novelty with breathless phrases—but this tires the veteran reader who has long since lost his “awe-struckability” over those objects and incidents that are common to most stories. He can only be thrilled by *unusual* happenings in an already *unusual* type of literature. Of course, the new reader will be thrilled at first by all the imaginative qualities involved.

And if you’re writing for the pulps, your stories must be filled with action, intrigue, and suspense. Remember that, along with realism—well-developed plot—conversation—novelty—good, logical science.

Now, go ahead and write that story!

THE SECRET OF THE
SHIELD
REVEALED!!!
IN
SHIELD-WIZARD
COMICS

WATCH FOR IT AT YOUR NEWSSTAND

FAN MAG DIGEST

(A regular department presenting excerpts of interest from the Science Fiction Fan Publications)

True Fans Buy Their Own Magazines

(Here is an excerpt from the printed fan-newspaper, "*Fantasy News*," 31-51 41st St., Long Island City, N. Y., in which the editor, William S. Sykora, expresses his opinion of science-fiction fans who do not support the publications.)

"We recently discovered that several science-fiction 'clubs' save the members money by buying only one copy of a pro science-fiction magazine, or by buying only one subscription to a sfan mag., passing around each issue among the members. We could hardly believe that such a petty un-American, unscientific procedure was actually being followed—but investigation showed that this procedure was all too common. If these 'fan clubs' believe that they are 'supporting' science-fiction in this manner, then they stand to be sadly disillusioned. Perhaps they do save each of their members a few pennies a month, but they cost the magazine publishers, and especially the fan mag publishers, not pennies, but dollars. . . . A true fan buys his magazines for himself. . . . Buy and save your magazines for your own collection; you will get far more enjoyment from this hobby."

Space-Travel Dangers Are Largely Imaginary

("Stardust," the semi-professional, printed magazine of fandom, 2609 Argyle St., Chicago, Ill., used an extremely interesting science article by the famous rocket expert, Willey Ley, in which he discusses the possibilities of rocket travel. We quote here a paragraph concerning the dangers of the space-flight.)

"A little thoughtful consideration should

show that most of the dangers exist only in the imagination of frightened spectators that have the unpleasant feeling that they might be commanded to act as guinea pigs. Most of the contrivances necessary to make the interior of the cabin comfortable for its occupants have already been built and tested, partly for submarines, partly for stratosphere balloons. In painting one half of the outer hull of the ship black and silvering and polishing the other half, the designer can enable the pilot to absorb all the radiation coming from the sun or reflect all of it, by simply turning the appropriate half of the hull toward the sun. If he wishes, he may also admit part of the sun's rays by turning the ship side wise. The much-talked about cosmic rays, although utterly penetrating, are not present in sufficient quantities anyhow to become a serious menace."

Fan Activity in California

(We read in a recent issue of "*Shangri-La*," club organ of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, Box 6475, Metro. Station, Los Angeles, Calif., about the fine fan spirit on the west coast. For example, Virginia Laney writes:)

"Miss Eleanor O'Brien has been appointed by the LASFS to head an entertainment committee, which will function in the best interests of the club in selecting weekend and holiday trips, social events, and other additions to the extra-curricular life of the Society. To date, several suggested field trips are under consideration, among which are visits to the famous La Brea Tar Pits, the caves off Beachwood Drive in Hollywood, where 'Flash Gordon,' 'She,' and hundreds of western pictures were filmed. Always convenient to visit is the popular Griffith Park Planetarium, as well as the Mt. Wilson Observatory, where a

cabin is at the disposal of the members for a one-day stay. Already inaugurated are the annual beach parties which will be continued. . . . Director Daugherty, whose mother manages a seaside hotel near San Diego, has invited the entire membership to a week-end stay at his mother's place. In the special events department, auctions, a dance, and banquets have been suggested as being both entertaining and beneficial to the treasury. Auctions have been carried on for some time, and plans for other events are being carried forward."

Thumbs Down on Fan Feuds!

(Fred W. Fischer, super-active fan, in his "From the Observation Port" department in "*Golden Atom*," 48 Lewis St., Rochester, New York, puts in his argument against fan feuds, saying, in part:)

"Scientifiction is coming of age, and yet its adolescent appeal is emphasized by the frequency with which fans get incensed at each other. After all, such silly bickering as that which continually goes on, is decidedly childish. It is only evidence of youthful enthusiasm, exuberance, and mercurial tempers, and shouldn't therefore be taken seriously; yet it doesn't aid the cause of scientifiction. New readers pick up the magazines, enjoy the stories, and then peruse the reader's departments and find themselves smack in the middle of some hot argument raging betwixt the fans—an argument to them senseless and immature. Of course, the seasoned fans know what it's all about, but there are far more casual readers than there are seasoned fans."

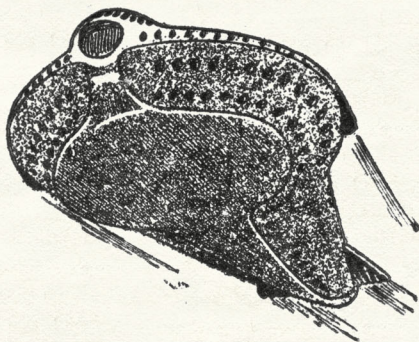
King Tut's Tomb

(Walt Daugherty of 1039 West 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif., publishes a particularly interesting fan mag, called "*The Rocket*." In one absorbing article, he tells about the tomb of King Tut-Ankh-Amen. Here is a brief excerpt.)

"The fineness of technique, the lavishness of gems and gold, the unique designs, the brilliance of color, and the *tout ensemble* of the Pharoahonic tomb display is almost incredible.

"There are four rooms in the tomb. The first has been called the ante-chamber. There was found a vast profusion of beautiful objects. Beyond it to the left is the annex. At the end of the ante-chamber, to the right, is the sepulchral hall, where the great Gilt Shrine (17 by 11 by 9 feet) was found, and to its right, extending backwards to the entrance passage, is the store chamber, in which was the cobra-corniced shrine containing the viscera jars.

"Such a splendid find raised many difficulties. A rider to the excavation agreement says the objects in an untouched tomb go to the Cairo Museum; otherwise the finds are to be divided in half. Examinations of the seals showed that a thief or thieves had entered the tomb, for it had been sealed again by the inspectors of Ramses IX. In the two outer chambers, the objects were in somewhat of a confusion. There being no inventory, however, of all the objects, it is easy to see why a question might arise over whether an object had been touched. At any rate, Egypt claimed the entire contents of the tomb."



FANTASY TIMES

Number Three

Conducted by James V. Taurasi

November, 1940

IMPROVEMENTS

Suggestions have been coming in about what, how, and which to publish on this page. Following them, we've made the following improvements. FANS AND FAN MAGAZINES has been changed to just FANS. A new department has been originated, MY FAN MAGAZINES in which the editor of a fan magazine tells of his own efforts. This column is open to all fan mag editors. We'll print them as they come in. Further changes will be made on this page as suggestions come in.

FANS

By Millie Taurasi

Sam Moskowitz of Newark
Sam Moskowitz started his active fanishp, reading and writing for the SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTOR in 1936, then published by Morris S. Dollens. He liked the little hectographed fan magazine and started writing articles and stf indexes for it. He got (and still does) a kick out of writing articles, so began to branch out and wrote for the other fan magazines, until, today, he is known as one of the best stf article writers among the fans. Moskowitz is always willing to help a new fan magazine get started, and thus you'll find that every new fan mag out usually has an article by Moskowitz in it. He writes fiction also, but not much. At present, he's making a serious effort to break out in the professional stf magazines, which we predict he'll do in the very near future.

Writing for fan magazines is only one of his fan activities. He attends conventions and has had a big, and we mean BIG hand in running the First National Convention in 1938 and the WORLD STF CONVENTION in 1939. He has edited and published quite a number of fan magazines, among them, HELIOS, CURRENT FANTASY, FANTASY REVIEW, VADJONG (for the Queens SFL) and DIFFERENT. He is a member of the Queens SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and is at present forming the Newark SFL for which he will publish FANTASY SCOUT with the help of James V. Taurasi. He is President of NEW FANDOM, the well-known fan organization for which he also runs a manuscript bureau to help fan magazines secure material.

Sam, himself, is a heavy-built fellow whose job at present is boxing trainer at a school in Newark. His hobbies besides stf are boxing and reading Sport magazines. He has an extra powerful voice, that one must get used to.

(Do you know a famous fan? If so, why not write up a short article about him and mail it to us to be published here? This is your page; make use of it)

MY FAN MAGAZINE

(A department where the fan editor tells of his mag)

I—"STARDUST"

By W. Lawrence Hamling, Editor
By the time this sees print, STAR-

DUST, the magazine Unique, will have 4 issues behind it—4 issues that tell the story of its very existence. Perhaps that story would prove of interest to the fan world at large—the story of how science-fiction's only printed, semi-professional fan magazine was founded—how and why.

The field of science-fiction is indeed a singular one. In no other field could a group of actively interested readers and followers such as the fan world of stf fandom be found. Perhaps there is a reason for this. However, I am not going to discuss that reason in this article—let it merely be understood that there actually is such a reason. Fandom exists—numbering in the hundreds—and because it does, organizations of national and local color exists simultaneously. Off-shoots of these well established fan organizations are the various fan magazines.

In Chicago, I happen to be Director of one of these well-established fan organizations, THE CHICAGO SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. The CSFL, comprising over 75% of the more prominent fans in this city, has been the creator's background for STARDUST.

Ever since the fall of the old FANTASY and FANTASY FAN magazines and MARVEL TALES, a few years back, the fan world had been minus a printed, illustrated fan magazine, of professional scope. Many were the dreams for such a magazine, but unfortunately, until recently, these dreams were not realized.

I knew that such a magazine was wanted, but I also knew the dangers and hazards of publishing such a magazine. Mainly, I knew I could not expect the magazine to pay for itself in the beginning, because of the limited number of subscribers I would be able to command.

But I talked it over with the principals of the CSFL: Jack Darrow, Neil deJack, Howard Funk, Chester S. Geier, and Henry Bott, and we decided that it was worth a chance. I am glad to say that our decision was not wrong.

The main hinderance, of course, has been, and is, production cost. Naturally, a magazine such as STARDUST, printed on heavy slick-gloss enameled stock, with standard professional covers and interiors, entails no little expense. The CSFL thought well before it decided to venture forth on this, but after the arguments were sifted, things moved swiftly.

