

SCIENCE FICTION

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SPACE-FLIGHT OF TERROR

A NOVEL OF INTRIGUE
IN THE VOID

by
RAY CUMMINGS

20¢ in Canada



A
DOUBLE-ACTION
MAGAZINE

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trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

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Find Out What Radio, Television Offer You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have



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

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Vol. II, No. 3



January, 1941

AN AMAZING NOVEL

SPACE-FLIGHT OF TERROR.....Ray Cummings 10

Intrigue and death, bringing an aftermath of terror, stalked the corridors of the Stardust ... and Jon Allen, Interplanetary Patrolman guarding a secret shipment of Radiumite-27, had to fight the mutiny of a superstitious crew as well as the ray bolts of space pirates!

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Joe Craven had discovered a serum that could mean new life to thousands of sufferers—but he loved only money, and Dr. Tuttle's "fate-sifter" showed him the horror that was to be his future as the result of his terrible crime against humanity!

FORGOTTEN FUTURE.....Arthur K. Barnes 47

They were just two men—alone in all the world—striving to learn their own names, to discover the awful secret of the forgotten future! The climax of this story will shock you with its stark realism!

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A strange apprehension overcomes the country as a freak radio beam creeps into the minds of the people with weird, mental effects—but Dan and Irene are the first to glimpse the true terror when they are accosted by the evil forces of perverted science!

SPACE SATAN.....Arthur G. Stangland 83

With the pressure in the oxygen bottles dropping from moment to moment, and help too far away to arrive in time, an oxygen mad spaceteer would sacrifice the life of his companions that he might live!

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A mysterious lifeless city on the surface of Jupiter—a weird madness that gripped the minds of men—these led David Reeves, commander of Earth's expedition, into a battle of death with an ancient race of living horrors!

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Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!

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Atlas Champion
Cup winner
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MEN—Meet J. G. O'Brien, of California, one of my Silver Cup Winners! Look at that strong neck—those broad, handsome, perfectly proportioned shoulders—that muscled chest and stomach. Read what he says: "Look at me NOW! **Dynamic Tension WORKS!** I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"—*J. G. O'Brien.*

I, myself, was once a skinny weakling of 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health and strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a swimming suit.

Then I discovered the secret that changed me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man," the title I won twice and have held ever since, against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension**. It is a natural method. Its purpose is not only to give you the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror, but also—for those whose systems are sluggish from lack of proper exercise—to help them tone their entire body, inside and out.

Accept My 7-Day Trial Offer

Do you want a better build? Are you dissatisfied with your present physical development? All I ask is a **7-DAY TRIAL**. Just one week! In even that short time you will notice your chest hardening and filling out with solid muscle—or the 7-Day Trial will cost you nothing. Surely this is proof enough that by con-

tinuing with my **Dynamic Tension** method I will make you a **New Man**—give you bodily power and drive, and put you in magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of everyone.

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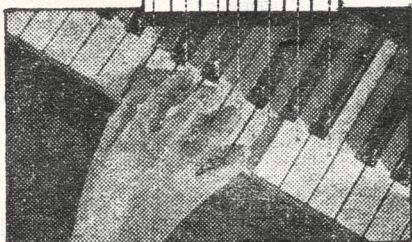
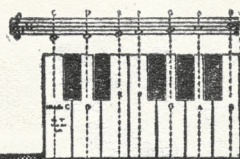


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*Actual pupils' names on request.
Pictures by professional models.

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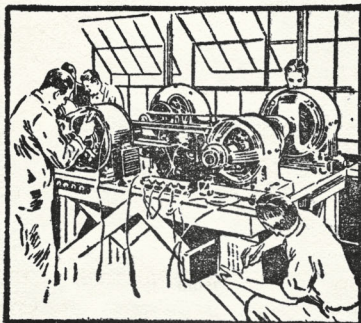
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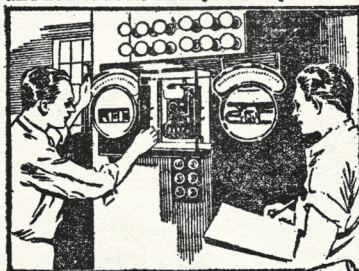
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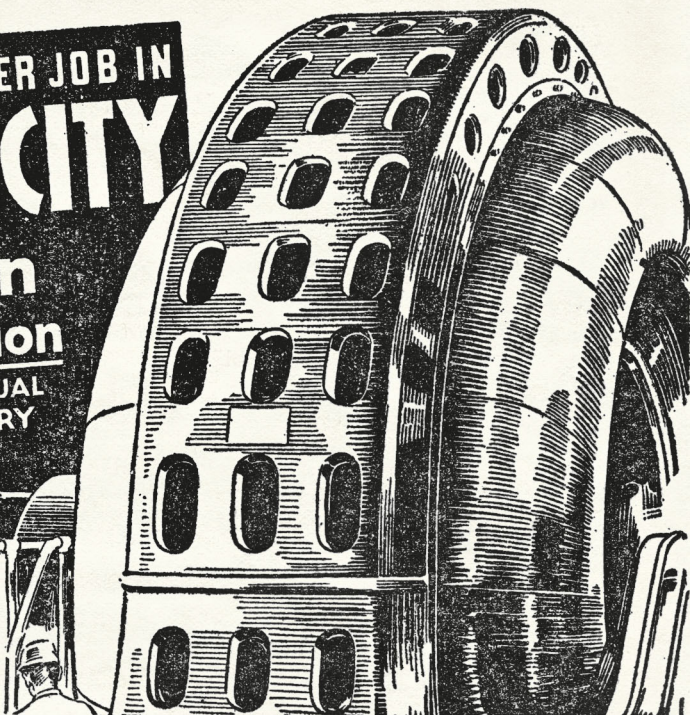
First you are told and shown what to do and how to do it. Then you do it yourself.



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BOOK**



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Coyne
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School



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Our tremendous defense program is now getting under way. What is more important to this program than the giant force of Electricity? Electricity is the mighty power that makes it possible to carry on the program our government and industry has ahead. This means thousands of jobs for Electrically-trained men.

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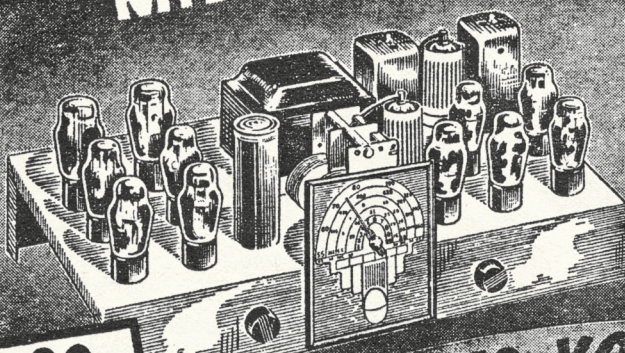
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AND SPEAKER READY
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DAYS
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EASY
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FREQUENCY MODULATION AND TELEVISION PROVISION

NOW, you can enjoy the mighty power of a 14-Tube* radio, at the amazingly low, factory-to-you price of only \$19.95.

You never heard such brilliant performance and beautiful tone for so little money! Now, tune in exciting broadcasts direct from distant overseas stations. Our famous 30-day prove-it-yourself plan, fully protects you and enables you to prove Midwest's super performance in the privacy of your own home, without obligation.

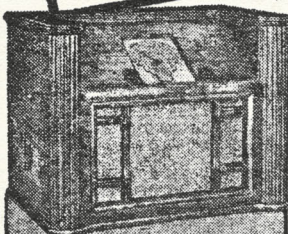
YOU BE THE JUDGE

Do like thousands have done—put this new 1941 chassis in your present cabinet. Other chassis and cabinet models are fully pictured and described in our new 1941 Factory-To-You, money-saving catalog... from 5 to 17 Tubes, and up to 5-Wave Bands... including Radio-Phonograph combinations and Home Recorders.

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Tune in broadcasts direct from the capitals of Europe. Listen direct to distant overseas stations in remotest parts of the globe. Hear history in the making before it appears in your local paper, and, before your local station announces its own version of the news!

*Fourteen tubes include Rectifiers, Control and Tuning Eye Tubes.



14-TUBE CABINET MODEL

\$29.95

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SEND YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ON A POSTCARD**

MIDWEST *Factory-to-You* RADIOS

MANUFACTURERS OF QUALITY RADIOS SINCE 1920

Midwest Radio Corporation
Cincinnati, Ohio, U. S. A.
Dept. 68-EE.

Send me your new **FREE**
Catalog, complete details of
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and factory-to-you prices.

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User-Agents Make Easy Extra Money. Check here () for details.



**GET
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ANSWER
TO
TRADE-
INS!**

HOW SAFE IS



YOUR JOB?

CAN YOU CLASS YOURSELF AMONG THE "OK-MUST KEEP!" EMPLOYEES?

NO USE dodging facts! At times—in every company's history—the pay-roll goes onto the operating table for major surgery. And when such times come, certain employees are amputated—sometimes a few, sometimes many.

Yet a certain few are always marked "OK-Must Keep!" And the many who are let out envy them—call them "lucky."

What's Behind Job-Holding "Luck"?

It can be *proved*, however, that there's almost always something more than luck involved.

Even the fellow who seems to "have a drag" may actually have a lot more on the ball than is apparent to his fellow workers.

He may have hidden values that only his superiors see or know about.

After all, the "I-Gotta-Drag-Club" has taken a bad licking. In fact, it rather completely disbanded in 1932-1933.

Yet why is it that some employees hold their jobs at the very time when others of seemingly equal ability lose theirs?

If it's not luck, there *must* be some explanation. And there is one!

How to Insure Your Job

The secret of holding your job in hard times is to be invaluable to your employer. And a man or woman who is invaluable is usually a well-trained one.

Training is of many kinds—stems from many sources. But the LaSalle kind has been unusually successful. Nearly a million members, in a score of subjects, over a thirty year period can testify to that—and many can prove it by their pay envelopes!

They have cause to agree with us that the real secret of both promotion and job security is just this: "On your present job, make sure you are doing it well, then train for the job ahead!"

Why It Works

Put yourself at your own president's desk for a moment.

You are faced with cutting the pay-roll. First of all, you certainly are going to do your best to hold on to those employees who really know their present jobs.

But among them—the very last to go will be those

few who are also wholly or partly trained for the job ahead—even for the job *ahead* of the job ahead!

What You Should Do About It—

But true as these facts are, you probably will tend to do nothing about them.

"My job is safe," you think. "My company won't cut down—and even if it does, I won't suffer."

But doesn't the very fact that you have read this far indicate that there's some small doubt—a trifle of uneasiness in your mind?

Wouldn't you be more comfortable if right now *your* boss knew that *you* were taking LaSalle training—a piece of knowledge that upon request we take pains to bring to the personal attention of every LaSalle enrollee's superior?

What you *should* do about it is, therefore, as obvious as the coupon below.

—If You've Got What It Takes!

That coupon, you know, has helped increase the pay envelopes, brighten the lives, and secure the future for many men and women who saw what they *should* do —AND THEN DID IT!

It isn't easy. It will cost you hours of serious study, of leisure with friends, your radio, and the movies. And, even on our very liberal payment plan, it will also cost you some money.

But any worthwhile insurance does cost money. And since this is the nearest thing to job-certainty that we know about—it is *worth* money!

Why not at least investigate? *That* costs not a cent! The coupon will bring a quick response—may help start you on the way toward the future that's *due* you!

Better mail it now—and play safe!

FREE! Any of these booklets — or similar ones on your own field.



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

Dept. 1172-R CHICAGO

I'd like to know what you can do to help me better my job. Send me your free booklet and full details about the training I have checked below:

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|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law: LL.B. Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management |

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

Address.....Present Position.....

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*The Martian ripped out
an oath and jumped for
the forepeak. Johnson's
bolt caught him on the
wing!*





SPACE-FLIGHT OF TERROR

A THRILLING, NEW SCIENCE-FICTION
NOVEL BY
RAY CUMMINGS

Intrigue and death, bringing an aftermath of terror, stalked the corridors of the *Stardust* . . . and Jon Allen, Interplanetary Patrolman guarding a secret shipment of Radiumite-27, had to fight the mutiny of a superstitious crew as well as the ray bolts of space pirates!

CHAPTER I

IT WAS about nine o'clock, that summer evening — June 10, 2050 A. D. — when Chief Greer called me on split-wave code audiphone.

"Jon Allen? Oh, you Jon—fly down to me at once. I'm in my office — Interplanetary Patrol Building—top floor X-120, under the observatory."

"What's in the air, Chief?" I demanded.

"I'm booking you as a passenger on the *Stardust*. You take off for Mars at midnight. Get down here fast. You haven't much time."

I am Jon Allen, Junior Operative, Shadow Squad Division of the Interplanetary Patrol. My job is undercover work on anything concerning Interplanetary illegality. Sometimes it's trivial, routine stuff; but by the tense urgency now in the Chief's voice, this didn't seem so.

I flew down to mid-Manhattan

in my small air-roller; landed on the roof of the towering IP Building. Greer was in his office, alone at his desk with his banks of instruments around him. He waved me to a seat before him. The padded, circular little office was dim with tube-light from a hooded cylinder on the desk. Starlight filtered down from the observatory overhead.

As I entered, Greer signalled for silence. The door slid closed upon us; the trap to the observatory cut off the starlight and the voices of the IP men on duty up there. Then he pressed another lever. The metal walls of the little cubby here crackled for an instant as the sound-absorbing barrage went into them. We were secure against any possible electric eavesdropping.

"As secret as that?" I murmured. My voice was dead, toneless, with the barrage gripping it. "All right. Let's have it."

"A secret shipment of Radiumite-27*," he responded.

"Valuable stuff," I murmured. "And I'm to guard it?"

I stiffened. He saw it, and he smiled. "I know what you're thinking, Jon. About your father—that mystery of his disappearance—"

My father, twenty years ago when I was only four years old, had been a member of the New York Shadow Squad. He had been on the job, guarding a very considerable treasure. The treasure had disappeared, and my father with it. Nothing had been heard from him again. It had broken my mother's heart; and she had died a few years later. . . . Like father; like son. It had put a cloud always upon me. I had no proof of my father's guilt—in my heart I could not believe him guilty.

But now, guarding this shipment of

*Radiumite-27—the technical name of a product known only to government officials and the medical profession. An ultra-radiumite concentration, which in 2048 was discovered and was now being produced by secret formula in the Earth-Federation Government Laboratories. Rumors of it had gotten out, but the details were withheld from the public.

Concentrate-27—suppose something went wrong? Surely this was one case on which I would have to make good!

"YOU'RE the only operative I have available," Chief Greer was saying. "And I know I can trust you, Jon." His gesture seemed trying to wave it away. "This Concentrate-27 is damn potent stuff—used to stimulate radioactivity in the baser, commercial ores of radium. Only our Earth-Government can produce it. For war purposes it can be made to incite, in certain uranium alloys a diabolic explosive force—"

"And now we're sending some of it to Mars?" I said. "What in the devil—"

His gesture checked me. "The wisdom of that isn't for us to decide. Besides being the basis for the most powerful explosives so far discovered, it has become a big factor in medical radiotherapy."

"I've heard about that."

"The cheapest and best germ-killer yet discovered," he said. "So our medical profession has been secretly using it. And they got permission to allow the Martian Human Welfare Society to try it. Naturally our Government couldn't refuse that."

"I get your point." Ironical, this stuff that could both kill people and save their lives!

"So now we have sold a small quantity to the Martian Human Welfare Society, for medical use only," Greer went on. "Fair enough. Not much danger that the Martian Government will confiscate it, and turn it into explosives. We'd find that out and it would precipitate war."

"They might use that as a sample, and try and make themselves more," I suggested.

He shook his head. "Can't be done. That's been demonstrated. But the point is, there's enough of the stuff in this shipment to make a lot of explosives. Subversive elements in Mars—plenty of them in Ferrok Shahn, working to overthrow the government—"

"And plenty here on earth," I commented.

"Exactly. They'd pay big to get hold of this shipment. Enough to tempt any band of criminals."

"And you think that news of the *Stardust* carrying it on tonight's flight may have leaked out?"

He shrugged. "That's what we don't know. I could imagine, if any criminals got hold of it, they could sell it on Mars for a thousand decimars. Maybe more. That's ten million platinum-dollars of Earth-currency. A lot of money." Greer smiled wryly as he added, "You could bribe even a pretty honest man with that much money."

I agreed with him there. "In what form is this shipment?"

"A small, leaden-insulated, double-shelled pressure cylinder. The whole thing isn't much bigger than your hand. It will be in the Purser's safe. He and the Captain are the only ones—" Again Greer smiled wryly. "So far as we know, the only ones who are aware it will be there. Or even be on the ship, for that matter."

"Does the Purser know about me?"

Greer shook his head. "Only Captain Allaire knows you. You can have a talk with him, but be damn careful. My idea, having you among the passengers—if there is any undercover stuff going on, you'll have a chance to spot it."

We talked a while more. "Have you ever heard of an Earth-criminal known as 2Y-X-4-4?" Greer demanded abruptly. "He was before your time."

I HAD heard of him. For quite a few years, up to six or seven years ago, he had raised the devil both in Great-New York and Great-London. And he had never been caught. His nickname was Trigger Joe—handy fellow with a gun.

"Practically nothing known about him," Greer was saying, "except the scent of him. The olfactory classifiers got scent of him

several times—the bloodhound machine, as the newscasters call it. 2Y-X-4-4—that's his olfactory classification."

The smell of him, so to speak—the inherent scent, different in every human, so that a dog has no trouble in distinguishing them.

"You think he may have something to do with this shipment of Concentrate-27?" I demanded.

Greer hesitated. "He's been inactive all these years. But there's one queer thing—you get suspicious of everything, Jon, in an affair like this—did you ever hear of one Dolly De Vere?"

I had indeed, but I saw no use in going into it with the Chief. I knew her well; was considerably more than half in love with her, to be exact.

"She's a young actress," Greer was saying. "Not a very important one—done television and stage work here in New York, and in Great-London. Just by chance I came upon a bit of stray information. Her father, years ago, was a good friend of this Trigger Joe. It wouldn't incriminate her, of course—she was just a child then."

Dolly De Vere possibly mixed up in this thing! I held myself tense. "And so what?" I murmured.

"Well, she's booked as a passenger on the *Stardust* tonight, and she doesn't seem to have any particular reason for going to Mars."

Dolly going to Mars! I had been out with her as recently as two nights ago, and she had said nothing to me about it!

I left Greer half an hour later. I had already packed and had my luggage sent to the *Stardust*. The little commercial space-liner was taking off from the Staten Island stage of Earth-Mars Spaceways.

Outside the IP Building a public taxi-roller came at me. I took it. Thousands of people work in the giant IP Building who have no connection with Interplanetary Patrol. I was not incautious, being seen coming out of there.

The taxi-roller sped up to a take-off ramp and within a minute we were in the air. I'm not psychic. I had no suspicion of that public-pilot, flying me now to the *Stardust*. To this day I have no idea whether the accident was normal or not. But at all events we went suddenly dead in the air; came down with an emergency landing on a dark ramp near the Staten shorefront.

My driver got out to putter with his mechanisms. "Sorry Chief," he muttered. "How much time we got? The *Stardust* rack ain't so far from here anyway."

"Right," I agreed. "Here's your money. I'll walk it. Take your time fixing whatever's the matter."

IT WAS a dilapidated waterfront; fallen into neglect for many years. Abandoned docks for surface ships; ramshackle old sheds, with almost lightless corridors between them. By night now it was a shadowy shambles. But I had no luggage with me; and a quarter of a mile ahead I could see the glow of tubelights where the *Stardust* was racked, with a bustle of activity around it.

I started off, with the taxi-roller pilot staring after me. I was in a corridor between two big broken sheds when suddenly the signal disc on my chest under my shirt began to heat. A call from Greer! His wave-length heating my disc. I put the tiny plugs in my ears. A police image-lens was mounted on a street pole here; Greer, worried over me, had picked me up through it.

"You're being followed!" Greer's microphonic voice whispered tensely. "Dammit man, get out of there!"

I didn't stop to answer him, ducked into a broken old warehouse, went through it on the run and into another street, almost as dark as the one I had left. A light-pole at a corner had another of the police image-lenses mounted up by the light. Greer picked up the image of me through it.

"Okay," his voice said. "Man in a black cloak—didn't see where he went. Keep going. Goodbye, Jon—good luck."

That figure in the black cloak evidently didn't try to follow me through the warehouse, but he certainly made speed. I shied around the street-light, with a lighted intersection where traffic was passing no more than a hundred yards ahead of me. And suddenly, from off to my left, there was a hiss; a violet stab of heat-bolt. It missed me, but I melted down as though it had drilled me. There was an instant of blank silence. I was lying prone, with my Banning gun cocked up on one elbow. And then I saw the dark-robed figure coming from a shadow! A man, robed and hooded. Fifty feet away.

I'd have drilled him in another second or two; but some fool city-desk policeman must have spotted the bolt-flash through one of these image-posts. He set off an actinic alarm flare. It was over by the traffic intersection—glare of white light which had me just on its fringe.

My Banning gun stabbed its bolt. But too late. The black figure, startled by the glare, had jumped back. I missed him. It was by inches; and the violet heat-beam must have singed the waving bottom of his voluminous cloak. I saw it shrivel and glow for a second as the fabric charred. No time for me to stab again. He was running; within a second he had ducked behind an intervening building and was gone.

The damned actinic glare, and an alarm siren now, was bringing chaos to the neighborhood. The last thing I wanted was to get caught in any turmoil of local-police activity! I got out of there in a hurry; joined a milling pedestrian crowd which was trying to find out what had happened.

So already my connection with this case was known! I had been picked up by someone who was watching Greer's office!

A few minutes later I was on the *Stardust*. For fifteen minutes or so I stood on the little flyer's forepeak, watching the

passengers and luggage come aboard—no more than a dozen passengers, this flight; Earth people, a few Martians—a Lunite or two.

Then presently the bulls-eye and the glassite dome-ports were sealed. The little *Stardust* lifted. With rocket-tail for atmospheric flight streaming out behind her, she slanted up into the starlight through the stratosphere, with the rocket-engines off and the gravity plates in Earth-repulsion.

Then we were in Interplanetary space. The voyage of terror had begun.

CHAPTER II

QUARRY OF THE BLOODHOUND MACHINE

“WHY DIDN’T you tell me you were going to Mars?” I demanded. “See here Dolly—”

Her eyes avoided me. She was a little beauty, this Dolly De Vere. The starlight, as we sat now on the forepeak of the ship, came down through the overhead glassite pressure-dome and bathed her with its shimmering light.

“I could ask you that same thing, Jon—” she murmured. “And you’re not traveling as an IP man are you?”

It was almost as though we were antagonists! A different Dolly, here now on the little *Stardust*, from the girl I had known in New York.

“I won’t say anything about your identity, Jon,” she added sweetly. “Not unless you insist.”

A threat! The *Stardust* was now a day out from the earth. Dolly quite obviously had been avoiding me; it was the first opportunity I had had of being alone with her. Destined to be brief, for two men now came strolling along the deck. One of the passengers, and the ship’s Purser. They joined us at once. Dolly had always been a magnet to men.

I gave no hint now that I knew her, and my warning glance suggested that she do the same. She did; but it was as though she was holding a threat over me!

“Interesting profession, theatrical work,” the passenger who had joined us presently said, when Dolly told him that she was an actress. His name was J. Tarkington Mantell. He was a big, handsome man. Fifty perhaps. Exceedingly distinguished-looking, with a great shaggy mass of grey-white hair.

“You were an actor?” Dolly Marks asked him.

“Some years ago,” he smiled. “Mantell the Magician. Surely you have heard of the great scientific illusions of Mantell the Magician?” He chuckled. “The public loves to be fooled. It is marvelous, what you can do with science, Miss De Vere, to make things seem what they are not.”

He was a likable fellow, this J. Tarkington Mantell. He had retired now from the stage and television. For half an hour he regaled us reminiscences of his big stage illusions, where with intricate mechanical trappings and a skilled application of modern science he had fooled his gullible public.

“Do something for us now,” Dolly said.

“Oh no, he laughed. “You would see through me. One needs soft lights, and music. I would be humiliated.” He winked at me. “I would get caught in my trickery. You are in the profession, Miss De Vere. Tell us about yourself.”

I sat tense, listening to her explain that she was traveling to Mars to fill a theatrical engagement in Ferrok-Shahn. It sounded plausible enough to these others. But not to me—for why hadn’t she mentioned it when I had seen her so short a time ago? Leaving for Mars, without saying goodbye to me! Was she really connected now with this Trigger Joe? And was he involved in some plot now against the Cylinder of Concentrate-27?

I could hardly believe it. Dolly was only seventeen—small, dark, with snappy dark eyes and pert red lips. A girl of brains, without question. Self-reliant from having earned her living on the stage for several

years. And I had thought I had known her so well!

THE CONVERSATION went on. I said very little. Somehow a queer uneasy tenseness was on me. That shadow that the mystery of my father had cast upon me always seemed so much greater now with the importance of this affair. I sat watching Dolly, the Purser and Mantell—alertly watching, suspicious of everyone and everything.

"My first space-flight," Dolly was saying. Her gaze drifted off to the glittering stars through the pressure-dome. "It's even more beautiful than I had imagined."

The *Stardust's* Purser—a stocky fellow with close-clipped black hair that bristled over his forehead like a wire-brush—was sitting with us. His name was P. B. Franklin.

"I hope we have a pleasant voyage," he commented. "But our crew doesn't seem to think so."

"What's that mean?" Mantell demanded. His sleek graceful hand brushed his crop of iron-grey hair with a gesture. "Trouble with the crew? For a fact, I heard one of those Martian fellows muttering to himself, back on the stern deck a while ago. I wondered—"

"Accursedly superstitious, these deck-hand minions," Franklin said wryly. "All nonsense, of course. But they're saying this is a voyage of doom, this trip. Ten of them, and they're all alike. We're star-crossed, this voyage—that's what they're saying. Astrologically, the stars were bad, for us to start last midnight. There was an electric aura around the moon, just as we took off. And a meteorite crossed our bow, just as we went into the stratosphere. Stuff like that. . . . Oh, do I frighten you, Miss De Vere? Why, I'm sorry."

I had been watching her. Terror had leaped into her eyes. Terror that seemed out of all proportion to the Purser's words. And yet certainly I could feel it myself.

Queer undercurrent of horror that was running over the ship. As though everyone on board seemed to sense an undercurrent of mystery, this voyage. Ship of doom. There is nothing so communicable as fear. I am a hard-boiled fellow, an IP man has to be. But still I could feel that queer clutching inside of me—the thought that there was something grow-some here—something not to be understood, nor translated into terms of rational science. No wonder the superstitious crew was frightened!

"Sorry if I've alarmed you," the Purser said again.

"Why no," she murmured. She tried to smile. "That's—very interesting, Mr. Franklin. Silly superstitions—"

The stocky, red-faced Purser looked contrite. "Of course it's all nonsense," he declared. "We're destined to have a perfect voyage. No chance for a space-storm. The sun-spots are normal this month. Captain Allaire checked every cosmic condition carefully before we took off. That sort of thing is never made public, Miss De Vere, but you can be assured we don't overlook it. The electronic space-pressures, all the way from here to Mars, are perfectly normal. Nothing can happen to us—"

"Well let's hope not," Mantell commented with his ready smile. Don't let's look for trouble. Imagination is a powerful thing. I used to find that with my audiences. If you could get them imagining things—"

HIS VOICE trailed off. I saw that he was gazing up toward the bow-peak. The bow lookout was there at his little electro-telescope. And near him were two big Martian deckhands. Brown, burly fellows, clad in rough Earth-garb of short jacket and wide flopping trousers. I could see that they weren't natives of the Martian Union—far too burly—and too tall, nearly seven feet. They were standing together. They seemed to be whispering as they gazed at us.

I leaned toward Mantell. "Those Martians up there," I murmured. "Watching us—"

Franklin the Purser heard me. "New members of the crew, this voyage. They're the worst with their damned superstitions—"

New members! Martians, from the Dark Country outside the Martian Union. That was the region full of revolutionary plotters against the Martian Government! Leaders of subversive activities there certainly would pay big for that little leaden cylinder of Concentrate-27, which I knew was now locked in Purser Franklin's safe, in his office-cubby here no more than a hundred feet from us!

Then suddenly, from the side deck between the cabin-superstructure and the side wall of the pressure-dome, a man came slouching. Another member of the crew—a little Earthman. He was muttering to himself, and his face was chalk-white.

As he came past us, the Purser hailed him. "You Jones—what the devil's the matter with you?"

He stared at us. "I seen it," he muttered. "An hour ago—I seen it in one of the cabin corridors—"

"Seen what?" the Purser demanded.

"There's a ghost on this ship, Mr. Franklin. That's what they're all sayin' an' I've seen it. A dead thing, but it won't stay dead—"

Beside me I heard Dolly Marks suck in her breath with a little suppressed cry. Whatever terror she had shown before was nothing to that stamped on her face now. My hand went out and touched her arm.

"Take it easy," I murmured.

Mantell was blankly staring at the terrified deckhand. Franklin demanded: "What do you mean, a ghost on this ship?"

"A dead man's head," Jones chattered. "I seen it. His head—somebody must have cut his head off when he got killed. An' now his head won't stay dead. It floats. I seen it—a big purple head, all glowin' like

light—Oh my Gawd, there it is now!" He ended with a squeal of terror as he stared up to the dome over our heads.

I was aware, in that stricken second, that there was a faint humming crackle quite near me. Mantell must have heard it also, for he stared at me with a look of startled astonishment. A little crackle down on the deck near us. But the thought of it was stricken away as we started, following the deckhand's frightened gesture.

The ghost of a dead man's head! It was about that big—a luminous round purple thing. Up in the starlight, under the pressure-dome thirty feet over us, it suddenly had appeared. For a second it hung in mid-air above the peak of the little control turret. And then it moved, floating. . . .

"Oh my Gawd, it's comin' down at us!" Jones squealed.

Slowly it was floating down. Crackling, with a faint humming hiss. I think we were all out of our chairs, standing clutching at each other. Another second or two. Was there the goggling face of a dead man, visible in the front of that floating ghost-head? For just a split-second my excited imagination made me think so. The damned thing seemed almost as though it would lunge at us. But ten feet away it turned, hung for a second on the yard-arm of the little electric cargo-loader here on the fore-deck. And then it was fading. A purple wraith. It quivered and was gone.

"Well, I'll be damned," Mantell muttered.

Jones had darted away from us in terror. The Martians in the bow were staring; then they ran down into the hold-companionway.

"Well—" Franklin gasped. "Well—"

I recovered my wits. We stared around us in the dim starlight. There was nothing here now. "That was a ball of ionized air," I said.

IONIZED air? Was it really that? St. Elmo's Fire, as the sailors of the old

surface ships used to call it. Purple balls that would hang on the ship's rigging during thunderstorms. But what was a ball of ionized air doing here inside the *Stardust*? There was no electrical disturbance here.

"You had the right idea," Mantell said to me softly a few moments later. Dolly had gone to her sleeping cubby. The Purser had dashed away with John Thomas, the ship's young First Officer to try and restore order among the crew and passengers.

Mantell had drawn me aside. "That was ionized air, all right." He laughed grimly. "I ought to know—I've produced balls of light-fire like that in my theatrical illusions. Never was able to make them seem to look like the ghost of a human head—"

"That was imagination," I said. "I realized that as I stared at it—"

He nodded. "Those damned things even can be directed," he asserted. "Radio-pressure control—make them travel in a directed course—"

But who was creating this horror on the *Stardust*? And Why? Again I wondered if Trigger Joe, with his olfactory classification of 2Y-X-4-4 could be on board. I had a small model of the bloodhound machine with me—no bigger than my palm. Furtively I had tried it, with its effective range of only a few feet, upon each of these men I had met. But always the action was negative.

"Well, guess I'll go into the Smoking Lounge and see if I can rake up a game of cards," Mantell said. He flashed me his likable smile, but it was lugubrious. "Whatever's going on here, I don't want to let it get me."

I left him at the Lounge door. By ship's routine it was now nearly midnight. I went to my room, midway down one of the small superstructure corridors. It was lightless. My door was locked. The single small window which opened to the side deck was a faint rectangle of starlight that filtered through the outside pressure-wall.

I sat on my bed, pondering. Space-flight of doom. But this horror was being created. The ship's crew terrorized. Why? So that the criminal could go ahead with his plans, under cover of this terror?

I had never felt less like sleep. In the pallid darkness I sat listening to the faint throb of the ship—the hum of the air-renewers, the ventilating system; and the faint rhythmic oscillation of the pressure-absorbing Erentz-current* in the double-shelled hull-walls and the big glassite dome which arched over the decks and the superstructure roof. Now, so late, the few passengers doubtless had gone to bed. I knew there would be two or three members of the crew on duty; Captain Allaire at the controls in the little forward turret; and Controlman Roberts down in his mechanism cubby in the vessel's hull.

Upon impulse I decided to go up and talk to Captain Allaire. I had had no opportunity yet to be alone with him; he had flashed me a significant look of recognition as I came aboard, but that was all. I went quietly out; closed my cubby door. The narrow vaulted corridor which vertically bisected the forty foot long cabin superstructure, was dim and silent. The passengers' doors, each with a glowing nameplate of its occupant, were all closed.

Silently I went forward, to where the corridor emerged at the bowpeak deck triangle, where we had been sitting earlier in the evening. No one was there, except the forward lookout at the extreme bowpeak, seated at his telescope. The stars beyond our bow—great blazing gems in a black firmament—glittered with celestial glory. Red Mars was there, still small, shining, dull-red disc.

At the corner of the superstructure I

*Erentz-current: a swift oscillation of current which by its kinetic energy absorbs the latent pressure-energy of the outer shell of the double wall. Thus, that pressure, absorbed into the swiftly oscillating current, cannot reach the inner shell of the hull and dome. Perfected by Erentz, Earth-scientists in 2010, making space-flight possible.

passed Purser Franklin's office, with a grating closing its entrance. The door to his sleeping cubby was open. He was not there. By his dim night-light the big electric-sealed safe was visible, closed and locked upon its secret treasure.

A light down the side deck attracted me—an opened doorway from which blue tubelight radiance was streaming out. I knew it was the men's smoking lounge. The murmur of voices was audible. I went to where, without being seen on the shadowed deck, I could see the lounge interior. It was blue with smoke of tobacco arrant-cylinders. The card-game was in progress, with gold-leaf stakes. Mantell and two other men passengers, playing with one Jenks—a gold-leaf professional gambler. I knew little Willie Jenks by reputation—rat-faced, glib little fellow, card-sharper, skilled with the trickery of his fingers at card-manipulation. The stakes evidently weren't high. Jenks was raking in the leaf, much to the amusement of Mantell. As I watched, Mantell let out a roar of laughter.

"Very clever, Jenks. You take me back to my theatrical days. The hand is quicker than the eye. The public likes to be fooled. You should get rich, Jenks."

I moved away. And suddenly I stopped, stricken. Down at the other end of the side-deck, where it emerged to the stern deck-triangle, a blob moved. Dolly! A sheen of light caught upon her dark short skirt—the satin pink-whiteness of her legs.

Which way had she gone? I couldn't tell. I was at the stern triangle in a moment. There was nothing. What was she doing, roaming the vessel at this time of night? Locating where the crew-hands were placed? Finding out who was in the smoking lounge?

Finding out that Purser Franklin was there! *That the safe in his office-cubby was unguarded?*

The thoughts leaped at me; made my heart pound. Was she getting the lay of

things so that she could break into the safe?

My padded shoes were soundless as I went forward in the corridor. Franklin's dim cubby back of the grating quite evidently was still unoccupied. No sign of anything here. And then I glimpsed the furtive girl again. This time she was midway of the superstructure, just vanishing into one of the little cross corridors. Had someone preceded her? I got that vague impression, as though I had seen the flick on some garment that wasn't hers.

It was the cross corridor in which the girl's sleeping cubby was located. She had obviously gone into her room when I got there. Her door was closed.

