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SPACEWAY

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X of MIZAR

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

A NOVELET

☾ *He was a living, planet-sized entity...and when the solar fleet attacked him they found he had a sense of humor.*

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

CHAPTER I

Home is the Handle

I HAVE found nothing in any of your languages that will tell you about myself. I have a name, but no way to transmit it that you could understand, for I must use, in communicating with you, what I have been able to absorb from Earthmen you have sent me. If it were not in any of them or all of them, it is not now in me, and I cannot make myself understood by you.

I am like one of your clouds, but I am not a cloud. I am like a human brain, perhaps more like that than anything in your world, but I am still not a brain. I am like no living or dead thing on your planet Earth. This should not surprise you, considering that I am a product of Mizar, as alien to you as anything in our galaxy could possibly be. I have thought of your word "mist" but that does not satisfy. I have thought of "ectoplasm," one of the strangest of your primitive words, and that does not fit me either. I am not animal, man, vegetable, plant, chemical. Yet I *am*, I *very much am*, as your Jacob Fels could tell you if he returned home, though I doubt very much if he could describe me to you. You lack comparisons. So do I. That I am far in advance of you must already be clear, if you can read your own strange mechanical hieroglyphics. Is it not plain that I have mastered such languages as your entities have brought to Mizar? Do you know *mine*? Have you any idea what it is like? Of course not! Thus the vast difference between us is proved. I



have found your secrets—such as have reached Mizar—ridiculously easy to solve. Obviously only your most enterprising have reached Mizar, and since I've found them to be *most* rudimentary, those of you who remain Earthbound must be inferior to the most inferior who has dared travel between us. I could, I think, reach Earth, but why should I trouble? I have but to send out challenges in your own language, and you will come to *me*—more proof of your inferiority, for what could be more juvenile than accepting such a dare?

So, since I wish to be understood, at least well enough to become the challenge that provides me with food and knowledge of other worlds, I have mastered your language, but no words to explain myself to you—except a simple element in your mathematics, “let x be the unknown quantity.” That's what I must *always* be to you, unless you come to me to see for yourself. But if you do, you'll never return to inform others!

I first became aware—I know, you would have said, “I first saw . . . !”—of Jacob Fels, within mere seconds of your time after his transmission through the Big Dipper—for which, naturally, I have a name you would never be able to comprehend—to Mizar, to be the first Earthman landing in my realm. I took note, since I have eyes within and without, of the tubular projectile in which he landed, out of which he stepped as if he owned Mizar. This attitude, I realize, has always been common with Earthlings. Whatever they *discover* they regard as a *possession*! And it's too bad for the folk who're already there, and wish to stay! I didn't, of course, know this when I first became aware of Jacob Fels.

I need not describe Fels to you. He's been in all your visiscreens since he was fifteen years old, earth time. You regard the foolish fellow as being *superior*—your word is “genius?” Anyway, I soon discovered that he shared your opinion of him! That also seems to be a part of the behavior of idolized earthlings.

Jacob Fels stepped out of the projectile, looked around at the Mizaran landscape in which he had landed. Save to say that he found it striking, beautiful, fearsome, stupendous, monstrous—I'm using words he wrote into the message I allowed the projectile to take back to you, though I retained his photographs—I'm not going into too much detail. For one thing, how could you understand it? For another, if you don't *know*, many of you will come to find out, which is exactly in line with my desires. I found Jacob

Fels an exquisite variation to my—to my . . . well, with you the word is “diet,” but that isn’t *exactly* what I wish to say. To know *exactly*, you’ll have to make the trip yourself!

Jacob Fels looked around. Then he returned into the projectile and for a moment I thought I would lose him, that he would be gone before I could absorb knowledge of him, absorb *him*, too, as you’d understand such an operation! But he returned with *things*. I had no idea what they were, save that they were crude, crude beyond belief. We have nothing of the kind on Mizar, though millions of eons ago we *may* have had, when my forebears were primitive, too.

Jacob Fels sat down on one eminence—“chair” is the word, I later learned—before the taller one, “table,” or perhaps “desk,” and placed a strangely shaped third thing on top of the second. He inserted a white plane surface in the gadgetry of the third thing, and began to hammer at parts of it with his finger-ends. Thus I first experienced your typewriter, which I now use far more efficiently than did Fels, naturally. Yes, I know he was an expert, one of the fastest typewriter operators on earth, but I was faster the very first time I tried the simple thing!

Fels looked around him, but was unaware of me, creeping up on him, because I made sure he *would not* be. It is no part of my life plan to make a possible enemy aware of me—not that one, or any number, from Earth, could in any way harm me. Nothing could, really, for I am indestructible; but there is such a thing as pain, and this I do not like. I have had quite too much. This Jacob Fels must be used to alleviate pain, not produce it. So, I did not mind if he saw the vegetal growths of Mizar, the valleys, the streams, the hills, visible from where he sat, so long as he was not aware of *me*.

I placed myself around him and began to absorb his thoughts. It was a simple matter to trace them through his nerves to his hands, into the typewriter. In your language, much of which I mastered before Jacob Fels ever became aware of me, the first man to land on Mizar was writing down what he saw, felt, *sensed*. He started it thus:

“I am the first man of Earth to land on Mizar! I take possession of it in the name of Galactic Authority!”

“Humph! I resolved to *see* about that!

Leaving Jacob Fels to write on, since I realized at once that I knew what he was going to write during the time I would not be in actual contact with him—simply enough, because he thought ahead, and I absorbed his forethoughts—I began my absorption of his Instantaneous Transmitter. I know you would say, "I began to inspect," or "I entered the Transmitter and studied, etc.," but I do not work as you do. "Absorption" is not the right word, either, nor any word in any other language known to Jacob Fels, but it is the closest. It doesn't describe my activities at all, simply because I need parallels, and there are none. I simply have to express myself to you as Jacob Fels would, if he were still able, and hope there'll be enough to induce others of you to visit me on Mizar. I have a monopoly here! Is *that* a good Earthword: *monopoly*? It seems to fit, because I am all that lives on Mizar, though I am more entities than exist on Earth! You see, I *knew* you wouldn't understand me!