In my high school days I was editor-in-chief of the largest prep publication in the world—circulation around 10,000—and it was this experience that aided with STARDUST.

I immediately contacted various professional authors and was gratified by a remarkable degree of cooperation. I secured many off-trail manuscripts of both fiction and non-fiction. I secured the services of professional artists, and then, after the ground work had been laid—went to press on the first issue.

Since the first publication date, January 1st, 1940, many things have happened. Foremost has been the

unprecedented support fandom has given STARDUST. I really found out just how much the fan world actually wanted such a magazine.

In STARDUST I have incorporated both professional and fan material. I run a regular Meet The Fan department, reviewing by picture and biography, each issue, a prominent fantasy fan. I have set the subscription rate at 20c per copy or \$1.00 a year. I have copyrighted the magazine, and put it on the major Chicago newsstands. With the CSFL, I have founded this unique magazine—the answer to fandom's fervent prayer. I shall continue to publish it as long as fandom wants me to. I love editing, and am happy if I have done the job the way fandom has hoped I would.

(FAN MAGAZINE EDITORS ATTENTION: Write a short article on your fan magazine and we'll publish it here. All editors are welcomed, so send it in without delay).

Fandom News

By J. Harry Vincent

A new movement is sweeping stf, a movement to do away with harmful science yarns. A while back, Ray Van Houten published a WHITE PAPER stating the harmfulness of stf stories portraying the horrors that science can create, and asking all fans to protest against that type of yarns. A fan mag titled SCIENCE FICTION FORWARD is being published to support the movement. Those interested should write to Ray Van Houten, 26 Seeley St. Paterson, New Jersey.

FANTASY-NEWS, progressive weekly, giving fans news of both fandom and professional stf, advanced another notch recently when it adopted a printed format, thus making the second printed fan mag at the present time. The new format is only an experiment, and if the subscriptions and advertisements don't go up in quantity enough to support the new printed format, the fan mag will again adopt a mimeographed format.

Information on any of the items published on this page may be had by writing to James V. Taurasi, 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York, and enclosing a three cent stamp to cover reply.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Will there be a Science Fiction Convention in 1941, and if so, where?—R. A.

A. NEW FANDOM is planning to hold a stf convention in Philadelphia in 1941; further details will be published on this page in future issues of FUTURE FICTION.

Q. Was there ever a weekly professional science fiction magazine?—L. S.

A. Yes, a stf magazine named SCOOPS published 20 weekly editions in 1934. It was published in England.

(Have you a question on stf that you want answered? Mail it in and we'll answer it here!)

LETTERS FROM READERS

You are invited to send your letters of comment upon FUTURE FICTION and science-fiction in general, for publication in this department, to FUTURE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City.

Dear Reader:

Have you seen the new SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY? Well, if you haven't, you're sure missing something! The first number is now on sale at all newsstands, or from these offices, for only 25c and it contains a reprint of one of the most famous science-fiction stories of all time, "The Moon Conquerors" by R. H. Romans, of 1929 vintage. Smooth edges, too!

Besides this big novel that has been brought back by popular demand, the new, big QUARTERLY contains five brand new stories by the top-leaders in the field. Just look at these names: Milton Kaletsky, David C. Cooke, John Coleridge, Arthur Allport, Harl Vincent. What more could you ask? Well, just ask it, and you'll get it next time!

Just a note to collectors, before we get on with your letters: Richard Frank of Box 136, Millheim, Penna., famed publisher of the Bizarre Series of booklets, has just put out a new two-bit special: A brand new yarn by Eando Binder, world's most prolific science-fiction author, entitled "The Cancer Machine." As an additional lure to collectors, Mr. Frank has had each number of this booklet autographed by the author!

And if you like FUTURE FICTION, you'll go for SCIENCE FICTION, our companion book, in a big way! Look for it at your newsstand today!

CHARLES D. HORNIG, Editor

60 Hudson Street
New York City

AN AUTHOR SPEAKS

Dear Mr. Hornig:

I haven't finished the March issue of FUTURE FICTION yet, but I can't wait any longer to write this letter. Reason: I have just finished reading John Cotton's "After Doomsday."

There have been many times, Mr. Hornig, when you pointed out to veteran fans who

squawked that science-fiction had degenerated since "the good old days," that it was not science-fiction that had gone down hill, but their own taste for science-fiction that had grown stale. Well, I am a veteran fan, and my appetite, while still lusty, is nowhere near what it used to be when I was in my early teens. I know that there is better science-fiction being printed today than at any time in the past (and if you old fans, object, kindly go back some ten years and READ the junk they printed then, instead of just talking about it from memory—especially since you were much younger and LESS CRITICAL when you read these yarns the first time). Still, in spite of this argument, it is harder for me to enjoy the yarns.

After all you sit back and remember the days when you first read "Universe Wreckers," "Awlo of Ulm," "Time Stream," "Moon Era," "Drums of Tapajos," "Man Who Evolved," "Slaves of Mercury," "Red Hell of Jupiter," "Hawk Carse," or any of the scores of others, and you feel as if you'd give anything to be able to read stories today with the same panting wonder and breathless excitement that you did then.

But now it's different. You're in the twenties, at least—you've got almost eleven years of steady science-fiction reading behind you. You read a story and you say to yourself, "Good night!—this is the old giant insect plot," or "Hell's bells!—this is a direct steal from such-and-such a story," or "Suffering catfish!—more ancient Aztec civilization!"

And then, if you've managed to sell a yarn or two by dumb luck (and most active science-fiction fans who go about it seriously can do it eventually), it gets worse. You sit with your nose in the air and say to yourself, "Look, he split an infinitive," or "What an awful way to handle that scene," or "He's murdering the yarn; I could do much better."

Well, all that brings me to the point. I began reading "After Doomsday," and for

the hour I spent on it, I was a kid again. Don't ask me to analyze the yarn; I enjoyed it too much to take it apart. All I know is that the writing was so smooth, it slid down my gullet with nary a hitch. Characterization was fine, and the love interest was handled beautifully—Asimov says so!

It's worth something to me to read a yarn like this these days. One like that will make up for seventeen issues of punk stuff, read merely out of loyalty and habit. "After Doomsday" takes up an honored position in my list of classics—I repeat, classics. Lots of readers will snort and sniff here, especially those who've been in the field any length of time. Classics, to them, mean stories printed years and years ago (the longer ago, the better) and which serve only to compare with the present-day stuff, to the detriment of the latter. Well, I have my own definition of classic." A story which I give five stars to, one which, when I come to the end, forces me to say, "Heck, it would end just when I was getting interested!" is a classic to me. If anyone thinks that's treason, he can go jump in the lake!

So, Mr. Hornig, record a vote. Best yarn in the issue—(and no reservations in favor of my own hunk of junk, please note)—"After Doomsday." True, two stories remain to be read yet, but I've no fear they'll come up to Cotton's yarn. If they do, of course, I'll send you another letter—but don't lose any sleep waiting for it, as I can practically guarantee it won't come.

There's not much left to say. I ought to throw a few brickbats before people start saying "Asimov's trying to get in good with editors," but I'll be damned if I'm in the mood for it. Of course, I might say that there was an awful long wait between first and second issues of FUTURE FICTION, but I might also say that "After Doomsday" was worth waiting for.

One last word to any old-timer who, reading my harsh words about the "good old days," and my defence of modern science-fiction, gets rambunctious. Well, friend, if you've got any arguments to trot out in favor of these grand yarns you read and enjoyed when you were twelve, I challenge you to mortal combat in these hyar columns. I'll fight it out with words, epithets, oaths, bricks, and shootin'-irons and

go to my death defending the grand yarns I read and enjoy when I'm twenty.

ISAAC ASIMOV

174 Windsor Place
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(Needless to say, this letter of Mr. Asimov's pleases us greatly. Thanks for coming out in favor of modern science-fiction! We too think that classics are being written today, just as frequently as they were in past years, and that first impressions give false values. However, we object to your calling your own stories "junk." Too many letters have reached us claiming otherwise!—EDITOR.)

SUPERIOR COVER

Dear Mr. Hornig:

Concerning your March issue; when I first picked it up at the newsstand, I could hardly believe my eyes. The cover is much superior to your first issue. The stories are all very good; the best one, in my opinion, is the novelette "After Doomsday." The novel "Isles of the Blest" comes a close second. All the shorts are good, especially Edmond Hamilton's Interplanetary Graveyard." I do not always admire Hamilton's style, but he scored a bull's eye this time.

I agree with Mr. Isaac Asimov on the subject of pictures of nude women on FUTURE FICTION. It seems extremely bad taste for the cover of science-fiction magazines. The November cover was so crude that one had to hide it under his coat as he walked down the street. The March cover is none of that, so good for you!

The feature "Fantasy Times" is the only one of its kind in any science-fiction mag that I know of; it is both novel and entertaining.

I notice that you have a short by Jack Williamson in this issue. Please give us a long novel by this master of science-fiction writing soon. He is my favorite science-fiction writer and I have never come across a hack story by him yet—more Williamson!

I think that a good name for your letter column would be "The Spectrograph." After all, the readers analyze FUTURE FICTION, don't they? How about a cover by Wesso?

Here is wishing you continued success.

ERIC ROLAFF
Moon Valley Farm
Flat, Missouri

(Well, I guess "After Doomsday" was the favorite story in the issue! Glad you liked the shorts, too.

We have had lots of controversy about the cover, and we find it quite difficult to decide whether women belong there or not!—EDITOR.)

ONLY APPEALING TITLE

Dear Mr. Hornig:

For the first time, since the early days of the *Amazing Stories* — Burrough's "Master Mind of Mars" and "Face in the Abyss" were in my first issue—I'm writing an editor. I've followed the early lean years of science-fiction's struggle for survival, rarely missing an issue of those early trail-blazers.

In fact, I tried to help them along with an occasional story that they wisely rejected. I remember one complete book, sixty thousand words, that I wrote when I was sixteen. Boy! Was it lousy! By the time I was going to college, I had a fine collection. Now, with all these new magazines sprouting up, I'll have to add a half-dozen new pink, blue, yellow, and green slips to that collection. If you receive a dusty mms. one of these days, don't be surprised. Collecting rejection slips is a fascinating hobby.