For a moment I hesitated. My electric listener, pressed against the metal panel of the door, yielded only a thumping that might be the girl's footsteps inside her room; her quick, hurried breathing sounding as though she were terrified. But mingled with it there was something else. A blur. The sound of someone else, further away from me, in the room with her?

And then I heard a man's low voice. "Whatever should happen, Dolly, you stay here. Understand?"

"Yes. Oh, but please—"

"Easy—don't raise your voice. You know we can't be seen talking together. Even in here—"

The man's voice suddenly checked itself, dropping so low that I couldn't catch the phrase. And then I heard him preparing to leave her room. Hastily I withdrew down to an angle of the corridor.

Her door opened. A man came out, turned the other way in the corridor. A big man, bent, with wide thin shoulders. His peaked traveling cap was low on his forehead. One of the passengers. I had seen him at other times, but only at a distance. In the blue tubelight of the corridor now, as he turned away from me, I caught a glimpse of the light glinting on his big goggling eyeglasses.

One of the deckhands came along, passing me as I stood at the corridor intersection.

"Who is that fellow?" I demanded.

"Man in A17," the deckhand said. "Old fellow, traveling alone. Keeps to himself pretty much, seems like."

The deckhand passed on. He hadn't seen the goggled man come from Dolly's cubby. I stood for a moment; then I padded to the corridor angle. Just in time to see the goggled man going into A17. The doorlock clicked as he closed it after him.

Within a minute I had padded out to the side deck again and was crouching at the window of A17. It was barred and shrouded, but there was a tiny ventilating slit through which a rift of air was drifting outward. I shoved my Banning gun back into my pocket; brought out my little model of the olfactory classifier. The bloodhound machine. Here, in this room—this goggled old man—was one passenger on whom I had not yet used it. This type portable model was useless except at very close range, and with direct air-current. I had that now, and it might work.

I pressed its tiny power-button. Weird, quivering little machine, snuffing as it sucked in the air while I held it at the window vent. Then its dials were stirring. The scent, coming out the window! I tuned the little receivers. And the verification came. The dial-pointers whirled, quivered and then hovered almost motionless.

2Y-X-4-4! Trigger Joe! The notorious criminal! *He was here!* I had him trapped here in A17!

CHAPTER III

THEFT OF THE CYLINDER

CALL this a confession if you like. I started, in that second to try and crack open that barred window. But I didn't. I contemplated going to the Captain with what I had learned. But I didn't do that either. The thought of Dolly—her

beauty, her terror, my feelings for her back in New York—the fact that I had thought, back there only a few days ago, that she was falling in love with me—all that rushed over me now.

Trigger Joe had been her father's best friend. He was a wanted man—wanted on both Earth and Mars. But those were old crimes. They did not concern me now. Was he here on the *Stardust* plotting to secure the cylinder of Concentrate-27? I had no proof of that. And if he was, he couldn't escape from the little *Stardust*, out here in the infinite realms of Interplanetary space.

I sat in my cubby, pondering it. Whatever this brewing plot—I knew Trigger Joe's identity now. I would be prepared for whatever move he might make.

I did not undress, but I think I must have dozed. And suddenly the thump of something striking the corridor wall outside my door roused me, brought me to my feet! A crash! And a man's muttered oath of horror!

I rushed out. In the dim empty corridor one of the ship's stewards—a little Earthman—was crouched against the wall, white-faced, staring down the corridor with a look of terror.

"What the devil happened to you?" I demanded.

"That ghost-head! That purple ball," he muttered. "It went past here jus' now. Nearly hit me—I jumped back."

His startled jump had cracked him against the corridor wall.

"Head of a dead man," he was chattering. "You, sir—you ain't seen it? I guess there's lots of 'em—my Gawd, sir, this one's going all over the ship. It's got everybody frightened—"

I dashed away, following his gesture. A purple ball of ionized air, radio-pressure-controlled? Mantell's warning words came back to me. These accursed balls of light-fire could be directed by some intricate form of remote control.

This one quite evidently was being controlled! It was roaming the ship, bringing terror to everyone who encountered it. I saw the accursed thing within a minute as it floated along one of the corridors—glowing purple ball, the size of my head. A faint hissing hum came from it.

And suddenly it turned into a companion-way where ladder-steps led steeply downward into the *Stardust's* hull! I followed it down. There was a catwalk half way down in the hull, with mechanism rooms opening from it. The ball slowly floated along the catwalk a few feet and then plunged farther downward.

I reached the hull bottom—a narrow passage. Cargo rooms were here. And midway of the ship, I knew, there was a pressure-lock, exit porte.*

The purple ball passed the lock entrance. Slowly it was fading now. A wraith, and then it was gone. I came to the pressure lock. Emergency air-pressure suits were racked against the wall in the little lock-chamber. And over in one dark corner there was a blob. It looked like a huge piece of luggage—the luggage of one of the passengers which had been brought here. I went in and examined it.

It was a folded, one-man volplane.† Not much more than a power unit. Synthetic food and concentrated water were here with it. The power unit of tiny rocket-stream and gravity plates was charged and ready.

Someone on the *Stardust* was preparing for a get-away! Trigger Joe?

*Pressure lock, standard, though differing in size, for all modern commercial space-ships. A small, sealed air-pressure room, with an inner and an outer doorslide, automatically controlled so that both may not be open at once. For exit, the inner slide is closed. The outer one slowly opens, so that the air in the lock hisses out into the vacuum of space. For entrance, the process is reversed. The outer slide closes. The inner one, slowly opening, admits the ship's air into the lock.

†Volplane. Popularly known as "space-sled." Suitable for short trips. A six-foot long sled-like apparatus, usually with a single seat. In effect, merely a power unit, with the occupant wearing the regulation air-pressure space-suit.

IT TOOK me hardly more than a minute to de-charge the volplane batteries, so that the rocket stream would be inert and the gravity plate useless. The criminal would not notice what I had done—but he would quickly find he couldn't get very far with this apparatus! Once he tried it, he would be caught red-handed!

I got back to the upper side deck, at the side of the superstructure. And abruptly there was a sudden crackle a few feet away from me on the deck. An electric crackle! A hissing! A tiny shower of sparks!

I stared. I could see that it was deranged electricity; and all in that second I could hear it spreading around the ship. Then one of the purple ghost-balls came floating along the deck. It hissed against a bulls-eye porte and died. But up at the bow triangle I could see another.

The *Stardust* went into chaos. The lookout was shouting. From up at the turret I heard Captain Allaire's startled oath. And then the little vessel lurched—through the side-dome I could see the starfield shifting as we turned over.

A space-storm! Impossible by meteorological-cosmic forecasts! But it was here. And already the little *Stardust* was in distress! The crackling sizzle of deranged electricity that darted like little lightnings all over the ship's interior, in a moment was gone. But it left fumes. Choking fumes of chlorine and monoxide products. The crewman on guard at the forepeak was still shouting. Passengers' doors were opening. Alarmed voices. Startled questions. Then I heard one of the crew in the corridor.

"Back in your rooms everybody! Captain's orders. No danger—jus' an outer space-disturbance. We'll be through it in a minute." The deckhand in the corridor dashed up to me. "Can't roam around, sir. Capt'n's orders. Get in your room. Electric disturbance—ventilator dynamos went out, but they're all right now."

"The Captain wants to see me," I mut-

tered. "Don't bother me." I pushed past him.

From his sleeping-cubby door, Mantell came at me. He looked frightened, but he was trying to grin. "Space-storm?" he gasped. "But I thought the Purser said—"

"We evidently ran into one," I told him. "Better stay in your room—guess we're all right now."

That damned excited deckhand was still herding me. I let him shove me down the corridor. Then I got away from him; ran to the side deck. "You—Allen—Jon Allen—"

It was Captain Allaire calling me. He was forward on the deck, starting up a companion ladder. He gestured for me to follow him.

THE Captain's control-turret was a small circular room set upon the forward end of the superstructure roof. It was about ten feet above the forward deck triangle; looked down upon it. Behind the turret, connected with it by an interior door-oval, was the small chart-room. And behind that, there was the open forty foot roof of the superstructure, with the bulging glassite dome covering it with eight feet of headroom.

I dashed up a side ladder and ran the length of the superstructure roof; went into the back door-entrance of the little chart-room.

The Captain was there. He gripped me. "You, Allen," he said softly, "been wanting to see you. Have you overheard any—" He checked himself; we had no barrage to guard against eavesdroppers here.

I put my mouth to his ear. "Plenty to tell you—when we get a chance—"

A deckhand came on the run. "Those two Martians in the crew—can't locate them, sir," he gasped to the Captain.

"What in the devil!" Allaire was a heavy-set, choleric fellow. His fist thumped the chart-room table. "Go find them, bring them up here. I want to know where they

got their ideas on this being a voyage of doom. By Heaven, it looks it—"

When we were alone again he swung on me. "Space-storm, Allen. We ran into a supercharged magnetic field, quite evidently. Deranged our interior power for a minute. Must have put the gravity shifting mechanisms out of commission—"

Our suddenly shifted gravity-plates had made the little *Stardust* turn over. The starfield outside was still crazily swinging. Allaire swung me another warning look. Then he buzzed his audio-tube which had direct voice-transmission down to Controlman Roberts in the hull mechanism cubby.

"Roberts! You, Roberts?"

"Yes, Captain—" Roberts' voice came back, muffled through the tube.

"All right now?"

"Yes, sir. Guess so. Deranged electricity. It threw everything out. But Captain—I understood there was no space-storm possible in this—"

Allaire flung me a queer look. "Get the gravity plates shifted back where they were, Roberts," he ordered.

"Yes, sir. The air-purifiers went dead—but I got 'em working now."

Allaire disconnected and swung on me. "Something damn queer about this, Allen," he muttered. "Ever since we left New York—crew been raising hell. Superstitions—ghost-balls of fire."

I leaned over him. "The Purser's safe," I said softly. "We ought to guard it now. All this chaos and terror—a good time for—"

"Good Heavens, yes." He looked startled.

I could see that angle of it now. Someone creating this confusion and terror, and under cover of it getting the cylinder of Concentrate-27. And then making a get-away in that little volplane down there in the pressure-lock.

"You keep your eye on the safe, Allen," Allaire was telling me. And where the devil is Franklin—"

A cry out on the dim, starlit superstructure roof made us whirl. It was Purser Franklin. He came staggering toward us, hair disheveled, face pallid, his braided coat uniform torn and dirty.

"Something—jumped me," he gasped. "Down by my office. Lights went out. Somebody—something knocked me down. Unconscious for a minute—or maybe the damned chlorine fumes—"

We dragged him into the chart-room. I gripped the Captain. "Something I want to tell you—" Surely it was all right for Franklin to realize my identity now—

But my words died in my throat. The Purser stiffened us with his next gasp.

"When I—I came to my senses I saw that the safe was cracked," he was muttering. "Cracked by one of those purple balls! It—it—that cylinder there—it's gone, Captain!"

The cylinder of Concentrate-27! Stolen from under our noses!

CHAPTER IV

BANDIT TRAPPED IN SPACE!

WE WERE all three stricken into a moment of horrified silence. Then I came to my senses. Allaire was gripping the Purser, demanding more details. I left them; rushed down the ladder to the forepeak deck-triangle. The little *Stardust* had steadied now, swinging back onto her course. There was no one in sight except the bow lookout. The air was purer here now. The ventilators, again seemingly working normally, had sucked away the fumes of the free-running electronic radiance.

I ran to the Purser's cubby. Its grating door was ajar; the dim light still burning inside. Banning gun in hand, I went in. The safe was open. As Franklin had said, the cylinder was gone.

On the safe-lock there was a fused, burned area. But it didn't look as though a ball of ionized air had made it. I knew that was hardly possible.

And then I tensed. This fused spot here, hadn't cracked open the safe-lock! The lock was broken now, but it seemed as though it had been done on the inside—after the door was opened. The purple ball that the Purser had seen was a blind! This was a plant, to make us think that the safe had been cracked open. It had not been. It was opened normally, by someone who knew the intricacies of the lock-combination! Had Trigger Joe done it? How had he gotten the information?

My heart was cold as I thought of Dolly. In Heaven's name, how was she mixed up in this thing? An accomplice of Trigger Joe? Or just his victim, forced now to do what he told her?

But of one thing I was sure. My fingers itched to get a grip on that fellow's throat. He was here, somewhere on the *Stardust*. And now he had the treasure-cylinder. His time for a get-away, of course. The ship was in complete turmoil from the space-storm. Would he try now to get away in his volplane?

I ran to A17, to see if he was there. It was closed and locked. My Banning gun, with spreading diffused ray, was a good impromptu heat-torch. I melted the metal doorlock in a moment and burst in.

The dim sleeping cubby was empty. Then I ran to Dolly's room. Its door was unlocked. She wasn't there. Then as I reached the corridor I caught a glimpse of her down near its stern end. And she saw me. She took one look and ducked into a companionway that led down into the hold. I was there in a few seconds. No sign of her. The iron ladder-steps went steeply down. I descended a level; came to the transverse catwalk. The place was dim with shadows; only an occasional spot of tubelight. The narrow catwalk ran from bow to stern. The ship's mechanisms were under it, but to the sides there were several dark little cubbies—storage rooms; mechanism control-rooms of the air-renewers, the rocket-stream engines and pressure-tanks;

the ventilating system and the gravity-plate pneumatic shifters.

Where had Dolly gone? She could have ducked into any one of these cubbies. Gun in hand I padded past two or three of them. Light streamed out of a doorway amidships. I knew it was Roberts' main control-room. Perhaps he had seen her.

At his doorway I stood transfixed. He was lying on the floorgrid, ghastly in the blue tubelight, with a knife buried to its hilt in his heart! Something was clutched in his hand. I bent down. It was a bit of charred black fabric. The man in the burned cloak had killed him! The man who had tried to drill me, back in New York!

Then a faint gasped cry out on the dark catwalk made me whirl. Dolly! She stood in the doorway, her face livid, contorted with horror. I jumped and seized her.

"You saw who did that? Stabbed him—"

"No! Oh, my God, no."

I believed her. Certainly she would hardly have had time. I had followed her down here only a few moments ago.

"I—I wanted to tell you something," she gasped.

"So you ran away from me? Damn queer way of trying to tell me something—"

"I was frightened. I thought you might shoot at me."

I STOOD gripping her shoulders. "There was a man in your room a while ago. Where is he?"

Agonized terror swept her face. "No! No," she gasped. "That's a lie. There was no one—"

"Oh, yes, there was! It's you who are lying—" I swear it cut into me, being rough with her. That's queer, too. But there was something weirdly pathetic about her, now more than ever in her terror.

"Oh, please—" she gasped. "There wasn't anyone with me. I swear it."

"You're looking for him now?" I took that shot in the dark, and it seemed to

strike home. "That's what you're doing down here, Dolly? Looking for him?"

"No, I tell you!"

"Well, you can see he's a murderer—" I gestured at the ghastly corpse of Roberts. She stared numbly; and then I added, "And you or he got into the Purser's safe. Stole something—"

It certainly wasn't Dolly who had rifled Franklin's safe! The look of blank amazement on her face made that clear. I was dragging her along the catwalk now.

"Where—where are you going with me?" she murmured.

"You had something to tell me?" I demanded.

"Yes. I—he—"

"He?" I echoed.

She tried to correct herself, with a new anguish of terror on her face. "No! I didn't mean that. I mean — I overheard something two of the crew-hands were saying. Two Martians, but they were talking with somebody else. One of the ship's officers, I guess."

Those two Martian deckhands who now had vanished!

We had reached the control turret. Captain Allaire was here alone. He gaped at me, as I came in still gripping the girl.

"You find that—thing we lost?" he demanded.

"No."

"Well, by Heaven," he thundered, "there'll be nobody get away with it. We've got the damned thief here. I'll search the ship—search everybody—"

Suddenly Dolly was murmuring, "That's what I wanted to tell you, John. Those Martians in the crew were saying—somebody's paid them big and he's going to make a get-away, with a cylinder or something. That's why all this confusion has been created—"

Allaire stared at me. "A get-away," he echoed. "Well, there'll be nobody get off my ship, here or in port, until we've searched every damn—"

A cry from the bow lookout interrupted him. And then we all saw it. A little blob out in space, visible through the side bullseyes. A blob no more than a hundred feet away from the *Stardust*. The tiny volplane. It hung there in the vacuum of space. Dimly within it we could see the lone seated figure—black-cloaked, black-hooded shape.

Trigger Joe, trying to make his get-away with the cylinder! He was bending down, frantically working at the volplane's controls.

But he wasn't getting anywhere! I had de-charged that power-unit! His rocket-stream wouldn't work! His gravity plates were inert!

BANDIT trapped in space! His tiny volplane and his own body within it—an infinitesimal mass compared to the bulk of the *Stardust*. His initial shove had carried him a hundred feet or so. But now the *Stardust's* gravity pull was drawing him back!

Inexorable forces of nature! He was hanging out there with a side-drift, so that slowly the volplane was finding an orbit of its own—by balancing forces, slowly beginning to circle the ship. Weird little satellite!

"Got him!" Allaire roared. "By Heaven, there he is, with the cylinder. He reached for an audiphone. "We'll have him aboard in a few minutes, Allen! By God, I'll go down there myself and put on a space-suit—"

A shout from down on the forepeak made us turn. John Thomas, our young First Officer was down there. He shouted and started to come up the front ladder. Then from down in the blood-red gloom of the forepeak, a tiny violet bolt stabbed up. Young Thomas screamed a little. There was the sickening smell of burning flesh wafting up to us as for an instant his body hung balanced. Then he crashed back to the forepeak.

Hell broke loose in that second on the little *Stardust*. That shot into Thomas was a signal. Other shots answered it. Shots back at the stern. Screams down in the superstructure. The ship's lights wavered; then went totally dark so that there was nothing but the blood-glare. In the lurid dimness I was gripping Dolly, with an arm about her. And I felt Allaire shoving at me. And heard his voice:

"Why—why Allen—they dare attack us? Close that chart-room door."

He was dragging his weapons out of the rack. Then he dashed across the turret, drew down its metal shades to narrow slits; banged its door. I came back from closing up the chart-room. Down on the forepeak I saw a figure leap upon the bow lookout and stab him. Passengers were screaming now down in the superstructure. An Earthman and woman came staggering out onto the peak. The same lurking figure leaped at them; sprayed them with a spreading heat beam.

A massacre. No more than ten or twenty seconds had passed. Through the ship's alarm-address system, Allaire had shouted commands for anyone loyal to come to the turret here. But no one could come. My shot stabbed twice down to the forepeak, missed that lurking figure. One of our officers; I caught a glimpse of his braided uniform. The screams in the superstructure, and the shots and sounds of fighting . . .

AND then I saw that during the murderous chaos the bandits were searching the ship; searching the bodies of the passengers; and we could hear their shouts as they tramped around the superstructure. Searching for the cylinder? That was queer. Why would they do that, when their leader Trigger Joe, out there in space, supposedly had it? We could see him out there now. He had abandoned his efforts to work the volplane. Then suddenly he stood up, jumped from it.

The lunge kicked the volplane farther away. And Trigger Joe's body, grotesque, bloated shape of big puffed air-suit, came wafting in closer to the hull-side. He would get back into the porte in a moment; back to join his triumphant conspirators.

"Where in the devil is Franklin?" Allaire was muttering. "Dead by now, probably—"

Then we saw Purser Franklin on the forepeak, where now half a dozen bodies were lying. Allaire shouted at him to come up. But instead, as he saw he was discovered, he jumped behind the dismantled cargo-loader. A bolt from his gun stabbed up at us. It missed the window-slit; struck the metal window-shade with a fountain shower of red, green and yellow sparks.

Franklin, one of the bandits! That made me understand more things. Trigger Joe was working with Franklin! Of course the safe hadn't been broken into! Franklin himself had opened it and taken out the cylinder, with which Trigger Joe had tried to make his get-away. And Franklin would have stayed here and never been suspected.

But still there was a flaw in my reasoning. Why were the bandits searching for the cylinder now?

Trigger Joe was still visible out there in space, near the porte.

"So Franklin is one of them?" Allaire was muttering. "And who else?"

We had no way of knowing. A sudden unnatural silence had settled upon the vessel. Charnel ship of death. One thing was sure—whoever was loyal to us now was dead. Captain Allaire and I, embattled here in the turret and chart-room. And Dolly Marks with us. What, in Heaven's name was her real connection with this murderous banditry?

She was crouching now in a corner of the turret, staring at us. I gripped Allaire, told him swiftly about Trigger Joe, the leader of our adversaries. Dolly's eyes stared at me numbly as I spoke. Eyes with anguish in them.

Allaire and I were watching at a turret window. The blood-red forepeak, with its strewn bodies, momentarily showed nothing moving.

"What we call the bloodhound machine, Captain," I was saying. "I used it to spot him in the girl's cubby—" I had the little classifier in my hand as I spoke. And suddenly I gasped. Its dials were still set to pick up the scent-classification 2Y-X-4-4. And now abruptly I saw that they were quivering! They were getting the scent from close range!

2Y-X-4-4 was here, within a few feet of us! That wasn't Trigger Joe out there in space! He was here!

I stared around the dim turret; then dashed into the adjoining chart-room. And then I saw him—a dark blob crouching in a shadowed corner half under the chart-table.

He rose up to jump me as I lunged at him!

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT IN THE TURRET

BEHIND me in the chart-room, I heard Dolly scream. Her anguished words: "Oh, please — Oh, my God—"

From under the table the blob rose up—a big man, with scraggly sandy hair; a gaunt white face with burning, weird eyes. His goggles were discarded now. My gun stabbed its tiny bolt, but from behind me with another scream, the girl grabbed my elbow. The bolt crackled down against the opposite wall with a fountain-splash of sizzling sparks.

And then I collided with my antagonist. My lowered head struck his chest and he went backward, with me on top of him.

"Oh, please—Oh, don't—don't kill him —" Dolly gasped.

I was aware that Allaire had come running, and was poised with his gun trying to stab a bolt into the man under me. And Dolly was screaming her terrified protest.

The fellow was on his back, with me sprawled on him. I felt his skilled fingers clutching my wrist, turning aside my gun. My left fist struck him in his face. Queerly it made him instantly go limp. His head sagged back. Gaunt white face, hollow-cheeked with burning dark eyes. Exceedingly high cheekbones; and hooked nose. His mouth goggled with gasping breath . . .

Queer. No fight in him. I felt Dolly as she threw herself down upon me, clutching at me frantically. And then I was dimly aware that an outside bolt had struck against the chart-room window. It made the Captain rip out a curse as he ran there, answering the outside shot.

"Oh, please—" the girl was moaning at me. "Don't you see—he can't fight—don't—don't kill him—"

2Y-X-4-4! Trigger Joe. No question of his identity. Notorious wanted man of ten years ago. He was lying here now. No wound seemed on him. But he lay gasping, his mouth, with thin ashen lips, goggled with his labored breath. And Dolly was pleading with me not to kill him.

I slid off him, still sprawled watchfully beside him; and at once the girl flung herself down, with an arm under his head, raising him up, her hand smoothing his forehead where his thin sandy hair lay plastered dank with sweat.

A sick man! Pallid, gasping as though now under my attack his breath was choking him. I saw that he was a man of about fifty. Dying of some desperate illness? Certainly he looked it.

"Oh, Uncle Joe," Dolly murmured, "you're all right now? Just lie quiet."

"Your Uncle?" I echoed.

"No. My—my father's best friend. I've always called him Uncle Joe. He—he took care of me when my father and mother died—"

His eyes were closed. For a moment I thought that he was dead. Then his lids raised; he was gasping again and his bloodless lips were trying to smile at the girl.

Captain Allaire for the moment was ignoring us. He was at the chart-room window; then he dashed to the turret, fired through one of the slits there, making sure that none of the bandits took advantage of this turmoil here by trying to rush us. But it seemed quiet now outside.

And then Dolly, with murmured, only half coherent words, was babbling out her pathetic little story. Trigger Joe—his name was Joe Johnson. When Dolly was a child he had taken care of her. She had not known then that he was a criminal. Then she had grown up; gone on the stage and television; became self-supporting. Johnson's criminal activities were over. He was stricken with a heart ailment—dilation of the heart. Incurable; he would die in a few years.

And ever since then the girl, knowing finally about his past, had supported him in an Earth-hideout. He was penniless and she had worked for him, trying to care for him.

I stared blankly. How I had misjudged this mystery on the ill-fated little *Stardust*! Trigger Joe certainly was not our adversary here! When he came abroad he had known nothing of the plot to gain possession of the cylinder of Concentrate-27!

He was recovering a little now. His burning, fevered eyes with love for the girl in them, turned to me. "She—was always very good to me," he murmured. "Worked so hard for me—terrible strain on her—frightened always that the New York Shadow Squad men would spot me."

And then he was telling me things that even the girl did not know. He had decided to smuggle himself to Mars. A stow-away here on the *Stardust*, and Dolly was making the trip to be with him.

"She thinks I was afraid I'd be spotted in New York. Well, I was." He tried to grin at me with irony. "But it was more than that. You see, there's no reward for me on Earth. But on Mars—four decimars—that would be forty thousand Earth-

dollars. A lot of money—if I'm caught alive in Martian territory."

I KNEW that custom. Foreign criminals on Earth—always a big reward if you can take them alive. And Earth-criminals on Mars, the same. And so Johnson, with his expanded, bursting heart, had been trying to stay alive until he could reach Martian territory. And then he would make Dolly turn him over to the authorities and have her claim the reward.

"Oh," she gasped. "I—I had no idea of that."

"Dying anyway, what difference?" he murmured with his faint smile. "She—she deserves it, Allen—that money—it will make her—secure for life, you see?"

Allaire momentarily was with us. He got the gist of what we were saying. "But the cylinder—the Concentrate-27," he demanded.

"Cylinder?" Johnson echoed. He was sitting up now, with a little strength coming back to him. "A small cylinder? Why, there it is—"

He gestured. Over in the chart-room corner, where he had been crouching when I attacked him, the small lead cylinder lay propped against the wall! I jumped and inspected it. The Concentrate-27 was here, unharmed!

And now, with what Johnson was telling us, we could piece together the plot of the murderous double-crossing Purser. Johnson had come upon Franklin opening the safe, taking out the cylinder, and then fusing the safe-lock, cracking it with a little heat-torch. And Franklin had with him a duplicate cylinder—a fake package of the Concentrate-27. He took it to a corner of the corridor; carefully hid the fake package behind a fire extinguisher. And he was making off with the real cylinder when Johnson jumped him.

Johnson was grinning at me. "Nice idea, trying to do something decent, just for once as you're dying—"

I saw now that in the fight, as he had forced his way up here with the cylinder, he had been drilled through the shoulder.

"Franklin was trying to double-cross somebody?" Allaire muttered.

"Of course," I exclaimed. "His principal, who was to make the get-away. He took the fake package. Franklin figured he wouldn't discover it until he was too far away to return. And Franklin would have the bribe which had been given him, plus the real treasure!"

But the Purser's plan had been thwarted by Johnson. And Franklin had been searching to find Trigger Joe and get back the cylinder. With his chief returning because the volplane failed to operate, the best Franklin could do was alibi himself that Trigger Joe had substituted the fake package. Doubtless he had alibied already!

"Damned dirty villain," Captain Allaire burst out. "He's down there on the forepeak now. I've tried a dozen times to drill him."

As though to answer the words, we heard the splatter of a bolt as it struck one of the turret window-blinds. Down on the dim, blood-red forepeak we could vaguely see the prone figure of the murderous Purser, lying behind the cargo-loader. I flung a bolt down at him but it only brought his jibing laugh.

"Save your current," Allaire warned me. "Haven't much left in these Banning guns here. We'll have to build up re-charges—takes time, and if they find it out—"

Doubtless they knew that we could easily exhaust our gun-strength. Three of us here—though Johnson certainly didn't seem able to fight. And we had the girl. We tried to figure how many of the bandits were against us. The two big Martian deckhands. The Purser. And the man who had tried to make a getaway. I had seen a big black robed, hooded figure dart along the dim superstructure roof after the slaughter of the passengers started. The man in the burned cloak.

FOUR of them against us probably. And they had control of the ship. From the lower controlroom all the mechanisms could be operated despite our controls here. And the main radio-helio sender was wrecked. A bolt had struck into it.

"I'm building up current in our batteries here for the emergency sender," Allaire told me. "If we can only hold out, Allen. In an hour I'll have power. We'll send a helio-distress. By God, if that goes out there'll be a patrolship after us."

Did the bandits know that we could do that? If they did, undoubtedly they would try to rush us.

A buzz sounded in the turret—the direct-voice tube from the hull controlroom. Allaire answered it.

"Hello—what you want?"

"That you, Captain?" The voice of the bandit down there in the hull controlroom was blurred and muffled by the tube. There was no familiar sound to it. "Don't you think you better surrender, Captain? We promise you won't be killed—" There was a chuckle. "We're going to the Dark Country of Mars. You can't stop us, you know—and we want that cylinder from you now."

"You go to hell," Allaire roared. "Kill us? We'll kill every damn one of you before this is through. You murderous, double-crossing—"

"Empty threats, Captain. You're helpless. Even worse, because you see—"

I suddenly felt my throat constricting; my nostrils stinging. The choleric, red-faced Allaire at the voice-tube suddenly coughed and staggered, clutching at the turret wall for support.

"Ventilators!" he gasped. "Allen, quick! Shut them off!"

Johnson and Dolly were here; Johnson on his feet looking like a walking dead man. Both of them were gasping, coughing.

From our ventilators chlorine fumes were pouring up from below! I jumped and snapped them closed. Did the same in

the chart-room. Through the chart-room window-slit, sternward over the dim starlit superstructure roof I saw the crouching figure of one of the big Martian deckhands, watching his chance to rush us. I took a shot at him and he jumped up and scurried away.

"We'll have to open the windows a bit," Allaire gasped.

We raised them all about a foot. The ship's air from the forepeak and the superstructure roof drifted in to us. They couldn't very well poison that air without poisoning themselves.

"Not so pleasant, was it?" the ironic voice from the tube was saying. "And food and water—you'll begin to miss them pretty soon, won't you?"

"Go to the devil," I shouted into the tube and closed it off.

Johnson swayed against me. "You better sit down," I admonished.

"No—don't want to. If they—rush us—you give me a gun." His whimsical grin still was on his lips. "I'm still very handy with a gun—I've had lots of practice—they called me Trigger Joe, you know."

I shoved one into his hand. He staggered, but he gripped it, with practiced fingers caressing it. "That feels natural, Allen. Sure does. I certainly hope they—rush us."

They did. They knew, of course, that we were building power to send a distress call. And if that went out over the starways and a patrolship picked it up, they'd have a pretty tough time getting away with this bandit vessel. I should have been warned perhaps, at a glimpse of a black blob climbing up under the glassite dome almost over the turret. But I held my shot; our charges were low—we did not dare waste gun-current now.

And suddenly from the turret there came Allaire's shout. "By God, they're coming—"

It was all from the forepeak. The figure of the murderous Purser appeared on the

turret-balcony ladder. Allaire's bolt missed him, and he dropped back. A big brown Martian already was on the balcony which encircled the front of the turret! And then the Purser's bolt sizzled through one of our window slits! It struck Captain Allaire full in the chest, drilled through him with the nauseous smell of charred flesh as he tumbled backward.

"Why—why here they are!" Johnson muttered. He went staggering past me, shoved the turret door open and staggered out to the balcony. The Martian out there was so suddenly startled that he ripped out an oath and jumped for the forepeak. It was a ten foot drop. Johnson's bolt caught him on the wing. Like a bird in midair the hurtling Martian crumpled. He was dead, charred leprous with part of his face gone, when he struck the deck. Trigger Joe certainly could shoot!

The Purser had leaped from behind the little cargo-loader. Cowardly damned villain, but he thought this was his chance. My gun leaped level. But Johnson's shot caught him in the heart before I could fire.

Hardly more than twenty tumultuous seconds. Behind me in the turret, Dolly was screaming with an agony of terror. From the balcony Johnson came lurching back. Gasping for breath, his poor bloated heart laboring. A dead man, fighting on his feet. But he was grinning.

"Sure feels natural," he muttered. "Dolly, don't be a fool—screaming like this—"

AND then we both saw why she was screaming. The trap-door exit-porte in the turret ceiling had slid aside. A dark cloaked figure up there came leaping down; landed on my back, crushing me under it. The panting, gasping Johnson was barely able to stand on his feet. I heard him curse as he tried to shove Dolly aside.

The man in the burned cloak. He was sprawled on me now. A black hood muffled his face.

"Got you now, Allen—" he muttered.

But he didn't have me. My gun had clattered away with the impact of his body knocking me down. He had a gun that he was trying to jab against my head, but my flailing fist hurtled it from his grip. And then I lunged from under him.

I was aware in that chaotic instant that the remaining Martian deckhand had come through the chart-room. Johnson seemed to have fallen; out on his feet. But as he went down, his bolt stabbed up. The oncoming Martian caught it between the eyes, tumbled dead in the center of the turret. And then Johnson was trying to fire at my antagonist. His gun clicked; it was de-charged; useless. With a curse he flung it away. It slid along the floor and as I lay entangled, wrestling with the black-cloaked murderer, the sliding gun hit my hand. Johnson had intended it; and I seized the gun, cracked it down on the black hood. The big sprawling, lunging body went suddenly limp in my arms. I tore away the black hood.

Mantell the Magician! J. Tarkington Mantell, suave and genial passenger on the little *Stardust*! Gracious Interplanetary traveler, former theatrical man, skilled with scientific illusions to fool an audience! Scientific magic! With what irony he had told us, as we sat on the *Stardust's* forepeak, that scientific magic could fool anyone! Could make things seem what they are not! I remembered that little crackling hissing, down between my chair and Mantell's. And then the purple ball of ionized air had appeared! Conjured by some electric apparatus Mantell was using!

He lay here now with blood streaming from his head where I had cracked him. And there was a knife-wound in his chest—some member of our loyal crew who had put up a fight before getting killed. Mantell was not dead, but dying, quite obviously. His glazing eyes focused on me. Bloody foam welled at his lips, but he was trying to smile.

"I told you—Allen—science-magic can do

—wonderful things if you have the skill. Mantell the magician—a very skillful fellow in his line. Wasn't hard to—terrorize the crew—so we'd put in at the asteroid."

A gush of blood from his lips choked him, but he struggled on. "And that space-storm. That wasn't exterior disturbance. It was my—electric-magic. Deranged, free-running static-electricity—the sort of thing I used to use a lot in my—stage work. It certainly threw the ship into chaos, didn't it? Nice stake I was after, Allen—could have sold that concentrate for nearly a thousand decimars. Ten million Earth-dollars—that's what the Dark Country Martians would have paid—"

His mouth filled with blood. Then he was twitching, with a final gurgling rattle in his throat. He was still trying ironically to smile, thinking of the trickery of his science-magic, as the light went out of his eyes and he was gone.

Here on the turret floor I felt Johnson plucking at me. "Guess that was the end of them, eh, Allen?"

"Yes. Undoubtedly."

Charnel ship of death. It was silent now, strewn with carnage. Just three of us here. And Johnson was dying; no question of that. He lay here on the floor; a bluish tinge was coming to his chalk-white pallor.

"You must—send out that call for help," he murmured. "Isn't the battery strength enough yet?"

I checked it. "Almost," I said.

Dolly had brought a cushion for his head. "You're all right now, dear. Just lie quiet—you've had these attacks before."

"Not quite like this, Dolly."

WE GOT him up onto the Captain's bunk in the chart-room presently. Then I sent the call, repeating it at intervals. And then at last I contacted an Earth patrolship. It answered. It would come and convoy us to Mars.

"Why, that's good," Johnson agreed. He

was visibly weaker now. Fighting to keep alive. And suddenly his groping hand pulled me down to him. "Got to stay alive," he murmured. "We're not in the Martian Mandate Zone yet, are we, Allen?"

"No, not quite."