Having absorbed the simplicity of the projectile—careful not to disturb its workings in any way, since I already had plans for its use—I knew I had nothing to fear, even pain, from Jacob Fels. He lacked the barest necessities with which to harm. Oh, I know, as you do, that he came equipped with atom-smashing guns, ray-spurters, blasters, disintegrators and other destructive things, but these would have no effect on *me*! Not after I made Jacob Fels aware of me, anyway.

I tried out what I had learned of English, first.

"I am X Mizar!" I conveyed.

"*I am X of Mizar!*" he wrote on the plane that I now named as you name it, "paper."

"What is your name?" I asked his subconscious, since I was not yet ready for him to be fully aware of me. His subconscious replied: "Jacob Fels!" It was easy, from the first, to pick his brains. I did it without interrupting his writing, *or his thoughts*, in any way! I could have, had it been my whim, gone on ahead of his thoughts and plucked them right out of him, so that when he reached the gaps in his thinking he'd have come to a dead stop, but I wasn't yet ready to do this.

Jacob Fels stared at what he had written: "*I am X of Mizar!*" as if he couldn't believe his eyes—which was exactly the way he felt. It was as if someone else, some other entity, had written the

queer words with the fingers and brain of Jacob Fels. I would have chuckled at his startlement, save that I have never chuckled; but I was *amused*. I could sense the man's fear.

Jacob Fels took the bait. I was afraid he might erase what I had caused him to write, and make no attempt to describe the strange feeling of insecurity that was coming over him. But no, he began to comment on the sentence, "*I am X of Mizar!*"

"I don't know whence the strange words come!" he wrote. "But while I can see nothing different there is, in a sense, a sudden shadow about me. I know there is danger, yet what danger can there be that I cannot see? I feel as if *probing thought were plucking my brains!*" When he wrote that, I withdrew his awareness a little, not wishing him to be *too* close to truth at once. He was keener than I had credited him with being. I wanted no withdrawal, physical, mental or spiritual, on his part, that would deny me knowledge of Earth, Earthmen, spatial projection (instantaneous), paper, typewriters, tables, chairs and other primitive matters. "Now," Jacob Fels wrote on, "the probing withdraws, as if startled that I am aware of it, and not *wanting* me to be. The atmosphere in Mizar is not like Earth, but the purifiers and compressors work perfectly, so I feel no discomfort . . ."

Purifiers? Compressors? Must be some other gadgets, I thought, for I did not see anything fitting what he wrote down, and which his thoughts pictured for me. Yes, I must know everything this man could tell me, for if anything happened to him before he did, I would not know all—like what purifiers and compressors were!

Jacob Fels wore pants, shirt, sandals, no hat. It will be a mystery to you how I know the names of those things, but that's just what I must remain, for the most part—a *mystery to you*. After all, is that not my principal intent? Fels' hair was . . . but there I am, unable to describe color—but just then Fels wrote down certain words which don't make sense to me, but must to you because they're yours . . . "*I feel my brown hair turning gray!* There is a creeping chill on Mizar! I know it isn't physical, but emotional, spiritual, something like that. Something is creeping stealthily upon me. I am marked for destruction. This writing will never reach you!"

Fels was wrong about that, of course—about the writing never reaching Earth, I mean, for it was no part of the plans I made the

instant I saw Fels the first time, to keep the Earth in ignorance of at least *some* facts of Mizar! I wanted enough facts, or what the ignorant people of Earth would regard as facts, to get back to them. I knew exactly how, for I knew all the secrets of the projectile, by absorption, before I began concentrating on Jacob Fels.

"*You're telling more than I wish!*" I made Jacob Fels aware. "*You're more intelligent than I thought!*"

I thought he would stop typing at once, or try to fool me with code or some other nonsense that would be diversionary, but he was a man of courage, as all Earth knows. He wrote down what I had just made him aware of, and began to write very fast, explaining what he thought it meant.

"Mizar is not a star, or a planet, or a planetoid or a comet!" he rattled off. "It is not gaseous, not a nebular offshoot, not even very close to Alcor as we've always believed. *"It's an entity!"*

Yes, he was going too far, *deliberately*. I could not entirely influence him to do and write what I wished him to, but I could absorb him, get what wisdom from him I might, and then depend on other Earthmen accepting the challenge I intended sending—and following him to Mizar, and *me!*

I made him fully aware of me, now, and he opened his mouth to scream. Everything he sensed was important to me in my future understanding of Earthlings. I made him aware of this thought:

"There is no use screaming. None will hear you!"

He accepted that, didn't scream. He faced me, folded his arms, while a slight wind stirred the paper in the typewriter, causing a sound that irritated my sensitivity almost as much as the typewriter did—at *first*; before I mastered it and silenced its clattering. Alien vibrations of certain intensity cause me pain. At first the typewriter did that.

"You are going to disappear as a thinking creature," I conveyed to Jacob Fels, "but you will be immortal among your people, since I intend that what you have written return to Earth!"

He merely stared at me, but I knew he was glad his work, his last words, were not to be lost to his world.

From here on it is of course most difficult, even for an entity of my intellect, to convey all the truth to intelligences so far inferior. But I flowed—not a good word, but it must serve—around Jacob Fels, I flowed around his typewriter, around his transmitter, around

the table and chair, around *everything* that had come from Earth with Jacob Fels, to make sure that none of its facts would radiate, and so be lost, until I completely absorbed every last one.

I did not alter anything in any way—except the make-up of Jacob Fels. I *had* to do this, I think you'll agree, because he was the repository of all knowledge that had so far reached Mizar from that grain of sand called Earth.