But I'm writing you to congratulate you on the only title that appeals to the more conservative type of reader. The greatest opportunity for acquainting the general public with that finest of all fiction, science-fiction, is yours. Drop into the nearest newsstand and run your eyes over the ghastly, terrific, preposterous, bizarre, stupendous, dynamic, violent titles of the magazines devoted to the tales of science. Then shudder with me as I snatch one of the glaring color-splotched magazines and carry it to the girl behind the counter. She is inwardly smiling at a man who reads such trash, never having tasted of it herself.

The majority of the reading public, judging these magazines by their lurid titles and screaming reds, blacks and yellows, pass them by. Only by chance or some friendly boost from another reader do they ever look inside at the perfect black-and-whites of Paul, Finlay, and the other illustrators, or read the superb mingling of fantasy, fact, and prophetic adventure of the future. To me, and I believe most of the constant readers of science stories, the interior

drawings and plenty of them, are of the most interest. With even a plain cover, save for the title, none of us would desert. A few of the flitters, skipping from flashy magazine to magazine, might not buy it, but a new class of mature, constant readers would be attracted to such a new, simple cover.

With your title and the excellent stories that you are giving us, you are in a position to dominate this field. Your covers, as covers go in science-fiction, are above the average. But I would like to see, as an experiment in the realm of covers, a simple one-color cover, of maroon, dark-blue, gray, brown, or green with a slightly smaller title at the top. Then, boxed in the central area of the cover a splendid black and white by Paul (P. 25 *SCIENCE FICTION* for March, for example) or simply the list of stories and authors. I believe, after two issues with such a cover, that readers would demand its continuation. Of course, that would release some of the budget for more interior art.

Naturally, we all have our favorite authors. I won't say that Kummer, Hamilton, Williamson, and this newcomer, Asimov, are my favorites, but an issue with all of them in it is good. Cotton had a really fine story, including the human element that so many stories forget. All in all, it was one of the best rounded bills of fare that I've eaten in a long time. That lunar cemetery of Hamilton's was a honey of an idea. Have been hoping to see a short-short one of these days in one of your two mags, printed in Esperanto. S'only way some of us will ever begin to study it.

Since I'm writing to the editor of *FUTURE FICTION*, I shouldn't mention another magazine, but I'm going to. What happened to *SCIENCE FICTION* in March? The same excellent artists and the same editor, even the same title for the mag. But the stories were far below the standards of earlier issues. I wish you'd speak to Charles D. Hornig about this slip-up, if you see him.

Stumbled across some of the books of Jack London the other day. Future fiction, they were, in the realm of human social relations and the state. One of them was a fantastic cruelly vivid escape from reality in a prison—not science exactly, in that the time-travel was all mental. Why not an article sometimes telling us about the

earlier authors of science-fiction less well known than Poe, Wells, Doyle, and Verne? Are there copies of a book called "Uncle Tom's Rocket" or "Interplanetary Family Robinson" stored away in Grandad's attic?

Wishing you the best of luck, and may FUTURE FICTION be the classic of scientification in days to come.

BASIL WELLS
Springboro, Penna.

(We are sort of proud of our title too. We think that the lack of sensationalism in it has brought us many new, more conservative readers.

As for Esperanto, you can secure very inexpensive, complete courses for home study from Joseph H. Leahy, General Secretary, Esperanto Society of North America, 1410 H St., N. W., Washington, D. C.—EDITOR.)

WHO ARE YOUR FAVORITES?

YOU WILL notice that FUTURE FICTION has brought you many of the world's greatest science-fiction authors in these first few issues—as well as several gifted newcomers to the field.

You've read stories in our magazine by Eando Binder, Ed Earl Repp, Raymond Z. Gallum, Manly Wade Wellman, Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, Edmond Hamilton, Amelia Reynolds Long, Thomas S. Gardner, Neil R. Jones, John Russell Fearn, and many other top-notchers.

What we'd like to know is—whose stories do you like best? What type of composition do you favor? What authors do you think write the most realistically? Whose efforts are nearest your conception of ideal science-fiction?

Why not drop us a letter, giving us your preferences? After all, you're paying for the magazine and you're entitled to the type of stories you want—but we've no way of knowing your likes and dislikes unless you tell us about them.

And, speaking of authors, let us know which ones you would like to see in our pages that we have failed to bring forth so far. You name 'em—we'll get 'em!

STARS IN THE SKY

COUNTLESS stories, poems, and songs have been written about the beauty of the pin-points that illumine the skies at night. Of course, in reality, they are not just points of light placed there for poets—but are flaming suns like our own, except that they are too far away to throw much light upon the earth.

It is only natural to presume that many of these stars have planets around them, just as our star has—and that some of the planets harbor races of intelligent creatures.

Many of our authors endeavor to bring mankind in contact with these alien peoples of other worlds—and as a result we are able to give you many amazing tales of unearthly encounters, realistically presenting thrills greater than in any other type of literature.

SCIENCE FICTION.



*My ability to destroy made my
agents loyal to me!*

WEDDING of the FORCES

by **POLTON CROSS**

The strange power that flowed through the brain of Ralph Davis was not of earthly origin, and he soon finds his own personality submerged under the influence of an alien enemy with dire plans for the enslavement of a world!

FORTUNATELY, Tarp Gregory was at home. I had never wanted to see anybody so badly in all my life. I had braved a wild night of wind and storm to reach my friend's New York apartment. . . .

As Chalmers showed me into the cozy study, Tarp Gregory looked up from the

armchair in surprise, rose immediately and came forward with extended hand.

I had shaken hands with him before I remembered I should not have done it. Tarp jerked his hand away sharply and eyed me doubtfully with his coldly analytical blue eyes. It was obvious that he thought I had one of those buzzer things in my

palm. But I hadn't and I showed him as much.

"Hell!" he exclaimed in surprise, elevating sandy eyebrows. Then he frowned, "What's started Ralph Davis playing tricks, anyway?"

He thrust forward a chair, automatically handed over cigarettes. I lit one with a hand that shook violently.

"What's on your mind?" Tarp demanded sharply. "Nerves?"

He eyed his own right hand reminiscently, then his frown deepened as he looked back to me. I guess I looked in a sorry mess, my hair tousled, my eyes wild.

"Tarp," I said slowly, breathing hard, "I think I'm going mad."

"Rubbish," Tarp retorted. "A perfectly solid electrical engineer of thirty-five has no need to go batty. Not on your salary."

"I'm not joking!" I snapped. "Something's gone wrong with me—something no doctor seems able to explain. You're a scientist with nothing to do but spend your money on experiments. I thought that with your knowledge, you might be able to help me."

"Sure, if I can. But what's wrong?"

I hesitated a moment, then got to my feet. I saw Tarp's look of surprise as I unscrewed the single-point electric light bulb from its socket and plunged the room into darkness.

"What's this? A seance?" asked Tarp's dry voice.

"No. *This!*" I announced, trying to keep my tone steady, and a moment later I became visible to him again holding the bulb aloft—and it was lighted! Yes! Every time I pressed my fingers on the lead contact, the lamp sprang into full radiance.

Gregory scratched his untidy head. "Nice going!" was his approving comment. "What else do you know besides the Statue of Liberty trick?"

"Dammit, man, it isn't a trick!" I nearly screamed. "The bulb's lighted by my merely touching it! Look here, too—!" I put the

bulb back in place, then snatching the plug of the electric heater from its socket, I jammed the brass pins between my teeth. Immediately the cooling bars of the heater glowed red hot again!

"There!" I shouted hoarsely, replacing the plug. "*That's* what is the matter with me! I've become a living dry battery—and I'm gathering power every day! Believe me, Tarp, it's no joke!"

He had lost his flippancy now. He stared at me incredulously, then he said slowly, "So that's what happened when I shook hands with you? I got an electric shock! Say, this *is* something!" He pulled up a chair and straddled it, leaned his arms on the back. "How'd you get this way?" he demanded. "When did it happen?"

I sat down again heavily, shook my head.

"I don't exactly remember. Near as I can recall, it started some little time after I came back from my summer vacation with Eva. Began with cramp, then it passed off. Then later, when I was cleaning an electric torch of some two volts or so, I found I could light the thing! From then on things got fantastic! And now I've been sacked because my presence interferes with delicate electrical instruments. . . . Gosh, Tarp, I'm in a hell of a mess!"

"But there must be a reason!" he insisted. "You couldn't go off like this without a cause!"

I HARDLY heard him. "Seems to be affecting me mentally, too," I went on dreamily. "Normally, as you know, I'm pretty sociable and even-tempered; now I find myself getting less and less considerate towards others. Odd ambitions are in my mind—things I hardly dare think about. Dreams of power. . . . All so weird," I finished, pondering.

Tarp reflected for a moment or two, then he got to his feet and headed for a connecting door. "Come into the lab a moment," he invited. . . . I followed him into the cool, brightly lit expanse.

In passive silence, I submitted to the tests he made with various complicated instruments. At the end of it all, he rubbed his head and whistled.

"It's got me!" he confessed blankly. "You're generating about seventy to a hundred volts of electricity. Every part of you is alive with it, but because the build-up has been slow, you have adapted yourself to it gradually. That's quite possible, of course. But how you got that way has me licked! Normally, a living body gives off a small percentage of electricity, sometimes enough to stop a watch. But as for lighting a lamp and starting up a heater—Hell, man, it's downright uncanny!"

Uncanny! He was telling me! I got into my jacket in silence.

"You're *sure* nothing unusual has ever happened to you?" he persisted anxiously. "I mean, have you ever come across anything strange, picked up anything queer, eaten something out of the ordinary, been stung by something, or—"

"Good Lord!" I interrupted him suddenly. Now I came to think of it, I *had* been stung. I wheeled around to him. "Now you mention it, something bit me during the holidays—" I broke off, smiled faintly. "Not worth mentioning," I sighed. "Only a baby cuttle fish, or starfish, or something. . . ."

"Be more explicit!" he snapped.

I did my best. I told him about the vacation. Eva and I had spent a day at Brimstone Pool, a little bathing place a few miles from Atlantic City. One of the days, while swimming, I had been stung in the arm, but I had thought nothing of it. Anyhow, the lump had soon gone down. . . .

"Did you *see* a starfish or anything?" Tarp demanded, as I became silent.