"Got to stay alive 'till we get there. Then you can—report that you've captured 2Y-X-4-4. Report that you've caught him—alive in Martian spaceways. They'll take your word for that—you're an official—" His glazing eyes were pleading with me. "Then Dolly will get the reward, you see? Got to stay alive for that."

The capture of 2Y-X-4-4! Earth and Mars, and Venus too, would ring with the news, within an hour. Trigger Joe captured alive.

"That's just fine, Allen. Thanks."

"You like her a lot, don't you, Allen?" he murmured.

I nodded.

His groping hand fumbled at his face. His queer hooked nose—his high cheek-bones. Wax-disguise! His nails drew blood in the skin—but in a moment the disguise was gone. His face had changed. Gaunt pallid face. But now it was a replica of my own, grown older!

My father! I gasped, numbed as I stared and then bent down over him. And his faint voice was telling me: he had not been guilty of that crime when he disappeared. He had been kidnapped with the treasure he had been guarding; taken to a distant world. Years later, he had escaped. Couldn't find me or mother. And then, with the cloud of guilt on him, he had become Trigger Joe . . .

"Jon, lad," he was murmuring, "it's good to be with you—now at the end—you—take care of Dolly always—fine girl, Dolly—always so good to me. I'm glad you both are—going to have the reward—"

Alone in the turret starlight I sat with Dolly, staring out through the bow-dome where Mars hung, dull-red disc among the stars.

DESTINY MADE TO ORDER

by ED EARL REPP

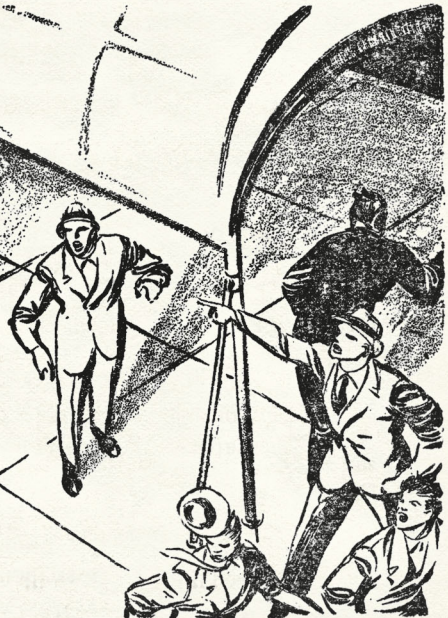
If you discovered a new blessing that would save countless thousands from a life of horrible suffering, would you magnanimously donate your gift to Mankind? Joe Craven answered negatively—and the doom forecast by Dr. Tuttle's strange machine placed a heinous plan into his greedy mind!

CHAPTER I

THE FATE-SHIFTER

IT WAS a shame-faced, puzzled lot of reporters that shuffled uncomfortably inside Doctor Tuttle's office. Harry

*Just before he struck, he
could see the crowd scattering!*



Adams, beetle-browed, solidly-built newshawk toughened by years on the police beats, grunted to a companion: "This guy Tuttle must be battier than we thought. After the panning we gave his screwball *fate sifter* invention, he sends word he wants to give us another interview!"

Pint-sized Charley Burt shrugged sparse shoulders and muttered: "Yeah. We sure burnt him in the rags. I'd think he'd hate our guts for it. Here he comes now . . ."

Lacking their usual bluntness, the newsmen waited silently while Tuttle came through a side door and approached them, rubbing his hands together. To him they somehow gave the impression of small boys waiting to be chastised. None of them had thought ever to see the eccentric little scientist again when they set out to make him and his invention the laughing stock of the city.

Tuttle halted before them, a portly little man rocking impatiently on the balls of his feet. Behind oblate lenses, his brown eyes seemed to swim in a state of semi-liquidity.

"I'm so glad you came, boys," he breathed. "Awfully kind of you."

Harry Adams cleared his throat. "You wanted to see us?" he asked flatly.

"Indeed I did," the doctor nodded pleasantly, his amber eyes shining brightly. "Especially you, Mr. Adams."

The newsman smirked impatiently. "About that uh—er—invention again, Doc?" he quizzed. "Got something new for us?"

"Something you never expected, Mr. Adams," said the little scientist. "This . . . !"

With no warning whatever, he exploded like a firecracker and launched himself at the big reporter. Twice his fists crashed solidly into the man's leering face before Charley Burt and the others could drag him off. Adams stumbled back, battle lights igniting in his dark eyes. Like a fighting bantam cock, Tuttle struggled to

get at him as the newshawk shrugged off his companions.

"You batty, half-baked little runt!" Adams stormed. "I could squash you like a gnat under my thumb!" He towered over the scientist. "What's the idea?"

"Idea?" panted Tuttle hotly. "Do I need to explain? Isn't it enough that you've ridiculed me and the greatest scientific discovery of the century?"

He jerked loose from Burt's grasp. Charley laughed tensely. "Aw, come on now, Doc," he coaxed. "It was all a clever publicity gag, wasn't it? You don't pretend to *believe* in that *destiny-making* or *fate-sifting* machine, do you? All you wanted was some cheap advertising . . . and you got it. You've got no kick coming."

"Publicity! Bah!" Tuttle strode to his invention and struck it lightly. It was a ponderous, black contraption like a portrait camera suspended over a barber's chair, an immense battery of rheostats panelled behind it. He swung to the reporters.

"When you have something like this, you don't need publicity to bolster your self-esteem. I could prove my assertions and claims to you, but what matter? To-day I destroy the *fate-sifter* anyway. The world is not ready for it."

Calming, Harry Adams said, scornfully: "So you can prove it, huh? Well, I'll just take you up on that, mister. Try it on me! You claim the machine will tell a man what the future holds for him from this minute on. All right. Set your contraption and I'll look into it. Each of our papers will print the story I see and from day to day we'll check on it. Got the courage of your convictions, Doc, or do you want to let well-enough alone?"

Tuttle's brown eyes flashed. "You wouldn't know what courage is, Adams, the way you attack helpless men in your columns!" he gave back. "Step over here."

He produced a large sheet of ruled paper and carefully seated the reporter in the

chair. Excitement stirred the group and the tussle of a moment before was soon forgotten as they saw the machine was actually to be tested. Eagerly they clustered around. Adams sat sullenly, disbelief and scorn written plainly on his dark face.

"I'm going to ask you a number of questions," Tuttle said to him. "Answer with strict attention to the truth, else the machine will not function. You understand, every influence of your early life will have bearing on your later development. These influences will color every decision you make. Given the correct answers, I can make adjustments on the machine that will place it in harmony with your own mind. Now . . . the date of your birth?"

For the next thirty minutes, he fired questions incessantly while Adams gave his answers. Then with the chart filled with tiny figures and calculations, the scientist went to work on the machine. Quickly he turned from it.

"We are ready, Mr. Adams," he announced. "Just lean back now. . . ."

The newsman looked more dubious than ever, but submitted, lying back as if in a barber's chair. Tuttle brought the big "camera" down so that the immense lens was a foot or so from Adams' face. A light kindled somewhere in the bowels of the intricate machine. Adams caught his breath . . . his eyes closed. . . .

It was only a moment until he cried out and sat up with a start, banging his head on the side of the suspended device over his face. Angrily he turned to Tuttle.

"Just as I expected, Tuttle!" he rapped accusingly. "You're a damned fraud! I've had enough of this making monkeys of us. Let's go, boys, before he becomes violent!"

But with noses for news, the others were eager for the results of the experiment. "What did it say, Harry?" they demanded in chorus. "What happened?"

Adams glared at the inventor. "It said," and his voice dripped scorn, "that I'm going to die within a minute after leaving this

building. I seemed to go outside, turn South and . . . the next instant something hit me and I was gone!"

The others laughed derisively. "Yeah?" Burt ridiculed. "It's a fake! He used hypnotism to put the idea in your mind, Harry!"

Dr. Tuttle sighed and his shoulders seemed to droop a little. "If you're so sure I'm a fraud, all Mr. Adams has to do is leave this building and walk South to prove it. If he reaches the corner, we'll know I'm wrong."

Silence gushed in. Someone growled. "Well, why not? Show him up, Adams."

Adams looked suddenly and decidedly uncomfortable. His eyes grew glassy. At last he said: "Sure! Why not? I've got the courage of my convictions, too. You boys wait here. Then when I reach the corner, you can phone the papers and we'll give this two-bit publicity hound a run for his money!"

Tuttle stirred, his face grave. "Better not, Mr. Adams," he advised softly.

Adams laughed derisively. "Losing your nerve, Doc?" he scorned, and left.

FROM the windows, they watched Harry Adams make his way down the rain-wet sidewalk toward the South corner, hands shoved deep in his overcoat pockets. Misgiving whipped Dr. Tuttle and a high flush stole over his face.

Adams was scarcely fifty feet from the corner when they saw it . . . a huge moving van, careening down the glistening street behind him. From the curb suddenly ran a small brown and white dog. The truck driver slammed his brakes on hard and swerved to avoid the animal. Smooth tires slid on the slick, glassy pavement, and the huge juggernaut was out of control.

Impotently Charley Burt screamed a warning to his friend. The others were frozen in their tracks as the van skidded into the curbing and vaulted onto the sidewalk with a terrific crash. For an instant,

Adams' hunched figure was blotted out. Then it happened. Before he could get out of danger, the truck hit him with such force that he was hurled high into the air to fall back and be ground beneath the dual wheels.

"Good God!" was all Charley Burt could gasp. The others were speechless. Soul-shaken and white as death itself, Dr. Tuttle hung his head. Sadness lay heavy in his voice as he spoke quietly. "I'm not boasting, boys," he said, "but you witnessed proof. Put it in your papers. And say, too, that I'm destroying this unholy machine of mine."

Silently the newsmen left the room and Tuttle moved on shaky legs to the closet where he kept his tools. Turning back to the machine, his head came up when he saw that one of the reporters had remained and was seated expectantly in the chair.

"The interview is over, young man," he said tersely. "I thought you'd gone with the other reporters."

The young man shook his head. He was long and high-shouldered, with pale blue eyes set too close together below a high forehead. His dark hair was thin, his weak chin shelving away obliquely.

"It's only begun, as far as we're concerned," he told the scientist. "I don't like to force myself on you like this, but I've got to have some information that only your machine can give me. It's not for publication, because I'm not a reporter."

Surprised, Tuttle snapped: "Then who are you and how'd you get in here?"

"Craven is the name . . . Joe Craven," the other said. "I slipped in with the others and witnessed your experiment with Adams. I'm a pharmaceutical salesman. I'll be brief as possible, Doctor. I'm an inventor in my spare time and, well, I've got hold of something, I think. You've got to help me decide what to do."

"Nothing doing!" Tuttle declared flatly. "My machine will never be used again.

Now get out peacefully or . . ." and he hoisted a hammer threateningly.

Joe Craven grinned as he moved his right hand from his coat pocket. A small revolver gleamed in it. "You're a salty one, Doctor, but let's not waste time," he said quietly and earnestly. "Ask me those questions and let's get going."

CHAPTER II

THE RIGHT FORK

DR. TUTTLE shrugged then, helplessly. "It's your funeral," he murmured. But what he wasn't telling Joe Craven was that he was about to put himself into the most horrible situation he'd ever been in—that every answer the machine gave him would seem more ghastly than the ones before—that he would emerge from the office broken and shaking. But that, after all, was part of a shotgun bargain such as this.

"Sorry to be so blunt," Craven apologized. "But when I've told you my position, you may understand. You see, I've discovered a formula for a serum with which I've licked infantile paralysis, osteomyelitis and any other bone diseases you might name. I don't need to tell you its worth to the world. And frankly, I want a fortune out of it. That's where I'm stuck. I have offers from two men willing to pay a lot for it, but I want to be able to launch it myself, if possible."

Tuttle was nodding slowly. "You want me to trace these three courses down to their ends and see which would profit you most?"

"That's it. One man offers me \$60,000 flat for the formula. Another wants me to take a half interest in his small drug manufacturing firm. Chiefly, I'm interested in seeing what I could do with it alone. So get your question blank out, Doctor; I'm ready."

Tuttle didn't like his visitor, but he was in no position to choose. He shrugged and

produced a fresh sheet of ruled paper. Swiftly, then, the blanks were filled up and the necessary changes made on the machine. Tuttle arranged Craven in the proper position.

"You won't like this," he reminded him. "But if you're dead set on it, follow these instructions. Decide which course you're going to follow and keep repeating it to yourself. Focus your attention on the little ball. Here we go. . . ."

Joe Craven set his jaw grimly. In the back of the machine, a little bead of yellow began to glow. Joe began muttering to himself: "I will accept Magnus' offer. I will accept Magnus' offer. I will accept . . . Magnus' . . . offer. . . ."

AND now the room ceased to exist. The frightened salesman found himself walking down the smooth, black bore of the camera, towards a magnificent ball of gold. When he reached it, he passed straight through it into its interior. That was the last thing Joe Craven, of the present, was conscious of. A bell rang somewhere, and he found himself entering a door inscribed: "A. R. Magnus Laboratories. Enter."

How he got there, he was no longer concerned with. He was now Joe Craven of the future, and a smiling, pretty girl at a reception desk was taking his card and speaking into a walnut wood box:

"Mr. Joe Craven to see you, sir."

The box rasped back at her: "Send him in, Miss Horn. I've been expecting him!"

Joe winked at the girl and passed her desk. Taking a deep breath, he went into the inner sanctum. In a room of massive size, Albert Magnus was the biggest object of all. Walking from behind his desk, he almost frightened Joe Craven with his bulk and swift, hard manner. He was no taller than the elongated Craven, but he carried an extra hundred pounds of muscle inside his well-cut suit. His forearms were like hams and his head was of much the same

shape. Magnus was said to have been a fighter before he inherited a patent-medicine business.

Joe was prepared to believe it when the manufacturer's giant paw closed on his with bone-crushing power.

"I see you've had the good sense to accept my offer," he said heartily.

"Aren't you jumping to conclusions?" Craven gave back testily. "Your 'offer,' as you call it, interests me; but don't think I'm fool enough to accept \$60,000 for a discovery like mine!"

Magnus' heavy teeth rolled on a cigar. "Then what are you doing here?" he snapped. "As I said before, sixty thousand is my top—take it or leave it."

"I'll take it—" Joe grinned, suddenly, "—on my own terms."

Magnus' brow was black as he waited for the biologist to go on.

"Which are these. I'll turn the formula over to you for sixty thousand cold cash, a vice-presidency in the company, the right to fix the price of the serum when we begin to market it, and twenty percent of all we make on it."

The giant manufacturer slammed his cigar on the floor. "I never saw it to fail!" he roared. "Let some punk like you stumble onto something big, and his head swells until a washtub would fit him like a beret! A vice-presidency! Do you think I'm crazy, Craven?"

"I think you're a smart enough man to know a fortune when it's thrown in your face," replied Joe quietly. "Your company, here, isn't so big. Give it a product like I've got, and it would be worth millions in a couple of years."

"But the controlling interest—"

"All right, the controlling interest would be shared with me," Craven came back impatiently. "What's the difference? Money is what counts, and you'd be worth five times what you are now! I intend to charge enough that we'll make fat profits. Take a man whose child is becoming de-

formed from infantile paralysis; he'd be glad to pay a hundred dollars for a few ounces. See the possibilities?"

MAGNUS eyed him stonily. "Yeah, I can see 'em a mile away. I can see 'em in the way your fingers shake every time you think of getting your hands on a stack of bills. You don't care much, just so you get the money, do you?"

Joe Craven met the big man's stare. "Not a hell of a lot," he drawled. Inwardly, he was under terrific pressure. Fear of Magnus was part of it, fear of his conscience the rest. He knew he was taking a coward's part in the drama. He'd invented something that could benefit thousands of unfortunates. But he'd had his share of being poor, of tramping from doctor's office to doctor's office, from drug store to drug store, trying to sell enough pharmaceutical supplies to eat on. Now, he'd stumbled onto the means of lifelong luxury, and he wasn't passing it up.

Suddenly Albert Magnus was laughing, heartily, thunderously.

"Hell, mister, put her there!" he boomed, extending his big paw. "They don't come much franker than you, I'll say that much. I'll take you up on that deal! I don't mind turning an easy penny myself!"

After the first shock of it, Joe Craven was laughing with him, nervously, in his strained way. They had drinks over it, from a bottle of Scotch Magnus took out of his desk. The manufacturer scratched some changes on a contract he had already drawn up, still chuckling.

"Just to bind the thing temporarily," he explained, affixing his own signature. But as he started to pass the papers to Craven: "You haven't talked this thing over with anybody else? Given them any idea of how the stuff is made?"

Craven snorted. "Of course not! Only one other man knows about the serum. You'll get your money's worth, all right."

As the salesman's fingers began to form the letters of his name, Magnus murmured absently: "Anybody else know why you were coming here today?"

The other looked up in quick suspicion: "What's the difference?"

"Nothing much. Only I don't want a flock of reporters around our ears until everything's settled." Magnus' fat face was blandly innocent.

"Oh," said Joe Craven. "No, nobody knows why I'm here. I guess nobody even knows I came."

"Uh-huh," Magnus murmured. "Now, about the formula—"

"Right here," Joe said. He brought out a bundle of papers and sorted through them. "We can start production tomorrow. There's no special equipment needed, no expensive materials. We can make the stuff for a dollar a quart and get a hundred an ounce!"

"Sure." Magnus seemed to be a little bored with it all, now. He got up and wandered over to the big windows that overlooked the street fifty stories below. "Come over here, Joe. I want to show you something," he said.

Puzzled, Craven went to the window beside him. Magnus draped his arm over the smaller man's shoulders in a fatherly way, his heavy, rather brutal features benevolent.

"I guess I'm a little bit like you, Joe," he said. "I don't care much how I make my money either. Now, if you was to fall out of this window, I'd be the winner by sixty thousand bucks and Lord knows how much more."

Craven started to leap away, an oath on his lips. But Magnus' fatherly grip had become an octopus-like one, holding him against him; Joe could feel his powerful muscles against his arm, hard as oak. Then he was feeling the slap of the manufacturer's hand across his mouth, choking off his cry.

"You've got no squawk coming!" Magnus snarled. "You came here to take out your greed on a million helpless people and you're going to get what you deserve. I'm not greedy, like you are; I'll sell that stuff for fifty a bottle! And you, Joe—you're going to commit suicide, whether you like it or not!"

Joe Craven fought like a tiger. Magnus' thick fingers snapped down to his throat and began choking the life out of him. Joe kept trying to scream. His tongue swelled and blood raced to his head. His eyes were bulging and sightless. His lungs . . . Lord, they were a searing fire in his breast!

And then, just as he was slipping to the floor, Magnus let him go. Joe lacked the strength to move as the burly manufacturer seized him by the legs and hurled him through the window. Feebly he cried out, his eyes filled with the terrifying sight of automobiles and street-cars hundreds of feet below. Magnus caught him by the heels and kept him dangling there.

Dimly, Joe Craven heard him shouting: "Miss Horn! Help! My God; *this man is trying to kill himself—I!*"

A door slammed open. A girl was running across the floor, screaming: "Hold him, Mr. Magnus! I'm coming!"

In that instant, Magnus' powerful hands opened. Joe Craven saw the open window sliding away from him. They say that falling persons lose consciousness long before they strike the earth. It wasn't so with Joe. He lived to scream his lungs out and sob and grab at window ledges that flashed by. Just before he struck, his body twisted so that he could see scurrying, frantic crowds scattering, leaving a wide, bare space on the sidewalk.

With a shock that caused him to bounce fifteen feet into the air, Joe Craven smashed his life out on the pavement. . . .

SWEAT soaked him from head to foot when he awoke. For a moment he looked wildly about, expecting to see the

walls of a hospital room, or the more confining walls of a coffin.

Then Doctor Tuttle's voice caused him to relax.

"Not much fun, is it, my friend?"

Joe sat up straight, mopped his forehead with a hand that shook. "But it was only a dream, thank God!" he breathed.

"A dream?" Tuttle smiled. He shook his head slowly. "No more so than this moment is. You *lived* that future! You have only to choose the course you took in your expedition into the future, and you will see how much of a dream it was."

Anger flared across Craven's sunken eyes. He felt a gnawing hatred towards Albert Magnus, as strong as if the dream had actually taken place! Then he managed a half-hearted chuckle at his fears.

Balling his fists, he leaned back in the chair. "I'll hit the jackpot this time for sure," he muttered grimly. "Start the thing again, Doctor."

Tuttle laid a hand on his arm. The salesman leaped away, recalling the Judas touch of Magnus.

"Don't do that!" he snapped.

"I'm sorry," the physician said. "But don't you think you've had enough of this? You may as well learn right now that you'll never see the happy ending you're looking for. You'll meet the same kind of end each time. It's inevitable! I tried five times to see myself dying happily, peacefully, in bed. Once I was run down by an automobile; another time a madman shot me. The other dreams were similar. Each course was different, and yet . . . somehow the same. The same disappointments, the same violent death. Learn from my experience, Craven—"

Craven was staring into the machine with fixed glare. "Turn it on," he ground out.

He didn't see Tuttle move, but presently he was being drawn along that long, black tunnel once more. Again he was slipping through the gleaming gold sphere. That same instant of terror, and then—

CHAPTER III

THE LEFT FORK

THE man across the desk from Joe Craven was a mild-mannered individual of slight frame and pleasant, care-marked features. The "desk" was really a long laboratory sink topped with worn slate; Joe and Nate Killigrew, his partner of six months, were working late tonight on an improvement in the formula of the serum.

Joe knew there was going to be another argument from the very way old Killigrew squinted thoughtfully at the light through a red-filled flask and murmured: "Oh, say, Joe! I was down at the General Hospital again today, talking with Charley Webster. He says if they could get 10,000 CC's of our stuff, he thinks they could wipe out infantile paralysis in this city!"

Craven's eyes kept tolling off the drops from a burette. "Yeah? Why don't they buy it, then?" he grunted and knew what the answer would be.

"They can't afford it, Joe! And I was thinking—" Here Killigrew put the flask in a rack and crossed his arms, raising one hand to finger his chin. "We've made a pile of money these last six months. Why, we could cut our price in half and still make a ninety percent profit!"

"But we aren't going to." Joe's words were harsh, dry. He opened the glass stop-cock a trifle, marked the quickened pulse of the falling droplets. "We're in business to make money, not give it to charity. This isn't new. Put it back on the shelf, mister."

"Not this time!"

The sudden, explosive sharpness of the words caused Joe to look up swiftly. Killigrew's mild face was alight with anger. He shook a pencil in his young partner's face, leaning across the sink. Never, in the months since he had closed the deal with the biologist, had Joe seen such a display of spirit.

"For once I'm going to have my way," Killigrew was telling him through set teeth. "I have as much say in the company as you have, though I've let you bulldoze me all along. And I'll tell you something right now, Joe: We're going to cut the price of *Epthamine* right in half!"

Joe's rigid fingers shut off the burette, while he slipped off the high lab stool and confronted Killigrew. "Charley Webster been working on your sympathies again?" he inquired icily.

"Well, what if he has?" the older man tossed back at him. "You've never been in the poli ward down at the hospital, have you? No, I doubt if you've ever been in any hospital, except as a patient; you're just a scientific freak who's made a lucky discovery. Well, it's a sight to sicken and terrify a strong man."

Pity stained the scientist's eyes until the dark pupils seemed to flood the whole iris with darkness. "Those kids in the active ward—! Tossing in screaming, delirious fevers, their very bones on fire. Too sick to eat, to sleep, to cry . . . and yet, unfortunately, most of them not sick enough to die. When they recover, they go into the orthopedic ward—and stay there, many of them—bent and twisted and helpless, the rest of their lives. And there's no need for it, with *Epthamine* on the market! Not a case treated with it has failed to respond!"

"Then it's worth what we ask," Joe Craven drawled. "And they're going to keep on paying it."

"No, they aren't." Killigrew tossed before Joe some scrawled notes on a pad. "I saw a lawyer today, too. I found out that although I can't force a price change, *I can stop you from marketing the stuff altogether!*"

Craven's long, bony arm seemed to telescope out, to fasten forcep-like fingers about Killigrew's throat.

"You try it—!" he panted, panic and hate stirring up all the muddy dregs of his contemptible soul.

Nate Killigrew showed some more of that surprising spirit, striking off the taller man's grasp calmly and meeting his savage glare with matching coldness.

"I intend to," he announced. "Tomorrow! Good night." And his long, quick stride carried him out the door of the lab and into the hall.

Sweat oozed out on Joe Craven's forehead, but not all of it was created by the hot summer night air beating in through the open windows. He stood there with his long fingers twisting about a pencil, like anacondas swarming around a victim. Hatred's bitter fumes filled his being.

For the *n*th time, he cursed the day he had decided to trust the fortunes of *Epthamine* to Killigrew. Well, he had an equal voice in anything relating to it, but what did that mean? The old man could block him any time he got out of line. Joe remembered Albert Magnus' fine offer of sixty thousand, and earnestly wished he'd taken it, with perhaps a ten percent royalty clause thrown in. Hell, he was cornered in this crummy outfit!

Old Killigrew was a philanthropist, that was the hell of it and just enough of a one to carry the matter to the courts—and the papers—and force the issue! Craven's lips trembled at the vision of his golden egg being broken by the law.

He tried to concentrate on work, but he was done for the night. Angrily, he snapped off the light and went out, turned to lock the door. He was on the point of striding down the hallway when he noticed the open door across from his own. The little lab in there was lighted. Glancing in, Joe saw among a jungle of chromium and rubber and glass, the bent form of old Sam Markee. Markee's eyes were on him. He'd been watching him like a hawk all the time. With the doors to both labs open, he must have heard the argument, too.

Joe swore softly. Markee would have been out on his ear long ago, if he'd had his way. Killigrew had kept him on here

since God-knew-when, like an old retainer of some baronial house. Markee wasn't worth a lick when it came to chemistry and biology; Joe hadn't talked with him, but he was sure of that. He felt that all Killigrew kept the old fox for was to spy on him. Often they were closeted in there for an hour, muttering and chuckling things that he couldn't hear.

Lying there in bed much later, a couple of drinks easing the bitter sharpness of his thoughts, he began to think more lucidly. He knew he was in a spot. Come down on the price or be shut out cold. Once he gave in, Killigrew would force other price drops.

But nearly any rat, backed into the tightest of corners, will eventually find a way out. Joe Craven cudgelled his brains until dawn was gliding the room; and suddenly he saw the narrow, mean pathway back to safety, power, and wealth.

And the way he found was murder.

SAM MARKEE, whose presence there every night had always bothered him, now rose to a place of importance. He was going to be a big cog. Always listening, listening, listening! That thought had first blocked Joe, when he thought of killing his partner; trust old Markee to be in on it!

Well, he was going to be, this very night but in the way Joe wanted him to be—as an alibi!

The next two days saw Joe meekly give in to Killigrew's demands. The papers applauded their announcement of a one hundred percent price cut. Killigrew warmed to the younger man, and for the first time they grew to be on sincerely friendly terms—apparently.

But Joe Craven was just marking time until the resumption of normal activities, when Killigrew would begin to work nights again. The fourth night, he did. But that night old Markee stayed away. So for a week they jockeyed around like that, seem-

ing to take turns working late until one night the doors to both labs were open and the lights going brightly.

It was a hot night again. Doors and windows yawned, gasping helplessly at non-existent breezes. Cold sweat was over Joe Craven's body as he worked noiselessly. In his ears was the muffled clatter from Sam Markee's little cubbyhole of a lab, and the sounds Killigrew made puttering about.

Joe had set ten o'clock for the zero hour. As the big minute hand scissored off the minutes, he grew panicky. He began to think: What if the phonograph goes haywire? What if I botch the killing? What if—? To stop those ghastly queries, he went into the store-room and braced himself with a shot of whiskey from his private stock. While he was there, he selected a heavy pestle from one of the mortars.

Nate Killigrew's gray head was bowed over a sheet of figures when ten o'clock came. Trembling, panting, wild-eyed, Joe approached him from the rear. He had one awful moment of terror before he leaped. Then, taking all his courage in his hands, the great, iron pestle gripped in white fingers, he sprang upon the scientist.

Killigrew died very quietly, sighing softly and sprawling across the sink. To make sure he was really dead, Joe took a lab knife and slit the jugular vein. Then he sprang to the sink, washed the pestle thoroughly, and replaced it. Stopping for an instant, he listened. . . . The busy rustle of movement told him that Sam Markee was still at work.

Now he went to a wall ventilator, standing on a chair so that he could carefully remove the grating. His hands reached in and fumbled an instant. A faint whirring noise resulted, finally a soft scratching; then:

"Joe, will you bring me those figures on the centrifugal test?" The voice might have been Killigrew's; it was slightly muffled, yet somehow possessed the mild tones of the dead scientist.

"Sure. Say, has that shipment gone out to General Hospital yet?"

"I think so. Why?"

Standing on the chair, Joe Craven listened to the sporadic conversation that ensued. Small talk, it was, the kind two men indulged in when they were both more or less occupied with their own thoughts.

Satisfied, he got down off the chair, carefully wiped the seat of it, and moved it to its former place. He stood tensely in the middle of the room, hoping that old Markee was lapping it all up—*knowing* he was! He, Joe, was getting out right now, and that transcription he'd so painfully made, studiously mimicking Killigrew's every speech-habit, was going to carry on for him for another half hour!

There was not a chance of Markee's stumbling in; he kept to himself too well. But when the police questioned him in the morning, he would tell them: "Yes, I heard Mr. Craven say good night to him about ten-thirty, an hour before I left." And when they asked: "But did you hear Killigrew say good night to him?" he would reply (as he must): "Yes. Mr. Killigrew said, 'See you tomorrow, Joe. And, say—don't forget to stop by for me in the morning, will you?'"

THAT phrase slogged through Joe's brain like a steady drum beat, while he waited for sleep to come. At ten-thirty, he told himself the automatic cut-off would be turning off the machine. At something after eleven, he pictured Markee shutting up his laboratory. Maybe he was doing it right now—!

Jarring him out of his icy thoughts, a buzzer rang. Someone at the door at this hour—! The luminous dial of his wrist watch showed it was only a quarter to twelve. Shaking inwardly, Joe got into his robe and opened the apartment door.

The navy blue of police uniforms was the first thing that struck his eye. Then the haggard face of old Sam Markee!

They were pushing into the apartment, two of them getting him by the arms. A big sergeant, stiff and harsh-looking, growled:

"Well, ain't this a help! Waiting for us right at home, as handy as you please!"

Markee's shaking finger went out at him. "That's him, officer! That's the one!"

In the interval it took the police to snap handcuffs on him, Joe's mind raced. Obviously, Markee had investigated the long-burning light in the laboratory. He'd halfway expected it. But why this—!

"Not so fast, Sergeant," he got out painfully. "I'm Joe Craven, if that's what you want to know. What I'd like to know is, what's the row?"

"I don't think I need to waste breath answering that," said the policeman. "Your partner, Killigrew, was murdered a couple of hours ago. You're indicated as the murderer. Now, calm down and—"

"I'm indicated—!" Joe gasped, staring at his gray-headed alibi. "Markee, you heard me leave at ten-thirty. You must have. Your door was open and you must've known when I went out. Tell them! My God, this is serious!"

But Markee only stared at him, half in fear, half in horror. He made no answer, simply shook his head dumbly.

Joe flung himself upon him, shook him by the shoulders. "Tell them, will you!" he roared. "Tell them you heard Killigrew say, 'Don't forget to pick me up in the morning!' Tell them that, you old fool, that he was alive when I left him!"

Markee shook his head, pointed at cotton plugs in his ears. "You'll have to speak a little louder, son," he whined. "I'm deaf as a post today. This weather has shot my sinuses all to hell. All I know, I told these officers how you was alone with him all evening, though of course I couldn't hear you talkin'. But, Sergeant, he musta been the one that done it!"

Joe Craven's attention had stuck at the words, "deaf as a post." In his head was

a roaring as of cannon shots landing ever nearer him. Sam Markee's sinuses were the one thing he hadn't, and couldn't have, figured on. But they were enough to put him in the chair.

Dimly, he was conscious of the sergeant saying gruffly: "Take him, boys. You know, I could have sworn I heard the bottom drop out of an alibi a minute ago."

But Joe wasn't through yet. He banged the policemen aside as they tried to seize him, sprang to the little bureau where he kept a gun. Some half-hearted idea of making a last, desperate stand possessed him. He'd fight his way through the whole pack of them!

Someone was bellowing: "Grab him! He's slipped a cog, Eddie; slug him down. No! *The fool's got a gun!*"

Craven's lips were back like those of a fighting rat. He was back in that same corner again, only this time there would be no way out. There was a gun in his hand, but three guns confronted him. Markee was diving out the door with a squawk of terror.

Then flame and lead gashed the tense air of the room, and Joe was slammed up on his toes against the dresser. Four shots blasted his heart to pieces. For poor, greedy Joe Craven, it was as though the master hand had pulled the switch: A moment of tearing agony, then blackness and release.

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDDLE PATH

VIOLENT shaking brought Joe to himself. He sat up with a start, sobbing brokenly. Unexpectedly, there sprang up before him the familiar, pudgy features of Doctor Tuttle.

"Wake up, man!" Tuttle pleaded. "No one's trying to shoot you. Good Heavens, you've been pleading with me to spare your life!"

A palsied hand faltered across Joe Craven's brow. His eyes found their way down

to his left breast, dreading the scarlet stains he still feared would meet his gaze. Not until he saw that the crumpled white linen was unspotted did he know for sure it had only been a dream.

"The cops!" he groaned. "They had me surrounded, Doc. They shot me down like a dog!"

Tuttle regarded him curiously. "Why? I hope Dream Number Two didn't lead to the underworld—?"

Joe shook his head, got up and began pacing the floor. "No! No, it—it was a case of mistaken identity," he lied with bad humor. "That Killigrew! Damn his Puritan hide . . ."

Tuttle made a move towards the machine. "Let's put it away, my friend," he suggested kindly. "No good will ever come of my fate-sifter. This time, you must see it yourself."

Joe lurched back towards the scientific monstrosity. "Don't touch it!" he rasped. He stood undecided, eyeing the machine with almost insuperable horror. Every ugly line of it poured terror into his soul. And yet he knew he must submit to the thing again.

He found himself warily approaching the machine. Once more, he told himself, just this one, last time. This time it would be the right answer, had to be.

Tuttle's lips formed a mocking smile as he watched Joe take his place in the chair. "If I ever saw a glutton for punishment—!" he marvelled.

"Don't kid yourself," Craven rapped nervously. "I'm just smart enough to know this is the only way. And I've got the guts to go through with it. Come on, Doc. We're going to town again."

Tuttle shrugged, re-set the dials and stood with his hand on the switch. "I wish you luck!" he said sadly. And closed the circuit.

JOE had a rotten, depressing headache when he woke up that morning. It

stayed with him all through breakfast. Marion's silence was the same, sarcastic, accusing one she'd adopted lately. They'd been married a year and a half, and it seemed a century to both of them. It was three years, now, since Joe Craven had launched his little drug business. It wasn't little any more. Joe was worth more than a million. Best of all, Fate had given him a trump card lately to beat anything he'd ever held.

Joe rose to leave, but Marion chose that moment to fling the morning paper at him.

"Seen the headlines?" she smiled acidly.

Joe stared at the glaring black banner: "Epidemic Sweeps Out of Control as Craven Refuses Compromise!"

His wife leaned towards him, hissed: "That's you, do you understand—*you!*—the man every soul in this city hates. How does it feel to know that?"

Joe's cheeks blazed. "Will you lay off me for a while?" he stormed.

Marion blocked his way to the door. "Not until you stop acting like a monster!" she flung at him. "Thousands are dying because of your rotten serum—dying because you substitute cheap ingredients for the right ones!"

"Is it my fault because the health authorities let an infantile paralysis epidemic get started?" he demanded. "Can I help their incompetence?"

"No; but you can give them honest medicine and stop *poisoning* them!"

"They don't have to use it," snapped Joe. "The war has upped the price of my main ingredient till I can't touch the stuff. This other stuff is . . . almost as good."