First, bit by bit, I dissected his subconscious, making myself master of its memories, most of which Fels himself had never used because he'd never known of them! *Remarkable!* How could any sentient being be unaware of the materials in his principal storehouse? But so it was with Fels, and naturally, I suppose, with his lesser Earth-brethren.

I must do a complete dissection—and again I must somehow make it clear that no word fits, but only that "dissection" is closest to what you can understand—on Jacob Fels, though "absorption" is closer, without expressing it as well.

I went into his brain, his nerves, his heart, his lungs, into everything about him, rendering him unconscious but not slaying him, and asking him about items that were not instantly realized by me, his answers being quickly furnished and reasonably correct in substance. I found the dissection quite interesting.

Jacob Fels was an interplanetary library of weird information! I absorbed it through senses there's no use trying to describe to you, because you have none of them—all your five together being inadequate even to understand the explanation of the least of mine!

The last thing Jacob Fels wrote was this:

"Home is the handle! I am now the star which is the middle of the Big Dipper's handle!"

Those words made no sense to me whatever but I realized that this was because I was Mizaran, and saw the heavens differently from Earth people. Perhaps he did not even refer to the heavens, but I felt that he did. I left it in the record which I now conveyed into the *Starlet*, which was the name of the projectile. I had already studied the *Starlet's* equipment, mastered it in seconds. I reversed the *Starlet* bodily, set its gadgets in motion, returning it to Earth—to the very people and the very launching stage whence it had borne Jacob Fels. It reached Earth so quickly it was still bathed in my auric influence.

CHAPTER II

Dissection

I DID not expect more of you presumptuous Earthlings immediately. No, there must first be conferences, the posturing of heroes, or men and women who would be heroes, so there was time for me to make a complete study of Jacob Fels, as preparation for others of you when you should arrive.

First, I performed a series of minor operations. I suspended Fels' animation, retaining his life within myself. I've searched Fels' subconscious to find some way by which to explain this to you and this seems most likely to be understood. I suspended Fels' animation within myself as a bit of your gelatine may have suspended within itself some substance *not* gelatine. This fits, except that gelatine eats nothing alien, and I *may* if I *wish*. But I was in no hurry; there was time in which to learn.

Having placed Fels' life where he would not lose it, and outside his body so there would be no possibility that he would suffer pain—I *know* pain and am too gentle to give it to anyone else!—I removed his brain, a perfect trephining job, and set it in my midst, that he might be aware of anything I did. His thoughts would guide me, whether or not he wished them to, into details of the dissection. There was a nebulous attribute about Jacob Fels which was not so easy to isolate; I believe you call it spirit, or perhaps soul. I held this in suspension, also, within the substance of myself.

All languages of Earth known to Fels were mine by this time, not as *you* grasp them by sound, but their meaning, their thought, their intent-to-picture-forth. So it was easy to carry on a conversation with him, mentally, as I worked out the problem, inner and outer, of Jacob Fels.

"I will make you a partner in my ventures between Mizar and Earth if you will only spare my life!" said Fels.

"How can I decide whether it is worth sparing," I made him aware of my thoughts, "before I have completely mastered its simplicities? How can I do that without making an *exhaustive* investigation? That means a careful study of every electron which composes you!"

"Super-infinite dissection!" said Fels. "I am lost!"

"Only if I decide to lose you," I said. I didn't *say*, but you're

accustomed to that expression, so hereafter I'll use it, though actually I *said* nothing at all. "Now observe closely, and correct me if I make any errors!" That was a bit sarcastic on my part, for what could Fels possibly find wrong with anything I did?

It was rather good, I thought, abstracting the trick of trephining from the brain of Fels, using it to *remove* that brain, but I am not sure that Jacob fully appreciated it. He was helpless, however, and could only *think* his fear and resentment.

My next task was to remove the rest of the head of my guest. I did not cut it off, pull it or saw it off. I *diffused* it. There is, in every creature using a head—I am *all* head, myself, and *all* body, *all* brain!—a place at which head begins and neck ends. This is the joining place, so subtly established that your greatest surgeon cannot find it. But it is there, easy for *me* to find. It was a simple question of releasing the interlocking elements at their key points, and lifting the head from the neck. This head I immediately began studying. I had already selected within my own body the areas I would devote to each segment of Jacob-study. You have a saying, "a place for everything and everything in its place." I got it because the thought flashed through Fels' mind when he realized what I was doing, setting aside parts of myself to be the "places" for various items. Having placed the head aside I began to realize that within each place I must have minor places, for the eyes, ears, nose, hair, which I proceeded to separate from the head proper.

In a short time, while Fels groaned mentally, I had so completely dissected the head and all its accoutrements that no human eye, and no human-built microscope, would have seen anything of it. Each item of it consisted of Basic Substance, as I had known all along—since I, too, am constructed of it—and I reduced it to that: electrons, you call them.

"I am indeed lost!" was Fels' thought. "There isn't a surgeon, a scientist, who could restore my brain to the brain-pan, the head to the body, or even the skull which you have, in effect, disintegrated!"

Here was where Fels' brain had a valuable use. I could both comfort him and prove something to myself, even as I proved my superiority to Fels, and so to all Earthmen.

"I can restore it exactly as it was!" I said. "It *exists*, apart, but exists. That which exists can be brought back into original or any other combinations."

I restored Jacob Fels, *completely*, as he had been when he first

landed on Mizar. I am afraid it was cold comfort for him, for when he was whole again his eyes, his brain, his spirit, *begged* me to leave him that way. . . .

"Let us be *friends!*" he said.

"I cannot yet be sure you are worthy of my friendship!" I said.

Reducing the head—except the brain—to all its electronic constituents, was much easier the second time. Fels said:

"You're bound to lose *something* of me, perhaps my spirit, perhaps my sanity, if you take me apart and put me back together so quickly."

"It only seems quick because Earthmen are so bumbling," I explained, not at all sure that it satisfied him. In fact, he seemed more and more difficult to satisfy. It was not that he was critical, but *fearful*, lacking faith in my ability which must have been obvious to him from the first.