That surprised me. "Matter of fact, no," I confessed. "But then, I didn't look very hard."

"Hmmm. . . ." He compressed his thin lips. "I don't like it, Ralph," he went on,

"especially as your change dates approximately from then. I'm not well acquainted with Brimstone Pool, so the best thing we can do is go there the first thing tomorrow. Tonight you'll stay with me. I'd like to get your general reactions."

I looked at him gratefully. There was something always masterfully cool about Tarp Gregory.

"Thanks, pal," I murmured. "I knew you'd help me."

AT BREAKFAST the next morning, Tarp told me that I had slept heavily and talked a lot, mainly about strangely intricate devices which ranged far beyond even his extensive knowledge. Certainly I had no recollection of such vaporings, and told him as much. He said nothing to that, but I guess he thought plenty.

By ten o'clock we were on our way. Some time after dinner, we reached the deserted spot whereon, in summertime, pleasure seekers sought the sun and waves. Without speaking, I led the way down a rocky declivity to a narrow inlet left by the ebb tide, finally indicated a deep, smooth pool banked around by curious, porous looking rocks.

"That's Brimstone Pool itself," I explained, glancing up to find Tarp's lean face within two inches of my own. "I dived in from here, swam right across, and back again. Eva followed a moment or two afterwards. . . ."

"Uh-huh, Tarp said pensively, then he stooped and stared into the Pool. It was perfectly clear, but it plainly had nothing in it beyond a few baby crabs and shrimps. Finally he wetted his lips with it.

"Normal sea water all right," he sighed; then as he stared around on the rocks fringing the Pool, he began to frown. "Say," he breathed, "these rocks aren't normal. They're—meteoric!" he finished, kicking one of them. "Large amounts of iron and pumice in them."

I looked at him in surprise. "But I

thought you knew that, Tarp! Don't you remember the meteor of 1942 which fell near Atlantic City? It landed here and broke up—wasn't very big. All around this Pool is where it dropped. These very rocks are the exploded parts of it—according to Doctor Grantham, anyway, Eva's father. Hence the name Brimstone Pool."

"Idiot that I am!" Tarp snorted. "I knew the damned name had a familiar ring. Now I remember. . . . A meteor, eh?" he went on keenly. "And suppose something crawled out of this rockery into the Pool and happened to sting you? Suppose that something came from out of space, as it very likely might? Now do you see something forming?"

I certainly did, and the speculation wasn't pleasant.

"You mean that perhaps an interstellar visitor bit me?" I asked him anxiously.

"It's possible," he said bluntly. "You say Dr. Grantham told you all about this meteor? Where does he fit in, besides being Eva's father?"

I shrugged. "He's a private geologist, writes all sorts of treatises on the subject. He was down here with us during the vacation and took some of this stuff home with him for his collection. He collects meteorite chunks, buried coins, old skulls, and all that. Goes abroad a lot too. Plenty of cash. . . ."

"I get it," Tarp nodded. "And he's not the only one to take some of this stuff home. . . ." Stooping, he picked up a loose piece and thrust it into his pocket. "Maybe worth analysis," he said briefly, then turned and led the way back up the slope.

THE STRANGE OBSESSION

TARP GREGORY'S analysis revealed nothing beyond the fact that the meteoric chunk was iron ore. Where it had come from in outer space it was impossible to say. But he still clung to his original idea that the meteorite might have

contained some strange form of life which, by sheer chance, had gotten into the Pool and bitten me.

The theory did not comfort me, I can tell you! It was all too possible for my liking. Besides, I was feeling stranger every day, though I said nothing to my friend. He was, I knew, doing all he could—but even he had his limitation. I had the feeling that all my natural, personal control was slipping.

One evening while Tarp was uptown on business, I came to a decision. I sat down and wrote a brief letter to him. In the interests of this history of my strange experience, I record it in full as best my memory serves me—

"My Dear Tarp,

"Out of justice to you, I am leaving. In these past days my condition has grown steadily worse. I realize that I shall soon be a danger to have around. Any unexpected contact with me may, in time, produce fatal consequences.

"I am obliged to go away alone where nobody can find me, where I am away from living beings, there to work out my destiny as best I can until I am either released from this strange electrical bondage, or else die.

"Believe me, I do thank you for all you have done—but even you cannot save me.

"Always your sincere friend,

"Ralph Davis."

I left the letter with Chalmers, packed my few belongings, and left. I was quite convinced in my own mind that I had taken the right course. I did not stop long at my own apartment in New York, either. I paid the rent up to date, then set off for the quieter regions beyond the city. At length, in the darkness of the winter evening, I walked up the drive of Dr. Grantham's great, isolated residence.

As I had fervently hoped, Eva Grantham was at home—but as usual, her father was away, in Europe this time, hunting for fossils.

I kept well away from her as I followed

her through the hall into the roomy, comfortable library. She looked at me curiously, the light catching the gold of her hair, sharpening somewhat the anxiety in her blue eyes.

"Ralph, what is it?" she asked quickly. "You haven't been to see me for weeks—and now you have come you won't speak. You didn't even kiss me. What's wrong? Are you ill—or what?"

"Nothing like that," I muttered. With a burning stare, I gazed around the opulent room with its curio cases against the walls. It seemed an odd thought to me then that I was seeing the familiar room for the last time. The best thing was to be brutally frank.

"Eva, something's happened," I said slowly, looking at her steadily. "I've got to go away— No, don't ask me why, please! I can't give a reason. You'll just have to trust me, that's all."

"But you're surely coming back?" she demanded, amazed.

She stepped forward as she spoke. I saw her frown as I took a guarded step backwards. I could not dare let her touch me. She halted, eyeing me.

"Look here, what is wrong?" she demanded. "You can't deceive me, Ralph. What have you done, if anything? I've the right to know."

"I've done nothing," I said flatly. "It's just that I have got to leave town—and quickly. Some day, perhaps, I'll come back. . . ."

I hesitated, looked at her young, sweet face gazing at me. I felt a mighty struggle, an intense bitterness at my fate, pass through me.

"Good by," I said, as curtly as I could, and turned for the door.

But I never reached it. Before I realized what had happened, Eva had run forward and seized my hand imploringly.

"Don't," I screamed hoarsely. "Don't touch me—!"

God! Shall I ever forget that moment! I saw her tear-dimmed eyes suddenly sharpen with pain. Her slender body stiffened— Then with a savage, frantic movement, I swept her backwards, tore free that prisoning handclasp. She slammed violently into the slender cases against the wall, collapsed motionless amidst a shower of glass.

For what must have been a full minute, I stood staring down on her fallen body. She was not cut. . . . I was powerless to help because I dared not touch her in case life was still within her. I had, I knew, unwittingly done the very thing I had sought to avoid; I had driven at least two hundred volts of electricity through her. . . .

Shaking, weeping so much that my vision was blurred, I thudded to my knees and leaned my ear towards her heart. I could not hear it beating. Nor was there any apparent life in her ashy face.

Mutely I stared at the shattered case, at the bits of stony metal lying about the carpet.

"Dead," I whispered at last. "Oh, God, I killed her! The only thing in life I loved. . . ."

I screamed at and reviled all creation. I do not know how long it was before I sobered up a little. Shaking, I got to my feet. I turned and ran blindly for the french windows, hurled them open and raced like a madman into the darkness.

I forgot everything. I must run, and run, and run. . . . I was an outcast—a murderer!

BY NO conceivable effort can I possibly recall what happened to me after I fled Eva Grantham's home. I lost all track of my own personality and wandered like a dream-man in places which I can only recall as blurred and unreal. I believe weeks elapsed. At the end of that time, I felt the compelling urge of something that was not the *real* me, but which dominated

me, nevertheless. I became, quite against my will, a dynamic personality about whom the whole of America was soon talking.

My methods were strange, inhumanly logical, surprising even me though I was the perpetrator. From a point in New York which I knew would effectually defy all efforts at location, I gathered to myself all the former big shots of the criminal world, and they—incredible though it seemed to my squashed inner personality, obeyed all my orders without question.

I had unquestionably become a master criminal, but with rather different ideas to the average criminal genius. I did far more than just destroy if my orders were disobeyed. I started to gain a hold over economic conditions, cornered markets, clamped down an invisible but ruthless hand on the freedom of the American people. My influence was everywhere, steadily growing, subtly taking over control of this and that business with a total disregard for the ruin and suffering occasioned thereby.

In a month I had gained a pretty good percentage of power in most walks of life, and my ability to destroy by the strange electric powers governing my body made my agents fanatically loyal to me. . . . America began to appreciate that I was going to turn the country inside out before long unless they found a means of finding my whereabouts. That, somehow, amused me immensely.

From what I learned over the radio, Tarp Gregory was apparently the only man who knew the real truth—who knew that the Unseen Dictator—as I had come to be known—was really me, Ralph Davis. . . . But not the Davis who had worried over his strange electrical powers. Here, declared Tarp Gregory, was a man who was relentlessly bent on mastering the world, who inevitably *would* do so unless a cleverer mind could defeat the aim.

Somehow I got the idea that Tarp was not sure of himself, that he needed more



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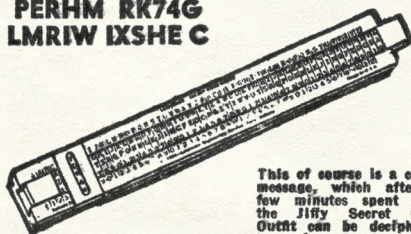
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facts before giving the real truth. Strange indeed, that I should be as anxious to know the truth as anybody. . . . Why had all this happened to me? What was it that was driving me on night and day to greater and more inhuman conquests?

In an endeavor to trace my experiences from the beginning, I set about writing this history at odd moments. The tale is not yet told. When at last it is, maybe it will become clear that I was in no way to blame. . . .

IT WAS inevitable that America should get to wondering what was going to happen next. Deputations to the White House demanded that something be done, that the powers that be get to work and apprehend the hidden genius strangling the life blood of a nation.

Congress, though, could do nothing. Neither could the law. I had tightened my hold; then, just as Americans were beginning to wonder where it was all going to end, there came a sudden change in events. An opposer to my regime appeared—or at least was known to be in existence! And this time it was a woman . . . a woman of inhuman fearlessness, I was told, but motivated by ideals similar to my own. She too wanted world control, and would go to any lengths to get it.