Marion sniffed at his "almost." Joe looked sharply at his watch, and swore.

"I'm late," he muttered, squinting as a new surge of pain wrenched his nerves. "Just hold your horses a while, will you? If this meeting works out like I hope, we'll all be satisfied."

In the Mayor's fiftieth-story office, they were waiting for him when he arrived: the

Mayor himself; Farrish, Chief Health Officer; and a number of influential scientists and business men. In their close-lipped gravity was summed up the seriousness of the thing they were fighting.

For six weeks, poliomyelitis in its most vicious form had locked its deformed tentacles about the city. A long dry spell had resulted in ideal conditions for the beginning of an epidemic. Hospitals, overtaxed with cases, shifted the overflow to warehouses improvised as nursing homes. But the number of cases daily grew larger. Craven's *Epthamine*, as tricky and unreliable as it had become since the change of formula, remained the only thing capable of combatting it. And according to Farrish, there were as many deaths due to its unforeseen actions as due to the plague.

The square-built Chief Health Officer told him that as soon as the meeting got started. And Joe Craven had for him the same answer he's had for Marion:

"Well, you don't have to use it, you know!"

Mayor Loftus grunted disgustedly. "Don't try to feed us that, Craven. *Epthamine's* the only stuff powerful enough to use here. If you hadn't changed the formula on us, the epidemic would never have got started!"

Then Craven pulled his little surprise.

"Well, gentlemen—I'm perfectly willing to make it exactly the same as I did before!"

"You—you're. . . !" Farrish's eyes widened, and he grabbed Joe by the shoulder. "You mean you'll furnish us with the real stuff . . . the serum that used to knock poli on its ear?"

Joe nodded, smiling. "But of course, at a slight increase in price," he amended. "You see, *alumine* has quintupled in price since the new war." For a moment he paused, frowning. He shook his head, trying to dislodge the persistent ache there. His face felt hot, now. Doggedly he picked up: "So my serum will have to reflect a

similar fluctuation—say, a four hundred percent increase."

Mayor Loftus' features grew purple. He hunched like a shaggy old bear.

"There's a word for maggots like you," he ground out, "and I've got it right on the tip of my tongue. Craven, you're a—"

"Your Honor—!" Loftus' secretary hastily put a hand on his superior's forearm. Loftus subsided into sullen mutterings. Farrish got up, stood back from Craven.

"You're serious?" he inquired. "Fully prepared to make a fortune off the blood of dying children and adults?"

The humming in Joe's head was like that of a swarm of bees as he got to his feet. His whole body ached, felt sensitive. The men before him swam in and out of focus.

"That's—what I—mean," he managed. "If the stuff's worthy of so much fuss . . . worthy of so much. . . ." He had to stop and shake his head. His thoughts slipped out of his grasp like quicksilver. This was the moment when he counted on snowing them under with his eloquence, trying to bring them around to paying what he asked.

"I say, if this stuff's so good," he quavered on, "you should be . . . should be willing . . . pay what I ask. Three hundred an ounce . . . gentlemen . . . three . . . three hundred . . . take it or—"

The room went black. Joe's legs bent under him, and he sprawled across the table, rolling from it to the floor. Men were gasping in dismay, springing to his help. They lifted him to the table and placed a rolled-up coat under his head.

FARRISH bent over him, took his pulse and scanned his flushed, heated features with expert eyes. "What is it?" Loftus growled.

"Any of you gentlemen who haven't had infantile paralysis had better stand well back," Farrish said quietly. "This man

has contracted it. It's gone a long way, too; he should have been treated long ago."

Joe's reeling consciousness struggled back to hear most of that. He tried to get up, protesting that he was all right. Bitterly he felt the way he had been placed at a disadvantage to them. But before he could so much as sit up, the blackness closed about him again.

The next time he was cognizant of his surroundings, he was in a hospital bed. Farrish and Loftus were in the background, while a white-smocked doctor prepared a hypodermic needle at his bedside.

Shock struck at Joe as he saw the bottle from which he was drawing the liquid: *Epthamine*, was the word on the label. He was barely able to clutch at the doctor's arm.

"No!" he protested. "Not—not that—that stuff! Might not—work. Give me paper—pencil!"

Farrish placed a pencil in his hand and groped for paper in his pockets. He found an envelope. The doctor shook his head.

"There's not enough time for that," he protested. "He's got to take his chances with the rest of them."

Joe's eyes pleaded with him. "No!" he whimpered. "Look . . . here's . . . formula. . . ."

The surgeon began to draw the paper firmly from his hand. Then Farrish, with a queer, intense look in his face, stopped him.

"Let him write," he grunted. "We need that formula."

With fingers that shook and fumbled. Joe wrote it all down. Hopefully, he handed the envelope to the city health officer. "Fix it' will you, Farrish?" he whispered. "Rush it. I'm—I need it bad."

Then he saw that an interne stood at each side of him and that they were bending down to hold him fast against the mattress. The doctor swabbed off a place on his arm and prepared to insert the needle.

Joe leaped against the restraining hands. "My God, no!" he screamed. "You're killing me!"

Not desisting from his work, the surgeon muttered: "So you don't like your own medicine, eh, Carven? Well, we'll all hope for the best!"

The needle plunged in; the yellowish serum filtered through Joe's arm. Joe could feel its liquid fire burning up his veins. He lost consciousness almost immediately.

There were times after that when he drifted back from near-death to see men and women in white shifting about him, times when he woke up, screaming in agony, to relapse again. In the last interval, he found himself in an oxygen tent, trying to focus his eyes on someone beyond the glass window.

It was Marion. She was holding up a paper for him to see. Joe was just able to read it:

"Epidemic ends as Craven dying!"

When Joe died, he was babbling that very phrase.

IT WAS necessary for portly Doctor Tuttle to dash a glass of water into his face before Joe came around. The ordeal had been too much for him. Recovering slowly, he lay back in the chair, panting, hollow-eyed. The apparatus had been covered.

Tuttle asked grimly: "Had enough?"

Joe's head made a feeble nod. He staggered to his feet, and, doing so, felt a scratch pad in his hand. How it got there, he didn't know; but he flung it from him like a viper.

Thoughts stampeded through his brain. They overpowered him with their dismal substance. The whole thing added up to one fact in Joe Craven's brain:

Nothing but trouble would ever come from the damned formula!

While it existed, while *Epthamine* was in the world, he wasn't safe. It was obvious that his tragic death each time had come

directly as a result of the serum. He'd brought it into the world and it had turned on him. Joe shuddered from the implied fact, that he was doomed from this moment on.

Tragedy lay before him every way he turned. The future was a horrible entity lying in wait for him. Then it struck Joe. . . .

He'd destroy the formula!

He'd wipe from his very memory, annihilate the last atom of the stuff he had around! With that thought plunging through him, he stumbled past Tuttle towards the door.

"It can't destroy me!" he cried. "I'll—I'll destroy it first!"

"Wait!" the doctor cried. "You don't want to go off like this—"

"Don't I!" Joe flung back, and slammed through the door like a hurricane.

In the lower-floor flat he occupied in a cheap section of the city, he barricaded himself in his improvised laboratory and gathered together every scrap of material he had accumulated on *Ephthamine*. He began methodically burning the papers in the sink. When there was not a tatter left, he turned to the bottles of trial liquids and completed serum and dumped them down the drain. He flushed the whole batch with a quart of dilute sulphuric acid.

Then he stood up, a look of infinite relief relaxing his sweat-glistening features.

"I've done it!" he exulted. "I've looked into the future—and licked it! I've chosen the future I want."

It did not occur to Joe Craven that he had also condemned countless thousands of sufferers to continued misery.

AT ABOUT the same instant, Doctor Tuttle leaned back in his chair and smiled vacantly at the scratch pad Joe had flung down in his haste at leaving. The doctor had been thoroughly over the figures and symbols and contrived a pretty good idea what they were all about.

"So it can't destroy you, Joe" he murmured. "You'll destroy it first. Only you won't, my friend! It was a happy thing for the world that you demanded this paper and pencil so realistically I wasn't sure whether or not you were still asleep. *Ephthamine* will still be given to the world, and I'll do the giving—free!"

A trace of pity crossed his face at the thought of what this would mean to Joe Craven.

"Somewhere, your own greed and your own brain child will catch up with you," he mused. "Too bad, but you can't say I didn't warn you. You can't pick your future, not even with a devil's machine like mine. . . ."

A little sadly, then, Doctor Tuttle went to his machine and with a large sledge hammer commenced breaking it up—

"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 control of the largest circulating newspaper in my County 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 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. 316, 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. 316, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

Here is one of the strangest stories ever told!—a tale so different that it will startle you with its rugged realism! Read here of the two men who didn't know their own names—who learned the tragedy of the

FORGOTTEN FUTURE

by

ARTHUR K. BARNES

HE AWOKE slowly, like a man struggling up from the depths of centuries of uninterrupted sleep. He strove to make out his surroundings, but the light was dim and his vision blurred. His only sensations were of extreme lassitude and bitter cold.

For many hours he lay quite still, alternately dozing and waking, before he finally determined to rise. He felt warmer now, and with a tremendous effort he lifted his head and looked down the length of his body. He discovered that he lay upon a low pallet, almost completely encased in a weird garment of metallic mesh and rubberized material. Insulated wires ran from this covering to a veritable phalanx of storage batteries on the far side of the room. This much he was able to see; then the strain of holding up his head proved too much. He fell back exhausted.

While gathering his strength, he examined the walls and roof with his rapidly clearing eyesight. They had been hewn from rough stone; apparently he was in a cavern. In one corner a hole had been drilled through the stone roof, and a cable from the giant batteries led upward out of sight.

Presently he felt a resurgence of energy and managed this time to sit up within his strange clothing. A voice greeted him.

"So you're awake, too," it said in weak, raspy tones.

He turned. Another man was sitting up on the edge of an identical pallet, and had just removed an identical suit. The other man was short, brown-haired, and incred-

ibly emaciated. He was nothing but bones held loosely together by quivering skin. The first man fumbled awkwardly, managed to divest himself of his garment. He, too, was unbelievably thin. He differed from his companion only in one respect; he was tall. His long, bony nose and pipe-stem legs gave him the appearance of a sleepy stork.

"Maybe you can tell me," said the short man faintly, "just what the devil we're doing here."

The tall man considered. But where he was, or why, or even who he might be, was completely beyond him. He shook his head.

"You have me there," he croaked. "Judging from the dust around here, which must be six inches thick, we've been here a long time. But beyond that, I can't say. I guess we're both victims of amnesia."

By tacit consent, the two men began feebly to search their surroundings. Close at hand they found water in tightly-sealed containers. It tasted stale, but was very welcome, nevertheless. Then they found a hoard of many bottles of concentrated food tablets, rich in minerals and vitamin contents. They consumed these plentifully; then, suddenly overcome by weariness, both men dropped off to sleep.

Four days passed in alternate eating and drowsing, while their strength rapidly returned. With abnormal speed, their bodies began to fill out. Finally the tall man decided:

"I think we're well enough to give this

place a thorough once-over and learn what it's all about. Do you remember anything yet?"

"Not a damn thing," said the short man ruefully. "But I've been looking over this weird outfit I found myself in when I awoke. It's full of wires inside, and there's a thermostatic control also an automatic device for registering pulse and respiration, I think, and a couple other gadgets I'm not sure about. It appears to me as if this is an advance refrigeration suit, and we've been frozen here!"

The tall man pondered this awhile, then examined the batteries and cable leading through the rocky roof. "If that's so, then there must be a series of photosensitive cells exposed to the sunlight somewhere above us, to provide continuous current for the storage batteries and the suits. I see there's an automatic control here for some purpose, probably to switch on the batteries during cloudy days and nights, thus keeping the refrigeration constant . . . I say, isn't it odd we should remember technical things like this, while forgetting our own identity? Or is amnesia always like that?" He sat down abruptly, beating with clenched fist at his forehead as if to pound memory back to life. "This is maddening! Who am I? What's the meaning of all this?"

THERE was no answer.

Presently the two began a systematic search of the cavern. In a niche they found clothing somewhat ravaged by time, but still in a surprisingly good state of repair. It had been moth-proofed. The men recovered some minor treasures—a pocket knife and a cigar lighter, and the remnants of a mechanical pencil. Next they discovered an extensive store of canned foods. A large percentage of it had spoiled, but some things that had been sealed dry, such as rice and macaroni, were still edible. There were also dry powders for mixing with water to make soup.

After dressing, the short man stumbled

on the greatest find of all, a leather-covered diary. With a cry of delight, he tenderly laid the prize before his companion. On the cover was stenciled a name: Dr. H. Murdock.

"Mean anything to you?" asked the tall man.

"Nothing."

Eagerly they set about making a light to read by. The batteries were dead, but surprisingly, they found an old-fashioned kerosene lamp which finally burst into flames after several attempts with the cigar lighter. "One of us was sure foresighted," chuckled the tall man.

Reverently they started to turn the pages of the notebook, to learn at last the reason for their strange situation, to push back the mists that shrouded their minds. Immediately, however, the brittle paper, brown with age, crumpled into powder. With that dissolution, the enormity of their circumstances suddenly burst with full and stunning realization upon the two men. They were utterly helpless, not knowing who they were nor whence they came. It no longer had the aspect of a puzzle game; there was fright, now panic in the eyes of those two men as they stared at each other. Within their hands they had held, a moment ago, perhaps the only clue ever to release them from their mental fog. Now it was gone, forever.

Or was it? With infinite care, the tall man laid the notebook down and gently blew away the dusty fragments. "Ah! There are still a few pieces with writing still intact!"

The short man knelt before the book as a man in prayer. Together, they pored over its garbled message, striving for light in darkness.

The first comprehensible bit of information was a line which read, ". . . James O'Donnell, my invaluable assistant." At once the short man produced the mechanical pencil. On the rock wall, each man copied out those words; then they compared

the handwriting. Beyond any doubt, the tall man had written the diary.

"So I'm Murdock," said he, rolling the name over and over on his tongue, savoring his rebirth as a personality. He enjoyed it. "And you're O'Donnell."

They grinned and turned back to the book, scanning the brittle bits of ancient paper for something intelligible. There were scattered phrases describing a cancer treatment. "... body temperature down to 85 degrees ... all life processes slowed down to an absolute minimum. During this period of suspended animation ... to all intents and purposes, the patient is frozen in a coma of several days' duration ... whereas growth of cancer cells is inhibited, the patient suffers no ill ..."

Four or five subsequent pages were a total loss. Then another line, "The burials of Siberia are known to hibernate for months during the bitter Arctic winter ..."

This was apparently followed by several pages concerning animal hibernation. Then most significantly, "... partially authenticated case of human hibernation ... small town near Montpelier, Vt. ..."

Suddenly something clicked in Murdock's brain, the first faint stirring of his dormant memory cells. "Of course, Jim!" the nickname came without effort. "Of course! its plain as day! You and I have been conducting an experiment in human hibernation. We've been here for heaven knows how long, like fish frozen in a block of ice, with automatic controls to lessen or increase the temperature whenever our lives might be in danger! And we've succeeded! We've—"

"But why?"

Murdock stopped as if O'Donnell's simple question had been a stone wall. "Why?"

"Sure. Why? Were we two crackpot scientists so crazy as to risk our lives here without attendants, without anyone's knowledge, as far as we can see, just for the sake of seeing if we *could hibernate*? Nonsense. There must've been a *reason*."

Murdock muttered under his breath. Of course there must have been a reason. And somehow, deep in those still-sleeping cells of his brain, he knew there was an answer to that question. He felt it.

O'Donnell's face screwed into an intensity of concentration as he, too, sought for that elusive answer. But it was no use. Instead, he turned to practical activity to relieve the tension.

"About time we got out of here, Murdock. This food-concentrate stuff isn't going to last much longer, and my stomach's clamoring for something besides rice and macaroni."

So the two men, following the pallid stream of diluted daylight which lit the cave, traversed a long, narrow corridor hewn from stone. At its end they were confronted by a dual obstacle—a thin-mesh copper screen literally covered with dead insects, and, just beyond, an iron-barred gate.

"We were smart enough to protect ourselves from invaders," observed Murdock. "The screen was evidently electrified."

BOTH barriers opened from within after some difficulty with rusted latches and uncoiled hinges. Presently the two looked out upon the world again after a hiatus of decades, possibly centuries.

The cave entrance was in the bottom of a very deep mountain canyon. Looking upward, it seemed almost a half mile to the top, where the two walls leaned forward in such fashion that sunlight would never, save in midsummer, strike the canyon floor. It was chilly, and Murdock had a weird sense of something unnatural, something wrong, about the scene.

Then it came to him. There was not a single sound; no birds sang, no insects hummed, no wind rustled through the leaves.

"Funny," said O'Donnell as realization also struck him. "There must've been a nasty fire through here. Nothing but burned

stumps and ashes. No grass or brush." He glanced about uneasily.

After consultation, they decided to follow the canyon to its mouth in an effort to reach civilization. Murdock armed himself with the only weapon they had thought to provide when they had entered upon the hibernation, uncounted years ago. It was a .45 automatic.

An hour's steady hiking brought the men out of the canyon and onto a rocky plain. For as far as the eye could see, there was not a sign of life—no growing things, no animals or birds just emptiness. In the near distance a grey ribbon of concrete stretched endlessly toward the horizon.

"That road," said Murdock, "must lead to a town somewhere."

His voice was flat and toneless in the solitude.

O'Donnell nodded. "But I vote to return to the cave. It's late, and I'm exhausted. A day or two of rest and food'll make it an easier journey, no matter how long it may be. Right?"

Murdock agreed, and they turned back to their rocky home. They almost never made it. Half way up the canyon, in gathering dusk, O'Donnell rounded a boulder and came face to face with a bear. He was huge and very lean, with ribs showing and eyes bloodshot. The echo of his hungry roar racketed between the stone walls.

O'Donnell squawked in panic and tried to run, caroming off Murdock in his blind haste. Murdock, legs none too sturdy, went down. He had no choice but to fight it out. He whipped out the automatic, aiming in the general direction of the ravening monster, and let fly with five shots. By a miracle, one slug caught the animal in the eye, penetrating the brain. The bear died at Murdock's feet, his naked fangs an inch from the scientist's quivering boot.

After quieting shocked nerves, the two men took advantage of the opportunity to collect fresh meat. With O'Donnell's

pocket knife, they laboriously hacked off a haunch. Regretfully they left the remainder to whatever prowling creatures of the night might find it.

"I guess he just awoke from his hibernation, too," hazarded Murdock, "and hungry. Pity we had to kill the first sign of life we came across."

The bear's flesh, even after long cooking over a kerosene fire, was rank and tough. It was a welcome change, however. They had not one meal, but several, from the animal, because they found to their surprise that the body was not molested in any way. Even after four days' steady eating off the carcass, balanced by the remainder of the canned goods, the bear was still untouched by marauders. More strangely still, it hadn't even begun to spoil.

Stocking up with the last of their food, Murdock and O'Donnell finally set out down the canyon and along the rather uneven concrete pavement in search of habitation. They walked for a full day through a plain of utter desolation in which nothing moved. Once they came upon a strange hunk of metal slag, almost as high as a man and twice as long, by the roadside. It was shapeless and they could make nothing of it.

By nightfall, still having seen no signs of life, they made fireless camp and huddled in the erstwhile refrigeration suits for warmth. The vast silence oppressed them. It was as if the earth itself were holding its breath in sly anticipation, bottling its laughter till the moment these little people should appreciate the point of some tremendous cosmic joke.

During those chilly hours, both men tormented themselves by striving to pierce the mysterious mental veil that shut them off from the past. Constant probing brought forth several curious, unrelated items.

O'Donnell started up once in the middle of the night, saying, "By Jove! I remember playing football in college. It was—yes! I attended Penn State! And we had

a damn' good squad my last year!"

Later Murdock sat bolt upright. "I'm an astronomer!" he proclaimed in tones of sheer amazement. "I've spent many years studying the stars. I recall it distinctly!"

But the most important memory of all—the reason for their hibernation—remained maddeningly elusive. Murdock became convinced that it had to do with a message, something important they wished to tell the world of the future. But he racked his brains till a blinding headache was the result—all in vain.

IT WAS mid-morning of the third day when they came upon what had once been town. The road turned sharply around a jutting shoulder of the bare hills, and entered into a triangular area formed by the hills and a wide river bed. The water was very low, a thin trickle in the middle of spreading mud flats.

But it was the town itself that held their appalled attention. It was in complete ruin. Not a large place, extending perhaps a mile or two from end to end, it had apparently been gutted by a terrific blaze. Frame buildings were nothing but ash heaps. Stone or steel structures, none of which had been more than four stories tall, were twisted wrecks. Windows were all gone. The tops of buildings were literally melted down; the stone itself had become molten, running like lava in the fury of heat. It was like looking at a waxen model of a city which had been set too close to the stove. All its outlines were blurred and run together into an ugly and disquieting parody of human works.

Sudden terror throttled O'Donnell. He seized his companion's arm, "Good God, Murdock!" he choked. "The place has been destroyed! There isn't a living thing left here, or anywhere, as far as we've seen! What does it mean?"

Murdock fought off the panic that communicated itself to him. "Steady, Jim. I don't know what it means. But maybe we

can find out."

They passed awestruck through the remnants of the town. A great many heaps of slag cluttered the tortured pavement. It was Murdock's close examination, revealing traces of melted rubber, that gave them the clue.

"Automobiles," he said somberly. "Caught in the holocaust without a chance to escape." He shuddered.

Of human beings there was no trace except frequent little piles of blackened bone. The wind had blown away any remnants of clothing that might have remained. Once O'Donnell pointed out a tiny rivulet of gold.

"Somebody's gold watch case," he deduced. "Or maybe a ring. It was hot enough here to melt it down completely."

Once they picked their way into the shell of a tall building, through the twisted caricature of a doorway framed by once molten metal. The interior was completely gutted. People had been caught inside; the shapes of bodies were vaguely discernible, blackened and smeared to unrecognizability. The two explorers did not stay long.

"D'you suppose," hazarded O'Donnell when they were again in the street, "that there's been a war?—that enemy weapons somehow blasted this place to ashes?"

Murdock raised his head to stare at the sky. More and more during recent hours his memory, clamoring for release, had turned his thoughts to the stars. War—the stars—his mind trembled on the verge of revelation. Was that the answer? Invaders from another planet?—armed, perhaps, with searing heat-rays of incalculable power? Had he, Murdock, through his telescope correctly interpreted certain activities on one of the neighboring worlds, anticipated the invasion? Was that why he and O'Donnell had hibernated for untold years, to warn earth's peoples that alien beings were descending upon them?

Murdock clutched at his temples, fighting for sanity. Again his quest for memory

was defeated on the edge of triumph. The invader theory didn't quite make good sense. He couldn't have seen anything through a telescope so small as a space-ship millions of miles distant. Besides, why bother to hibernate to deliver a message everyone would know about in plenty of time? A fleet of space-ships, as it approached within telescope range, would have been spotted unmistakably long before it reached the earth. No, that wasn't the answer.

Murdock roused from his reverie at a distant shout. O'Donnell had wandered off; it was he who cried out, from down near the river. Murdock ran and found his colleague pointing exultantly to something in the mud of the river bottom. It was a line of fresh footprints, leading from the water to the town.

"Somebody's alive!" yelled O'Donnell in excitement. "At least there's one person besides us around here!"

An odd childhood fragment flashed into Murdock's mind—Robinson Crusoe finding a footprint in the sand. The sudden knowledge that they were not alone made him strangely uneasy.

"Let's follow the tracks, Jim," he decided. "Maybe this will give us the answer to our questions."

The muddy trail led to the rear of one of the larger stone buildings, and down a cracked ramp to the cellar. Murdock stood outside and yelled, as if challenging a monster to come forth. The answer was a faint cry and the patter of running feet.

A girl appeared.

For many seconds the trio stared at one another devouringly, pathetically grateful at finding another human being. The girl was about twenty-five years old. Although she was dressed in scorched rags, with face and hands peeling from recent burns, she was good-looking in a coarse fashion. It was she who spoke first.

"Have you—have you got any food?"

THE query was a dull bomb in Murdock's chest. So she was running short of food, also. That was ominous. But he put that aside for a moment. Even more important, he had to ask her that tremendous question which had hammered inside his head for days.

"Girl," he begged, "for God's sake, tell us what's happened!" He seized her by the shoulders, shaking her in the intensity of his desire to learn. "What's happened?"

She stared at him in fright. "Why, the sun went haywire, don't you know? It exploded, or somethin', and burned everything up—"

"The sun!" Murdock reared back, looked aloft. The solar orb *was* changed. It was smaller, intensely white. Nor were its radiations nearly as warm as Murdock recalled them.

And then understanding dawned as the thunderbolt of complete recollection struck both men simultaneously. It was like some internal, rending symphonic discord.

"The sun!" shouted Murdock. "Of course! The sun! I'm an astronomer; why didn't I remember? Why, for twenty years I specialized in research and study of suns and novae and white dwarf stars. I know more about them than any living man . . .

"Jeans was right, of course. He said the course of stellar evolution is from main-sequence stars—of which our sun was one—to white dwarfs. There's nothing in between, because it would be an unstable configuration. When a main-sequence star falls below the absolute stellar magnitude of 4.88, it must undergo precipitate contraction to the next stable configuration, which is the white dwarf state. He also pointed out that a mere three per cent reduction in luminosity of our sun would bring that about!

"But I was right, too! I carried those observations further, cataloguing the symptoms of a star about to become, in effect, a nova. And I learned that our sun was already rapidly approaching the danger

point. *That's* the message I wanted to tell the world of the future! It was in 1947 that I finally was assured of what was going to happen. I published my findings, but no one paid me any heed; so I determined to bring my message personally. I estimated a hundred years of safety, then—"

He stopped, appalled as he realized what would happen to a planet if its sun underwent such change—tremendous unbelievable temperatures as the sun collapsed in upon itself. A throwing off of terrific lethal radiations of all kinds. Energy in amounts beyond the conception of the mind. An inferno lasting for days, while the earth spun like a roast on the spit in a fireplace, toasting all life to a crisp.

O'Donnell took up the story with horror in his voice. "Because nobody would listen to you, we developed a process for human hibernation, so we could live those hundred years and then warn the peoples of the world of their imminent doom, so they could take steps to survive. And although the nova wiped out our photosensitive cells, the juice stored in the batteries got us safely through the danger period, deep under the mountain."

"And the bear which also survived by hibernating," reminded Murdock. "Remember how the meat didn't spoil? That's because bacteria, along with all other life, have been annihilated."

O'Donnell laughed with irony. "We came to warn them, but we awoke about two weeks too late."

They paused, stricken silent by the realization of the frightful extent of the holocaust. Murdock spoke to the girl, who had listened uncomprehendingly to his scientific outburst.

"How did you manage to live through

it?"

"My brother, he was a butcher," she said simply. "When the sun blew up, we hid in his big refrigerator room where the meat's kept. Down in the cellar it is, under the shop."

"How long did you hide there?"

"Six days. For a while it was awful cold, then the machinery didn't work no more. Then it got awful hot during the daytime. I thought I'd die. My brother said it was only the super-special insulation that saved us. We ate raw meat and there was water that melted from the pipes."

"And where's your brother now?"

Tears began to stain the girl's dirty cheeks. "Every night, when things cooled off a little bit, he sneaked out to see what it was like. One time he didn't come back. I ain't never seen him again. . . . I get water from what's left o' the river, but I'm awful tired of eating raw meat. Besides, there ain't much left. Have you got any food, please?"

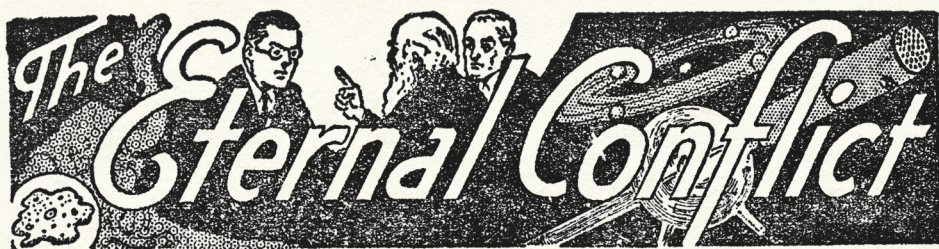
Murdock stared again at the sun, now so dense, so white, which had let loose for six awful days a savage fury unmatched in all geologic history from the dawn of Time. Then he looked at O'Donnell, and the girl.

They were practically out of food. Their chances of finding a cache such as that which sustained the girl were very slim. Unless they did, and soon, their hours were numbered. And even if they did manage to find something to keep them alive, it was possible that they were the last three human beings in that part of the world. Two men—and one woman.

O'Donnell stared calculatingly at Murdock, and his lip curled back in a snarl.

Murdock's right hand stole toward the butt of his gun.





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WILL THE UNIVERSE BE EXPLORED?

by RAY LENNOX

IN THE present day, scientific interest has turned to the vast space commonly called the universe. In this space are situated the so-called mysteries of the day, the mysteries of life, and its existence. Yearly scientific interest is becoming more cognizant of the facts of this space, and someday in the near future, man will wait no longer. But first man must find some new force, a mighty force which will hurl him in some future mechanism through a vast expanse at a rate of speed never before attained. This mechanism must endure the ravages of the intense cold and mysterious rays which exist in space. This machine will most likely be in the form of a rocket or shell which will be propelled by its own power or shot from a gigantic cannon. The theory is that once entering space, a projectile will continue at the same velocity that it left the earth's

atmosphere under. Upon nearing its destination, the machine must have some ray or force to hinder gravity, or have some form of brakes. There must also be synthetic food, air and water. If all these necessities are accomplished, man will control the universe.

From the beginning, man has explored and searched for new peoples and today he has at last conquered even the most dense regions of the earth—and now, still not satisfied, he longs for more adventure. Man likes to think that he is not alone in this vast expanse and wants to prove the existence of some worldly neighbor. This is the scientific explanation of why man will at sometime in the very near future accomplish this seemingly impossible task.

QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

by CHARLES WHITESHIELD

MR. JOHN DEAKYNE: In the recent experiments with bombarding Uranium atoms with electrons, the atom has been smashed and tremendous power released. The atom has been tapped and the world is still here. The very violence of the explosion shattered the entire mass of Uranium into such small particles that each was soon extinguished by reason of its infinitesimal size. Now what have you to say against atomic power?

Frank Marion: I agree entirely with your

contention that immortality would, after a time, become quite boring. In fact, I find myself bored at times after only eighteen years of life. What would immortality do to me? I do, however, often find myself wishing that I could go into a shell of some kind that would preserve me at the age at which I entered it until I wished to come out. It would be very interesting to see just what will develop from the present-day discoveries and future revelations, wouldn't it now Mr. Marion?

And last, though definitely not least, we come to Vivian Lynne. Miss Lynne, you have an unusual point of view, but I cannot say that I disagree. I would, though, like to ask you one question. What do you consider a superman? Will he be all brain and only body enough to extract nourishment for his brain from whatever food he may eat in that far distant day, or will he be a super-efficient physical machine which can work at top speed for days without tiring? Or perhaps, and this is what I like to think, perhaps he will achieve a perfect balance between the two. Perhaps he will fulfill the ideal of the Ancient Greeks of a perfect mind in a perfect body. Who knows?

WHAT IS LIKELY TO COME

(Name Missing)

ATOMIC power is probably coming, but I will not attempt to predict its social effects, beneficent or otherwise. I may be wrong about this, but I do not think that there is any room for doubt as to the existence of enormous stores of energy locked within the atom. The only question is as to man's ability to solve the problem of releasing this energy on a practical scale. If Uranium 235 can be located in sufficient quantities at a cost within reason, this problem will be solved, but of course science may find other ways of solving it.

Education is going to be conducted more in the direction of progressive education. The school career of the child will be started earlier, perhaps at the age of three or four. Physical training will play a very important part in the earlier school years. To appreciate what physical abilities a human being must have to qualify as having the first of the three parts of a liberal education as per Huxley's famous definition, we should study Harry Houdini or a first class jiu jitsuan. Let these be our norms. I consider Kellock's Life of Houdini the most interesting of all American biographies.

I am skeptical about interplanetary travel, but I think that successful rocket-ships will be built, at least for travel at great heights above the earth. Such ships might cross the Atlantic in an hour or two. They would help in the investigation of the earth's atmosphere (particularly of the extreme upper regions, which airplanes and balloons cannot reach), and they might enable us to see parts of the moon now hidden from us. They might fly high enough to give the passengers a total eclipse or an annular eclipse of the sun every new moon. At least, rocket-ship builders can strive for these goals first, and then go for interplanetary travel when and if these more limited objectives are attained.

THE POWER OF MUSIC

by HUGH ERLINE

IN THE science department of your October SCIENCE FICTION, I read an article by a Mr. Bradbury, in which he states that music makes powerful propaganda. I am a lover of good music myself—and at times I can even appreciate "swing," but I think Mr. Bradbury overdoes it when he calls music "propaganda."

Music can put a person into a mood, but its effects cannot change the inborn personality of the listener. A person who can be led to war by the beating of a drum

(Continued on page 113)



A special supplement department for the active science-fiction fan and collector. Send your items of interest to THE FANTASY FAN SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson St., New York City.

ARE YOU A FAN?

IF YOU belong to a science-fiction club, issue or work on a science-fiction fan publication, or come in contact with science-fiction notables, why not write us about it? Readers of THE FANTASY FAN are anxiously waiting to know what you are doing to spread the gospel of science-fiction! Share your experiences in the fan field with advocates all over the world! This department is open to all fan, author, and publishing material, so don't hesitate to make free use of it.

DAVID H. KELLER, M. D.

JUST after the New Year's chimes had stopped ringing in the year 1928, the science-fiction world became aware of a name soon to be listed among the greatest in the field—David H. Keller, M. D. His first story, "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," ushered in a new kind of science-fiction — the psychological story.

Dr. Keller is a master psychologist, and through the many dozens of stories he has penned, he has brought to the attention of science-fiction readers the fact that psychology rules our lives and will decide the future of mankind more so than all the other sciences combined. He was the first to emphasize the human element in science-fiction, the quality that makes any story boldly realistic.

No one has successfully imitated his style. He stands in a class by himself. For his excellent work in awakening the science-

fiction fans to the fact that the human mind is the most important element in any adventure or enterprise, we respectfully dedicate this issue of SCIENCE FICTION to Dr. David H. Keller of Stroudsburg, Penna.

THE SECOND CONVENTION

OVER the Labor-day week-end, the Second National Science Fiction Convention was held in Chicago, sponsored by the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers. The triumvirate to organize this year's convention were Mark Reinsberg, Erle Korshak, and Bob Tucker (sometimes known as Hoy Ping Pong).

Well over a hundred science-fiction fans and authors gathered in the Hotel Chicagoan for two days of good fellowship. The only unfortunate occurrence was the retirement of the Convention Chairman, Mark Reinsberg, who nearly collapsed during his key-note speech. This near-breakdown was caused by many sleepless nights in his efforts to arrange for the most successful meeting possible.

Special features of the Convention included a science-fiction auction in which the chief donator was Raymond A. Palmer, who gave the auction thousands of dollars worth of cover paintings and illustrations from science-fiction magazines, to be sold to the fans present. Largest purchaser was famous fan number one, Forrest J Ackerman.

A mask ball was held one of the evenings, during which the fans dressed themselves to represent numerous famous science-fiction characters. E. E. ("Skylark") Smith, the guest of honor at the Convention banquet, masqueraded as Northwest Smith, a character from the stories of C. L. Moore. Cyril Kornbluth of New York City caused a bit of excitement when he came into the ballroom with his head swathed in bandages—until the gathering realized that he was posing as the Invisible Man! Another fan represented Johnny Black, the talking bear of L. Sprague de Camp's stories.

The Convention Committee selected Denver as the Convention City for 1941.