I found the cranium particularly interesting, before I reduced it to its electronic minima, placing the parts in that area of myself where it would be simplest to reassemble them. When I had done, I knew all that the head, as such, could tell me—and nothing that has ever served a purpose fails to make a record within itself of its own history, *in complete detail*. It is true throughout the Universes, though not every entity is so far advanced as I am, that this record is *deliberate*. In other words, each entity personally chooses the "place for everything and everything in its place."

I began working down, since it was clear that the head, wherein the brain sat, was only part of the story of Jacob Fels. Indeed the "brain" was only part of the brain, and in order not to sever it from the spinal column when I removed the head, I had to retain the connection with a thin thread of myself, so that no messages would be lost, and the brain of Fels would keep its complete record.

I removed the arms next, then the legs, conveying each to its place.

I knew at once that in order to really maintain Jacob Fels, I must keep his communications system *connected*, so while I actually separated its large number of parts, I connected them with filaments of myself. I had a slight qualm, during the details of these operations, that while it was my intention that Fels become part of me, I might become part of *him* without realizing it! And I dread being surprised. But I need not have worried. It never occurred to Fels to take advantage, besides which he *couldn't*, since

the idea did not occur to him until I originated it, when it was, of course, far too late.

Human surgeons can dissect the human body and stand amazed at their own cleverness. But none exists who can dissect the *finesse* of the nervous system, *retaining the very messages of pain, sorrow or whatever which are at that instant moving back and forth along the—the, is the word "ganglia?"* Nerves will do! How can a surgeon possibly know about nerves, blood, corpuscles, impulses, capillaries, if he doesn't know what they are used for, and is unable to actually see the "uses" at work? I became angry just thinking of how lacking in ability . . . but I'd best discontinue display of my own egotism, more in keeping with the behavior of Earthmen.

First having reduced all of Jacob Fels to his *visible* component parts, I withdrew from operations long enough to exchange thoughts with my guest:

"Simple as you are, Fels," I said, "you are still strangely and wonderfully made, as is everything in the Universe."

"You can scarcely expect me to applaud either your work or myself!" said Fels. "I must look as if I were the human remains from a terrific train wreck, caught up in clear cold consommé!"

At first I did not understand consommé, but gathered it must be something on Earth of which Fels was reminded when he looked at those parts of me which held the visible parts of him in suspension!

"You are not in pain," I said, "else I would be also. Credit me with making it painless!"

"I am thankful that it doesn't hurt," he agreed, "and I would be happy to know how you managed it, if I thought I had a chance *ever* to be happy again, or to profit from your knowledge."

"I'll allow you to participate, though I still make no promise that you will survive," I said. "Much depends on further investigation—and on what Earthlings make up their minds to do when they've read your report and begin to suspect that something may be much amiss here."

"They'll return and blast you to bits!" said Fels.

"I've no fear of that," I retorted, "though I might find the mental impulses that bid them take such steps, *painful!* In that case I might forget any incipient magnanimity! If I forget, I may forget *you*, whereupon your identity can easily be completely lost within me!"

I trust it makes sense. It did to Fels, or I would not be able to

write it here, on his machine, from knowledge I could derive only from *all* of Jacob Fels.

Well, Fels tried to turn away from *sensing* his separated segments. I thought he might prefer *seeing*, and gave the ability of his eyes back to his brain momentarily—and heard him cry out, silently, mentally, with horror. I was almost forced to render him unconscious to keep his pain from hurting *me*!

I soothed the man as best I could.

"I'll have all this crimson debris out of your sight in a heartbeat or two!" I said.

"I am not reassured!" he replied. "But, save mentally, I gather it won't hurt."

"That I can promise you," I answered.

Now, how would you shred an arm, or a leg? I mean *really* shred it, reducing every conceivable part of it to its irreducible minimum?

I asked Fels about that and he started telling me a long story about how eaters shredded chicken, "*fricasseed*" it, was the word. "Chicken," I presumed, was some sort of food. Fels said that cooks tore chicken meat, especially the white, apart and apart, then tore it again, until it was almost a *mass* rather than shreds. It helped me a little, but my dissection had to be more minute. No instruments of man would serve. The arm, leg, whatever I worked on, had to be *diffused*. I did it this way: I absorbed, by—well, an osmotic process, a section of an arm. This I worked upon inside myself, in a way somewhat akin to digestion, until the segment became—as I gathered from his thoughts—invisible to Jacob Fels; it was *always* invisible to me, in any sense Earthlings would understand.

Each section I removed, apart by itself, and separated to its ultimate, I studied until it had nothing left to tell me. Did you know that every electron in a human body—or any other sort of body—bears record of all that body—and of the universe itself? Each electron remembers, records eternally, and transmits to entities capable of reading.

That's how, as I gradually reduced Jacob Fels to invisibility, while keeping him *practical*—as far as he needed to be on Mizar!—I came into possession of about all the knowledge Earthlings could bring me. Any who came after would simply vary the simple facts, changing none of them—so I believed.

I discovered one thing, as I gradually built Fels into myself: I

became stronger, more sure of myself. The reason was obvious: I was absorbing and making use of his *life forces*. Added to those which were mine already they did not greatly increase my total potential, but they *did* increase some—enough that his egotism enhanced mine, made me even contemplate travel to the Earth, if opportunity offered and no great effort on my part should be required! I recognized this for what it was—a feeble attempt on Fels' part to get back to Earth, even if he only got back in the only way he could express it: "in spirit!" I squelched this, or tried to, refusing to be overly influenced by Fels. But his stubbornness was amazing. He kept sending the return thought through our growing connections as "eater" and "eaten," until I began to think that perhaps it would be *wise* for me to make a journey to insignificant Earth!

"I won't go, Fels!" I said.