At first I was contemptuous, but that unknown woman had a way with her. I found myself compelled to listen to her demands. You see, she had powers just as powerful as my own. She too was electric in her makeup! Between us, we had a continent paralyzed. We had both cornered every market and launched parallel schemes for the absolute control of the Americas. For that very reason neither of us could move. It was stalemate.

I was debating the advisability of co-operating with this woman, when to my surprise I found that the morning papers all carried one glaring headline:

THE TWIN DICTATORS MUST MEET!

THE context told me nothing I did not already know, but that same evening Tarp Gregory followed things up with a radio speech. I sat in my hidden abode listening to his fervent words. . . .

"In the interests of humanity, of America, of the world itself, these two soulless dictators must *meet!*" he cried, in a fervent voice. "We demand it! And if they are listening to me now—the man dictator most of all—I say this to him. . . ."

I looked up in sudden interest at the loudspeaker.

"Ralph, this is your old friend Tarp speaking. I'm still trying to help you. You shouldn't have run out on me like you did. I have your whole case doped out and know exactly what has gone wrong with you. Listen . . . This woman who has risen against you is no stranger. She's Eva Grantham! Meet her—I beg of you!"

That news brought me to my feet. For a long time, I stood fighting with that other self of mine, then for a while at least, Ralph Davis got the upper hand. I grabbed hat and coat, left my abode by the secret entrance and stalked out into the night. Naturally, not one of the thousands of people I passed, at a discreet distance, knew who I was. . . . Only one thought was mastering my brain at that moment—to find out what *was* wrong with me.

I reached Tarp's apartment without much trouble, saw the amazed look in his eyes as he himself opened the apartment door. Quietly, I waved him back. He nodded understandingly, watched me from a little distance as I walked slowly to the center of the room.

"I heard your radio speech," I said, trying to bring some tone of friendliness into my harsh voice. "I've risked a good deal to come here and find out the truth. . . ."

Tarp smiled faintly, straddled a chair at the other end of the room. He sat looking at me for a long time.



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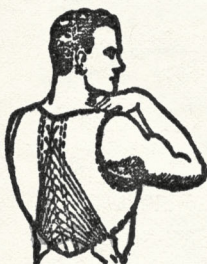
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"If I didn't know the facts about you, I'd say you were a different man," he said quietly. "Anyway, here's the low down. . . . When you left me I got to wondering where you'd go. I fancied you'd first pay a visit to Eva Grantham's, so I hid myself there. I found the place empty of servants with the windows of the library swinging wide. Dr. Grantham is away in Europe, as you know . . ."

"I killed Eva Grantham," I said stonily.

Tarp shook his head. "No you didn't, Ralph. In the library I found lots of clues. A case against the wall was smashed, glass lay on the floor and on the hard rubberoid of the surrounding shelves. Pieces of gray metal were strewn about the carpet. Amongst those metal fragments I found the case's identification card and it read—'Section of Brimstone Pool Meteorite, 1941.' Among other things I found your hat, hastily left on the library desk. Skipping the whole thing, I also found that the carpet had rubberoid underneath it. . . ."

"I pieced things together," Tarp went on slowly. "You went to see Eva. You touched her, and Eva dropped under the terrific shock. You imagined you had killed her, but you were wrong. The rubberoid undercarpet would absorb a great deal of the current. She was stunned. You couldn't investigate for fear of making things worse. You fled. But in that library where you'd left Eva, there was a section of the identical meteorite that had effected you in the first place. Apparently, when Eva fell, she smashed open the case containing it. It broke apart along smooth, formerly hidden seams. Out of it there emerged a small creature similar to the one that had bitten you in the Pool, but of the opposite electric charge—negative! The thing bit Eva and she absorbed it. She recovered. Her less strong constitution reacted far more quickly than yours. As I see it, she must have dismissed the servants, then she left home filled with sudden mighty ideas, was motivated by schemes similar to yours . . ."

"But *what* bit Eva and me?" I demanded.

"In the first place, a meteorite came from a world unknown. It was not an ordinary meteorite, but some kind of space-machine. Inside it were two beings whom I can only assume were pure force—a type of life we cannot comprehend, though at root we too are motivated force. Anyway, male and female in these beings was expressed by what to us would be plus and minus electric signs. They were positive and negative. . . .

"I believe something went wrong when they landed," Tarp mused. "The meteorite—space ship—exploded, but one of the creatures, the positive one I believe, escaped. It found a habitat in Brimstone Pool. It was, I imagine, extremely minute. You went into that Pool. The creature not only bit you—it assimilated itself into your system.

"By degrees that powerful positive charge was absorbed by you, in step-up stages, and with it was bound to come a certain percentage of the mind or brain force of this incredibly intelligent little being. You became obsessed with ideas that were not your own, that had formerly belonged to the creature you had absorbed!

"The same thing happened to Eva when the mate escaped from the rest of the meteorite in the Grantham library. . . . Now do you understand?"

I nodded very slowly. "Yes, Tarp—I understand. And I need her as she needs me. Nothing can keep us apart . . . yet that very meeting will bring destruction," I finished, pondering.

"It will destroy both of you." Tarp said steadily. "Positive and negative will meet each other and cancel out in free energy. It is either that, Ralph, or this perpetual striving for a something you do not understand, together with the fight against Eva's irresistible electric attraction. You wanted each other when you were normal. If you

take each other now you can both be assured the world will be a better place without you. . . ."

I got slowly to my feet. "You'll find the records of my entire experiences at my headquarters," I said quietly, and added the exact situation for his benefit alone. . . .

I WRITE these words upon my return from Tarp. I have issued a request to Eva that we should meet. We shall, in an hour's time, at a place well away from people and buildings, in case the explosion of our unity should produce far-reaching havoc.

I am not sorry I am going to die—perhaps start again. Nor, I believe, is Eva, who is now in possession of the facts. . . . But I have added certain facts to Tarp's analysis that I *know*, from the knowledge the being I have assimilated, to be correct I state it here—

Originally, the beings were pioneers of their race. They planned to come to our world as the most likely place for starting life anew. Mischance upon arrival separated them. They entered living flesh to gain sustenance, but died in so doing because of the toxics therein, but not before they had passed on their grim heritage to the recipients. Normally, I understand, the unity of positive and negative in their own correct environment brings not a cancellation but a surge of energy, which becomes a new creature. But, housed in the fleshy structure of Eva and me, unity will bring cancellation. . . . Possibly these two did not mate in space because of lack of room for more than one or two offspring. . . .

I wonder, as I write these last lines, what Dr. Grantham will think of it all—I believe he is hurrying home from Europe. He will learn of the strangest marriage in earthly history. . . .

But my tale is told. And the hour is up.



What mind could conceive these alien beings from the fires of earth's core who followed Alan Shay into a world inimical to them . . . to steal a six-inch figurine of a man?

THE ONSLAUGHT FROM BELOW

by JOHN COTTON

ALAN SHAY halted the car in front of the Dexter's summer cabin, and breathed a sigh of relief at the memory of the winding Black Hills road. He got out, stretched, and placed a cigaret between his lips. There was time, though, the sun was low in the west, for one relaxing smoke before unpacking his vacation equipment and taking possession of the borrowed cabin.

He thumbed the match head, then froze. He listened intently. He had heard a choking sob.

He heard the wracking sound again. Someone inside the cabin weeping, sobbing with harsh abandon. The match flame burned his fingers. Cursing softly, he dropped the bit of charred wood and started quietly toward the door.

A smashed padlock lay on the step, but the door was closed. His foot slipped and he stepped aside to regain his balance. He waited breathlessly. Had the weeper heard the slight sound?

Then he heard the hopeless crying again. He breathed easier and looked down to see what had come so near revealing his presence. An odd gully about four inches in depth and six in width extended from the step, across the drive, and disappeared in the shadows of the pines. Shay stared down at it, and felt a queer chill. It was smooth-sided—artificial. It looked like a trail of some strange beast.

He heard the mournful sound from the cabin again and went silently to the door. It gave easily, soundlessly. The room was in darkness, but he made out a huddled form in the middle of the room. Whoever it was must not have heard him for it neither ceased weeping, nor looked up. But remained motionless except for the wracking sobs, crouching miserably over something it held close.

Shay stepped noiselessly into the room, then to one side so that he wouldn't be outlined in the doorway. He waited without speaking. The skin of his neck chilled and felt as though it had crinkled into gooseflesh. Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the gloom and he saw that the mourner was a woman. A young woman, he thought, though the thick dark hair streaming in tumbled disarray effectually concealed her face.

There was a moment of doubt, then he stepped forward.

"What's the matter?" he asked quietly.

The woman started violently and looked up, eyes distended with fear. Then, slowly, the fear left. Sorrow again twisted her youthful features and she caught and held her lower lip between her teeth as tears ran down her cheeks. But she said nothing.

"I'd like to help you," Shay said gently and waited for her to answer.

But she only stared at him and wept.

"Won't you tell me what is wrong?"

"M-My f-father—" she choked, and could say no more.

He waited a moment for her to continue, then saw that she would not be able. Hunting accident, he thought. He looked at the object she was holding so tightly to her breast. It was small and black.

"What is that?" he asked with the notion of getting her to talk of something else.

"My-f-father—" she wept and lifted the object from her breast so he could see that it was a black figurine, a tiny statuette not more than six inches in height. It seemed to be a representation of a man, but it was so dark in the cabin that he could not tell for sure.

He stepped to the table, lighted the lantern, then turned to look again. He gasped, and stooped to peer closer. It was exquisitely done—a tiny black figure of a man. But the pose was indescribably horrible. It was fear! . . . greater fear than Shay had ever thought possible. The tiny figurine was that of a crouching man, turned half-away, with one arm raised to ward off some terror. The teeth were bared, eyes horribly distended, and face rigid with fear of some inescapable menace.

"God! Whose is it?" he whispered.

"M-My father—"

"Then your father is a great artist," Shay said sincerely. "What is his name? That's the best work I've ever seen. A person would swear that it was alive!"

A shrill chattering of mad, hysterical laughter escaped her lips; she was laughing uncontrollably while tears streamed from her eyes.

"*This is my father,*" she shrieked.

SHAY straightened and stepped back. Mad, he thought. And he determined to take her to the nearest town where she could have medical care.