THE INSCRUTABLE CHINESE ANGLE

by Hoy Ping Pong

WE CHINESE fans envy you lucky Britishers and Americanos. Yes, envy you, while at the same time you sicken us! You fans have everything in the world that is dear to a fan's heart right at your fingertips, just for the taking, and still you gripe at little things! That is where you sicken us!

We envy you because you can have every one of those things you want, while we cannot—yes, there are about a dozen Chinese fans. I, Pong, am Director of the Peking Science Fiction League. Let me tell you a few of the hardships we must put up with here. . . .

Hop Wo Fling, an advance fan living on the outskirts of the city, has been trying for years to finish "Skylark Three." Years, I said! And he has the entire story at this writing! He first bought the magazines at a second-hand store when they appeared years ago, and settled down to read the yarn. Well, he only about half-finished it, when a rice blight came and he was obliged to lay it down while he went to work to save the rice crop. Two years later he

again picked up the story where he left off and continued.

This time he did not get further than an additional chapter. That was in 1931, when the invaders overran our great country. Hop Wo Fling was straining his eyes in the dying light of the sun after a hard day's work, trying to read the page, when up ran a little foreign soldier and speared his bayonet right through the last chapter! Not waiting to see if he had harmed Hop Wo, the invader made off with last chapter! It took poor Hop Wo two years to get the last chapter back via way of red tape cutting, smooth diplomacy, etc., and finally Japan returned the frayed and battle-scarred chapter to the patient Chinese. Again Hop Wo sat down to read it.

But no luck! This time the honorable river overflowed and washed away Hop Wo's home, rice field, Skylark, and everything else. It even washed away Hop Wo, but somebody rescued him. They had to hold him to keep him from plunging into the river after the missing chapter. Hop Wo was very disconsolate until finally, one day he wrangled another complete story from a fan in the States. Once again he tried, this time starting from the very beginning, to refresh his memory. But again his luck failed him!

While he was wading through the mass of technical detail, that annoying little country across the lagoon again got nosey and invaded quiet China. This time they brought airplanes and bombs. Hop Wo was sitting in his doorway reading up to the last chapter. He was breathless. At last, he thought, he was going to be able to finish the story! And what happened? Again a nasty fate stepped in and snatched that last chapter away from him! A lone bomber flying overhead spotted Hop Wo sitting in the sun and decided to get a rise out of him. He dropped a bomb. Much to Hop Wo's chagrin, the bomb exploded and tore away the last sixteen pages from the final chapter—shattered them into little

bits of paper and the wind scattered them to the four corners of China! Was Hop Wo mad! A bomb cheated him from finishing the greatest story every written. Hop Wo was *so* annoyed he journeyed across the lagoon and protested to the Emperor about it, but he was just placed on the relief rolls and forgotten about. Such is the sad fate of Hop Wo Fling!

Another local fan, Took To Long, has had some very annoying misfortunes in trying to obtain American fan mags. Took To first sent a dime for a copy of "Fantasy Fantasy," but to date, it has never arrived. Took To has arrived at the conclusion that he has been Took. Again, he sent another dime for a copy of the "Science Fiction Appleknocker," but the Japs intervened with the mail-boat and confiscated the magazine, claiming it was Moscow propaganda. It seems that there was a column on michelism in the "Appleknocker." But Took To was stout of heart. He tried again. Wrapping up another dime, he addressed it to "Fantasy Scallywag." This time those annoying soldiers confiscated the dime.

So you see, Britishers and Americanos, what a dreadfully hard time we poor Chinese have? Stop bickering about little things! Stop cussing one another. Stop fighting over who is what and has what—think of us! We have nothing! You live in science-fiction's Garden of Eden!

THE AGE OF THE FANS

by ANTHONY BARBARA

I Work on an Eighth Avenue newsstand in New York during the summer months. Every time a customer comes up for a science-fiction magazine, I make it my business to find out what it is that makes him tick.

Here's what I've noted. They form a definite type that I can now recognize almost at a glance, glasses, somewhat shy and soft-spoken, generally high school

graduates but working at uncongenial occupations, ages ranging from 21 to perhaps 30. The only pulps they read are those in the fantasy field. I did not find any college professors or bank presidents of the type that are generally supposed to read science-fiction on the sly. Nor has a single twelve-year-old shelled out a single penny for one of your mags while I've been on the job. Why should they? They can get a whopper of a slam-bang comic with real action heroes for only a dime. Judging by articles on the subject which I've read, you science-fiction editors seem to think your readers range from twelve to eighteen years, with a freak smattering of physics professors thrown in. Judging by my own observations, which have covered nearly four years and which I believe are closer to the actual consumer than any you people can get, your readers range from 21 to 30.

NO MORE CLASSICS

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

I OFTEN look long and hard at the earnest new fans who enter the science-fiction fan field. I can't help but wonder if they are not, actually, many times more sincere in their liking for science-fiction, and what it represents, than are the older fan.

They are starting the reading habit of science-fiction at a time when the average standard of the fantasy magazines, if not pitifully low, then is at least consistently and mediocre in every respect.

I respect these new fans never having known the indescribable ecstasy of reading the liquid, enchanting prose of A. Merritt as rendered in "The Moon Pool," nor the ironic surpassing satire of Stanton A. Coblentz' great novels, "The Blue Barbarians," etc., or the homespun, classical simplicity of David H. Keller's "The Evening Star," and the unsurpassing interest of plots as done by Richard Vaughan in "The

Exiles of the Skies," the insatiable curiosity that made us follow Professor Jameson from world to world, the soul-stirring drama of such immortal yarns as "The Eternal Man," "The Man from Beyond," "The Forgotten Man of Space," etc., and oh, so many, many, many others!—never having read any of these, fed upon a choking diet of hack, hack, hack. Knowing possibly one great story a year, in contrast to one great story an issue, they still stand by science-fiction and fantasy with a loyalty, a tenacity, that is all but unbelievable.

I am loyal to science-fiction, yes. But my loyalty is based on hope—the all-but-despairing hope that the next science-fiction magazine I read will contain a new, great story, a classic of science-fiction.

ANOTHER GIRL FAN

by MILLIE TAURASI

YOU SAID in your column called "La Femme in Science Fiction" that you wished for a young lady to write to that department. Well, I'm a young lady and I'm willing and I *am* writing to that department.

Why am I a fan? Because my illustrious brother, James V. Taurasi, introduced me to this fan-field. He gave me a mag (SCIENCE FICTION, naturally) and asked me to read it while he finished putting out his fan-mag—so I did. I enjoyed it very much. I, then, joined the Queens Science Fiction League. Ever since then, I've met people, strange and otherwise, read almost every mag my brother buys, and attended many parties given by science-fiction fans.

Science-fiction means a good time to me as a hobby, but as a money-making industry—foo!

I hope that this shows you that girls join this wacky field called "science-fiction."

THE FAN MAGS

IN PURSUANCE to our usual custom, the latest batch of science-fiction fan magazines will be reviewed in the next number of SCIENCE FICTION. If you know of any current fan publication that has not yet been reviewed by this column, send us a copy. And fan-mag editors, be sure you send your latest issue so that your effort will be acknowledged in THE FANTASY FAN.

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*Carson struck the gun
aside before he could
pull the trigger!*



HABITS VIA RADIO

by E. A. GROSSER

A miraculous accidental discovery broadcasts a very annoying phenomenon through the country—and complications arise when people find themselves forming useless and embarrassing habits! But Dan and Irene find this simple annoyance turned into genuine terror by a strange trick of fate!

DAN CARSON ran down the path toward the garage, feeling as though school had let out. He didn't enjoy working for Dr. Lindsay, the experimental

psychologist. The tall towers of KKOM, showing above the trees, marked the job he wanted and the one for which he was qualified. But his position as assistant to

Dr. Lindsay had its finer moments in the form of Irene Lindsay.

He trotted around a clump of shrubbery, then halted in the drive. The anticipation faded from his face. He and Irene had planned a pleasant drive. And now George Hull seemed to have chiseled in on the affair.

Carson went to Irene's side, trying to ignore Hull's mocking grin.

Hull raised his hand in a sloppy salute as Carson passed and said, "Hi, Carson." His grin widened.

Carson grunted, still trying to ignore the mockery, and looked down into Irene's eyes. "Hello, sweet," he greeted, smiling, "Got a kiss?"

She lifted her lips for him and he swooped eagerly to meet them. Then several things happened simultaneously. Their lips met . . . Hull said, "You're both shameless!" . . . And they were galvanized on the spot as though by a surging electrical current.

Carson staggered back against the car and leaned on the door for support. He gazed at Irene with a new respect. It was several moments before he was aware that she was gazing at him in a like manner.

"How—how did you do that?" she asked tremulously, seeming very uncertain of herself.

"I didn't do anything," Carson denied. "I thought it was you."

They turned to face Hull accusingly, and saw him getting back on his feet and when he achieved that position, it didn't seem as though it would be permanent. The man was groggy.

"It hit him, too," said Irene. "It couldn't have been the kiss."

"He didn't try to electrocute us," Carson muttered as though unwilling to give Hull a clean bill. "It was somebody—" His head jerked around and he looked into Irene's eyes. "—somebody else," he concluded.

"Father!" Irene cried, and the three of them ran toward the house.

Dr. Lindsay stood at his worktable, looking at his instruments with puzzled eyes. Regularly, as though motivated by clockwork, his right arm reached out and his fingers tripped a switch. But he seemed almost unaware of the action.

"Father! What did you do? What happened?" Irene demanded as she came into the room with Hull and Carson only a step or two behind her.

Dr. Lindsay was startled and he turned quickly. His eyes were needle-sharp beneath heavy black brows.

"Oh, it's you!" he said in relief, and his hand went out to fumble with the switch again. "I don't know what happened, my dear," he said wryly. "But as for what I did—well, my hand seems to have acquired an instinct of its own and refuses to stop switching on this current, even though the set is burned out." His hand started again, but halted. He looked at it curiously, then at the other. His right hand started toward the switch again.

He jerked it back and thrust it deep in his pocket for safe-keeping. He looked at Carson and Hull. "I'm glad you hadn't gone, yet," he said. "You must help me find out just what did happen. I had just made some adjustments, trying to match the curve of our broadcast wave with that last record we made of my own mind. I believe I must have synchronized the two," he concluded, turning and starting toward the other side of the room.

His hand leaped from his pocket and at the switch. Dr. Lindsay was unbalanced and fell against the side of the worktable as his fingers tripped the switch again. He looked distrustfully at his right hand and he regained his feet, then glanced at the others.

"See!" he said, "Very inconvenient!"

Holding his right wrist firmly with his left hand, he went across the room to the dynamo switch. He opened the power switch and the whine of the dynamo started down the scale. He smiled as though at

a minor triumph and started to return, but his untrustworthy right hand streaked out and closed the switch. The motor started turning the dynamo over again.

"We've got to do something!" he cried exasperatedly. "I can't spend the rest of my life closing switches!"

"CAN'T you stop?" asked Carson.

"Certainly!" Dr. Lindsay snapped. "But I have to *think* to stop. I can't accomplish anything if I have to keep my mind on such a trivial matter. And everytime I start thinking to solve the problem of what has happened, my hand acts as though it were alive. I won't stand for it!"

His hand leaped to the switch, trying to close it again; even though it was already closed. Carson looked at Irene and they both had to stifle smiles.

Very slowly and deliberately, Dr. Lindsay pulled the switch, then walked away with his right hand straining against the restraint of his left. His sharp eyes were sharper than was usual and his lips moved soundlessly, though with satisfaction.

When he was in the middle of the room, he stopped, released his right hand and pulled out his necktie. Then he grasped his right hand again, looped the colored silk around his wrist and drew it tight.

"Father! What are you doing?" asked Irene, fearing that he had become more than queer.

"What does it look like?" he snapped. "I'm tying my hand up so I can work with my left. Carson! Take a look at that transmitter and see what we'll need to fix it."

"Haven't you had enough?" Carson grumbled, moving to the workbench.

"You do as I tell you and shut up!" the doctor replied impatiently. "I don't intend to go through life turning on every light I see. First, we'll fix the transmitter and see what in the devil happened. I think that by synchronizing that wave with those originating in my mind, I reinforced the mind-

wave so much that it destroyed the plasticity of my nervous tissue—set the paths for the nerve current so the action has become almost automatic. I guess it could be called habit, because continued repetition would have the same effect. Anyway, it's a damned bad one. And I'll have to break it."

Carson's investigation didn't take long. Hull joined him for a moment, then went to the window. He turned back to face them when Carson spoke, and Carson noted a smile on his saturnine face.

"You did a complete job of it," Carson announced to the doctor. "About all we can salvage out of this is the panel—and it's scorched." He waited for the doctor's pronouncement, and felt that in the meantime he would have a cigaret. He reached to his pocket—but never completed the motion.

With the relaxation of his thoughts, habit claimed him. He turned to Irene.

"Hello, honey," he greeted. "Got a kiss?"

She was a dozen feet away, but she lifted her lips for the caress. As Carson strode forward to dispose of the intervening space, a commentary on their actions came from the window.

"You're both shameless!" said Hull.

"Well, I should say they are!" said Dr. Lindsay. "Irene! Carson! Behave like hum-ug-ug-ug. Help!"

Carson and Irene stepped apart and looked toward the source of the choking sounds. Dr. Lindsay's hand had escaped his attention and was jabbing ineffectually at the air for an imaginary switch. Or rather, not ineffectually, but inconclusively—as yet! Dr. Lindsay had, as a matter of convenience, tied his disobedient right hand with the narrower of the two pendant ends of his necktie. So, as a matter of consequence, the necktie made a very good noose and was performing efficiently.

The good doctor was evidently too startled to collect his thoughts. His face was

purpling rapidly. Irene and Carson ran to separate the old man and Death.

When they were finished, he leaned back in the chair, breathing heavily. He regarded the necktie in Irene's hands with an expression of distaste. But his right arm was performing gymnastically. Finally he recovered sufficiently to become aware of its independent actions and forced it to desist. He grasped the arms of the chair tightly.

"Well, go on!" he snarled at Carson. "What are you waiting for? Go on to town and get the things we need to rebuild the set."

Carson started toward the door, grinning. Irene went with him.

"Irene! Where do you think you are going?"

"To town," she answered her father stubbornly. "I have some shopping I intended to do."

"You stay here," directed her father. "If you have no more sense of decency than you've shown in the last few minutes, the safest place for you is home."

"But father," she objected. "You can't blame us for that. It's habit!—just like your arm!"

"Habit!" Dr. Lindsay roared with surprising vigor. "Habit! Irene! If you—"

"Wait a minute!" Hull called to Carson. "I'm going with you."

Carson faced the unwanted guest angrily. "Is that a habit, too?" he demanded.

Hull glanced at Irene. "No, but it would be a pleasant one," he admitted. He drew a piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to Carson. "There is the list of things Doc wanted me to get. You can get them when you order the stuff for the new set. I'm quitting."

"But Hull," Dr. Lindsay objected, clawing at empty air with his right hand, "you can't leave now! Think of the discovery we're about to make."

Hull shook his head determinedly. "It's getting too—well, a little too wild around

here for me. And besides, I've been wanting to get away, and on my own."

Dr. Lindsay saw that it was useless to argue and turned to vent his anger on Carson. "Well?" he asked.

Irene gripped Carson's arm, cautioning him to hold his temper. He wheeled and with Irene's hand in his, started toward the doorway.

"Irene, you stay here," called Dr. Lindsay. "And hurry back, Carson!"

Carson halted in midstride. The pleasant drive he and Irene had planned and which they had intended concluding with dinner at some roadside inn, a musical show, then supper in town, vanished from their immediate future. His disappointment was obvious, and changed slowly to anger.

"Hi, Carson!" Hull retorted with a mocking fling of his arm that was supposed to pass as a salute. Then he left to gather his belongings.

Irene took a firm grip on Carson's arm, glanced angrily at her father, then started through the doorway.

"Irene!" called her father. "I told you to stay here!"

She gave no sign that she had heard. Her sole object seemed to be to get Carson and her father separated as soon and as completely as possible. She and Carson left the house, followed by a running stream of sulphurous comments on the close similarities of daughters and right arms.

SEARCH FOR A CURE

THE car sped quietly toward town with Carson at the wheel. Typically, Hull had seated himself in front with the others, though he made no effort to add anything to the conversation.

"Why is Father's 'habit' so troublesome?" Irene asked, "when ours isn't." She flushed a bit.

Carson shrugged. "The only reason I

can think of is that the broadcast wave was tuned to his mind-wave. There is a general likeness in all mind-waves, so naturally a wave that affected him, would affect us too, but to a lesser degree."

"I wish I hadn't left him alone," she said. "Do you think there's any danger of him hurting himself?"

"Not much," Carson comforted. "The power is off and I think he'll stay away from the switch." Then he chuckled. "But his right hand is sure offending him."

Irene smiled with him, but not very happily. When they reached the outskirts of the business district, Hull asked to be released. Then Irene and Carson continued on their way across town to the electrical supply house.

The clerk scanned the list Carson had dictated with some surprise. Then he looked up apologetically.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't get some of these things for you before tomorrow morning. I'll have to order them. Someone phoned in not more than five minutes ago and placed an order that is almost a duplicate of this one. There isn't much call for some of these things, and we don't keep a large stock of them."

Carson glanced at Irene. Her eyes met his with puzzled understanding. Carson turned back to the clerk.

"Can I see this other order?" he asked quickly.

The clerk shook his head. "I'm sorry. But some of our customers like their orders to be kept confidential, so we've made it a rule not to reveal the contents of any orders to a third party."

Carson had to be satisfied with that answer. "Well, you'll get these things out to Dr. Lindsay's the first thing in the morning, then?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir," the clerk replied as they turned to go. "Nice day, isn't it? I'm sorry, sir."

Carson turned back to the clerk, questioningly. "Yes, it is; but what in the

devil is there about that to be sorry for?"

The clerk looked puzzled. "I don't know," he confessed. "It seems to be a bad habit I've fallen into. I'm sorry, sir." He ceased speaking with an expression of annoyance. "There it is again! I'm sorry, sir." He frowned and closed his jaws with a determined snap.

Carson hastened out of the store with Irene. They halted at the sidewalk and looked about with sharpened sight. And in both their faces something like fear was evident. Irene clung to Carson's arm.

It was she who first saw what they both feared.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to a man who walked on the extreme edge of the sidewalk.

He was crouched, holding something tightly in both hands and mumbling to himself. Occasionally he glanced up at the stores with fearful eyes. Then they saw that he was holding his wallet—in his left hand. His right was busily trying to open it, and the man's face was beaded with perspiration.

They watched him go down the street much in the manner of a person walking between two rows of tethered lions. Irene faced Carson and there was fright in her eyes.

"He's—he's like father," she said.

Carson nodded. "That set has more power than we suspected," he agreed, worried.

They winced at the sound of screeching, breaking metal and turned to see a truck coasting toward the curb, gears stripped. The driver must have tried to shift while speeding.

Carson urged Irene toward their car. "Come on! We've got to be going. I'd like to look around town, but it might be dangerous and we've got to get to work to repair this damage."

He drove back through town, alert for any signs of others being affected. His heart sank at their number! People on

the streets seemed nervous, worried. Time after time they repeated the actions upon which they had been engaged when Dr. Lindsay's fatal broadcast overtook them. They wanted to stop . . . tried to! But it was ingrained habit and they couldn't. The broadcast waves had reinforced their nervous energy and grooved deep channels into their nervous tissues . . . created new habits in a moment that had the tenacity of those which had taken years to form.

It wasn't until they were well on the road outside of town and speeding toward the Lindsay home that Irene spoke. And then her voice was quiet with the realization of the seriousness of the situation.

"Dan," she said in a low voice. "Some of those men and women are as bad as father, and others are more like we are. Why?"

He hesitated, then offered: "I don't know, unless it is because the wave was tuned more closely to their thoughts and nervous impulses."

She pondered his answer, thinking so deeply that she repeatedly pursed her mouth as though to receive a kiss. Carson saw her facial exercises and for a moment feared she had gone mad, then realized the cause and stopped the car to cater to her appealing habit.

DR. LINDSAY was waiting for them. He had his right arm fastened securely in a sling as he ran to meet them.

"Did you get the materials?" he questioned eagerly, and when Carson shook his head, snapped, "Why not?"

"George Hull phoned an order in ahead of us," Irene interrupted. "They have ordered more for us and will deliver them in the morning."

Dr. Lindsay grumbled, but his dissatisfaction had no target, and they ignored it as best they could. It wasn't until they had reached the house that he turned and admitted that he had been worried about them. He gestured, with his left hand,

toward the radio, which was running merrily.

"I've been listening to news reports," he said. "Is it as bad in town as they say?"

"It'll be worse," Carson said gloomily. "The effect will be cumulative. Now, people are irritated, annoyed and some of them are worried. A little later they will all be worried and some will go mad. Business and communications will come to a standstill. Nothing can be accomplished if people are guided by habit every time they try to think."

"But are there many accidents?" Dr. Lindsay pursued. "Have many — been killed?"

Carson looked at the doctor, saw clearly the trend the older man's thoughts had taken, and felt a quick sympathy.

"We saw a few automobile accidents," he replied more gently. "But we didn't see anybody killed."

Dr. Lindsay turned away, uncomfortable. "We'd better get started," he said. "I phoned to town for a metal-worker to come out and help us shield the laboratory and fix helmets to protect ourselves. Should have done that before! And I should have phoned that order in, instead of sending you to town. We've lost twelve hours!"

"You couldn't know Hull would do a trick like that," said Carson. "And at that time, we didn't know anybody but ourselves was affected."

"Should have known that too!" the doctor bitterly incriminated himself.

Suddenly the music ceased coming from the radio, usurped by the quick, excited voice of a new announcer. "Further reports on the strange affliction that has struck the Midwest: The original, and first reports indicated that the contagion — if that is what it is — was confined to a roughly circular area including parts of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. But additional reports have extended the afflicted area to include Denver and parts of the prairie and mountain states; New Orleans and a

large area of the southwest, south and southeast; and the entire Atlantic seaboard from Jacksonville, Florida to Newport, Rhode Island. Further reports, unconfirmed, state that an additional zone of affliction exists on the Pacific Coast extends down through Mexico and over to Cuba, and possibly, to Newfoundland.

"Scientists are unwilling to comment until they have had more time to study the affliction, but Professor Madison of Midwestern University hazarded the opinion that this affliction which has spread over the country like wildfire, might be an example of mass hysteria similar to the dancing manias that spread throughout Europe in the Middle Ages."

The voice of the announcer was gone in another moment and the music returned, but none of the three seemed to hear it. Dr. Lindsay and Carson stared at each other; Irene watched them with a puzzled frown.

"Skip distances?" suggested Carson hesitantly.

Dr. Lindsay nodded. "Must be. That means that the broadcast will effect people in concentric circular zones all around the earth."

"What do you mean?—'Skip distances?'" Irene demanded. "Do you mean that all people will be affected?"

"Short waves, such as we were using, travel more nearly in a straight line than ordinary frequencies. They leave the earth's surface as it curves, and extend upward until they strike the Heaviside layer, where they are reflected back to the surface again. That leaves some areas untouched, but gives them greater range."

A truck rattled up the drive with a load of galvanized sheet metal, and came to a halt near the garage. Two men got out and approached the house. Dr. Lindsay went to meet them.

By offering higher wages and a bonus, he was able to persuade the men to remain and work all night. The doctor was very

little help, because at best his arm was troublesome, and fatigue seemed to aggravate the affliction. But Carson and the others kept on until past midnight. The ceiling and most of the walls were covered with sheet metal that was grounded. And in addition, they had constructed one metal helmet that would fit over the head and protect the wearer. One more was needed and Carson was at work on that.

He reached for the shears, only to find that the others were using them. He straightened his back wearily and reached for a cigarette as the metal-worker's helper brought them back.

"Hello, honey," Carson greeted mechanically. "Got a kiss?"

The helper's jaw dropped as he regarded Carson with startled curiosity. "Wh-what did you say?" he stammered.

"Nothing," Carson denied quickly—too quickly. He took the shears from the helper's lax fingers.

The helper returned to the tinsmith and Carson heard him giving a whispered report. Carson listened so intently that his habit again possessed his tongue. "Hello, honey. Got a kiss?" he mumbled to himself, and immediately decided it was time to retire.

THE MORNING was bright and a lot more cheerful than the thoughts of either Carson or Dr. Lindsay. They found the work finished and the tinsmith and his helper asleep, respectively, on the divan and overstuffed chair and before they awakened, the delivery truck arrived from the supply house with the materials they needed. Carson worked in the laboratory while Dr. Lindsay went to pay the workmen. Then the two of them worked until noon, assembling and testing the set.

At last Dr. Lindsay looked up with satisfaction, removed his helmet and started away to get one of the rabbits for experimentation. Carson checked to see that all the switches were off—that Dr. Lindsay's

right hand hadn't escaped and done a few things on its own without the doctor's conscious volition. Then he straightened and raised his hands to remove his own helmet. It was uncomfortable.

Dr. Lindsay opened the door, then crumpled unconscious to the floor. Carson stared frozenly, hands still on his helmet. Slowly he lowered his hands and went to the doctor's side. He felt for the older man's pulse.

In a moment he had been reassured by the strong, steady rhythm. He tried to force water between the unconscious man's teeth, and succeeded. But Dr. Lindsay only choked weakly and didn't revive. He seemed asleep, so deeply asleep that it was like death. Only the automatic functions such as breathing and heart action continued.

Carson stood up and looked around, puzzled. He saw the open door and remembered the coincidence of its being opened and the beginning of the doctor's trance-like state. He dragged the doctor into the laboratory and shut the door.

Dr. Lindsay moved restlessly, then sat up with a sleepy yawn. He looked around, turned angrily on Carson.

"Why did you let me sleep?" he demanded. "We have too much work to do to waste time. Get busy!"

For a moment, Carson considered re-opening the door, then he was interested in the fact that the doctor seemed to believe he had slept for hours.

"How long do you think you slept, anyway?" he asked.

"What difference does that make? It was too long, at any rate!" But a puzzled frown had furrowed his forehead. He turned to Carson. "It's a queer after-effect, to say the least," he said. "The last thing I remember is going for a rabbit so we could safely check the set. Did we finish that?"

Carson shook his head. "It wasn't an after-effect," he contradicted. "I wasn't effected—because I was still wearing my

helmet. And you weren't out more than a few minutes."

Dr. Lindsay stared at him unbelievably, then something in the younger man's face must have convinced him. Fear came into his eyes, and he started toward the door.

"Irene!" he cried.

Carson grasped his shoulder, held him tightly. "Put on your helmet, you fool! This is Hull's work! And don't be a child! You weren't hurt; so probably Irene is all right. Hull wouldn't have any reason for killing." But remembering Hull's cold lack of emotion beneath the friendly, bantering exterior, he wasn't so sure. After all, Dr. Lindsay had been out only a few minutes and there was no way of determining how long others might have been under the influence of the broadcast.

They found Irene slumped over the breakfast table. Carson carried her back to the shielded laboratory. At first their ministrations had no effect; then she moaned and opened her eyes. She sat up and felt tenderly of the side of her face. She drew a handkerchief from the pocket of her apron and wiped the marmalade from her bruised cheek. But she didn't speak.

"Are you all right, Irene?" asked her father anxiously.

"I—I guess so," she replied indecisively. "What happened?"

Carson's relief made him feel weak, in need of a stimulant. He reached for a cigarette.

"Hello, honey," he said. "Got a kiss?"

Irene looked at him questioningly, but she didn't respond. Carson forgot all about the kiss. He grabbed Dr. Lindsay's shoulder.

"She's cured!" he shouted, then, remembering her affliction, was a little regretful.

But Dr. Lindsay was stripping the bonds from his own right arm. He watched it suspiciously for a few seconds, then cried happily, "So am I!"

But in the excitement, Carson was reminded forcibly several times that he him-

self wasn't. Dr. Lindsay left hastily, and when the door was opened, Irene relaxed again into a deep slumber, to awaken only a moment later when the doctor closed the door.

THE STRANGE WAVELENGTH

SHE LOOKED at Carson angrily as though blaming him. He hastened to clear himself of the charge and was busily engaged constructing a third helmet when the doctor returned. He placed the rabbit on the table and only Carson's prompt action prevented him from turning on the set. Patiently, Carson explained the necessity of waiting until Irene was provided with some protection.

"I wish Hull had stayed with me," the doctor complained, waiting impatiently. Then, with a glance at Carson, added, "He's intelligent. See how quickly he found out how to cure those artificial habits!"

"Sure," Carson agreed. "But you can bet that he's getting something out of it."

The doctor's face flushed with anger. "Carson!" he snapped. "It's small of a person to give way to professional envy—or, perhaps I should say, semi-professional, envy on your part."

"He's getting something out of it," Carson stated without looking up from his work.

Dr. Lindsay started to answer when Irene interrupted.

"Can't you quit fighting?" she demanded. "George Hull probably *has* a profitable angle on the affair, and he *is* smart. So you're both right and you're both wrong."

Dr. Lindsay drummed irritably on the table with his fingers while Carson worked, but they were both silent.

"All right, Irene. Try this for size," Carson invited, offering the hastily-built helmet.

She put the clumsy contrivance on her head and immediately Dr. Lindsay turned to his set. Eagerly he closed the various

switches, revealing in the fact that it was not from habit. Then he watched the rabbit with anticipation.

Nothing happened. The anticipation faded from his face. Carson felt a like disappointment. He had rather counted on being able to stymie Hull—had, in fact, been looking forward to it.

He crossed to the window and looked out while Dr. Lindsay worked over the set. He wondered what it was that had caused Hull to smile, and decide to proceed on his own. Carson saw only the lawn and shrubbery, the garage, the trees, and—the aeries of KKOM. He turned quickly.

"Irene, open the door," he said.

She looked puzzled, but did as he directed. Immediately the set on the table crackled with an overload and the circuit-breaker cut off the current. The set was dead and so was the rabbit. It crumpled over to the tabletop, twitched, then lay with the still flabbiness of death.

"That's it!" shouted the doctor. "Interference! The wave my set broadcasts interferes with another and creates the mind-wave reinforcement. But what is the other wave?"

"KKOM—wavelength 30.01," grumbled Carson. "At least, that's the short wavelength they were using yesterday. And they must be using it again." He was looking at the rabbit. He raised his head to ask, "None of the animals died yesterday, did they?"

Dr. Lindsay shook his head and started to speak, but a figure appeared in the doorway.

"All gathered together and waiting for me! Isn't that nice?" said Hull cheerfully. He had a pistol in his hand. He stepped into the room and called: "Here they are, Carney."

There was no answer and Hull shouted. "Carney! I have them!"

A small heavily-set man came into the room, chortling. "You know, Hull," he

informed gleefully, "Some of the boys grabbed the First National's armored car. They just passed on the way to the station with a load."

"Get one of your men to finish this bunch off," Hull ordered gruffly.

The good-humored man looked at the two men and Irene. His eyes lingered half-regretfully on Irene; then he shrugged. "Well, if they know too much, they know too much," he said wisely. "But it's a shame she's so pretty." He left the room.

"A small-timer," commented Hull, and Carson thought, almost apologetically, "But he'll do for the first stages."

"What's the idea, Hull?" asked Carson.

"Just going to use the power we stumbled onto," said Hull. "And to do that, I need what is commonly termed money. But that is to be had for the picking up, and I connected with Carney and his mob so I would have help."

"You mean you're looting the town?" Irene interrupted.

"This town first; others in turn," said Hull, "until I have enough to start on nations. By the way, Doc, do you know that your little broadcast yesterday played hell with the European War and the 'China Incident?' They can't stop shooting. But by the time I get to them, they'll be shooting at the ones I tell them are targets."

IN SPITE of his easy manner, Hull was watchful and the pistol never wavered. Carson guessed from the other's words that Hull didn't yet know that the artificial habits were eliminated by the second broadcast. Carson looked steadily at Irene, trying to tell her something. He glanced several times at the door, at the same time frowning at her. At last she nodded that she understood. Carson edged imperceptibly toward Hull.

Unknowingly, Dr. Lindsay aided by asking, "How did you guess it, Hull?"

"I didn't guess," said Hull. "I drew conclusions from the facts. I knew the

transmission line of the broadcasting company passed in front of this house and that they were re-broadcasting at the time. So I concluded that the accidental modulation of the 30.01 by your wave was what did the work. I experimented, and found that the higher power wasn't necessary—just gave more range. And I found that closer modulation induced sleep or unconsciousness. Now, I'm harvesting."

"But it's the interference!" objected the doctor.

Carson was so intent on moving forward unnoticeably that his preoccupation allowed habit to claim his tongue.

"Hello, honey. Got a kiss?"

There was no response from Irene, but Hull said, "You're both shameless!"

Dr. Lindsay leaped to the switch and Irene ran to the door and closed it. Carson jumped at Hull, struck the gun aside before Hull pulled the trigger. The lead splintered the wall. Carson slashed out with his fist, felt it strike. Hull staggered. His helmet fell off and rolled on the floor.

But he recovered his balance and struck Carson with the pistol. Carson went down heavily. Irene ran to his side as Hull backed away and once more covered them with his gun. They were right back where they had started. Their efforts had canceled out perfectly. The set was running but, by itself, was ineffective. And Irene had closed the door.

Hull looked around at the shielding. "Thanks, Irene," he mocked. "Lucky for me that this room is shielded."

He stooped for his helmet, but Carson was sitting up. At the dreary disappointment on his face, habit claimed Hull again. He saluted sloppily with a grin. "Hi Carson!"

The door burst open and Carney and another man ran into the room. The set on the table crackled and the circuit-breaker snapped as Hull folded over and fell to the floor.

Carson snatched for the pistol that fell

from Hull's lifeless hand and before the other two men could understand what had happened, he placed a slug in the chest of Carney.

Carney's companion leaped out of the room as his chief collapsed. Carson tried to follow, but he heard the clash of gears and an automobile shot down the drive for reinforcements. They heard it skid, then the screech of tearing metal. Dr. Lindsay went out to look.

"You shouldn't have taken the chance," Irene rebuked Carson.

Carson's knees felt weak. He sat down, drew Irene to him "Got a kiss?" he asked, then added, "And that wasn't habit!"

She hesitated, then acceded. "Father and George Hull didn't seem to be talking about the same thing," she said with a puzzled frown.

"They weren't," Carson agreed. "And it's

lucky Hull didn't find the thing your father did. The complete shielding of the room except for the open door, gives the other broadcast wave a beam effect. And the interference of the two waves is deadly. That modulation of his was bad enough. If he had ambitions from that, no telling what your father's discovery would have given him."

Dr. Lindsay returned. "Hull's transmitter was on that truck that crashed," he informed.

Carson leaned back, wishing for a cigaret. "Hello, honey. Got a kiss?"

Irene hesitated, then offered her lips. The doctor frowned but turned away without speaking.

Carson sighed when she pushed him away. "I'm sorry Hull cured you," he said sadly. "It'll take years to condition you out of that hesitation."

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Where Editor and Readers Exchange Thoughts

SCIENCE FICTION invites you to write letters to this department, giving your views and criticisms. Address your letters to EDITOR, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson St., New York City. Write us today!

Dear Reader:

So many of you have written in complimenting Frank R. Paul on his excellent covers for SCIENCE FICTION, that we have decided to use his work also for the covers of our companion magazine, FUTURE FICTION. Speaking of FUTURE FICTION, I'd like you to write to me and tell me which of the two books you like better, and why. It'll help me a lot in planning future issues of both magazines. Although there is a different variety of departments and articles in each, you will find the same quality of science-fiction in FUTURE FICTION that you read in the publication now before you. Stories for both magazines are picked from the same pile of manuscripts. If you're one of those fans who require a book a month, you'll of course buy FUTURE FICTION during those months between issues of SCIENCE FICTION—and don't forget the SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY. The first issue, featuring a long novel and several shorter stories, with smooth edges and no advertising, 144 pages, is now available. If your newsdealer is sold out, you can get your copy by sending a quarter to our editorial offices.

We start off this issue of THE TELEPATH with a special BRITISH EMPIRE SUPPLEMENT—several letters of interest from our readers in the English-speaking nations outside of the United States. Hope

this idea sponsors more letters from our foreign fans!