He didn't answer, and I knew why; he was afraid that his impulses would thereafter be wasted, if I rebelled against them and cut them off—and I felt his hope growing as he began figuring a way back home, even if he *must* return in spirit!

In virtually no time nothing visible remained of Jacob Fels except his brain. I had a "place" for that, too. I now proposed something to Jacob Fels:

"I'm going to leave you scattered through my body, invisible, but completely functional," I said. "It amuses me to discover whether you can find a way out of a predicament I am almost sure no Earthling has ever before experienced!"

"I am to live, then," he answered. "My problem is to restore myself, to be again Jacob Fels . . ."

"But you *are* Jacob Fels!" I assured him.

"Only his electronic entities," he retorted. "Do you discourage my desire to become whole again—if I can?"

"I shall learn from it," I said. "Go right ahead!"

I could feel the hope surge in him, because nothing moved in him, was felt in him or by him, that was not instantly part of my, shall we say, digestive organization? I was immensely intrigued.

"I'll do my best to protect other Earthmen from you!" said the mental impulses of Fels, which now ran through me as they had hitherto run through his body—and *still did*!

"Go ahead," I said, "but there's little you can do! They will come!"

CHAPTER III

Mizaran Web

JACOB FELS was a smart man, for an Earthling. No sooner had he my promise that he would survive as an entity than he began trying to make contact with Earth. His first message was:

"Stay away temporarily until I find some way to inform you of facts on Mizar!"

Fels, mind you, was utterly invisible to *any* eyes, even microscopic eyes, of Earth. His electrons were scattered over a considerable area of Mizar, and therefore over *me*. In your measurements, of which I am not at all sure, Jacob Fels' minimum constituents were scattered over an area of five square miles. Perhaps it is better to say cubic miles, since his width, breadth and thickness were about the same. He was functional because I used filaments of myself to connect his parts and keep them working. Let's see now, how can I make you see just how he *was*? If I had restored Jacob Fels to his original shape, without bringing him back to human size, he would have had the *shape* of a human figure—five miles wide, five miles thick, and five miles tall! This is not startling, not really, since individual human beings, even babies, cover more territory than that; it's only that their extensions are *invisible*.

"You won't make contact with your friends, Jacob," I said. "How can you, possibly . . . ?"

I made an end, just then, of thinking about it, for one could never tell. I almost did not solve the secrets of the "purifiers" and "compressors" about which I wrote further back. I had looked all through the *Starlet* and the typewriter, read all the records of Jacob Fels, before I found the answer. This was it: Earth science had not built space suits to protect its interplanetary travelers from differences in atmospheric pressures, but had built differentials into the space travelers themselves! For ages man had protected himself from infection with injections of various kinds, so some scientist evolved the idea that the right injections would make space suits unnecessary, and thus the purifiers and compressors were elements science had introduced into the very electrons of human beings who traveled interplanetary. I just *did* find the answer, which led me to believe that perhaps Earthmen were more clever than

I at first suspected. There might possibly be secrets in Jacob Fels that even I had somehow missed.

I realized my shortcomings, shortly after the *Starlet* reached Earth, and Earthmen were going wild with excitement over what had happened to Jacob Fels, and assuring one another that he must be alive and, as one reporter put it, I heard later, "all in one piece!" else he would not have been able to send the *Starlet* back to Earth. This amused me. Earthmen never give other-worldly entities credit for ingenuity of any sort.

It was shortly after this that I sensed that Jacob Fels had, *somehow*, managed communication with his fellows on Earth!

"I've beaten you, X of Mizar!" said Fels. "They will not come."

"Jacob," I said, feeling fairly friendly with the little man by now, "suppose you were on Earth right now and someone were here in your place? If you received a message from the exile, commanding you not to attempt rescue, what would you do?"

"I'd do my best to make a rescue!" said Fels.

"Shame on you, for thinking there's nobody on Earth who has your kind of reckless courage! Go ahead and keep in touch, it won't matter one way or the other."

I began to understand that Fels was using *me* as his medium of communication. Remember, the *Starlet* was instantly transmitted to Earth, my auric influence still upon her. It was this element of me, a kind of Mizaran *od*, of which Jacob Fels made use! Thus it was that he was able, by extending this detached part of me like tentacles, to reach the communication panels of the *Starlet* and begin rapping out messages in straight English. It must have been surprising to members of the crew remaining aboard, or put aboard after *Starlet* landed, to hear the instruments begin clicking when, apparently, no one was near them. But the facts were soon understood, sufficiently for the communications systems of the world to transmit such truth as Jacob Fels understood, throughout the Universe of the Stars—which is, of course, outside the orbit of Mizar, if Mizar may be said to *have* an orbit—and stir up the Worlds of the Sun.

I knew all this because, faintly, so faintly I was only slowly aware of it, impulses transmitted by my auric influence on Earth, entered my body on Mizar.

"Fels," I said, "you are smarter than I thought! That is, your warning has reached your people and the people of all your worlds.

But I know them better than you do. In spite of your warnings they will have more volunteers than they can count, willing to suffer whatever they suspect you may be suffering, to find out what's happening to you!"

"That leaves me only one alternative," said Fels. "And I have to hurry with it . . ."

"Before my auric influence fades out of the skin of the *Starlet*," I said, to let him know that I finally *knew*, "and you can no longer communicate. You know, I am inclined to allow you to *fix* it, so you can transmit indefinitely. It gives me so much information!"

So, with a carefree effort of X-will, I "fixed" the influence across the light-years—and this I find I cannot explain to be understood—so that Jacob Fels could remain in contact with his Earth, and so with all his worlds. He began testing out the possibilities of the alternative he had suggested.

"Take your time!" he messaged Earth, messages that were re-broadcast to Venus, Mercury, and all the other inhabited worlds of your system. "Perfect your best atomic weapons. Make sure of your rays, your disintegrators, your diffusers, and come not in one spacer, but in *millions*! Don't approach Mizar from just one side as I did, but surround it. And when you reach the areas of influence of Mizar, do not venture in until science has learned all it can about it! There is something here I cannot explain. For instance . . ."