He sat down and talked to her, rambling quietly on any subject that came to mind. And at last he saw that she had quieted and

was listening, though choking sobs still wracked her slender body. She hugged the figurine tight to her breast and looked at him as though she heard his voice but not the words.

Then he asked her to come to him, and she didn't answer. He helped her rise to her feet. She would not release her hold on the figurine and he saw that when she walked she carried it as though it were much too heavy for her slender strength. She staggered, and leaned heavily on his arm. He was forced to brace himself against her weight. He looked at her with surprise.

He helped her to the car, saw that she was comfortably seated—and still she clung to the statuette. He went around the car and seated himself behind the wheel. With a faint smile he realized that he hadn't yet had his smoke. He had lost ~~he~~ ^{his} cigaret somewhere, too. He took another from the pack, and offered one to the girl. She didn't seem to notice. He shrugged and returned the pack to his pocket.

He breathed the smoke deep, then turned on the ignition and stepped on the starter. The motor started instantly.

"What is your name?" he asked.

Before she could even show that she might have heard, there was a heavy-toned rumbling that seemed to come from far below the surface of the earth, and the car swayed violently.

"Earthquake!" he cried, then threw his arm around the girl to prevent her getting out of the car.

She was screaming. She had opened the door. And she fought to free herself from his arm. Alan Shay thought of the fear personified by the tiny figurine she still clutched to her breast.

The rumbling grew louder. It seemed to be coming closer. The springs of the car creaked with the jolting strain. The sound was like that of an approaching avalanche. The girl's fearful screaming was drowned

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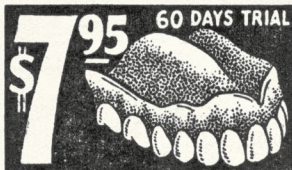
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by its thunder, though Shay knew that she still screamed.

Suddenly the great pines at the side of the clearing around the house swayed violently—twisted like tortured things; and toppled. And in their place was a blazing amber dome that bobbed up and down in the solid earth like an air-filled ball in water. And Shay suddenly felt sure that the dome was only the upper part of a great globe.

As it bobbed, the harsh rumbling waxed and waned. The strange amber-colored dome was hot. Even inside the car Shay could feel the heat irradiated. And Shay began to feel the freezing coldness of fear like that shown by the statuette. Wildly, he imagined that the globe was a malignant monster; that it was seeking them.

He feared that it would hear the girl's screaming. He clapped his hand over her mouth with brutal strength. The amber globe moved, parting the solid earth as a blunt prowed vessel might plow through water, or a free balloon part a visible air.

Shay reached frantically for the gear lever, stepped on the gas. The engine raced madly as the car skidded in low gear around the half-circle necessary to get on the drive leading to the public road. The automobile bounced over the trembling road, the door swinging wide.

He released the girl, pulled the door shut, and shifted gears rapidly. Then he sped recklessly over the rough drive. The girl cowered, hugging the tiny statuette. She was talking, mumbling to herself. And Shay heard. She was repeating a few words over and over:

"It's father they want! It's father they want!"

ONLY when they reached the public road did Shay glance back. The cabin was gone; in its place was a heap of shattered wreckage. And a trail of fallen pines led his eyes to where the globe moved majestically through the earth. As he looked, the amber

globe passed into the side of the mountain and was gone from sight. But the ground still shook and the rumbling of the globe's movement was deafening.

Gradually the quaking of the earth became less, and the sound receded into a distant thunder. Shay halted the car. He looked back at the wrecked cabin, then at the girl. For a moment he thought. The globe had moved off in the same direction as the road led. They might meet it.

Then he shrugged and started the car moving. They couldn't stay here. They must go somewhere. And in the other direction the road dwindled into a mere fire-trail. They had to go on.

He drove in silence, muscles tense, eyes aching from the fixity of his stare. Whenever he looked he saw a phantom of that strange globe. It floated silently across the road, swept along ahead of them in an eerie muteness that was more horrible than the grinding roar. He knew that it was only a wakeful-dream phantasy, but he could not dismiss it from his sight.

"Who are you?" asked the girl suddenly.

Shay jumped with surprise and the car veered. The tone was that of one awaking from a dream. He looked at her.

She still clung to the figurine, but her eyes were clear. And in them was the bright sparkle of intelligence.

"Alan Shay," he replied. "And you?"

"Elsa Wallgense," she said simply.

Shay laughed, a little discordantly. The sheer commonplaceness of their words made him drunk. It was like any ordinary pick-up.

"Don't laugh like that," she pleaded oddly.

Something about the intonation struck Shay as foreign. He glanced at her.

"American?" he asked.

She nodded. "Naturalized. We came from Europe a few years ago. Father teaches . . . taught at Chicago."

Shay saw her hand tighten spasmodically on the figurine as she turned her head away.

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He felt a quick sympathy for her, but couldn't find any words to express it. So, in an attempt to get her mind away from her own problems, he started to tell her of himself.

"I work for the Mountain Metals, Inc.," he said. "I was on the end of the first day of my vacation. Caleb Dexter—he's the chief of the research department and my boss—said I could use his cabin . . . the one we saw wrecked. Nice fellow, Dexter. They don't come any better. He isn't—" Shay glanced at the girl and saw that she was scarcely listening. "—at all what you'd expect one of the best scientists in the country to be. He's quiet-speaking and never loses his temper. Harrumph!" He ceased speaking and settled down in his seat to devote his entire attention to driving.

It was a long time later that the girl spoke.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"I'll take you to Newcastle where we can find a doctor, then I'm going back to Denver. I kind of want to tell Dexter what happened and see what he makes of it. Then, of course, it was his cabin."

She said nothing, and Shay added no more. Neither spoke until they topped the last rise in the road and looked down on the small town. Elsa straightened.

"They've been here!"

Shay looked down into the inky blackness where the lights of the town should have been, and felt again a chill fear. But he pushed the girl back in her seat and growled:

"Don't be a fool!"

But when they came to the outer fringe of the town the car headlights picked out and spotlighted a scene of utter desolation. Houses were tumbled masses of wreckage. The jagged planks and boards were mixed with loose earth and great slabs of concrete from the streets. It was as though a gigantic plow had passed through and through the city.

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lence that lay over the dead city like a shroud. There was no moaning, no wailing of injured; there were no lights of rescue parties. Alan Shay got out and went to the nearest masses of wreckage and saw neither living people nor dead bodies. He returned to the car, sick at heart. He was afraid to think.

Elsa Wallgense lay back in the seat while he turned the car to shine the lights on the roadside. She was white and faint. The strength seemed to have drained from her body. Her nerveless fingers relaxed from around the black figurine for the first time, and it slipped to the floor.

It struck heavily. There was a dull snapping. Elsa stifled a cry of dismay and stooped to retrieve the object. Then she held it in the light of the dashboard.

"It's broken!" she cried.

Shay glanced over and saw that the figure was indeed broken. The arm that had been held up to shield the tiny man from the unknown cause of fear was gone. It was broken off at the shoulder.

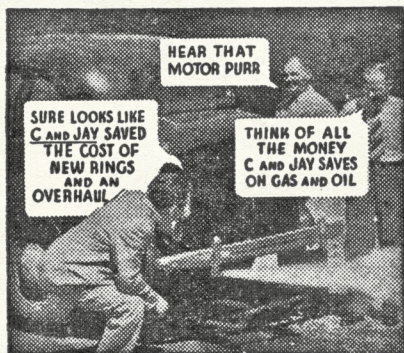
Elsa lifted the figurine to the seat between them, then stooped to retrieve the arm. Her shoulder struck the gear lever, threw the car into gear. It leaped forward. Just in time, Shay stepped on the clutch and brake.

He reached down and seized her shoulder. He forced her to sit up.

"Now, you sit still, you little fool! Do you want to wreck us?" His voice was harsh with strain and she glanced at him, then sat still. Her only movement was to reach down cautiously and tug the one-armed figurine onto her lap. Then she was motionless while Shay drove across a shallow ditch, pushed down a wooden fence, and started over the fields to get around the town and back to passable roads.

WITH the wheels on smooth pavement again and the wrecked town behind, Shay pressed the accelerator close to the floor. They rocketed southward through

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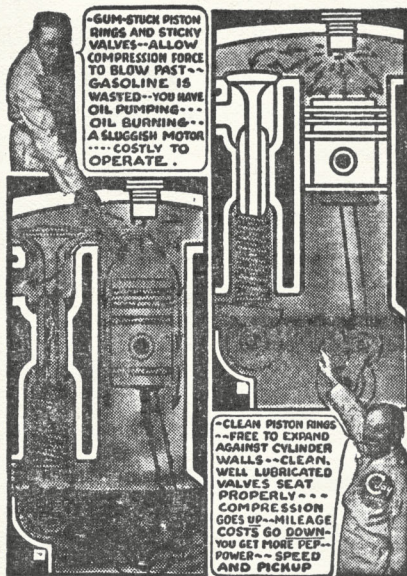
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the night toward Denver, and he said nothing more about leaving Elsa with a doctor. He was no longer sure that she needed one.

It was noon when they reached Denver and Shay sped straight to the research building of Metals, Inc.—where he knew he would find Dexter. The old man met him in the doorway and his jaw sagged with surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "I thought you'd be up at the cabin by this time." Then he saw Elsa in the car. A knowing look came to his eyes and he grinned. "What is it?" he chuckled. "A honeymoon?"

"No, Doc," said Shay. "It's—It's something big! God only knows how big! Do you believe there is a hell?"

Dexter rubbed his gray-stubbed chin. "Well, I've always gone to church pretty regular," he started, but Shay cut him short.

"No, I'm serious, Doc! I've seen a great amber glowing dome that I think was the top of a globe, and it moved through *solid earth* like a fish goes through water. That must mean that it lives underground, moves underground, and can come to the surface once in a while. You know, that land used to be sacred to the Indians; they thought gods lived there."

Dexter looked at him sharply. Shay felt like blowing in the older man's face to let him smell his breath, but instead he called Elsa, told her to help him explain.

"Father has always been interested in subterranean things," she said. "And when he heard about the queer noises that used to be heard in the Black Hills, we went to investigate."

"Wait a minute," said Dexter. "You say your name is Wallgense—Is your father's name *Otto* Wallgense?"

Elsa nodded and gripped the figurine tighter. Dexter was impressed. He nodded for her to continue.