Now I just want to close with another plea for you to write to me about our magazine—make it a rule to comment on every issue, and you'll make us very happy!

CHARLES D. HORNIG,
Editor, SCIENCE FICTION,
60 Hudson Street,
New York City.

"ONE OF THESE DAYS"

Dear Mr. Hornig:

Right near where I work (in the South Australian Public Trustee's Office, State Bank Building, Pirrie St., Adelaide) is a small book-shop which I pass two or three times per day. In the window of this shop there is always a display of magazines of nearly every type, including a fair sprinkling of science-fiction mags. These always caught my eye (I suppose the bright covers, mostly by Paul, saw to that) and I kept saying to myself, "Now one of these days, I'll buy one of those things and see if they are really as bad as they look."

Well, two days ago, Friday (payday), I bought one, and purely by chance, selected SCIENCE FICTION as being the most likely-looking choice. Suffice it to say that a good angel must have been watching me at the time, for the March issue of SCIENCE FICTION is something to write home, or rather to America, about.

The stories are all good, clean, clear, and

exciting, without being too much of a strain on the nervous system. These horror yarns, in which bee-you-tiful goils are slaughtered by the strange Secret Cult which is undermining the whole nay-shun invariably cause minor earth-quakes in the Thompson homestead.

The yarn which I liked most was the "Scourage of a Single Cell." This story was quite feasible, well-written, of a rather unusual plot, and contained just sufficient love interest to be sufficient, but not overwhelming.

This love interest was a bit over-done in "Sky Trap." It only needed Alice to have suffered a fate worse than death to have made this part of the plot so ridiculous as to overwhelm the clever scientific ending.

I would like to know if there is anything of a Fantasy Fan club in Adelaide. If not, can't we do something about it?

BRUCE THOMPSON,
167 Greenhill Rd.,
Tusmore Gardens,
Adelaide, South Australia.

(Needless to say, I'm glad that your "good angel" pointed to SCIENCE FICTION when you finally decided to buy one of those lurid-looking magazines! We find that cover-appeal is the biggest drawing card to secure new readers. After all, the great percentage of pulp magazines are sold on the stands, and they must compete with each other for "eyestrikability"—hence the lurid reds and yellows.

We try to minimize the love interest in our stories, using only enough to make the yarns realistic—for where there are both a hero and heroine, love is likely to creep in, you know.

I'm certain that there are other science-fiction fans in Adelaide, and I hope those of our readers who read your letter will get in touch with you, for the purpose of forming a local club and science-fiction circle.—EDITOR.)

FOR CANADIAN ESPERANTISTS

Dear Editor:

Just a line to let you know that though many Canadians interested in Esperanto have joined associations in England or the U. S. A., we do have our own national association. The address is: Canadian Esperanto Association, G. P. O. Box 272, Toronto, Ontario.

I don't know about the other provinces, but quite a few Ontario cities have their own local clubs. I found it quite easy to learn. I liked Butler's "Step by Step." It was witty as well as instructive, with lots of little verses and jokes, interspersed with more serious paragraphs.

Anytime your science-fiction writers run short of a plot, suggest that they read "The Secret Doctrine" and "Isis Unveiled" by H. P. Blavatsky. If they don't get some new ideas, I'll offer to eat the volumes page by page. In case the readers may be interested, these books can be borrowed from the Theosophical Lending Library, 52 Isabella St., Toronto, Ontario. They have a large number of books on a wide variety of subjects, mostly of an occult and mystic nature. There is no charge for borrowing.

Some of these books certainly give one a new outlook on life. Personally, I am quite intrigued with the reincarnation theory—that the body is only a "coat of skin" which is discarded when this life is over, and a new one taken on at the next incarnation. Imagine being here again to live some of these science-fiction stories or review your past lives "when you were a jelly-fish and I was a clam!"

I think it would be quite possible to visit other worlds and times in the "ghost body," but I can't see how one could interfere in a physical way. It would be more like being a spectator at the movies. You could see and hear, but your presence would mean nothing to the actors.

I wonder just what makes a scientifiction writer or fan? There must be aspects in

their horoscopes to the newer planets (astrologically speaking). Neptune is supposed to represent the weird and Uranus the futuristic. Pluto represents Co-operation whether on the higher plane as world Brotherhood or gangsters in its lower phases.

Would some of your writers object to giving their birth-date? I'm sure many readers would be interested.

J. E. WALKER,
Box 23, S. Porcupine,
Ontario, Canada.

(I know that there are many Esperantists among science-fiction fans—as proven by reaction to the recent publication of articles concerning the international language—and those of our “Esperanto-science-fiction” readers living in Canada will be glad to get the address of the local organization, if they are not already members. The Esperanto Association of North America, 1410 H Street N. W., Washington, D. C., includes many Canadians also, having the entire continent for its coverage. Thanks for informing us about the Canadian Esperanto Association.

The editor of this magazine is now at work on an Esperanto project—the translation of “Alice in Wonderland.” Even non-Esperantists can understand the translated title: “La Aventuroj de Alico en Mirlando”—except, perhaps, for the “mir,” which denotes wonder.

Your notes concerning weird stories, theology, reincarnation, and astrology are interesting. Many science-fiction fans—those who appreciate the imaginative but are not meticulously scientific—are fans also of these subjects. We personally must reserve our opinion on non-scientific philosophy, for obvious reasons.

It may not be a good thing for science-fiction authors to look into other people's work when they run short of plots—we think that they get more original results by delving a little deeper into their own

minds. This being a scientific magazine—supposedly, anyway—we cannot use stories based on theories that are not scientifically tenable.

Let's hear from you regularly!—EDITOR.)

CONGRATS FROM AFRICA

Dear Mr. Hornig:

So sorry to be so late with my heartiest congratulations on your new science-fiction magazine. It's really a fine example of what a science-fiction magazine should be. As for the name—SCIENCE FICTION—goodness knows why no one ever picked it before.

I have been reading science-fiction for the last nine years and have written frequent letters to the old Wonder. So you may remember me. Anyway, keep up the good work.

Now for some criticisms:

It's a good thing you've got Paul to do your illustrations. He's certainly one of the best science-fiction has got. It's quite a pleasant change to see so many new writers in your mag. After all, the mag can't always remain the property of Binder, Schneeman, Cummings, Coblenz, etc. And it's a change for the better. It's no use me giving my views on the issue I've just completed, as it is the December 1939 issue, although the latest out here. Fact remains it was hunky-dory.

FLASH: I've just seen the first issue of FUTURE FICTION. All I can say is: “Thank D. A. (Double Action) for Hornig.”

S. B. FINE,
Surf Hotel, 518 Point Rd.,
Durban, Natal,
South Africa.

(Many times in the past, the name SCIENCE FICTION was considered by various publishers, but until the present magazine came into existence, said publishers always kept away from it, believing that the word “science” on the cover would

scare away pulp readers. But that theory has been exploded by the satisfactory success of the magazine now in your hands.

We hope you'll remain our South African correspondent.—EDITOR.)

MORE FLOWERS FOR PAUL

Dear Sir:

As I write, I have the first six issues of SCIENCE FICTION on the table before me—a bundle of books to delight the heart of any scientifiictionist. Yes, I have finally written to tell you what an excellent little job you are turning out. One, of course, is immediately satisfied by seeing the cover and a goodly portion of the inside illustrations painted and drawn by the king of his line—Frank R. Paul.

After that very excellent first impression, the stories, as reminiscent of the type found in the old Wonder Stories, leaves a feeling of some excellent and interesting science-fiction read, in ones mind. And then, of course, a choice selection of interesting letters in "The Telepath" with perhaps an article thrown in as well, finished off an hour's reading of an excellent magazine.

Mr. Paul, can't you think up something after the style of your "Fourth Dimensional Fate" cover on the old Wonder? And please—where do you see a red sky? Keep your skies blue!

Yes, siree, Mr. Hornig, you've got something there! And by the way! As you know, we are at war! Rah, rah, rah—wave the flag a little harder, boys!! And so, when you resume your interrupted overseas sales, you might send your magazine starting from your last issue to be sent here, and send two issues per shipment until they catch up to the latest issue. That is the only way, I think, Mr. Hornig. "The Futurian Society of Australia" is very cut up over having lost all the American science-fiction magazines, especially yours, and I hope that you realize that the war is not only unkind to you, but to us as well. We lose your excellent magazines until the war

is over. Australia is sorry!! Cheerio!

J. KEITH MOXAN,
%YMCA, Edward Street,
Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia.

(Appreciation such as you show in this letter gives us no end of encouragement! But in order to keep us from getting a swelled head, you should always include at least one brick-bat! That is one of the essentials of a fan letter. Ask our American readers, if you don't think so! Isn't there something just a little nasty you could throw our way?

Regarding the war being unfair to us as well as to our readers in the belligerent nations—it's this editor's opinion that war is unfair to everyone involved. We only wish that the difficulties of shipping magazines were the greatest of war's curses.—EDITOR.)

THE BIGGER, THE MORE!

Dear Mr. Hornig:

I have been reading SCIENCE FICTION for a long while, just how long I can't say, but I have never tired of your mag. Your last issue was as good as all former issues, and, in some ways, better.

For one thing, enlarging "The Telepath" was a smart move. The bigger it is, the more letters you can print and more fans will be pleased.

Now for a little tearing apart. "The Voice Commands" was good, but I, personally, am a little tired of the word "war." You can understand why, of course. It's a horrible thing and we (the Canucks) are engaged in one right now. I'll fight if they need me, so don't think I'm lacking in loyalty to my country.

Your Canadian readers might be interested to know that a club has been formed for Canuck fans. Just get in touch with me and all details will promptly be sent you.

Thanks a lot for letting me take up your

time, Mr. Hornig, but you can expect me back again soon. Before I close—ignore letters like the one you received from Woolley of England. He is a fool and a (censored) to make such rash statements without any reason. As a fellow Britisher, I apologize for him—if he hasn't got the guts to do so himself.

TED WHITE,
73 Taunton Rd.,
Toronto, Ont., Canada.

(Yes, I can understand your hatred for the word "war." Enough said.

I'm glad that you intend to "come back" to this department. I'm sure that many Canadian fans will write to you in regard to your club.—EDITOR.)

MORE CUMMINGS WANTED

Dear Sir:

Could you please put more of Cummings' Atom stories in the *SCIENCE FICTION* magazine? Those stories are somewhat different from others, so they are not monotonous. On reading his stories, you look forward to his next story.

I will be sending in my story in typed form according to instructions next week.

FRANK EGAN,
High Prairie,
Alberta, Canada.

(You will notice that we use quite a bit of Cummings' works. He is one of the oldest and best-liked authors in science-fiction and some fans can never get enough of his style of composition.

Your last paragraph will give our other readers who aspire to become authors, a hint that this magazine is always anxious to give careful consideration to manuscripts sent in to us free-lance.—EDITOR.)

COMMENTS FROM ENGLAND

Dear Sir:

Through the courtesy of an American

friend, who sent it to me, I have just finished reading a copy of *SCIENCE FICTION*, and I thought perhaps you would like to hear my reactions to the stories therein. I'll begin at the beginning.

Cover: Very pretty and quite eye-catching, but, where does it come in the magazine? The robot seems to be one in the "Women's World"—but just where did the motor-bikes come in?

Planet of the Knob-Heads: Excuse me, but I never laughed so much in all my life! Fancy the wife saying: "Have some more toast, my beautiful knob!" Believe it or not, every expression containing the word "knob" made me laugh out loud. A real humorous story, that! Let's get knob-uled!! Oh, dear! And I didn't care for the casual expression of "It took us seven years to come," etc. This over-casualness drew one's attention to the imaginative side of the story and emphasized it—thus making it "far-fetched."

The Atom Prince: This story was well-written. As I am not out to pick scientific holes in scientifiction, I can only say I thoroughly enjoyed reading this and give it place number one. A jolly good story.

The Women's World: All right to the last paragraph—and then faded out like a pricked balloon! Six hundred years without the company of the stronger sex—then it all comes back in a few seconds! I should think sex, and all its attachments, will have died out in six hundred years. Good story with a weak ending!

Lever of Destruction: The good thing about this story was that it was complete. The author gave considerable thought to the plot and succeeded in introducing a deep one! Yes, I liked it. The machine for smashing the atom may or may not have been an actual fact, and this very possibility makes a complete story.

In spite of my criticism—I like the magazine.

If any of your readers would like to correspond with me about scientifiction, the

uncanny, mysticism, etc., I'd be glad to hear from them.

A. WILLWARD,
70 Leicester Rd., Cheetham,
Manchester, England.

(Regarding the covers of science-fiction, I'm sorry that they puzzled you—but they were not at all written around the stories in the magazines—not since the second number. We have found that Paul does his best work when left a free rein as to the subject matter of his paintings, and not limited by the ideas of the authors. His imagination is up to the par of the most fantastic-thinking writer.

We agree with you about sex not changing in six hundred years. Perhaps Mr. Cooke intended to convey the idea that sex had not disappeared from the women of the future, in his story, but merely lay dormant over that period of centuries.

I hope that your request for correspondents will soon cause an overflow in your mail-box.—EDITOR.)

A CANADIAN VERSUS AN ENGLISHMAN

My dear Hornig:

I know it—I'm late with that promised letter touching on science-fiction. I wouldn't be writing it even now if it weren't for a certain letter in the June issue, a letter which I think no right thinking American—and I say this as meaning every inhabitant of these American continents—should be weak-kneed enough as to let pass without some kind of comment. I refer, of course, to that particularly obnoxious communication of a certain Englishman, to wit, one G. B. Woolley.

Really, Mr. Hornig, and fellow fans, I am surprised that anyone who reads science-fiction could be so narrow-minded, cheap enough, as to write such an apparently infantile letter! I had always thought that readers of this future literature were very broad-minded, very friendly, always ready

to extend a ready hand of good fellowship to one and all. I had thought that we were educated enough to at least, when aroused, coach our terms in something approaching a gentlemanly literacy. Apparently, I am most sorry to say, I am mistaken.

Certainly, (Mr. Woolley) you should believe the English to have the greatest nation on Earth. You should be patriotic. But remember, others love their country just as much as you—and to them, their country is the greatest. Must you flaunt it in their faces? But what of us in Canada, in the United States? We are of the same stock as you. We are descended from a common heritage. If we are cowards, then you must be also. If I wanted to be mean, I could say Canada is the greatest nation on Earth! But that would take in our brothers to the south, for only a silly boundary line makes us two.

LESLIE A. CROUTCH,
41 Waubek Street,
Parry Sound, Ont., Canada.

(I'm sorry, Mr. Croutch, that I could not print your entire letter, as per your request, but it descended too far into personalities—therefore I present to the readers only the few paragraphs above.

After all, Mr. Woolley's letter was unthoughtful, to say the least, and I felt that a little chastisement from the letters of his fellow-fans would do him some good. I am sure that after he reads science-fiction a while longer, he will become more of a cosmopolite, and lose some of his fiery prejudice.

You are more than right in stating that Canadians and we below the border are of the same "common heritage" with the English. I'd like to go a bit further and suggest that *all* men are of a "common heritage," if we go back even further. A realization of this is the most necessary thing, in my opinion, to bring about permanent world peace, eventually. "All men are created equal," remember—so let us not condemn

even those whom we fight—for the common people of all nations are peace-loving. Let us not condemn any group of people who may have been so unfortunate as to be misled by a few power-mad leaders.

I think that one of the most important links between science-fiction and Esperanto is that both groups have strong cosmopolitan attitudes—they realize that *all* men are of the same stock, with the same inherent emotions and desires.—EDITOR.)

THE STORY COMES FIRST!

Sir:

It seems to me that since the average reader buys magazines chiefly for their entertainment value, the policy of SCIENCE FICTION should be, primarily, to concern itself with cleverness of plot and smoothness of narration, rather than absolute scientific accuracy—in the event that such accuracy is not compatible with the requirements of certain situations in the story.

True—most of us prefer a solid basis of demonstrable fact in our science-fiction—but not, I think, at the expense of the story interest. We feel, I believe, that, after all, the story is the thing and that if we must have scientific facts to ponder, we can readily obtain them from any good text book on any given subject at our Public Libraries.

By all means, let your authors cling to accepted facts and theories whenever possible—but, if one of them should write a good story based on the premises that the Earth is a cube and the moon really a silver dollar—print it! What good is a reader's imagination if it can't be stretched?

JOHN I. HODGES,
822 Seventh Ave., S. E.,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

(I certainly agree with you that "the story's the thing," but remember that a story cannot be good without being realistic—that is, it must convince the reader at the time he is reading it. In order for a story

to be realistic, it cannot be based on impossibilities. Our authors can give their imaginations full rein, when they write—they can theorize upon anything their hearts desire, as long as they do not violate known facts. We know that the world is round—that is a proven fact—and for an author to state otherwise in a serious story would take his yarn out of the science-fiction class and make it a fairy-tale.

Not that I have anything against fairy-tales! Just between you and me—and a hundred thousand readers—I often re-read "Alice in Wonderland." That is my favorite fantasy. But in a science-fiction magazine, we should make some effort to live up to the first half of this compound word—don't you think so?—EDITOR.)

"IF YOU REALLY WANT TO ARGUE—"

Dear Mr. Hornig:

Much to my surprise, a letter written by myself about eight months ago (I'd almost forgotten it) is included among the collection in your current issue. The letter contained some remarks favoring English over Esperanto as an international language, and your answer to that letter hinted strongly that I didn't know much about the subject.

Okay, Mr. Hornig, if you really want to argue, I'm willing to defend my original stand. I may as well admit right at the start that my only contact with Esperanto was a small beginner's handbook on the subject; but a semi-intensive study on my part, plus some articles favoring other synthetic languages, showed quite a few weak points in the so-called "perfect" language.

Let's start with the alphabet. Certain letters bear accent marks showing differences in pronunciation, and standard printing devices aren't equipped to print these special letters, a great handicap for an international language.

The grammar, compared with English or other modern languages, is simple, but it is still unnecessarily complicated. Why, for

instance, is an accusative case needed? And why must an adjective agree with its noun in case and number? Even English, with all its faults, is simpler than this.

The method of forming the plural is also difficult. While English (with a few archaic exceptions) adds the letter "s" at the end of the word, Esperanto adds the vowel "j" (which is used as a consonant in most other languages) creating a hard to pronounce double vowel.

In my original letter, I stated that, paragraph for paragraph, Esperanto contained more syllables than English, to which you replied that the volume was the same. True, but I said syllables, not letters, and simplified spelling will help English there. For proof of my original statement, let's take the first three lessons in the aforementioned beginners' handbook. The Esperanto passages contain 60, 112, and 196 syllables respectively, the English 46, 86, and 149. In other words, where 100 syllables are necessary in Esperanto, only 76 are needed in English. English is definitely faster for speaking purposes.

One advantage claimed for Esperanto is the fact that it is made up of root words common to most European languages. So is English! English is derived from Latin, French, Scandinavian, Dutch, and every other European tongue. More than any other language in use today, English is truly international; and it is already used by 200 million people as their native tongue (a far greater number than speak any other white language) and is the second language in almost every non-English-speaking country.

A great deal of work must be done, of course, before English has anywhere near the simplicity of Esperanto, but the work is constantly under way. The language of two or three hundreds years ago was much more complicated than it is today. The changing process just needs speeding up. It is true, as you say, that in its present form, English is the most difficult of civ-

ilized languages, and that few foreigners can really master it; but even now it is one of the simplest languages when it comes to learning enough to get along.

As for this matter of expressing exact shades of meaning, I'll stick to English. There are only two ways of qualifying statements exactly; one is the use of a large vocabulary, the other is the use of a large number of words in making the statement. A large vocabulary is difficult to use, unless used constantly; and as for the other method, Esperanto is already a poor second in the syllable test. English has a definite advantage in both preciseness and conciseness.

Racial prejudice, of course, is a handicap to English; but time will probably take care of that. There is always prejudice against foreign innovations, but if other things are adopted, why not language?

If you really want a synthetic language, you might try Ido, a simplified form of Esperanto, or Interlingua, a simplified language based on Latin root words. Both are handier, easier to learn, than Esperanto.

I just got the magazine today, so haven't had time to read the stories yet. Comments on same will follow at a later date.

LYNN BRIDGES,
7730 Pitt,
Detroit, Mich.

(I'm glad that you mentioned your only knowledge of Esperanto having come from a small introductory course, although the nature of your arguments precluded a careful study of the language, anyway. Many beginners in Esperanto hold the same ideas that you have, until a little familiarity with the tongue and its values convinces them otherwise.

I admit that the accent marks used over certain letters in Esperanto are a present drawback to general use, due to the lack of the special characters in the common type-case. However, any printer who wants to use Esperanto can secure the special

characters at a very low price—so the curing of this inconvenience is not a matter of much time, but simply interest in using the language. The added ease with which Esperanto can be read, due to the use of the supersigns and consequent elimination of unnecessary letters, more than repays for the slight printing inconvenience.

Grammar cannot be eliminated altogether, you know, if you want to keep any kind of a civilized tongue—and in creating the Esperanto language, Zamenhof eliminated all the grammar possible—but there's just no getting away from the accusative case altogether!

You are a little confused concerning the Esperanto plural. The "j," pronounced as a "y" in Esperanto—as in many foreign tongues—forms the most liquid plural possible. The plural for "stato" (state), for instance, would be "stat-oj" (pronounced stat-oy). You certainly will agree that there is no difficulty in pronouncing the syllable "oy"—or, in the accusative, "oin." You mention that the "j" is a consonant in most languages. Well, you will notice that it is also used as such in Esperanto—the equivalent of the English "y"—without the "exception" of sometimes being a vowel. And while the simple "s" is not always used in the English plural—the "j" in Esperanto follows the unfailing rule of never having an exception.

I stand corrected on Esperanto having more syllables than English—but it can be spoken just as rapidly and easily as English—because the liquid syllables of Esperanto flow into each other and are "made to fit the tongue." It is true that English is also derived from other tongues, but only by accident, and not design—therefore the derivations are not those that are the *nearest* common to *all* European languages, as is the case with Esperanto.

You emphasize the point that it is only a matter of time for English to become the perfect language—but, at the rate it is going, that would take many hundreds of

years. Therefore, if we want an international *second* tongue—why not use something that can be adopted immediately, without the need of fighting down national prejudice—a tongue specifically adopted to the needs of the world? Why not this instead of trying to distort a language out of shape, to fit a purpose for which it is not suited? That's like trying to wear gloves on your feet, when there are shoes available. If you were clever enough, you could, after a tremendous amount of work, change the gloves into shoes—but why go to all that trouble when the finished product is there for the asking?

There are other languages simpler than Esperanto, but none of them compare to it for completeness *combined* with simplicity. A great man spent his life creating this tongue—and like the Constitution of the United States—it was created to such perfection that no major changes have ever been necessary.—EDITOR.)

AN ANALYSIS OF SCIENCE FICTION *Dear Mr. Hornig:*

Science-fiction is a brand of literature that has given me many very enjoyable hours. The first science-fiction one reads, he generally thinks is the best. That's because it's something new and it impresses him, after reading science-fiction over a number of years. The new ideas of science-fiction become harder to find and it's only once in a great while that a brand new basic principle is discovered. I began science-fiction as a main type of reading in 1926. Long before that I had read the "Diamond Lens," "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," and all Poe's works. I've always had a yen for science-fiction. I think the true fan, or reader of science-fiction, is made for science-fiction—not science-fiction for the reader.

I've quit science-fiction a number of times and always sooner or later come back to it, because good science-fiction is always interesting. If it contains good sound sci-

ence, it's worth reading, because to anyone interested in any or all branches of science, especially astronomy, it fires up the imagination, takes one away from this old world of sordidness, silly wars and intolerance. I'll just bet anything that you (Mr. Editor), won't find a narrow-minded person among all your readers — no sir. Because if they were, they wouldn't be reading science-fiction.

What we need today is less intolerance, more unselfishness, and science-fiction can help by showing what may sometime possibly make this world a better, more comfortable place to live in for all of us. Anyway, it's got me, and I like it!

Your magazine is a fine mag—. I don't want to tell you how to run your magazine, but I will tell you what stories I like best and why. I like stories with science in them, yes sir! I demand a fair amount of science, or else it isn't science-fiction. Best of all, I enjoy a good science-fiction puzzle yarn, and it's always interesting to imagine what, if any, life inhabits our sister planets. Fourth dimension yarns are o.k. also. I've read some good ones. I notice you always end your stories happily. That's o.k.—most every one wants their stories to end happily. But of course it isn't true to life. As for the love element in your stories, I suppose you have to have it. I would enjoy the yarns just as well without any female in the story. Surely a guy don't have to rescue a beautiful damsel and save the world as well. Guess I'm sort of an inhuman buzzard — ha, ha! I always enjoyed the cold, calculating scientist, or scientific adventure minus any frills. But you're doing a fine job. Your covers are nice, as a rule. Special features greatly enjoyed.

So thank you, Mr. Editor, for the hours of pleasant reading you throw my way and may a long prosperous career editing science-fiction be yours. Would enjoy hearing from any readers. Hobbies are science-fiction and stamp collecting.

CHET PAYFER,
Route Three,
Yale, Mich.

(This thorough analysis of science-fiction from an old-time veteran shows how this branch of literature works its way insidiously into the personalities of the fans! Once it's got you—you're a science-fiction fan for life!

Your opinions of science-fiction coincide largely with our own—particularly your statement that most people are greatly impressed by their first science-fiction stories because of the novelty of the whole thing, and often claim those particular yarns were the best ever written, because of this forceful first-impression.

We try to keep plenty of good science in the stories, without having them become dry with too many technicalities. Female interest is kept down to a minimum—but at times it is necessary to bring in a woman so that the stories may be more true to life—and all stories do not end happily. For instance, "Martian Martyrs" by John Coleridge, used in an early issue of SCIENCE FICTION, comes to my mind as a tragedy-end story.

I hope this letter brings you many correspondents.—EDITOR.)

WHAT?—CUT OUT THE DEPARTMENTS?

Cheerio, Charlie!

The March issue of SCIENCE FICTION did arrive today, and Charles, I have a kick to propel in the general direction of your office.

Charlie, I counted the pages. There were 114 of them. And those 114 precious pages were divided as follows: 18 pages of advertisements—20½ pages of readers' departments and miscellany—75½ pages of fiction and illustrations.

Charles, do you see that last figure? Do you note the horrible fact it reveals?

Charles, you are not playing fair with us readers. Out of each issue, for which we plunk down fifteen good (or counterfeit) cents, you only give us 75½ pages of superb fiction, and devote the rest of the issue over to horrible, uninteresting, dry, and unwanted advertisements and fan letters and silly fan-magazine reviews!

Charles, this has got to stop!

I decry this situation. It must cease! You must cut out all these advertisements, all these "conflict" arguments, all these fan magazine lists, all the club notes, and cut that reader-letter section down to about two pages. You must give us at least 110 pages of your usual superb, brilliant, classic, unforgettable fiction! Let's have less of this fan bunk and more classics like Edmond Hamilton's "Under the White Star."

Meanwhile, in this issue at hand I note with interest and pleasure the letter from Andrew Lenard of Hungary. I wonder if the gentleman remembers me? When last heard from in about a 1934 "Wonder Stories," he was ready to banish me and the SPWSST-FM (Society for the Prevention of Wire Staples in Scientifiction Magazines) from the face of the Earth. At any rate, I sympathize with him in his predicament; not being able to secure enough of that without which life is made miserable is indeed a fate worse than any man on earth deserves—except some.

I am mailing him today a copy of the 1939 "Yearbook." It will probably only increase his misery, showing him how many science-fiction magazines he cannot get, but it is the best I can do at the moment. Personally, I believe he places more value on certain magazines than I do, for should he ask, he can have my entire file of some "sister magazines" for the postage it will cost to mail them to him. It would be practicing banditry to ask him a cent a copy for some of them.

And too, thanks very much for the full and almost complete list of fan magazines

in "The Fantasy Fan." Especially noting the prices. Nothing is more discouraging to an amateur editor than to get, say fifty letters from new readers each asking for a free sample copy. It can't be done! (Neither does one get fifty requests. Hah!)

And a suggestion: At present, your method of printing letters and editorial comments is just a bit turned around. By that I mean italics are a little harder to read than plain type, and as the letters are usually far longer than your comment, I would like to see the letters set up in plain type while your answers and comment should be done in italics.

To finish: I believe you already know my opinion of Paul's work. Even though this letter should win the cover painting (and it will, because of its unusual merit), I wouldn't be caught dead or alive with most of the "art" Paul turns out. I don't want the painting. I wouldn't dare bring it into the house; the landlord would probably break the lease. So just send it along to Richard Meyer, 3156 Cambridge Ave., Chicago, Ill. Richard is Secretary of the Illini Fantasy Fictioneers, the fan-organization that is sponsoring and staging the 1940 Chicago World Science Fiction Convention, this summer, and he can use the painting. It will be placed with the other science-fiction material to be auctioned off to the fans at the Convention.

See you in Chicago this summer!

BOB TUCKER,
P. O. Box 260,
Bloomington, Ill.

(This letter is just a bit hard to understand. If I didn't know that Bob Tucker is fandom's leading science-fiction fan writer of articles of subtle humor, I would be completely baffled, but I must take the early part of his letter as a bit of bantering. I know he is one of the leading fans of the country and one of those fellows who constantly clamors for more and bigger departments in professional magazines.

At first, I was going to take him serious—all that stuff about cutting out the departments and ads (life-blood of the magazine)—until I found him contradicting himself later in the letter, in his appreciation of the help “The Fantasy Fan” has given fan magazine publishers—and Bob is one of the best of these.

Why do you do things like this, Bob? Suppose some fervent fan takes you seriously? Suppose someone actually believes that you want to do away with the very features that the fans have been clamoring for, for years? If we don’t hear from you again, we’ll take it you received a bomb in the mail!—EDITOR.)

MORE COBLENTZ WANTED

Dear Mr. Hornig:

I would like to cast my vote for reprints—judging from some of the new stories now appearing it would be 100% better to reprint some of the old classics.

Get Coblentz to write another long novel. His stories are tops, and “Planet of the Knob-Heads” is by far the best story you have published.

SYL BROWN, JR.

7 Arlington St.

Cambridge, Mass.

(We will study the matter of reprints very carefully—if we find it advisable to bring back the old classics of the past, they will probably appear in separate publications, so that SCIENCE FICTION and FUTURE FICTION can continue to keep up to date with the latest productions of modern writers.

Coblentz has long been a favorite with fans, and we hope to give you something more by him very soon.—EDITOR.)

HE’S GULLIBLE

Dear Mr. Hornig:

I’m gullible. Yes, I read any bit of science-fiction that comes my way.

SCIENCE FICTION is an excellent

magazine, but can stand plenty of improvement. The day that it comes out regularly every second month will be a great improvement.

I notice that you edit quite a number of magazines, Mr. Hornig. Perhaps if you devote all of your time to editing SCIENCE FICTION and FUTURE FICTION, you would be able to put out magazines at regular intervals and perhaps SCIENCE FICTION can become a monthly.

Enlarge your readers’ column in FUTURE FICTION by all means. A good name for the readers’ column in FUTURE FICTION is “And Here We Have—.”

Can’t we have an interplanetary cover on either magazine soon? I get sick of looking at Paul’s ugly humans. He’s good at painting machinery, but when it comes to humans, phew!

Most of your stories have been pretty good so far, and I’ve especially liked your short stories.

As I’ve just received the new SCIENCE FICTION and FUTURE FICTION, I can’t comment on the stories, but have read both readers’ departments and I can truthfully say that it is the most interesting feature in both magazines.

MARTIN BRONSTEIN

Box 105

Kerhonkson, N. Y.

(The European “situation” has pretty well upset things all over the world, even to pulp publishing on this continent—loss of foreign markets, etc.—so that some irregularity has resulted in publishing dates, but we hope to clear that up soon.

I do no work outside of science-fiction—editing magazines, writing continuities, offering literary criticism—and so you can see that all my efforts are for our literature alone. Regularity of publication is something over which I have no control.

We like interplanetary covers, too, but like to vary them with other types of subjects.—EDITOR.)

SPACE SATAN

by ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

THE big air-converter that had been blowing the fuelling ship's atmosphere through its helical coils was silent. From the heart of it had suddenly burst a hair-raising chatter that brought Skipper Bill Stirling and his three-man crew on the run.

A strange, eerie silence, as deep as space itself, replaced the hiss of moving air—and carbon dioxide, the invisible killer, began accumulating. Quickly and calmly Stirling set to work. No time for a screen of profanity to hide fear. He pointed a finger.

"Joe, shut off those lime jets."

A burly dark man with black hair curling out his shirt front, went to work. He answered to "Joe Sharples" this "trick," maybe something else next time out, depending on how much trouble he stirred up in the first space port he reached.

Ted Jennison, blue eyed and clean limbed said, "When I got here to shut 'er down, Bill, she liked to buck herself off her bed plates."

Bill Stirling nodded his blonde head. He'd seen it too just as he'd bolted in through the engineroom door. That could mean only one thing—and the thought of it chilled him. A heavy moving member had sheared off somewhere inside, unbalancing the whole works.

He traced the air circuit through the converter. "Nothing would make that noise here at the strainers or the hydrobath. It might be here in the cyclone chamber where she builds up for the pressure boost through the helicals and the lime water sprayers.

That second cyclone pump blowing through the oxygenator might be it too. Well, we got to begin somewhere—let's look at the head cyclone chamber first. Here, Ted, a three-quarter socket fits those bolts." He crooked a forefinger at Joe who stood wiping

his grimy forehead with a mop of waste. It was humid in the engine-room, filled as it was with heated transformers, and gravity-generators. "Joe—give him a hand."

The fourth man, Smiley Graves, hovered about them, reaching for socket wrenches off the board and trying to help. But

there seemed to be only enough to do for the two men. A dry hacking cough shook his slight frame at intervals.

"Bill—isn't there something I can do?" he asked the skipper.

Stirling stood reading a bank of panel gauges. C-O-two, normally at a tenth of a percent, was up a couple of tenths. And the humidity was going up too. But if they kept the blowers circulating the air, it would cut down the effect of the carbon dioxide. Smiley's question broke into his thoughts.

He turned cloudy gray eyes on the older man, and his voice held concern. "Take it easy, Smiley, you know you aren't supposed to get tired in your condition." He didn't add that lungers should be spending their time resting—and preferably in Arizona.

The men were ratchetting the bolts off the lips of the cyclone housing now. Their hands worked swiftly and surely with no lost motion. Sweat dripped off their chins and stained their armpits. At last the final

With the pressure in the oxygen bottles dropping from moment to moment, and help too far away to arrive in time, an oxygen mad space-teeer would sacrifice the lives of his companions that he might live!

bolt. The three of them grabbed hand-holds and lifted the massive shell of steel, then staggered away with it. They lowered it to the engineroom grids, and Stirling came back. He looked into the maw of the cyclone chamber with a sharp eye. The blades in sight were bolted solid so far. He had faint hope that it would be a loosened blade on the rotor shaft, causing the chatter.

"Joe, turn her over easy."

The dark man stepped over to the starting switch and shoved in the lever. Bill and Ted watched the slow turn of the pump blades. One by one the undamaged edges paraded by.

Bill ran a hand through tangled blonde hair, his brows wrinkled up in thought. "Nope, it's not there." He signalled for faster turnover. As the machine turned up, a light chatter started in the heart of the unit.

Stirling put the flat of his hand on the coils leading into the chamber, and on the base of it. Then as he felt the bulge of a twin cylinder unit feeding lime water to the jets he caught the dissonant vibrations of trouble. He nodded.

"Here it is." The machine stopped.

He unbolted the head of the twin cylinders himself, and looked inside. So far nothing seemed wrong. He lifted his head and nodded at Joe. "All right."

JOE shoved the starting lever in again to slow speed. The engine turned over and the pistons of the lime water pump started their heavy duty rhythm. But the right hand one didn't stop its outward cycle. With a clatter it came right on out and fell on the engineroom grids. And dangling from its insides like the clapper of a bell was the con rod—broken off midway.