He began telling Earth what had happened to him. At first I was inclined to head it off, then decided against it, knowing myself utterly invulnerable as far as any demonstration from the Worlds of the Sun were concerned. Let them come in their millions, even their billions. . . .

For I am also millions and billions, a potentially infinite entity!

Perhaps you are by now getting some sort of picture of me, though I doubt it, for I have an idea of your pictures. I held back photographs of Mizaran landscape made by Jacob Fels, remember, and anyway such flat reproductions would provide almost no idea of the thing so inefficiently portrayed.

But to make this record clear, I knew I must find some to-Earthmen-understandable simile. It was some little time before I managed it. Think of a spider of infinite proportions, lurking in a web of infinite proportions; but the spider has no shape, the strands of the web no directions, yet it exists within *all* proportions, in all

known dimensions. Think of me so and you have some idea of Mizar, and of X of Mizar.

If it came to a question of numbers I had another advantage of Earthmen regardless of how many allies they might bring with them from their other planets. They could not be reinforced from among themselves, but must call upon the planets for reinforcements. I could reinforce myself, out of myself. I could spawn X-perfect as fast as any part of me was destroyed—and *nothing of me could be destroyed!* Everything favored me. First among the balancing elements was the fact that I was *at home*. I was the defender, not the aggressor. I would teach the Worlds of the Sun a lesson they would never forget! I would cure them forever of greed of their neighbor galaxies' possessions. Profoundly amused, I waited in my web, "lurked" is a good English word to express it, and awaited the coming of the sun-hordes.

"You would be wiser if you suggested something less in the way of an aggressor force, Jake," I said. "Suppose I turn every last one of your friends into exactly what *you* are? What then would happen to your Worlds of the Sun?"

Jacob Fels was suffering. He could visualize what *might* happen. If I could do as I suggested, then his imagination could picture worlds utterly depopulated, sere and dead, before there should be an end of struggle. I could not endure Jacob's suffering, for I felt it myself.

"Jake," I said, "let me tell you something. I'm going to teach your people a thumping lesson. Then I'm going to send them home, whether or not they wish to go. What good will it do me to destroy them? No, Jake, I shall only shame them. I shall slay their pride!"

"How?" said Fels.

I knew he would send the word immediately if I told him. I knew I had stung him, too. Worlds of the Sun could face annihilation with easier minds than they could face shame, or ridicule—even shame that they turned on themselves, even self-ridicule. I knew if I made this clear to Jacob Fels he would transmit the word to Earth, and the Allies of the Worlds of the Sun might find excellent reason not to go poking through the Handle of the Big Dipper just to rescue one insignificant mortal—and *I wanted them to come!* Very carefully I thought these things without allowing Fels to know my thought. I could still keep secrets from him, though—as far as I *then* knew—he had no secrets from me, since he must

use something of me in every activity of thought: the only activity remaining to him.

"You will know in due course," I told Fels.

All this time, of course, knowing that the world would be *delighted* to have the true record, I made use of Fels' typewriter, recording the facts in English taken from the brain of Fels. The typewriter itself, an old one, provided me with many words and phrases, from its auric influence. The Worlds of the Sun do not use the auric influence at all, a sign of their ignorance, for this influence is their greatest asset. Now, I've set it down here! Perhaps, ages hence, some "genius" of world science will "discover" the truth—and forget that it came to him first from Mizar—from X of Mizar!

The fleets were being mustered. Every world had been given the secret of instantaneous transmission—until now the secret of Earth alone. That, I felt, was a good thing. If Fels had done nothing else he had opened the Earth pocketbooks of selfishness! Now all the worlds had a valuable secret, a secret no longer—and even if millions of worldlings died in attacking Mizar, the worlds would still be far in advance of what they had been before Fels came to the Handle of the Big Dipper!

"You are a benefactor of the Worlds of the Sun, Jake!" I told him.

"I can grasp that," he said, "but it doesn't change the way I feel about the possibility that millions of my people will die!"

"You know, Jake," I said, "I'm beginning to like you. Why not, since you are virtually myself? I've decided not to destroy any of your people, not *any* of them! Of course, thousands of spacers will be lost between the Worlds of the Sun and Mizar, but that I cannot help. These are merely hazards of space travel . . ."

"How can they be lost during instantaneous transmission?" asked Fels fearfully. "There isn't *time* to get lost!"

There would be time, because I would *make* time, as soon as the spacers entered the influence of Mizar, in order to investigate them and their passengers and weapons. Not *much* time, but it wouldn't take much time for things to go wrong with *machines*. Man was vulnerable while he must depend on machines. When he eventually rose above them he might so perfect himself that nothing could hurt or slay him. When that time came, of course, there would be

no reason for war, greed, envy, rapacity—and what then would man *do*?

He would become much like X of Mizar and I am not sure he will like such superiority, especially since then there will be none to whom he can be superior!

Bit by bit, I think, your picture of me must be growing, if your wit *amounts* to wit!

On a given day, before which I allowed Jacob Fels to tell the Worlds of the Sun all he knew—and I allowed him to know just what I wished him to, and no more!—the Allies were poised. The spacers of Earth were twins of the *Starlet*, ovate spheroids, those of Venus globes, as were those of Uranus and Neptune, while Mercury's vessels were discs, Pluto's elongated discs (the most efficient spacers, these), Jupiter's shapeless masses of electronic force that gave me pause for thought, since in essence the substance of those masses were much akin to *myself, my body!*

They launched at a given signal. I watched them come, circling wide to take Mizar from all sides. When I say I watched them I say something the time-bound cannot grasp. For the time-bound who recall that day, know that the instant the vessels left their respective home bases on the Worlds of the Sun, they reached Mizar. But I could slow them down in time in order to study them, without in any way slowing them *as Earthlings understand it*. Thus I was aware of their brilliance, the great spatial panoply of them, rushing out to me in all their millions. I might have felt flattered that so many did so much to destroy, or overcome, *me*—but it was all so futile, so much waste, merely to learn a lesson and lose the most precious human ingredient, *pride!*

I stopped them dead where Mizar's influence began!