"FATHER detected a queer rhythm deep underground," Elsa went on, "and when some company prospectors were shooting for temblor maps for oil possibilities near the Hills, the rhythm changed. Father became very excited. He said the change was an exact repetition of the prospecting blasts—he said *they were answers!*

"I thought he was mad. But he contrived a signaling device by using very small blasts in an underground chamber. And his signals were answered!

"I wanted him to quit. I begged him to! But he wouldn't and, knowing that I disapproved, he no longer confided in me. He worked alone. I don't know what he said to them; or what they said to him. But they came! They destroyed our home and tried to capture us.

"Father went—went mad I think. He said they were lying to him; that he would kill them all. But he never had the chance, because one of the creatures found us after we had broken into your cabin for shelter. I was looking for food. Father was alone.

"I came back to the edge of the clearing in time to see. The—the thing lay at the foot of the step. Father had made a queer instrument out of wires and a battery and he turned it on the thing. He hurt it somehow—I know, because it writhed with pain. But it pointed a rod at Father and a red beam came from it."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Dexter again. "You saw this thing. . . . What did it look like?"

"L—like an ugly worm, only big and round; and it had lots of tiny legs, hundreds of them." She halted, eyes bright and wide.

"Then the globe is a machine—a kind of a boat!" said Shay, suddenly realizing what had made that queer gully in the drive. "But how do they stand the pressure, or the lack of it?"

"It had something on its back that made it glow the same as the globe." She

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halted again. It was as though she feared to go on. Her fingers were white with the strength of her grip on the figurine. She held it close as though it were very precious, with body arched back as though it were very heavy.

"Go on," Dexter urged gently. "What happened?"

"Father got smaller and smaller under the red ray—smaller and smaller—smaller and smaller!" Her voice became thin and reedy and Shay moved to her side. It was as well, for she was near collapse. She struggled to hold the figurine up so they could see. "Smaller and smaller—smaller and smaller! The thing tried to get into the cabin after him, but it was hurt. Smaller and smaller! Until this was all that was left!"

The eyes of the men went to the figurine. Shay again chilled at the abysmal fear expressed so vividly; but Dexter stepped backward as though struck. His aged face paled until he was drawn and haggard.

"What's wrong, Doc?" demanded Shay. "It's only a little statue."

Dexter smiled weakly, ran his fingers through his gray hair. "Yes, yes," he said nervously. "It's only a little statue. But it gave me an awful start. I've met Wallgense several times, and I never saw such an exact likeness."

Shay stared, opened his mouth to say something, then leaped to catch Elsa as she crumpled. The figurine struck the floor heavily.

Shay lifted Elsa in his arms as Dexter stooped to pick up the figurine. Dexter's fingers slipped and he regarded it with surprise. Then he grasped it again and lifted. He stood, holding it with both hands. His eyes met Shay's.

"It weighs over a hundred pounds!"

Shay said nothing, but held Elsa closer. He saw that Dexter was going to speak again and, somehow, he feared the words that might come.

Dexter spoke hoarsely. "And Wallgense was a small man. He weighed about a hundred and twenty-five."

SUDDENLY there was a sound like an explosion far underground. The earth trembled. Elsa moaned and raised one hand toward her face.

The trembling of the earth grew stronger. There was a heavy-voiced roaring as though the earth were being torn asunder.

"It has come here!" Shay shouted to Dexter. "It's following us!"

Elsa moaned again. Her eyes opened. She seemed dazed. Then she heard the roaring. Her eyes brightened with fright. She struggled to escape Shay's arms, finally succeeded and tore the figurine from Dexter's hands. She started to run, wildly, unreasoningly.

Shay leaped after her, but she was speeded by fear. She ran to the street, started to the right, then turned with a scream and ran in the other direction. Shay glanced to the right and saw the amber dome moving down the street like a great plow. Fear lent speed to his feet, too, and he overtook Elsa.

He forced her to turn off the road, out of the path of the globe. He drew her into a garden and they crouched in the concealment of the shrubbery.

They watched the globe approach swiftly, destroying the street as it came. It came abreast of them, and they crouched lower. But it stopped, remained motionless, then a part of the top of the dome slid back and a pale amber beam darted out to touch Elsa. . . . Touch her and lift her into the air. A ray of ruby-red light came out to join the other and Elsa floated toward the opening in the dome.

Shay leaped forward. The heat from the sphere dried his skin. But strangely, it became no hotter when he leaped on the side of the dome and tried to climb to the opening. But it slid shut when Elsa was

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taken within. Then the dome started away and Shay was brushed off.

He sat stupidly in the ruined street, staring as the amber-colored dome dipped beneath the surface and was gone. Soon the earth quit shaking and there was no sound of the globe's passage. But still he sat motionlessly until a hand touched his shoulder. He looked up dazedly.

"You loved her, Alan?" asked Dr. Dexter in a low voice.

Shay nodded and didn't dare speak.

Dexter looked the way the globe had gone. "It's like that," he said as though to himself.

Shay hardly heard. He felt that a greater part of his life had died. And it was with a slow, shambling gait that he went with Dexter when the elderly doctor urged him back toward the research building. Finally he turned agonized eyes to meet Dexter's.

"You saw her—talked with her . . . It was real, wasn't it?"

Dexter nodded. "Yes, it was real." And he spoke as he would have spoken to a child.

But Shay hadn't the will to resent; he hardly noticed.

"But it's so impossible!" he burst out.

"What is?" inquired Dexter. "That's a dangerous word. I know Wallgense's theories. I thought them improbable; but I never called them impossible. All he said was that it was not necessarily three states to which matter was limited—gas, solid and liquid. He said there might be others . . . infra-solids and ultra-gases."

THE words struck a spark in Shay's mind. He felt that he was coming to life again. A small thought was forming, snow-balling larger by the second as memories were added.

"You mean like neutronium?" he asked almost indifferently.

"No. That, hypothetically, is material—or let's say 'stripped atoms' . . . nuclei

stripped of electrons and outer particles. Infra-solids, or ultra-gases, would be a normal state of matter, but unknown to us—just as air is unknown as a gas to a deep-sea fish."

Shay knew that Dexter would have gone on, but the thought that had fascinated him must be spoken.

"Why did it follow us?" he asked.

Dexter shrugged.

"Because it wanted either Otto Wallgense or Elsa. I think it was afraid of something. Elsa said her father had something that hurt the thing. It was afraid of him. It followed to get him back. But why? Because Otto Wallgense *isn't dead!*"

Dexter started to protest.

"He has to be alive!" Shay argued. "Maybe they were changing him to their 'state of matter.' Maybe he hurt the thing so that it couldn't finish, and he is frozen in a sort of suspended animation."

Shay was arguing to persuade himself, as much as to convince Dexter. Hope lent him some strength—filled a part of that aching void within him.

"And if Elsa's father is alive, then so is Elsa."

Dexter smiled grimly. "Well, I can't say it's impossible, after the lecture I just gave you, but—" he shrugged. "Even granting that it is so, what could we do? We don't know them; we don't know what energies they use; we can't reach them; we can't—"

Shay grabbed his arm and tugged him along at a faster pace. At the car he halted, opened the door and peered around the floor. At last he found what he wanted—the tiny arm that the figurine had held up to shield itself. Victoriously, he held it for Dexter to see.

"It's the arm that broke off!"

"Off what? The figurine?"

Shay nodded crazily, and Dexter snatched the slender black thing away from him and peered at it.

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"It's a dirty trick on Wallgense," he said, striding into the building, "But if we can find out how it differs from ordinary flesh, we may find a means to fight them."

Shay followed him into the laboratory, watched the arm with sharp eyes when Dexter set it down. Dexter eyed him sharply, then turned to another man working a few feet away. He had a dazed look that made Dexter smile, and the smile grew broader at the way the fellow glanced unbelievably out the window, then shook his head.

Old Dexter laughed. "You weren't seeing things, Chatterton. It really happened." Then he went closer, spoke in a low voice so Shay couldn't hear. Chatterton looked at Shay, greeted him with a smile that Shay found disturbing. Then Chatterton left.

Dexter went to Shay's side. Shay had turned back to the tiny arm, was staring at it fascinatedly. Finally, he said hesitantly, "Doc, it's growing."

"You need sleep," Dexter said unhesitatingly.

"No, it's growing," Shay insisted. "Mark and watch. You can't see it grow; but it's larger now than it was before."

Dexter insisted that Shay sit down. He did so, but was careful to choose a place from which he could watch the arm.

Chatterton returned with a tray of food and set it in front of Shay. "Dig in," he invited.

The aroma of toast and ham and eggs reminded Shay that he hadn't eaten for twenty-four hours, and he needed no second invitation. He ate while Dexter and Chatterton worked.

Surfeited at last, he pushed the tray away with a sigh and started to get up. It was slow, hard work. He tried to walk to Dexter's side, but was so dizzy that he was forced to hold to the table for support. Dexter turned and grinned.

Shay stared, stricken. "You . . . doped me," he accused.

Dexter nodded. "I knew you wouldn't rest any other way; and you are too tired and jittery to be anything but a nuisance. Chatterton and I will get along all right, and I've called in Bailey and Wilson."

Shay weaved on his feet. His senses whirled dizzily. He felt himself being lifted, then knew no more.

ALAN SHAY was brought back to consciousness by a thunderous roaring. He struggled to open his eyes and when he succeeded he found that he was lying on the cot in the corner of the laboratory. The cot was rocking. He heard the crash of something falling and turned.

His mind was still drugged, as was his body. He saw that the laboratory was shaking as though in a severe earthquake. Someone shouted:

"They're coming!"

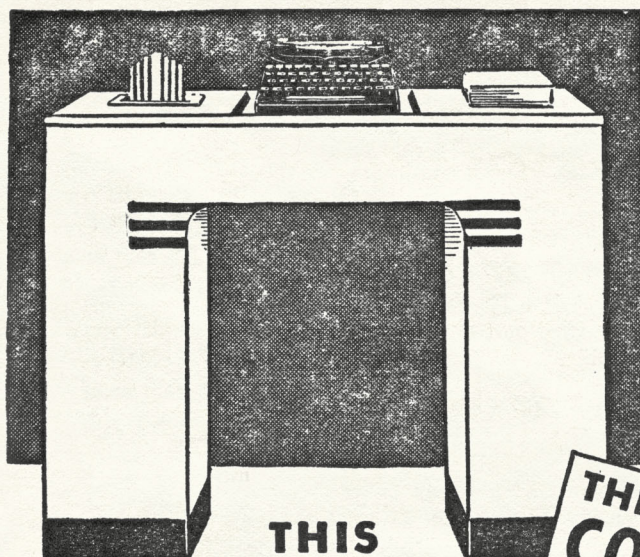
His mind cleared as though the words had been a tonic. He sat up quickly, then gripped the edge of the cot to keep from falling. Dizziness swept over him in sickening waves.