The four men stared down at it for a long moment. And in every mind was the sobering knowledge that they didn't have any more of those special connecting rods aboard.

Stirling stooped, picked it up, holding it

in his hands as if pronouncing the verdict of a post mortem. "Well, no wonder she crystallized, what with all the wear she gets. Had to break some time."

He said it matter-of-factly with none of the overtones of full knowledge that the breakdown had suddenly numbered their days of life. "That means we got to switch over to the air bottles."

Stirling did not look at the men. For a moment terrible fear nagged at him. Ten days of life at most, he thought desperately. What can I do to stretch them out, to hold the men together without cracking? Every breath they breathe they'll know is one moment nearer to strangulation. God, I'm scared—but I can't let them know it. I don't want to die any more than they do. But their lives are in my hands—what I know of ships and space is necessary to pull them through. Then there is Martha and the children. I've got to live for them. They need me too.

Ted Jennison said as if it were normal routine: "Shall I cut in the bottles now?"

At Stirling's nod, Jennison walked over to the bank of big carboloy bottles containing frozen oxygen. As he opened up the valves to feed oxygen into the ship's ventilating system he wondered what Stirling was thinking. Hell of a spot for a married man, he thought. Bill with a wife and two kids back on Earth eating their hearts out for fear each time he left for his six months' trick on station duty 'tween Saturn and Neptune would be his last. And what about me? No loss to the world back there if I go out. Nobody to depend on me. I've had my fling at life—what th' hell!

Smiley Graves with clear eyes unafraid and facing certain extinction in the not distant future looked searchingly at each of the men. Here they are, he thought, three men facing death. Their first lesson, their first test in it. The lesson I had to learn. Death has terrible eyes to look into for the first time and I know what they're thinking. Stirling with his wife and family pull-

ing at his heart, and driving him to live. Sharples and his brothels, and wild passion for the lusts that life affords him. Jennison and his reckless disregard for life and what it might have given him swallowed up in restless roving. God help them all!

JOE SHARPLES stood with his back to the others, slowly wiping the sweat off his face and listening to the steady hiss of the oxygen flow. The bottles were tremendously strong containers, taller than a man and twice as thick. Rated capacity of each as stamped on a metal plate indicated one hundred thousand liters of oxygen, two days supply in each for the four men. And five bottles meant ten days of life for them. Ten short days. But, Sharples mused without emotion, if only one man were alive he'd live four times as long.

Stirling adjusted the oxygen valve and locked it for automatic regulation at a C-O-two concentration of two percent. "We'll probably have headaches at that figure," he explained, "but I guess we can put up with that."

He went up the ladder slowly to the main deck, turned left and followed the corridor into the communications cabin. The others came up, too, stopping at the door to listen while he called the Spartan Prince, a liner expected through—after they'd all be dead.

Bill picked up the transceiver from its cradle, then touched a big rheostat on the control panel. "Fuelling station, the 'Cornwall,' calling the liner, the Spartan Prince," he said. Then he put down the instrument for the fifteen minute timelog to the liner.

Joe Sharples took out a cigarette and touched a flaring match to the end. Beside him Ted Jennison barked out,

"Hey, what the hell's the idea! We ain't got oxygen to waste."

Stirling regretted that blunt protest, no matter how much it was deserved. From now on the soft pedal was on all such outbursts. Four men cooped up in a space ship for long months without relief had a

hard enough time as it was getting along together. And now that he had had to raise to C-O-two content it would make the men even more irritable.

"Douse the weed, Joe," he said.

Sharples shot a jabbing glance at Jennison, then stepped on the cigarette. His full lips formed a faint, sibilant oath.

Jennison flushed, and little knots stood out on his jaw.

"Yeah, I know—well, you're one too, Sharples—sink your teeth in that," he answered. "I know this's gettin' under your skin. Six months is a long time for a guy like you to be away from the lights of Front street. Don't worry, they'll still be there waiting to take your roll when you get in."

BEFORE Sharples could spit out a foul stream of invective, Stirling gave an order. "Joe, go down below, shut the bulkhead doors to the rocket tubes and the fuel tank alleyways."

"Aye," the man said, glancing darkly at Jennison.

In the next moment a faint voice began calling through the loudspeakers. "The Spartan Prince calling fuelling station, the 'Cornwall.' Spartan Prince calling the Cornwall. We aren't getting you clear here . . . meteor swarm ahead of us damping carrier wave. We're going to be delayed a couple days, Cornwall, dodging this swarm. What is it you want? Go ahead."

For a long moment there was silence in the cabin broken only by the frying sound of static. Stirling didn't look around at the men at the door. He swallowed slowly and tripped a transmitting switch.

"Cornwall, the fuelling station to the Sparton. We've switched over to the air bottles here with ten days capacity—maybe eleven if we spend most of our time in the bunks. Broken con rod shut down the converter. Please make all haste! Go ahead."

He switched on the speakers again, and the three men listened intently for the re-

sponse. The hand on the wall clock passed fifteen minute markers. It crawled passed sixteen and reached twenty before Jennison spoke, his voice sounding like dynamite in the tense silence.

"Maybe a meteor—" But he didn't finish the thought.

Joe Sharples, breathing heavily, poked his head in the door.

"That bottle you cut in has stuck a pressure reducer," he announced.

Bill got up, motioning to Smiley. "You take over."

Down in the engineroom the three men went to work on the oxygen bottle. For an hour they labored over it. Short of knocking the reducing valve off and letting the oxygen spew out under the tremendous pressure they were less a whole day's supply. Stirling spit down on the hot gravity-generators in the well and watched the steam rise. "Okay, cut in No. 2."

He tried to be calm about it as he said, "Tough break that." He glanced at the tell-tale gauges. "Going to have to conserve ourselves as much as possible. We'll do a lot of sleeping—only use two thirds as much oxygen then. Two hours in twenty-four for a little exercise and recreation, and four hours on radio watch for each man." He gestured at Jennison. "You take over from Smiley for the first trick, and don't take your ears off that speaker. The first squawk you hear—call me."

Joe Sharples interrupted the skipper, pointing a finger at the engineroom deck by the ventilating fan shield. "Look at that damned rat!"

A large rodent was up on his hind feet, twinkling his nose at the air and twisting his head around, as if looking for something.

Joe's voice came again, harsh and intense. "He knows there's trouble aboard—and maybe he knows more, like the rats that leave a sinking deep sea ship." He took a chunk of iron off the bench and heaved it. The rat dodged into a space between the air bottles, peeked out again

after an instant with its black beady eyes, then disappeared.

Three of their eight remaining days of life passed. It was on the fourth day that Bill Stirling woke up from a sound sleep with a headache worse than usual. He discovered it was the dry hacking sound of Smiley's cough that woke him. He got up off the bunk, glancing idly at the clock, then looked again. Sharples was an hour overdue to call him.

He left his cabin and went down the corridor a few feet to Smiley's door. Lying on his side, Smiley was coughing so hard that he shook the whole bunk. The handkerchief in his hand was speckled with red.

"Feeling tough, Smiley?"

BETWEEN racking coughs the older man nodded his head without speaking. The atmosphere felt closer than usual to Bill. Had anything gone wrong in the engineroom? He went on down the corridor toward the communications cabin, poked his head in. Joe was gone. Then he noticed that the light was on in the navigating bridge. Curious, he went on. As he approached it, he could hear a tapping and the snick of metal on metal. At the door he paused and swept the cabin. What he saw sent the blood pounding angrily through him. Forgotten was his resolve to be patient and calm. Certainly he'd never expected this.

Joe Sharples stood swaying at the chart bench, and in his hands were the insides of an alcohol pressure indicator. The tube of alcohol he was breaking at the end. Other alcohol-containing instruments lay strewn on the bench and floor. Joe was in the act of lifting the broken tube to his lips when Stirling walked in.

"What the hell've you been doing here!" the enraged skipper bawled at him. His own blood stream, loaded up with more C-O-two than was good for it, had set up a hue-and-cry for oxygen that set his nerves on edge.

"It's none o' your bloody business!" Sharples said, facing him with an ugly, tight mouth. He weaved a little, waiting for the other.

When Stirling reached for the tube in his hand, he dropped it on the bench. Then he balled his left hand and made what he thought was as a lightning jab at the skipper. But Stirling's hard right fist landed with a bone-breaking smash on his jaw. There was a skyrocket burst in his eyes and he fell with a heavy thump.

Ted Jennison came on the run, his heels banging noisily on the deck. "What is it, Bill?" Then he saw Sharples, and the strewn instruments on the deck.

"So it's that way, eh?"

His face red from anger, Bill gestured with his head at the fallen man's feet. "Bear a hand with him."

Together they carried him to his cabin and dropped him on his bunk, where he lay for a couple of minutes breathing heavily in his alcoholic stupor.

"We oughta take a rope's end to 'im when he comes around!" Jennison spat out.

BY NOW Bill Stirling had gained some measure of control of himself. "Better go down and see how the oxygen's flowing," he told the incensed Jennison. "The air's pretty thick."

Some minutes later Sharples stirred on his bunk, and opened his eyes. Then his right hand crept up to his jaw to feel of it.

"Yes, I hit it hard," Stirling told him. But it's not as hard as I'm going to hit you next time you pull a stunt like that. You've crippled us pretty bad in the navigating bridge. Now, get this, Sharples, and get it the first time. Either you promise to behave from now on and follow orders to the letter, or else you'll lie here roped into your bunk from now on. Savvy?"

Joe Sharples lay staring red eyed up at the captain for a moment before he nodded his head slowly. "I get you."

"All right. Now go to sleep, and sleep it off."

Joe slept, but was still an unchanged man when he awoke. During his next spell at the radio he stood looking at the calendar and counting the precious days left. Three days. And if the Spartan hadn't cracked up on a meteor, it would heave into sight in five days. But in three days they would be dead. For long moments he pondered the problem. How to stretch out these two days? Then the problem fell apart in all its simplicity. Why not fill the space work-suit reservoirs from the air bottles and hide them? When the oxygen was gone and all the others were dead, he would still have air!

He stepped out of the cabin then and looked up and down the corridor. They were all sleeping now, and wouldn't hear him. He walked softly along to the store closet and opened the door. Six suits in here—and that meant six tanks. Enough to last him until the Spartan came—if it was coming. He unbuckled them from the suits and carefully carried them down to the engine-room. Then one by one he began filling them under high pressure from the big carboloys. He was in the act of uncoupling the last of the six when he caught sight of Smiley. The older man was standing at the bottom of the engineroom ladder watching him with calm, steady eyes.

"What're you doing here?" Sharples demanded harshly. He put the tank down and walked slowly toward the lunger.

"I couldn't sleep anymore," Smiley said. He looked past him to the six tanks. "I take it you don't trust the skipper."

"No, I don't. Pretty soon it's every man for himself." He started to make a grab for the older man.

Smiley dodged away. Blocked off from escape, he stepped lively around the gravity-generator well, trying to keep the railing between them. Sharples lunged across the corner of the railing trying to seize him.

But the distance was too far. His clawing fingers missed hold and he fell into the well on top of the hot generator covering.

For an agonized moment of searing pain he clung to a rib of the housing. And below him humming with tremendous electronic energy were the thick, exposed bus-bars leading to the gravity skin of the under hull. If he fell on those bars, a moment would make him a smelly blob of flesh.

"My God, get me out of here—I'm burning!"

Smiley saw his immediate fate, too. Without thinking or hesitating because of what had put Sharples there, Smiley lay belly down, dug his toes in between the grids and lowered his hands for the other to grasp. Sharples reached up a desperate left hand, grabbing with a death's grip, while still making sure of his grip on the generator housing. Then he put up his other hand.

Racked with pain from the effort and the tremendous strain on his diseased lungs, Smiley closed his eyes and pulled, keeping up the effort only by willpower alone. When Sharples came within reach of the railing, he gave a yanking grab and pulled himself up the rest of the way.

Rubbing his aching heat-pained hands, he was unaware for the moment that Smiley didn't get up. Then he became conscious of the tremendous coughing and retching of the prone man. And for the first time he noticed blood drooling down between the grid bars into the gravity well. Bits of tissue came up and spilled from his lips.

The old gink was on the way out!

HE'D have to call Skipper Bill right away. And here he was with six oxygen tanks on his hands. Hurriedly he picked them up and carried them into the fuel tank alleys and hid them in far corners. Then he ran up the ladder, and started yelling for Stirling.

At the door Stirling met him, hastily pulling on his pants. "What's the matter?"

"Old Smiley's down on the engineroom deck spittin' up his lungs!"

Ted Jennison came out of his cabin in time to hear the words. By the time they were all on the lower deck Smiley had stopped coughing.

Stirling stooped and turned him over. With his own handkerchief he wiped away the bloody foam. Peace had come to the older man's face.

"Poor old Smiley—didn't get to spend his last days in Arizona sunshine."

They picked him up and carried him to the clean-out breach of the rocket tubes. While the others wrapped him in a white sheet, Bill went up to his cabin and brought down the Book. With a few brief words of sacred scripture, they loaded him into the tube. Then they shot in a slug of fuel and ignited it.

Once again the molecules and atoms that had gathered around the activating spirit of Smiley were flying in free space.

When they passed through the engineroom again, Bill looked at the pressure gauges on the last carboly. They were beginning their last lap.

And still no word from the Spartan.

Ted Jennison followed Stirling into his cabin and waited while he entered the death of Smiley in the log. Far from the gloom that might have been there, Jennison wore a cheerful expression.

"What you say we have a game of draw poker, Bill?" Jennison suggested when Stirling finished. "And to make it interesting—let's use real money."

"Jake with me," Bill said, managing a grin. "I could do with a little cash on my next trip home. Kids probably need new shoes."

They didn't speak of Smiley, or the dwindling oxygen. They played as if their very lives depended on winning all the money they could. For an hour they

played, hand after hand, see-sawing in their luck.

"Gimme a card."

"All right, I'm raising you ten."

"Hm. Wonder what you got there? Well, I'll meet you, and call you. What you got?"

"Okay. Three kings."

"Good here. Your pot."

THEN, abruptly, with a shine to his eyes, Jennison said: "Here's everything I got—a thousand bucks, including the hundred I won from you. I'm betting her on my next hand—sight unseen."

Stirling's grin sobered a little as he looked at the pile of bills. He lifted his eyes. "That's a lot of money, Ted. Sure you want to go that strong?"

"Yep. Let's make it worthwhile."

Bill dealt slowly. Jennison looked perfunctorily at his hand, discarded two and called for cards. It was silent in the room except for the humming blowers. Bill looked up and studied the other with speculative eyes. Something was funny about this. For the whole hour Jennison had been bantering and lively, and now he was a little quiet.

"All right," Jennison said looking up from his hand. "I'm calling you. What you got?"

"Two pairs—jacks and tens."

Jennison tossed his hand into the discard pile with a shrug. "That beats my pair of aces." He got up from his chair. "Well, I guess I'll turn in, Skipper. Don't get drunk on your winnings."

For a brief fleeting moment at the door his head was turned back over his shoulder, and his eyes wrinkled up in a grin. Bill never forgot that last living expression on the man.

He sat eyeing the pile of currency on the desk. A lot of good it was going to do him though, he thought, trying to be calm in his thinking. Well, at least whoever found

their bodies aboard would turn the money over to his family.

He picked up the cards to put them away. And in turning them over he noticed three aces shuffled together. That was Ted's hand! No mistaking it. He distinctly remembered seeing the five cards at the edge of the discard. He sat staring at the aces, trying to make sense of it. Why had Jennison deliberately tossed away three aces—and a thousand dollars?

He got up and stepped out his door. Disturbed by Jennison's strange behavior, he felt impelled to see him. Down the corridor he went, stopping at the closed door. He turned the knob and stepped into blackness. Funny. He couldn't have piled in that quick. Uneasy now, he fumbled around for the light. Then his foot struck something soft and yielding, as he found the switch. He looked down at his feet—then swallowed hard.

Jennison lay with his own knife in his heart.

A note was on the bunk. It read: "Hope you can make it now, Bill. Don't forget to buy the kids some shoes—and an all-day-sucker for me."

He stood with his feet spread wide, staring down at the dead man. Something rose in his chest and he breathed deeply to keep it down. Then he brushed roughly at the corners of his eyes, and stepped to the door where he bawled in a harsh, angry voice, "Sharples! Hey, Sharples!"

When the dark man arrived, he took one look at the sprawled body and the note. Then his eyes shot to the captain.

Stirling answered the look with a bark. "No, he didn't get chicken and take a quick way out! Jennison was a guy with guts and plenty of it. He did it so you and I could live a little longer—maybe have a chance to get through."

Sharples dropped his gaze and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down. "Well, at that he won't have to be in at the end when it comes. He went quick."

STIRLING shook his head. "When the end comes?" he repeated. His square face hardened. "What the hell's the use o' talking that way! We aren't dead yet, Sharples."

He took a sheet off the bunk, and they wrapped Jennison up. Then they made another sombre journey down to the rocket tubes with their burden.

Twenty-four hours passed with straining ears set for the first sounds from the radio. Sharples paced up and down the cabin nervously irritable, with a headache throbbing through him and his stomach wrestling with ten aspirins. He walked out of the cabin, and down to the engineroom. The pressure gauges on the last air bottle read seven hundred pounds. Damned little life left in her, he thought. With the steady hiss of the oxygen making a background for his thoughts, he leaned against the curving hull of the engineroom. Up there on the next deck sound asleep was Stirling. Wholly unconscious, not knowing what was happening until he was called. No better time than now to kill him. He could be disposed of like the others, and when the rescuers came—if they did—he could tell a plausible story of two deaths and a suicide.

Slowly he went up the ladder. When he reached the top he pulled out his knife. He passed through the corridor with panther stealth until he stopped in front of Stirling's door. As quietly as he could he turned the knob and pushed—but it did not give. He turned it back the other way and pushed. It still held.

By God, Stirling had a head on him all right! Smart guy. Figured out something like this might happen. But how to get at him in there? Suddenly, the idea came to him while he moved restlessly toward the communications cabin.

C-O-two. That was the solution. Instead of sending him all this oxygen, feed him carbon dioxide, let him suffocate in

his cabin and he would have to come out. And when he did, Sharples would be there to get him!

In his cabin Stirling lay dreaming that someone had thrown a great blanket over him and he was in the act of suffocating to death. Then he woke up to a splitting headache and a painful gasping for breath. He tried to move his right arm and found that a deadly lassitude had sucked all strength from it. His whole body was in the grip of that terrible lassitude.

HOUNDED by the awful headache, he tried to think, but it was like trying to get a message through sunspot-blanketed radio waves. With a mighty effort he lifted himself to the edge of the bunk and sat for a moment humped over double. He turned on the light, then reached for the aspirin box. A warning voiceless message came through to warn him of C-O-two. He had to get out of here. Maybe a pocket of the deadly gas had formed up here in his cabin. He drove himself with all the will he possessed, and unlocked the door. One foot, then another he hoisted over the coaming of the air-tight door.

Suddenly his deadened nerves signalled a warning but too late. He sensed swift movement from the left and instinctively raised an arm. That undoubtedly saved his life. He felt a sharp instrument drawn across his forearm.

Sharples! —And with murder in his eyes!

The protective emotion of fear poured an instant's supply of adrenalin into his blood, making him see for a clear-headed moment that he was fighting for his life. He sensed, he knew, that he was in the last stages of carbon dioxide saturation. He knew it for certain because in the next moment his head cleared miraculously and he felt a great exhilaration. But this stage would last a short while before he lapsed into prostration and death from carbon

dioxide poisoning. In that short while he had to fight his way past Sharples to get to the oxygen tanks for a head-clearing gulp of oxygen.

"Now it's your turn to go out the rocket tubes!" Joe Sharples said savagely, his knife arm outstretched and swinging in for another stab.

Exhilarated far beyond normal sensations, Stirling stepped in close to the man and grabbed his knife arm at the wrist. For a moment they swayed, locked in deadly, heavy-breathing silence. Then Joe kicked up with his knee, and for a moment Bill knew exquisite agony. But it fired him to greater effort, maddened him into terrific strength. He twisted and twisted until the knife fell on the floor. Then as they stamped around, banging against the narrow walls of the corridor, he managed to kick it away.

Dimly, Bill became conscious of another voice down the corridor. Now, he thought, I must be slipping into the finish stage. Hallucinations. I've got to hold out. There's no one else aboard. Smiley and Jennison are gone, he told himself. Yet, there was the voice. It spurred him on. He had to finish this up in a hurry.

Jerking loose from the dark man, he swung with his left, catching him under the ear. But Sharples braced his back against the wall and when Stirling went after him again, he kicked out with his right foot. It caught the skipper in the solar plexus, and he stood for a moment gasping for air. That was Sharples' opportunity. He descended on Stirling with the fury of a stamping mill. But Stirling was able to take it too. He stood his ground and slugged with heavy bone cracking smashes. Then he began to detect a slowing of his senses and a rising roar in his ears. He was heading for prostration!

Seizing Sharples' right arm in both his hands, he lunged to his left, swinging the man with him. Then he stopped short and

Sharples spun at the end of the whipper-snapper. His head cracked against the corridor wall, and he sagged to the deck.

Wasting no time, Bill tied him up, arms behind and his legs roped to his arms. Then leaving him unconscious on the deck, he staggered down to the engineroom.

No. 5 carboloy was hissing out the last of its oxygen supply and he stood in the draft of it, gulping down the life-giving gas. The roaring in his ears subsided. But still the sound of a steady voice in the background persisted, worrying him. Then he realized the voice was coming from the upper deck—in the direction of the radio shack!

With new found strength, he clambered up the ladder to the main deck and ran heavy footed along the corridor to the cabin.

"... tan Prince calling the fuelling station, the Cornwall. Come in Cornwall. What's the matter with you? Come in."

Stirling seized the transceiver and fairly shouted into it. "Cornwall answering! This is the Cornwall. Go ahead!"

Then he put down the instrument to wait for the time-lag. But to his amazement the speaker's voice came instantly.

"SPARTAN Prince back. Good boy! We're coming in now—just a few hundred miles away. Man, we've been bucking trouble all the way to reach you in time. Meteors everywhere. One of them knocked out our antenna and we're using our interior one now. Couldn't reach you sooner. How's your oxygen holding up? Go ahead."

"Cornwall back. We're sure glad to know you came through okay. We'll be all right until you arrive. So you've been bucking meteors all the way? Nice mess to have one of those plowing into you at your speed. Think I'll stick to the Cornwall."

MASTERS of MADNESS

by BRAD BUCKNER

David Reeves was confronted with the greatest mystery ever to face a man from Earth—for here on Jupiter his first expedition discovers a city without life—and an unexplainable madness overtakes the minds of his companions! But an answer to it all comes in a cloud of alien death!

CHAPTER I

EXCITEDLY, David Reeves, commander of Earth's first colonizing expedition to Jupiter, clasped his hand over Ruth Manning's on the rail of the *Invincible*, leader of the fleet of space-ships that streamed out behind them in long, winding formation.

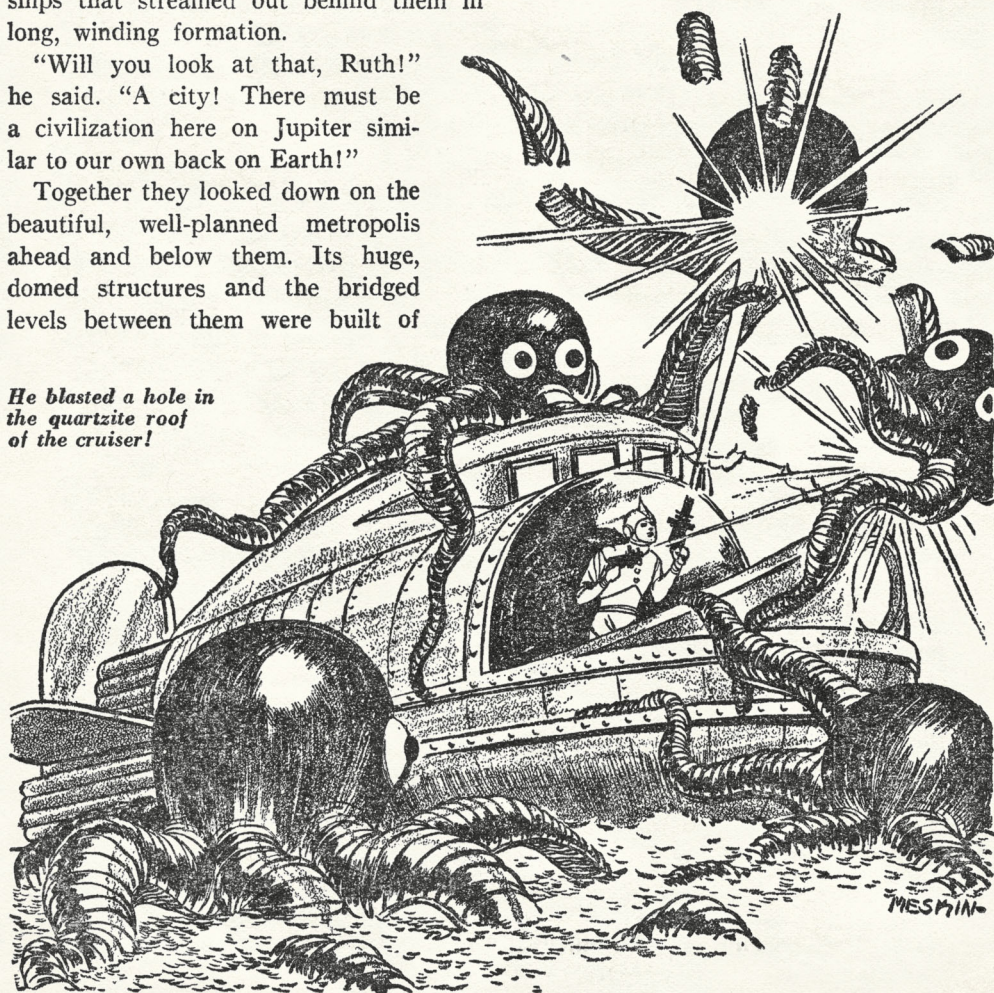
"Will you look at that, Ruth!" he said. "A city! There must be a civilization here on Jupiter similar to our own back on Earth!"

Together they looked down on the beautiful, well-planned metropolis ahead and below them. Its huge, domed structures and the bridged levels between them were built of

some light yellow metal that gave off a dull gloss.

"The architecture is much like ours," Reeves went on with suppressed amazement. "And those flat areas on the larger buildings must be landing stages for planes. Yes, I can see a plane now in one of the

He blasted a hole in the quartzite roof of the cruiser!



REEVES led the way out onto the landing stage, tall body tense, eyes alert. The bullet-shaped Jovian airship lay in its hangar, a sliding door open in its hull. Beside the ship a ramp spiralled down into the building. But there was no sound, no movement, no life.

"They couldn't have missed seeing us," Eric observed. "And the rockets of the fleet make enough noise to rouse anyone who isn't stone deaf. There must not be anyone here."

Striding toward the ramp, Reeves shook his head. "I can't believe it, a people who have advanced to a state of civilization which evidently equals our own, just suddenly vacating their city, or being wiped out without a single trace? It doesn't make sense."

He stopped suddenly at Ruth's call from the parapet around the landing stage. "David, come here!" As he reached her side, she pointed into the sky at a distance of ten or twelve miles from the city. "Look. Those clouds are moving, but there isn't any wind."

It was true. The stillness was not disturbed by so much as a breath of air, yet from the upreared crags of the black-foliaged mountain range on the north, a heavy blot of clouds moved ponderously down toward the city.

"There must be wind up there, even though we don't feel it here," Reeves said. "We'll have to be careful not to let our nerves work against us. We're liable to have enough to face as it is. Let's go down inside with the others."

But before they reached the head of the ramp, a scream knifed up at them from the interior of the building.

"Wanda!" Ruth gasped. "She's down there. . . ."

Side by side, they raced down the curved, sloping surface, followed by the others of the party. The ramp led to a lower level, from which a massive stairway descended into what evidently was a conference room

for the governing body of the Jovian citizens. A heavy table of polished green metal occupied the center of the chamber, surrounded by chairs of the same material. Halfway down the stairs, Wanda sobbed hysterically in Eric's arms, her eyes averted from the foot of the incline.

Reeves looked and then held Ruth back. "You'd better wait here. It isn't pretty."

Four skeletons lay at the bottom of the stairway, attired in the tattered fragments of what might once have been red, rich-bodied cloth. The bones had supported tall, wide-shouldered physiques, but they now lay in horribly distorted attitudes of terror, as if these four lives had been snuffed out under great agony or fear. Arms were clamped about skulls or extended in attitudes of supplication. Feet and legs were writhed back, twisted.

Eric was speaking softly to Wanda. "It's all right, darling. There's nothing to be afraid of. These people died a long time ago. There's a mystery here, but nothing tangible to be afraid of."

Wanda's body still shook uncontrollably. She followed Eric's lips with her eyes like a small child, repeating the words. And Reeves, watching from above, couldn't help thinking there was more to her fright than just the sight of the skeletons at the foot of the stairway.

The light from the ramp above suddenly dimmed, and Reeves remembered the bank of clouds that had been coming down from the crags to the north. Then his heart suddenly froze as Wanda began to scream again. She broke away from Eric and ran past the skeletons, her wild cries echoing within the metallic walls. Sanders caught her at the far side of the room.

"Wanda! What is it?"

She struggled with him, her face ashen, eyes protruding from straining sockets, her lips flared back in agony.

"Don't! I can't!" she screamed. "I'm afraid . . . afraid . . . afraid . . . !!"

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"Don't! I can't!" she screamed. "I'm afraid . . . afraid . . . afraid . . . !!"

She gave another shriek and then went

utterly limp in Eric's arms. Reeves was glad the convulsions were over, until he saw Eric's face. The Lieutenant-Commander looked like a different man. The skin of his face was pulled tight across his long, straight nose, and the high bridge of his forehead by some titanic emotion. He met Reeves' eyes.

Then Reeves knew. Wanda was dead.

HOURS later, Ruth, Eric, and Reeves still waited in the Commander's study aboard the *Invincible* for Dr. O'Brien's report.

When the chunky, red-faced little medicoscientist came in from his laboratory, his wide, friendly mouth showed strain. He realized that upon his analysis might depend the future of them all. "Mrs. Sanders," he said slowly, "died of heart failure. She was literally killed by terror—a terror so great that it could make a change in the brain cells, inducing madness before death."

"But what could have frightened her?" Reeves asked. "There was nothing there."

O'Brien shrugged. "I don't know, Dave. But I have the feeling that when we discover what that 'something' is, we'll have the answer to the lost race of Jovians."

"You mean," Ruth whispered, "all those people died as Wanda did? There were no germs, no actual destructive influence?"

The Doctor nodded. "My assistants have examined one of the skeletons thoroughly. They found nothing." He ran work-calloused, acid-stained hands through his thick red hair. "But I would suggest that all the remains in the city be cremated. Since we are to live here, we'd better make a thorough clean-up."

"Yes. I'll get at it right away," Reeves agreed.

Eric stood up. "It's my job," he said softly. "I'll start now."

"But . . ."

The Lieutenant-Commander faced Reeves. "Remember, Dave? 'From now on we go forward . . . no turning back'.

You'll have plenty to do sealing a dome across the city, installing pressure and heat conditioning, and looking for this 'something' the Doc speaks of. I'll carry on the cleanup."

As Eric left the room, Reeves noticed the back of his head. Down through the thick, black locks a band of snow-white hair showed, as wide as a man's hand. Ruth saw it too, and there were tears in her eyes.

O'Brien shook his head. "There goes a *man*," he said.

SO the clean-up progressed. Under Reeves's direction a band of chemists made tests of the mineral deposits in the surrounding hills. At a distance of four miles, they discovered a vein of *quartzite 2*, as they called it, similar to Earth's quartzite except that it had an opalescent hue. The mineral made a perfect substitute. A plant was set up to smelt the ore. And then, working from a ring of space-ships suspended motionless around the city, they began constructing the huge dome that was to seal in Jupiter City. After that would come pressure and heat conditioning, and they would be able to go about freely without the necessity of wearing space-suits and helmets.

Other scientists went to work on the Jovian planes, endeavoring to discover their secret of propulsion and flotation. The secret was well hidden. It had something to do with the special properties of a strange mineral kept in the ships. But severe burns rewarded those who endeavored to analyze it. The work would take time.

Biologists analyzed and tested and experimented with the thick, black vegetation. They found that, with certain adjustments, many varieties could be used for food. Of animal life there was none. Reeves wondered if this latter fact were caused by the "something" O'Brien declared had destroyed all human life here. But there was no more evidence of the thing that had brought horror and sorrow

on their first day, and Reeves had almost begun to hope it would never be seen again. Then late one night he looked up from his desk aboard the *Invincible*, where they were living pending completion of Jupiter City, to greet Ruth's troubled frown.

She wore a flowing gown of silk, and her red-gold hair hung in shining cascades to her bare shoulders. Reeves knew with a catch at his throat that he had never seen anyone half so lovely. He kissed her and for just a moment they let the world slip away, memory of the old, anticipation of the new. For that moment their happiness was their world, giving promise of the time when this new home would be established and they would marry.

Then she trembled as if chilled. "I'm afraid," she whispered.

Reeves went white.

"Oh, not that," Ruth added hastily. "At least not the way Wanda felt it. But there is a growing unrest among the people, a sort of gnawing fear. I've felt it. It makes you want to turn around and look behind you all the time."

"I hadn't noticed," Reeves observed in surprise. "Everyone seems to be working so hard, there is little time for worry."

"On your job, yes. You've been concentrating so hard on the construction of the dome lately, that I don't think you've noticed the women and the men who aren't engaged in active work. They're skittish. They don't sleep well."

"We'll fix that," Reeves said grimly. "I'll put everyone into active duty. Inexperienced hands can be used on the dome. I'll send some of them out with O'Brien on his next research trip into the hills. And I think it's about time we started exploring and charting the entire surface of Jupiter. We'll keep everyone busy and not give them a chance for 'nerves'."

A buzzer sounded on Reeves' desk and he flipped up the switch on the ship's phone.

"Dr. O'Brien to see you, sir."

"Right. Send him in." Reeves turned back to Ruth. "That's funny. I hadn't expected him for at least a week. I wonder what . . ."

He stopped as he saw O'Brien swaying in the doorway. The scientist's red hair was tousled and matted, evidently forgotten for days. Red stubble sprouted from cheeks that had lost their full-fleshed joviality and were sunken and pale. His hand shook as he slid the door shut behind him.

"The 'something' is still here!" O'Brien gasped. "Twelve of us went into those mountains. Three came back, and two of those are mad. I brought 'em back chained to the walls of my cruiser, babbling idiots."

CHAPTER II

MYSTERY OF THE MADNESS

IN the hospital on the top level of the *Invincible*, Reeves stood and looked down at Johnston, one of the assistants O'Brien had brought back from his ill-fated research trip. The man was strapped flat on his back. His lips twitched ceaselessly, and his white-rimmed eyes never stopped moving. Up and down, back and forth they swung as if he were trying to look everywhere at once.

"He's fairly quiet now," O'Brien husked. "There have been three attacks since we returned. The next will be his last. That's the way they all went—unless they went quicker, as Wanda Sanders did. Johnston's illness has been longer than any of the others. He was a very level-headed young man—strong, courageous."

With a start, Reeves got an idea of what O'Brien had been through in the last few days. These men who had died had all been youngsters O'Brien had taught in the University back on Earth, men he had hand-picked for the trip to Jupiter, his friends and co-workers. He had seen them go mad one by one, and then die.

"But you . . .?" Reeves jerked suddenly at the stocky medico-scientist. "You're all right?"

O'Brien's voice was only a whisper. "I've felt it, a sort of insidious dread that seeps into you and makes you turn around to look at your own shadow. Johnston started that way."