We of Mizar are sufficiently advanced to be *one*. Therefore when I say "I," or "we," or "we of Mizar," the expressions are interchangeable. We are one entity at the same time we are limitless in number.

Bear this in mind if the intelligence of the Worlds of the Sun will bear it!

I caught the spacers outside that part of Mizar's influence—call it atmosphere, if you like, since on Earth it would be that—opposite the area in which I held Jacob Fels in suspension. I simply stopped them still in space—as it must have seemed to them. I did not permit them to open their locks, nor maneuver, nor do any-

thing *outside* of their spacers, but I granted them leave to do as they wished inside the ships. It was rather amusing. They disobeyed orders, some of them, and turned loose—or *tried* to!—with everything they had in the way of destructive elements. I stopped every explosive force at its source, so that all their explosions failed even to start, all their cartridges were duds, all their projectiles just so much dead material. No, not *dead*, for nothing in the Universe is dead, but comparatively useless.

"Do you think they'll return home if I free them, Jake?" I asked Fels.

"They have to touch Mizar, *solid* Mizar, before they can make the round trip," said Fels, which I already knew, "and I cannot conceive of *all* of them returning without making *some* sort of investigation!"

All the time, in millions of languages, the Allies of the Worlds of the Sun were bombarding me, us, with demands for surrender—somewhat ridiculous on the face of it—and with demands for explanations of what transpired. I gave no sign of response, merely remained aware of it all—while mastering the languages as each fired its verbal nonsense at me. My attackers were a pretty futile bunch, and I allowed Jake Fels to tell them so. But did they take his word? They did not! I held them until all the worlds knew; then . . . well, *then they landed! I permitted it!*

CHAPTER IV

Captive Ego

WHAT I am about to explain happened *all over, and all through*, Mizar, with but few exceptions; for one, the suspended typewriter. I might also mention the chair on which Fels had sat and the table whereon he placed the typewriter. This trio of gadgets was, of course, near the spot where Fels first landed.

Save for these items, as mentioned shortly hereafter, what happened at the "I" location, happened in variation throughout Mizar. But can you grasp that? I suspect not, from what I collected of Fels' thought on the subject. Earthian "ego" must be *localized* or remain unconscious of itself. Peculiar! But one must face fact, even in Mizar, where no fact is ever quite, naturally, what an Earthling would expect it to be.

I withdrew the influence which held the ships of the Allies of the Worlds of the Sun, and they began swooping down to landings. Fels, I think, realizing how they must have wondered about the influence which had held them briefly beyond direct contact with Mizar, groaned in despair, and I had to reassure him:

"Just a lesson, Jake!" I said.

Naturally I expected *some* of the spacers to turn tail and go back to their worlds, but not a single one did. Pride, again! Where some rushed in, like fools and angels, others *must*, or be afraid of being afraid!

They came down everywhere. . . .

They landed and debouched as skirmishers. They landed firing everything they had that would explode or speed a projectile. I permitted it, since there could be no harm. I had but to space my electrons, and nothing of me was hit. I was far far finer than mist, for mist can be disturbed by atomic explosions, while I cannot be—when I so elect! The Allies made a brave show and plenty of noise; before I began closing in on them.

The first thing that brought attackers to pause was Fels' typewriter. Some Earthian named Frank Luco spotted it. I intended *someone* to see it, for by then I realized that its appearance would puzzle men of Earth. I did not leave the typewriter on the table—no. I raised it twenty or twenty-five Earthian feet in the air, and calmly wrote on it! Since I had diffused myself outside the vision range of Earthians, it appeared to them that the typewriter was suspended in midair—and when you analyze it, it *was*!—and something or someone invisible wrote upon it! Moreover, since even a staid and dignified entity of Mizar likes a show occasionally, especially if he has been more or less lonely for ages on end, I calmly allowed the typewritten sheets to fall to Mizar's ground as I finished with them!

"Hey, look!" yelled Luco. "Here are some of Fels' notes! But how is he *doing* this? What has happened to the guy?"

I immediately set Luco right. I wrote:

"Your reporter is *not* Jacob Fels—save in infinitesimal part! This is being written by X of Mizar in order that the exact truth may be known! If I were you, I would gather up these sheets and transmit their sense to the rest of your Allies. It would be far wiser than wasting destruction on Mizar, where it can have no effect whatever!"

It was ludicrous. For several minutes the brave warriors who

had landed at the spot whereon Jacob Fels had landed, were men fighting at shadows. They fired their ray guns so wildly, in all directions, often spinning on their heels to look behind them, that it was a miracle they didn't kill one another. I let it go on until someone aimed at the clicking typewriter, then called a halt.

"That will do!" I wrote. "You visitors lack respect for hospitality. You are also careless with weapons. I shall now disarm you!"

They were, of course, much surprised when their weapons, scores of them, seemed to jump out of their grasp as if snatched by invisible hands—a fair approximation of what *did* happen—and hoist themselves far out of reach, higher in the "air" even than the typewriter which, as far as Earthians understood, stood on nothing to click out its words.

Yes, it happened all over Mizar at exactly the same moment, since a command on Mizar was a command *to* Mizar—the ultimate in cooperation.

Frank Luco was the first Earthian to protest. Thinking—I could sense his thought—that he was far lighter on Mizar than on Earth, that he could jump higher by far on Mizar than on Earth, Luco made a great leap to clutch at one of his brace of ray-guns, suspended above his head.

It amused me to catch him in midleap and hold him there! There was a great furore when his comrades saw what happened to him. They began running this way and that like disturbed woods creatures. Command went glimmering on the instant, I saw to that, for I began to pick men here and there at random, and flip them up, to hang them in space. I did not harm them, of course. I left breath in them. I merely rendered them helpless, though I did allow them to swing their arms and legs, to talk, shout, scream, moan, whatever they wished to do—which, of course, meant to breathe also.