When he could see again, he saw four men standing in the room—Dexter, Chatterton, Wilson and Bailey. Chatterton leaped to a huge coil of wire mounted on a universal joint. He swung it around to face the direction from which the roaring was coming. Wilson and Bailey stood beside Dexter who reached up and slapped a large switch home. Shay staggered forward to join them.

He came close to falling. His legs felt like rubber, and only distantly related to the rest of his body. He grasped Dexter's shoulder to stay on his feet. The old man jerked around.

"Hello, Alan," he greeted. "Get back out of the way! You're in no condition to help."

"Whose fault is that?" Shay snarled.



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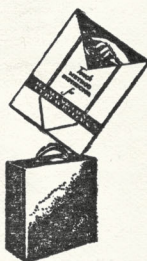


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Chatterton grinned at him from across the room and saluted mockingly. Shay thumbed his nose and turned back to Dexter.

"The globe?" asked Shay.

Dexter nodded. Shay waved toward Chatterton.

"Are you going to *fight*?"

"Going to try," Dexter corrected. "Your noticing that the arm was becoming larger gave us a good lead. And the cells came alive just after it reached normal size. We had a hell of a time finding out why it was getting larger. They evidently increased the intra-atomic attraction—condensed the elements. We finally figured out that the arm must have been in the field of some magnet or wire while you drove down, and that the field started a slow readjustment to normal. We tried it out and the arm grew faster. So—here we are."

Wilson interrupted bitterly. "And they've destroyed half the town while we held them out of here."

"We're letting them in, this time," said Dexter, "and we'll let them figure a way of getting out. If a field will keep them out; it ought to keep them in."

Shay noted that the room was girdled with high-tension wires.

"And you think that they must use the same sort of a field to maintain their body pressures?" guessed Shay.

"Something of the sort," shouted Dexter above the din, "or they'd burst apart like balloons."

He opened the switch suddenly, and waited. Almost immediately the wall of the laboratory burst inward and collapsed atop the amber dome of the globe. Shay saw now why the cables had been strung near the ceiling. They draped downward, almost touching the top of the amber globe.

Dr. Dexter closed his switch at the same moment. There was a flaring gush of light from the globe and the strange hard metal of the dome blistered, expanded, and soft-

ened. And the amber glow of the dome began to fade.

A round insect-like head appeared in the opening and stared at them with a pair of great compound eyes. Two antennae weaved questioningly as a huge pair of mandibles opened and closed.

CHATTERTON swung his weapon and the head disappeared into ballooning particles. There was a squashy explosion and they heard the remnants of the creature drop back inside the globe.

There was a short pause, then a dozen of the strange creatures scurried over the nearest edge of the opening and darted at the men. Chatterton swung his weapon as fast as he could and picked off a half dozen, but their many legs, moving with the wave-like motion of an ordinary millipede carried the rest to the men.

Shay saw defeat in front of them.

"Hold 'em, Doc!" he shouted. He leaped over one of the monsters and ran toward Chatterton's coil.

Someone fired a pistol. Shay's lips tightened. That was about as effective as a water pistol against an elephant.

Then he was standing at the giant coil, straddling Chatterton's lifeless body. He swiveled the weapon around to sweep the laboratory. He was heedless of his fellows. This weapon would not harm them.

There was a quick series of popping explosions, and the laboratory became silent. He heard only the hoarse sound of his own breathing. Then came a shout from the globe. Shay wheeled, coil ready, and saw Elsa helping a shouting man down the side of the globe.

"Dexter! Caleb Dexter!" shouted the small man. "How did you get into this?"

Shay strode forward, and Elsa came to meet him. Somehow, she was in his arms, and he couldn't remember exactly how she had got there. But he had no complaint. And neither did she.

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You Can Show**

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

**Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry**

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

**This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing**

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

F. E. ARMSTRONG, Presidents
Dept. 4013-K, Mobile, Ala.

**RUSH FOR EXCLUSIVE
TERRITORY PROPOSITION**

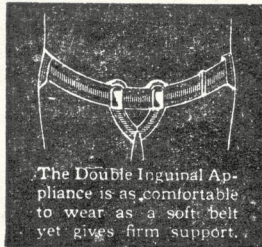
F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4013-K, Mobile, Ala.
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name _____
Street or Route _____
Box No. _____
City _____
State _____

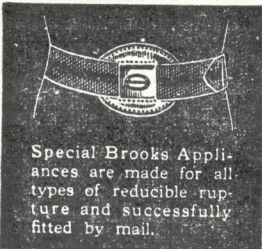
STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!



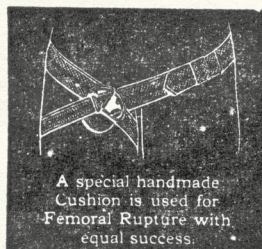
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WHY worry and suffer any longer?
Learn now about my perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. It has brought ease, comfort and happiness to thousands of men, women and children. You can imagine how happy many of these rupture sufferers were when they wrote to me that they had no further use for any kind of support. How would YOU like to be able to experience that same happiness? The only way to find out is to actually try this remarkable appliance. I guarantee it to fit properly and to hold comfortably ... or it costs you nothing. Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, easy measuring chart, and PROOF of results.

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

Surprisingly—continually—my perfected Automatic Air Cushion supports the weakened parts allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most heavenly comfort and security. No obnoxious springs, metal girdles or hard pads. No salves or plasters. My complete Appliance weighs but a few ounces, is durable, inconspicuous, sanitary and cheap in price. Wouldn't you like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom ... NEW glory in living ... NEW happiness with the help of Mother Nature and my perfected Air Cushion Appliance?

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 33,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

"Doctor Says Cured"

"My son, Ivan, wore your Appliance until three years ago. The doctor pronounced him cured a year or two before that time. He is now on the Rice Institute track team of Houston, Texas, is a dash and relay man. He participated in track meets at Milwaukee and in the National A. A. U. at Buffalo this past June."—Mrs. Wm. H. Jones, Box 502, Hedley, Tex.

"Gymnasium Instructor at 54"

"My rupture is greatly reduced after wearing your Appliance for a year. I have taken up my old work as gymnasium instructor for Stanton Park Baptist Church, and in showing the boys all the stunts, I have felt no ill-effects. Remember—I am 54 years of age, and I think it is very unusual for a man of my age doing hand-balance, especially with a double rupture, that the Brooks Appliance held me in. The above statement is true and correct."—Wm. H. Robertson, 1329 17th St., Detroit, Mich.

"Appliance Discarded"

"I discarded your Appliance about three months ago, having no further need for it. By that I mean I am perfectly cured and have no discomfort whatever after lifting pianos, etc., at my work."—G. Swindells, Long Beach, Miss.

"Brooks Holds"

"I can't tell you how much I think of your truss. It sure has done me worlds of good. I have hard work mining and so much lifting, but the truss held me and I never was bothered a bit with my rupture."—Joe Thumerelle, R. R. 2, Peoria, Ill., c/o Big Bear Coal Co.

SENT ON TRIAL!

If your doctor says you have reducible rupture, and advises a proper-fitting support, don't delay but get free details about the Brooks at once. It will be sent on trial to prove its merits. In trying it you risk no money—and if it doesn't "work"—if it fails to completely satisfy you or your doctor—you return it and the trial costs you nothing. Beware of imitations! The genuine Brooks is not sold in stores or through mail order houses. Stop Your Rupture Worries—send coupon now! All correspondence treated as strictly confidential.

Brooks Appliance Co.
421-H State St.
Marshall, Michigan

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

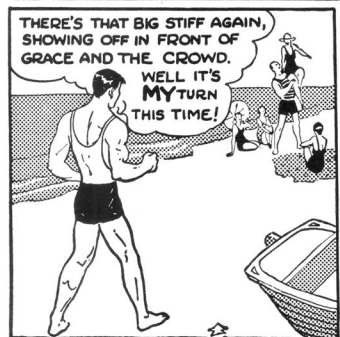
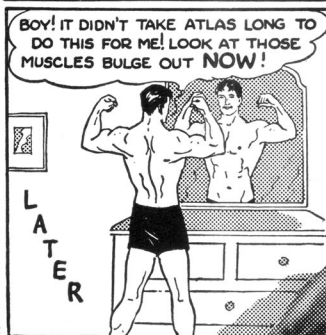
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Inventor

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whether _____
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I'll show you how to get the kind of body you have ALWAYS wanted! A big-muscled, evenly-developed physique. A broad, powerful chest. Biceps with SMASH in them. Arms and legs with energy, endurance and SPEED. A powerful back. A stomach ridged with bands of muscle. A REAL MAN'S build that stands out in a crowd!

My body-building method, "Dynamic Tension," changed me from a 97-pound weakling into twice-winner of the title "World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man." Let me prove it can work wonders with your body too!

7-DAY TRIAL OFFER

TRY "Dynamic Tension" for 7 days. It, even in that short time, it doesn't begin to show you results you can see, feel, measure with a tape—you don't have to go ahead with it, and the trial won't cost you anything.

"Dynamic Tension" has done so much for me and other fellows that I simply ask you to give it a trial. Make me prove it can make a new man of YOU—start new inches of power pushing out your chest, build up your shoulders to champion huskiness, put new, hard muscles on your biceps!

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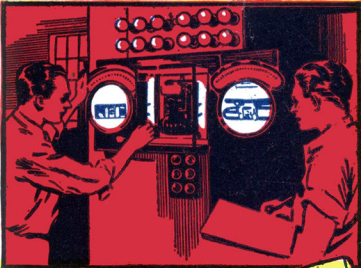
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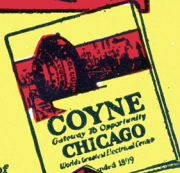
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