Reeves turned to meet Ruth's eyes. Together they faced the sudden realization that the symptoms she had spoken of only a few moments before were the very ones O'Brien had just described. Ruth had them. O'Brien had them. And fully half the members of the party of Earthmen had them.

Reeves shook himself. "Sorry, Doc," he said levelly. "I've got to ask this . . . How long?"

"We're all in this together," O'Brien smiled drily. "There doesn't seem to be any set course the thing runs. Some go slowly, some fast, some almost instantly. But always . . ."

He never finished. From the bed behind them, Johnston's shrieks shattered the silence of the dimly-lighted hospital. O'Brien lunged to the madman's side. "They're sometimes conscious for a second," he rapped at Reeves. Johnston had jerked his head and shoulders up, fighting the leather strap across his chest. O'Brien's big hands lashed out in open-handed slaps to Johnston's head.

"Johnston!" he bellowed. "It's me, Doc! What is it, man? What's got you?"

There were tears in the stocky scientist's eyes, rolling down into the red stubble on his cheeks, as he went on trying to get through to the spark of sanity which might lurk behind the wild convulsions which shook Johnston. For a moment, it looked almost as if he were going to succeed.

Johnston's cries stopped. He closed his eyes. "Doc," he gasped, and there was a trace of relief in his tone. "It's awful! You can't see it, or feel it, but it makes you afraid. . . ."

From above, the light of the four moons which were visible began to fade. Looking up, Reeves saw that heavy clouds had covered the night sky. Johnston began to

whimper. Then he burst again into wild screaming.

"It's come! No, no, . . . *No!*"

And helplessly they watched him die, powerless to comfort him. His life departed in final surrender to terror, and his body fell back on the bed.

As they turned away, a young man burst in and saluted. "Commander Reeves, sir, we've just received word that there have been three deaths aboard the space ship *Gallant*."

THE restored lighting system in the Jovian conference room where Wanda had died gave off a mellow, filtered radiance. It picked out the lines of worry and fear on the faces of the fifty leaders assembled around the big green table. Commander Reeves rose from his seat between Eric and Ruth and without preamble launched into the subject at hand.

"A few hours ago," he said, "Doctor O'Brien returned from the Black Hills. He brought back two of the party of eleven that had gone out with him. The rest had died. And those two have since been struck down and killed by some unseen force. A few minutes ago there were three deaths aboard the *Gallant*. We must take action at once."

No sound disturbed the silence in the room. The men seated around the table wasted no time in idle comment. Each knew that unless something was done, they faced a horrible death. It might come in the next day, the next hour, or the next second. To a man, they gave Reeves their undivided attention. As he faced them, it struck him that the Jovians must have had just such conferences in this very room—before the last man had died. He shook loose from that thought and went on.

"I believe this force which is striking among us is mental. No one has seen it or been able to describe it. It's victims' words have been only . . ." his voice shook and he paused, then continued ". . . that

they were afraid. Theoretically then, it is a subversive mental power, and there is only one way to fight it—mentally. Please believe me when I say I am not minimizing our danger by advising a good, old-fashioned pep talk.”

A stir of astonishment circled the table.

Reeves went on. “But we’ll make it stronger than words. We’ll drop all our preparations right where we are and start a systematic search of this whole planet. A good many of us have wondered what is out there beyond the confines of the city. Let’s find out!

“With each searching party using its home ship as a base for investigation of any terrain not conveniently explored by air, I figure it should take us about four months. We’ll comb every inch of Jupiter’s enormous surface. If we find something, we’ll destroy it. If we don’t, we’ll know we’re just being afraid of our own shadow! I repeat, I’m not minimizing our danger. But if fear is what we have to fight, then our only method of fighting it is by not being afraid!”

A buzz that was almost enthusiastic passed around the table as he finished. Something of Reeves’ determination had entered the assembled leaders. At least they needn’t take this thing lying down. As long as you could fight, you weren’t licked. As they left to rejoin their respective squadrons, their step was almost as firm as it had been when they had first landed on Jupiter.

Eric gripped Reeves’ shoulder tightly. “Good luck, Dave, and let’s hope we have it licked this time. But I wish you’d let me comb those Black Hills.”

Reeves shook his head. “No. Those are mine. O’Brien and Ruth and the crew of the *Invincible* will help me cover them. The rest of the party will divide up into two equal groups and work from the poles toward the equator. You will command them both by radio from the *Gallant*. I don’t think our unseen foe has any special

association with the Black Hills, but I want to make sure.”

LONG before the Jovian night had ended, the space-ships were on their way. Rocket vents flared red in the gray-black dawn, and with a flaming roar, the gleaming duralumin hulls flashed away toward the two poles.

The *Invincible* was the last to leave. As it rose into the chill air, Reeves held Ruth close beside him as they stood on the bridge watching Jupiter City fade away to the rear.

“I wonder if we’ll ever come back,” she said with a tremor.

As dawn arrived, the *Invincible* reached the Black Hills and worked slowly along the gradually steepening slopes, while careful observers manned all lookout stations with cameras and notebooks.

The vegetation was black, evidently developed to absorb all possible heat from the distant sun. “Not much moisture on Jupiter,” Reeves said to O’Brien and Ruth as he watched the gnarled, stunted trees below. “Looks as if we might have to go on drinking synthetic water indefinitely.”

By noon, Earthtime, they had covered the first range and reached the heights that had been faintly visible from Jupiter City. The sky was clear at this point and a cold, fitful wind whispered around the jagged outcroppings of rock. Just beyond, they came upon a mute reminder of their mission. Nine crosses, hacked from the glistening ebony wood of a Jovian tree, were arranged in three even rows to mark the graves of O’Brien’s co-workers.

“This is as far as we went,” O’Brien rasped. He cleared his throat noisily. “Beyond is the unknown.”

Throughout the rest of the day, Reeves’ eyes didn’t once leave the tortured slopes and sharp pinnacles of the Black Hills. He strapped the engine-room phone on his chest and directed their course as the *Invincible* eased along only yards from the rocky, arid

ground that lay like bald patches between the growths of flora.

"A little closer here, Randall," he directed the chief engineer. "Drop down into that crevasse. It looks wide enough, but watch your clearance lights . . . now a little slower until we get a look at the base of that wall of rock . . . O. K. . . . you can put it back at one-hundredth speed. . . ."

And so it went on. Around eight p. m. he sent half the members of the party below for rest. "You turn in and get some sleep, too," he said to Ruth and O'Brien. "I'll carry on and you can relieve me at midnight. We'll work straight through, spelling each other every eight hours. With the searchlights we'll be able to see almost as well by night as by day."

By morning of the third day they had penetrated thirty miles into the Black Hills, covering the ranges from end to end as they progressed. Nothing unusual had been sighted. By radio check-up with the rest of the fleet working down from the poles, Reeves learned that there had been no more deaths. Three more cities had been discovered, each filled with the lifeless remains of its Jovian inhabitants, but no ill effects had been suffered by the Earthmen.

Reeves couldn't forget that Ruth and O'Brien had both shown symptoms of the opening stages of the terror sickness. But by watching them when they weren't aware of it, he failed to detect a recurrence of their fear. Evidently his "pep-talk" was working.

As he joined them on the bridge, O'Brien grabbed his arm and pointed ahead.

"Take a look, Dave. And then catch your breath. I'll bet you've never seen a sight like that before."

Reeves' eyes widened as he stared ahead and down. The Black Hills were no more. From this point on, they dropped down in an absolutely vertical descent to the floor of a gigantic valley far below. The valley stretched farther than the eye could

see and was covered with a vegetation that shaded away from black to a dull green.

"It must have been a sea at one time," O'Brien went on. "But it's almost dried up now. That tropical-looking jungle is existing on what moisture is left."

As the *Invincible* descended, they noticed a startling change. It grew warmer and warmer, until finally all heat had to be turned off in the *Invincible*; and the space-suits.

"Volcanic action in the interior of the planet," Reeves muttered. "That means this would have been a warm sea, more capable of supporting life than the cold, barren plains. Anthropologically speaking, Jupiter's life forms should have centered here in these warm waters and in the other oceans which once undoubtedly took up a great part of the surface—instead of up there at such places as Jupiter City."

"What are you driving at?" O'Brien asked.

Reeves half closed his eyes in thought. "Suppose the life source did center here?" he asked. "Half of it anyway. The other half would have produced the human Jovians. Then suppose there was a conflict. . . ?"

"Take it easy, Darling," Ruth cautioned. "That kind of talk gives me chills. What about the pep-talk?"

"We'll go on with the pep-talk," Reeves answered. "Since it seems to be getting results. But it will pay to be careful when we explore those green jungles."

The plant life on the ocean floor was so thickly matted and intertwined, it was impossible to see through it from the air, even at a proximity of a few feet.

Reeves picked up the engine-room phone. "This section will have to be covered on foot, Randall. Let her down easy. The weight of the hull will break through the vegetation, and we'll land. O'Brien will take over here on the bridge. I'll lead the landing party. We'll start straight across, spread out in a line. Each man will fire

a green flare up through the trees at fifteen minute intervals. You will re-ascend and cruise along the line, checking the flares. Land immediately upon sighting a red flare or upon failure to sight the regular firing of a green flare."

"I'm going with you," Ruth said firmly. "Yes I am! It's no safer up here than it is down there."

There was no denying this. The terror sickness had seemed to be no respecter of locations. So when the *Invincible* dropped down through the upper limbs of the forest, she took her place beside Reeves in the air lock, helmet on and vibra-gun ready.

CHAPTER III CLOUD OF DEATH

ONLY silence greeted them when they stepped out. As Reeves swiftly inspected the ugly yellow and green growths towering a hundred feet in the air like trees from hell, he felt some unexplainable warning reach some sixth sense. The bulbous plants all around them were quiet and gave no indication of being some strange version of carnivorous flora. They saw no animal life in the first few miles, but the tight sense of impending peril remained.

Ruth struggled through the matted undergrowth at Reeves' side. The rest of the party spread out fanwise for the inspection of the ocean floor.

"Keep within hailing distance," cautioned Reeves. "And don't forget your flares every fifteen minutes. We'll check by voice about every five."

His first call echoed weirdly against the silence. "Blain! You, there. Are you all right?"

The reply came faintly but reassuringly. "Aye, aye, Commander. All's well." Then, even fainter, as Blain sent his call on down the line: "Fitts! What's the good word?"

And the answer, "Righto, fella! Robinson, how about it?"

So it went. Blain, Fitts, Robinson, and two hundred more to the left—Alexander, Carter, McCormick, and a similar force to the right. Several hours of this, fighting their way through virgin jungle, skirting the swampy pits that threatened to drag them down, and hearing the unfailing answer to each check-up, served partially to allay Reeves' apprehension. Perhaps this was what they should have done in the first place—look under the bed, so to speak, and show themselves there was nothing to be afraid of.

He was inspecting a strange parasitic form on one of the trees when Ruth's gasp of horror jerked his attention back. A huge black snake fully six inches thick hung down in their path. The head, with glittering green eyes ablaze, swung forward toward them in hideous, oscillating motion.

Reeves' move was instinctive. His vibra-gun tilted up and spoke almost before he fully realized the danger. The current stepped the snake's life vibrations up instantly to a rate that literally blew it apart. The head and neck disappeared in a quivering mass of flesh, and the body slithered down to writhe and twist on the ground.

"Commander Reeves," Blain called. "I felt your gun. What happened?"

"A snake about as large as a good-sized python swung down at us from the trees," Reeves answered. "Watch out for them and pass the word along."

He seized Ruth and shook her out of her hypnotic stare at the slowing movements of the black body. She was in no condition for concentrating on such a sight.

"It isn't very pretty, but it's a good sign," he reassured. "The snake didn't have the terror sickness. It was allowed to live. If we hadn't found any form of life, it might have meant that we were fighting a losing battle—that life on Jupiter was impossible. Now I'm sure we have a chance!"

They went forward again as before, their cheerful calls echoing strangely through the silent, brooding forest as Reeves made

his check-ups and the men answered from right and left.

"Time for another green flare," Reeves said. He raised the small tube of the flare pistol and sent a little green blossom of light shooting up through the tree tops. "The ship should be along in a minute now. If I figured it correctly, the fifteen minute interval will allow Randall and O'Brien to cruise along the line from end to end and be directly over each man as his flare goes off. Yes . . . here they are now."

He looked up as a shadow came between them and the light above. Then a feeling of clammy dread crept over him. It wasn't the *Invincible* above! It wasn't anything tangible, but the sunlight was no longer visible—only a dull, leaden darkness that seemed to draw closer every minute.

Ruth's scream cut a jagged hole in the quiet. "Dave! The cloud! *It's in the cloud!*"

She went on screaming, but no longer in words. Her cries took him back to the first day they had landed on Jupiter and Wanda had died. The same agony that had driven Wanda into death in an endeavor to escape it, now gripped Ruth!

He seized the girl and shook her roughly. "Ruth! For God's sake, look at me! Come out of it! There's nothing here but that cloud. There's nothing to be afraid of!"

She paid no attention. Her eyes, behind the quartzite helmet, were turned upward toward the cloud, their whites showing in terror. Her shrieks rose in intensity. Then she went suddenly limp.

Reeves had felt nothing from above. But the fear that gripped him as Ruth's body sagged lifelessly in his arms brought clammy sweat springing out on his forehead. There had been an identical similarity between Wanda's death and Ruth's convulsions and subsequent collapse. For a minute he dared not look down. Suppose she were dead? His world went lifeless at the thought. Without Ruth there would be nothing left,

no worlds to conquer, no duty to be done, no life, no love. . . .

Finally he forced himself to investigate. Her eyes were closed. Slowly, he put his hand to her breast, searching for the heart-beat. And as he felt the flutter of life there, courage flooded back into his being. The terror sickness had left its stamp upon her, but while she lived, he could fight.

He swung her to him. With the other hand he sent half a dozen red flares rocketing skyward in quick succession.

"Blain!" he bellowed to the left and, "Alexander!" to the right. "Are you there?"

There was no answer from either of the two nearest men. But from farther along he thought he caught a faint hail. It sounded like: "He—ere! Robinson calling."

Robinson. That meant that both Blain and Fitts were unable to communicate. There was no sound at all from the right. Quickly, Reeves raised his vibra-gun. All along the line they would be able to feel it. They would know that something was wrong and would come straight to this spot, following the vibrations.

A thought struck him suddenly, and as he squeezed the trigger, he pointed the gun up at the cloud. With his thumb, he turned the volume control to full and swung the wave-length lever back and forth across the entire range of possible vibrations.

Startlingly then, a torrent of water poured down upon them. And, swirling and boiling from the blasts of the vibra-ray, the cloud moved off, seemingly under its own power.

REEVES had little time to wonder about this, for Robinson staggered up at that moment. The Earthman's breathing was loud in his helmet microphone. His face showed white and drawn behind the quartzite. "I found Fitts and Blain, sir. They were both dead."

In a few minutes a hundred men had

come from the left, only half the force. Among them they bore a dozen comrades, men in the grip of the same coma that still held Ruth unconscious. The rest of the left wing force had died.

McCormick arrived from the right with only half his men. His voice shook when he spoke. "Carter and Alexander . . . it was awful. They looked as if they'd been fighting something. But there wasn't anything there."

Facing them, Reeves knew the galling pangs of failure. He had led these people to Jupiter to establish a new life. Now they looked to him for protection, for a solution to this horrible death which was dropping them by the dozen. And in his arms Ruth lay dying. In that instant, the certainty grew within Reeves that he must face this thing alone. No longer could he drag the Earthmen up to the altar of the terror sickness and offer them in sacrifice. The death in the cloud was his responsibility. He must fight it alone.

A crackling in the tree tops drew his eyes to the *Invincible*, grounded directly overhead. He could hear the faint whine of the de-gravs, locking the space-ship at that level. But the rocket vents were cold, and from the open door of the escape chamber, an Earthman's body dangled head down, held there by one leg which had caught in some tackle.

Gently, Reeves handed Ruth over to Robinson. Then he started climbing one of the green growths whose top branches supported the *Invincible*. The trunk of the Jovian tree was ten or twelve feet through, but a tangled mass of vines and creepers served as a natural ladder for the first fifty feet. From there he proceeded by driving his fists and boots through the pulpy outer shell of the tree to provide handholds. As he did this, an ugly yellow sap oozed out. It stuck to him, hampering his movements and making progress a treacherous, slippery gamble.

But at length he reached the ship and

drew himself into the exit chamber. He raised the dangling Earthman and laid him on the floor. The man was dead, as were the three other occupants of the room.

Reeves entered the engine room next, in his grim search. Here the strange death had made a clean sweep. Reeves' face blanched as he saw men dead at their posts, hands still stretched out toward controls, their expressions horrified even in death. Chief Engineer Randall had scribbled a brief note as he stood before the master rocket controls: "Commander. The men have died bravely. I'm the last. I can feel it coming on . . . will lock controls and hope ship will drift near you . . . can see flares . . . I hope . . ."

Reeves' jaw was granite-hard as he strode out of the engine room and up to the bridge. O'Brien lay on his side, ship's phone gripped tight in both hands, the sweat of agony still on his cold brow. He had died as the others had, fighting in the only way he knew how to destroy this menace before it killed them all.

Most of the remaining passengers had been women. Reeves found them in the hospital. The ones who were conscious were administering restoratives to those of their number who had not died, but had fallen into the strange coma which so often preceded death.

Going back to the engine room, Reeves slacked off on the de-gravs and dropped the ship down through the trees. He carried Ruth to the hospital, then strode purposefully to the stern of the *Invincible* where a dozen small cruisers lay near a launching platform.

Robinson reached him as he secured a second vibra-gun to his belt. He watched Reeves swing a cruiser out on its davits and lower it to the launching platform.

"May I go along, sir?"

Reeves shook his head. "You're in charge, Robinson. Radio Lieutenant-Commander Sanders to bring the whole expedition here at once. What we're after is in

that cloud that hangs near the Black Hills. If you don't hear from me within twelve hours, tell Eric I said to attack—and to fight until you destroy it or until the last man dies! It will be your only chance.”

Reeves opened the de-gravs on the cruiser, switched on the stern rockets, and blasted up through the treetops in a zooming climb.

Flashing across the sky in the tiny cruiser, Reeves knew an icy calm. He had made his decision. Throwing the entire force of Earthmen against the cloud, with the horrible death toll which would be a sure result, must be used only as a last resort. First, he must make an attempt to get close enough, undetected, to discover the nature of the menace and to destroy it. From such a mission he would come back victorious, or he must not come back at all. He tried to push all thought of Ruth out of his mind and to concentrate his faculties on the duty which lay ahead.

Thus as he rose from the floor of the dead ocean and crossed cliffs surrounding it, he sought narrow passes and followed their winding course as long as they led him upward toward the topmost peaks where the cloud hung like a huge leaden ball in the pale sky.

As he fled through the shadowy canyons, Reeves' thought returned to the thing that had devilled their every move, had halted their attempts to settle in Jupiter City, and now threatened to take the lives of them all. What was it like to die of fear. He couldn't remember ever having been afraid of much of anything. There was duty, and love, and sorrow, and death. But of fear he knew little.

But Wanda had felt it, and O'Brien, and all the others. And Ruth . . . God! If Ruth died! What was it like? He tried to pass his hand over his face, forgetting that he wore the quartzite helmet. A sudden chill shot up his back, reminding him that he was closer to the cloud. His flesh began to crawl within the space-suit. What . . . ?

He stared through the forward window and realized suddenly that he was racing straight down toward the rocky canyon floor. He had changed the controls without knowing it!

In a panic, he corrected. But he over-controlled. He shot back up in a steep climb. The ship began to roll. He couldn't keep it on an even keel. His arms and legs moved when he told them to, but they didn't do what he said.

The cruiser slipped off in a spin. As it began to fall again, Reeves knew he was going mad. It seemed that his mind was a round, clear pool. But along the edges there were horrible shapes—crawling, sucking things. And they began to drink of his mind, drawing it up in great, sibilant gasps. . . .

He was aware of a crash which seemed far off somewhere, having nothing to do with him. Then merciful blackness closed over him.

HIS first impression as he groped up from the dark depths of unconsciousness was that he had gone blind. Then he saw that he lay in darkness on the rocky floor of a cave. He was not alone.

On the opposite wall of the cavern, which was hewn from solid black rock, a small light similar to those in Jupiter City burned in a brazier bracketed to the wall. Before it stood a man examining Reeves' vibraguns intently. As the man turned, Reeves set himself for a flying tackle. Then something held him back.

The man had once been as tall as Reeves, but countless years had bowed the proud lift of the shoulders and replaced robustness with fragility. With a start, Reeves recognized the long red cloak the man wore as being the same as those found on the skeletons in Jupiter City. This must be one of that race!—but Reeves was at a loss to account for the helmet of shining silver-colored metal which completely covered the

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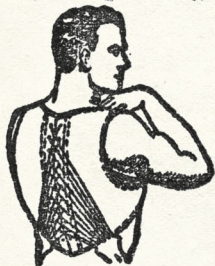
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venerable head and was flared out to rest on the shoulders.

Eye holes in the helmet formed its only openings, and Reeves saw blazing blue eyes staring out at him. Excitement shook the wearer of the helmet and he spoke, his voice sounding hollow and weird from behind the metal. Reeves had studied the books found in Jupiter City, and had a fair knowledge of the language. He therefore understood the Jovian's words.

"Your weapons are sufficient," the old man exclaimed, "providing you can keep your mind clear to use them. But the *galo* helmet will help you ward off the affects of Zug's ray." As he spoke, the man removed the strange helmet and stooped before Reeves where the latter had risen to his hands and knees. Upon coming closer, Reeves saw that the Jovian's head was much larger than his own, so that the silver-colored headgear fitted easily over his quartzite space-bubble.

"Can you understand me?" the Jovian asked anxiously as Reeves' astonishment held him silent.

Reeves nodded. "Yes. I studied your books in the city to the south. But who is Zug? And why are you up here alone, the only Jovian we've seen since we landed?"

The old man glanced apprehensively at the cave's mouth, where the day was drawing to a close.

"There is little time, but I'll explain briefly. I know you are from another planet. You were headed toward the cloud to fight Zug and his people when his ray brought you down. Alone, you would have had no chance. With the *galo* helmet, there is one slim possibility of success—although of late I've noticed Zug has improved his ray. Soon the helmet will be of no avail. Perhaps it's too late now.

"As you surmised," the Jovian went on, "I am the last of my people. I was once Prince Wogan Markin, but that means nothing now. Zug and his race lived in the seas of my planet. When we began

using the sea water in great quantities to produce the *hydolak* metal which enabled our ships to float on Jupiter's atmosphere, Zug complained. Representatives of my people met Zug in his underwater kingdom and arranged a treaty whereby we agreed to limit use of the sea water.

"But a change in the atmosphere began drying up our planet, and the seas grew smaller and smaller. Zug thought we were responsible. In a sudden, undeclared war, he brutally destroyed my people."

The brief words told a tragic story, reminding Reeves of his first thought upon sighting the dead sea to the north—that in those warm waters must have dwelt some highly advanced stage of life.

"But if Zug was a sea-dweller, how can he live in a cloud?" Reeves asked.

"He constructed a huge globe of *hydolak* metal. Even full of sea water, this globe is more buoyant than our atmosphere. *Hydolak* is also very sensitive magnetically, when heated. So by heating or cooling any one side of the globe electrically, Zug allows the magnetic deposits of the planet's surface to pull him wherever he wants to go. The cloud effect is produced by steam from the heated side of the globe."

Reeves understood now why the torrent of water had deluged him when he fired on Zug's cloud. His vibra-gun had bored a hole through the *hydolak*, allowing some of the floating sea to spill out before Zug could repair the damage.

"And the ray?" Reeves asked.

"I'm not certain how he produces it," Prince Wogan Markin answered. "But it acts on the mind, breaking down the brain cells. It induces great fear, then madness, and finally—death. The helmet you now wear is the only protection against the ray. I discovered galo metal here in this cave after it was too late to save my people. . . . But enough! I've repaired your ship, and you must make haste. If Zug triumphs over your people, he will take your space-ships and fly to another planet, perhaps yours,



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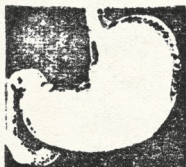
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CHAPTER IV

BATTLE ON JUPITER

AS THE Jovian night descended, Reeves raised the blunt nose of his cruiser toward Zug's cloud. Up there was death. If, as Prince Wogan Markin had feared, the galo helmet was no longer a sure protection against Zug's ray, then Reeves would die horribly.

Resolutely, he fought down this unfamiliar panic. He must protect the future of solar civilization and the lives of the expedition from this race of cruel seawallers. Three things drove him on: civilization, the Earthmen now on Jupiter, and Ruth Manning. One more attack of the ray and Ruth would die.

The nearer he approached, the larger did Zug's cloud seem to be. The globe must have been four or five miles in diameter, and Reeves marveled at the crafty genius which could have evolved such an achievement. Zug was an opponent to test the skill and courage of the greatest fighter.

The cloud was misty at the edges, growing denser as he penetrated farther. He reached the hydrolak shell and flew upward along the periphery of translucent, gray metal to the top. Here an aerating apparatus took up most of the opening that showed in the top of the globe. Water was pumped up from the bottom of the globe and allowed to run down through towers containing baffles. Near the base of one of these towers Reeves saw the first one of Zug's people.

The creature was floating on the surface, and in the light of the Jovian moon it showed as an octopus-like form of splotched brown and gray. At sight of the cruiser, it turned over and sank from sight.

Reeves shuddered. He had seen waving tentacles some fifteen feet long, a soft, sac-like middle body, and great red eyes. With

shaking fingers on the controls, Reeves nosed down and entered the water, heading straight for the bottom of the floating sea. Here it was that Zug would have his ray gun, since his targets were always below him.

On the way down, Reeves passed undulating sea growths and small, curious fish. It was hard to believe that these dense blue waters, shading now toward black, were floating miles above the surface of the planet. It seemed, rather, that Reeves were back on Earth, plumbing the depths of the Atlantic in a diving bell. Then he sighted Zug's gray stone dwelling place. It rested on the sandy soil which covered the bottom of the globe, towering up from among thick undersea grasses and plant-life like a castle in some nightmarish dream.

"Steady, man. Steady!" Reeves said to himself as he felt the short hair at the back of his neck stiffen. He pulled the galo helmet more securely down on his shoulders and checked his guns. And, suddenly, he saw the thing he had missed.

Zug's people were waiting for him. From the blue-black depths they came closer, swimming up on either side and down from above to form living barriers around a tunnel of water leading straight to Zug's door. Their huge red eyes glared at him mockingly, like the myriad, glowing embers of a hellish fire.

Then from somewhere within the stone castle, Zug struck.

The ray must be turned full on him, Reeves thought hazily. A blinding light flashed in his mind. A thousand universes burst asunder in his numbed brain and fell, threatening to grind him to powder. His very being seemed to be dissolving, melting away, drying up, burning up, freezing. And through it all was terror!—terror that brought every muscle in his body bunching up in agonized knots.

He had failed. The galo helmet was of no avail under the full blast of the ray. With a desperate surge of strength, he

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strove to reach the controls of the cruiser. His hands touched nothing. He could not see. He tried again—and with his last conscious action, he sent the cruiser up into a climb.

This brought him out of the ray, and he began to regain consciousness. But Zug's people were above. The cruiser smashed the first few bodies, but a hideous, writhing form slid around the ship, tentacles gripping onto the hull with a sucking noise. Another huge sea-dweller joined the first—then another, and another, until the clinging, swarming arms entirely covered the small ship.

Reeves was almost fully conscious now. The galo helmet evidently would protect him if he could keep out of the direct concentration of Zug's ray. But Zug's people had taken a hand. With a tightening, choking sensation around his heart, Reeves understood their intention. The ray had no effect on the sea-dwellers, and by their great weight, they meant to hold Reeves down in it until it could get in its hellish work!

There was only one thing to do. Raising his vibra-guns, he blasted a big hole in the quartzite roof of the cruiser and fired on the sea-dwellers. They died, and writhed down with gurgling, horrible gasps. But as each slipped away, another took his place. Reeves was almost back on the sandy bottom again. He could feel the first effect of the ray beating upon his brain like the hammer strokes of doom.

Desperately, he stood up through the opening, firing right and left along the length of the ship. This freed him momentarily, and he gunned the cruiser quickly through the door into Zug's castle.

The terror sickness closed over him. It lapped at his consciousness with the waves of a black, terrible sea. Reeves circled the first room, skirting the walls, endeavoring to shake off the effects of the ray as a fighter staggers away from a stiff punch to the heart.

As he felt the terror ease off, he sent the ship on through the room, down a rocky passage, and into a vaulted chamber of vast proportions. In the exact center, Zug crouched over the ray-gun.

The king of the sea-dwellers was formed the same as his people, but he seemed larger. Around his bulbous middle body, under the blazing red eyes and slit of a mouth, was a webbed belt set with green jewels. The rays-gun's stubby, laminated barrel was pointing directly at Reeves. Zug reached over with a waving tentacle to the volume lever on the side. When he pulled it down, Reeves thought he had flown into a stone wall.

His hands fell away from the controls, and the cruiser nosed down, crashing into the rocky floor. Reeves was thrown clear, catapulting out of the opening his vibraguns had made in the roof of the cruiser. And as he fell, the galo helmet rolled off.

A THOUSAND little dancing devils of madness pounced down upon Reeves. He tried to fight upward through the terror. But it squeezed all volition out of him and cast him back, beaten and trembling. He was in a pit, falling faster and faster into darkness. Eyes stared at him—red eyes. And he knew Zug's people had followed him in to watch him die. He slumped forward.

A thought was trying to break through. Ruth! He thought he could hear her screams. Then he knew they were his own, echoing and re-echoing through the slimy halls of Zug's castle. From somewhere he dragged up strength to draw his vibra-guns. The slim barrels shook in his hands, but they answered his touch. He shot current into them. As he did so, Zug melted away from Reeves' sight and the ray-gun sagged on its swivels.

He was free. He turned. And a dozen waving tentacles closed down upon him, jerking his guns away. He stared into the maddened, blazing eyes of the sea-dwellers. Ugly, soft bodies crowded the water, flippers

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reaching down for him. Crouching, Reeves launched himself forth beneath them. Somehow, he eluded the clutching arms and swam through a doorway in one wall. There was a door of heavy metal. He slammed it shut and dropped a heavy bar in place.

He stood in the control room of Zug's floating sea. Mighty dynamos towered on every side, shielded by quartzite domes. Here the current was generated which would heat any desired part of the hydrolak globe to increase its magnetic attraction and thus draw it in that direction.

Reeves paused, and a grim smile touched his lips. It was crazy. It might not work. But if the dynamos were strong enough . . .

He stepped to a wall and closed a full dozen big switches. Then he opened another smaller door and looked out into the big room where Zug's gun was. The octopus-like creatures were still battling at the other door into the control room, trying to break it down. Reeves balanced the bar on the second door and then eased it shut. The bar fell into place behind him, effectively locking the control room.

He crossed to the cruiser behind the sea-dwellers in a long, floating glide. Sweat broke out all over him as he saw the ship's smashed nose. Suppose it wouldn't fly?

He was climbing in when they saw him. With slobbering coughs of rage, they raced toward him, their whipping tentacles driving them forward with terrifying speed. He opened the controls. The cruiser shuddered, but failed to move. He tried again. And just as the sea-dwellers reached it, the ship swung around in a tight turn, its rocket vents blasting them back. Reeves zoomed out of Zug's castle, while from the control room came the ominous, crackling hum of overloaded dynamos.

Boring upward through the middle of the floating sea, Reeves noticed that the water was getting warm. It was working! By shooting the entire load of the dynamos into the hydrolak shell, he had turned Zug's

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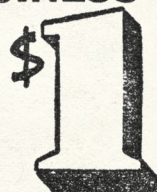
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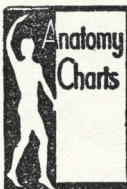
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floating globe into a huge kettle which would soon be filled with boiling water. Already his skin felt parched and blistered even under the thick space-suit. And as he shot up into the air above the opening at the top of the globe, the water was beginning to boil.

A column of hissing steam shot up as Reeves raced away. He had hardly flown clear when the great volume of water burst the softened hydrolak shell and gushed down on the Black Hills in a torrent. With it went struggling, writhing shapes that hit the barren mountains and moved no more.

A mighty sigh breathed through Reeves' tired body. The menace of Zug was gone. Nothing remained of his people except horrible masses of roasted flesh. These would disappear as time and the elements played their part.

Reeves flew to Wogan Markin's cave and took the Jovian Prince aboard. Then he went on to meet the fleet, which had waited the twelve hours and was now moving toward the Black Hills. Amazed faces lined the quartzite windows of the space ships, all eyes turned to the battered, empty hulk of hydrolak that drifted overhead.

Eric met the two passengers of the cruiser at the *Invincible's* stern launching platform.

"We saw the destruction of the cloud," he said through colorless lips. "And we knew you had succeeded, but we were afraid you might not have escaped."

Ruth was there. Reeves gathered her to him. After a minute, he held her off and stared at her blushing face anxiously, looking for signs of the terror sickness.

She understood and shook her head.

They paused in an unspoken tribute to the brave members of the expedition that had died. Then they pointed the gleaming hulls of the space-ships toward Jupiter City once more, where they would build the new life that had been born of courage—courage that overcomes all fear, that knows no master.

(Continued from page 55)

and the blaring of a bugle could probably be led into the same war by other kinds of "propaganda." If a person's convictions are dead set against militarism (which would be unfortunate for him in these times), no amount of marches are going to make him go to war willingly.

I think the value of music lies more in its soothing qualities than in its ability to rouse the emotions. And remember that while all people (all those who have gone through the second grade) can understand language, there are millions who cannot understand music. To them Beethoven is just so much noise. Poor people!

Music is undoubtedly the most wonderful medium of expression in the world, but let's not let the idea run away with us. It has its limits, due mostly to the fact that it is not universally understood.

A REAL CONFLICT

by F. DODGE

SPEAKING of "Eternal Conflicts," I'd like to start a conflict with the publishers of SCIENCE FICTION, and most other magazines of its type; a really scientific conflict, too. Except for such department as this (which contains little real science anyway), there is an appalling lack of science in the stories. I would not kick about this, except for the fact that the stories are called "science-fiction." I have always majored in science in school, and I may be prejudiced, but I like my science and plenty of it. Would some kind person please explain to me why there is such a lack of science in science-fiction magazines? Or perhaps there really isn't supposed to be any—maybe the word "science-fiction" is a misnomer, just like the word "manufacture," which, analyzed, means to "make by hand." I don't want you to think that this "conflict" means that I don't enjoy your stories—I do, very much. But I'd still like to know where the "science" comes in.

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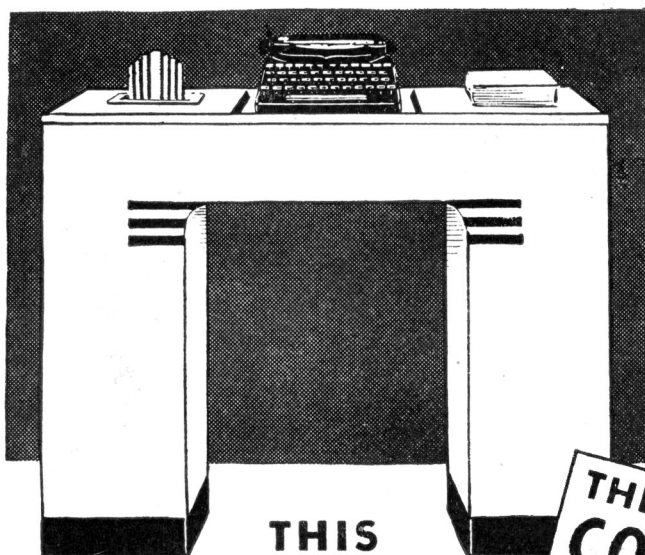
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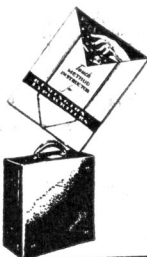


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