They were like men just below the surface of water too thin to swim in, trying to swim, trying to reach the surface, wondering why, since they could not, they were still able to breathe.

I allowed one or two near "me" to swim back to ground level, to stand upright—then snatched them up again. Their screams hurt me, somewhat, so shortly I shut them off. Quick silence fell all over Mizar. The attackers, in all their millions, stared at one another, their mouths gaping as they sought to force communication with fellow fighters close enough to touch—yet whom I did not permit

them to touch. The Earthians—Venusians, too, and Mercurians, all the worldings of the Worlds of the Sun—were resourceful. They, of course, had military signals, and many of them were adept at dactylology. In a short time they were in communication again, and looking somewhat foolish, even to one another—though nobody laughed, you may be sure!

Men signaled one another in semaphore, and with the hand-wagging of deaf-mutes. And since all stood on nothing, and some persisted in kicking feet as if they swam, the tableau was something to see. Some men stood on—apparently—nothing at ten feet altitude, some at fifty, some at a hundred, and to further confound and confuse them, I snatched up the leaders to altitudes varying from five hundred Earthian feet to one thousand!

Picture it? Picture it!

Millions stood on nothing at varying altitudes above what *seemed* to them to be Mizar! It occurred to none, nor would until I was ready to disseminate, that the hard surface of Mizar was part of my physical body, while that which they could not see was my sensitive body—in which I held them, in readiness to digest them at my leisure if that should be my urge!

It was not, however, my plan, though I could sense terror in Jacob Fels that made me ache in a spot or two.

"Jake," I said, "did I not promise you? I shall not harm your people save in their pride, as I told you. Do not fear. I really like these friends of yours, and would be friends with them!"

Jacob Fels was unconvinced. He mistrusted me, perhaps because it was natural for him to mistrust *everybody*, an Earthian trait, I believe. He could not believe that I would allow worldlings, come out with weapons of aggression in their hands, to live when it was so clear that I could erase them without trace—and be less hungry in my body for having done so.

"Trust me, Jake," I repeated. "I shall not harm them."

When I tired of the play I stood everybody still where he suspended, and paid heed only to their thoughts, which ran back and forth crazily through sensitive *me*—while I investigated the spacers, one by one, finding some far superior to the *Starlet*, some inferior, all equipped with instantaneous transmission. I myself, I now realized, since people and spacers were part of me, also had instantaneous transmission! Of course I could have had it these ages past, but there had been no need, and I had never been curious about

other worlds, suns, planets, anything outside Mizar. There had been countless attempts to communicate and we had accepted them all, answering none. Mizar and X of Mizar were sufficient unto themselves.

However, here I now had every convenience for travel to the Worlds of the Sun. I could go as one "ego" or as millions. I could go to one of the worlds at once, or all at once, in communication with myself the whole time though I might be divided among the worlds. The Allies of the Worlds of the Sun, without realizing it, without of course planning it that way, had not only delivered themselves up to me, but each and all of their worlds at the same time!

Did I wish to take advantage of the situation? I was not sure. I held conferences with myself while I studied the gadgetry of the spacers and found them absurdly simple. I could run them myself, as I could run the typewriter. I could run them singly, with part of myself, or distribute myself among them, running them all at the same time.

But why should I do this?

I had "henchmen," henchmen by the suspended millions! I began to be amused again, and shared my amusement momentarily with Jacob Fels—who in his turn was not at all amused!

"I appear not only to have delivered Earth into your hands, X of Mizar," he said, "but the other Worlds of the Sun as well!"

I teased him a little.

"If I wiped out all life on those worlds," I said, "it would really be your fault that billions and billions of human beings . . ."

"Please, X!" said Jacob Fels, putting more pleading, more feeling, into the one word and the 'X' than he could possibly have put into all the words of this record, had they been his. Come to ponder it, the words *are* his, since I got them out of him and his typewriter!

"But surely you cannot expect me just to send your friends back whence they came?" I protested. "They will spend the rest of their lives planning other forays against me!"

"I will dissuade them, if you'll give me a chance," said Fels.

"They really *do* listen to you, don't they?" I said. "I am of the opinion that worldlings listen to nothing, to no one, even their own advanced natures!"

Fels groaned in answer; there was no *other* answer!

I continued with my lesson to the worldlings. For some hours

I let them hang on what seemed to be nothing. Then, I deepened it, so that they could see—like a cloud growing, becoming visible, around them. It was a thickening of myself, my atmosphere more and more evident to them. They had been silenced for hours. Now I removed the necessity for silence, just to see what they would do—and the silence held.

I will not say that the worldlings were *afraid*. They were beyond fear. They had resigned themselves. Having resigned themselves to death—or dispersion, though they only *sensed* that—they gave way to their curiosity. I could feel them, each and severally, ask themselves, in this thought:

"Just what is happening to us, how, and what is doing it?"

It could do no harm to let them know. Having by this time learned about newspapers on the worlds, I not only prepared notes on what had happened, I translated them swiftly into all their many tongues, reproduced them almost infinitely, so there should be enough—and after I did that, I continued to do it, page by page.

Distribution was a simple problem, quickly solved—though I doubt if it seemed simple to the suspended ones. I simply scattered the pages through *my inner communication system*, passing them from "tentacle" to "tentacle" of my substance. But the pages must have seemed as if sped by the wind, to the men who received them. In order to make clear that the pages were not leaves from some strange tree scattered by high winds, I sped the leaves to areas just before the eyes of each of my "guests," where each could read truth in his own language.

However, had there been observers not involved in the situation which I found amazingly intriguing, those observers would have said that all the surface of Mizar broke into a storm of spinning sheets of white paper! I suppose it would have looked like that, and did indeed look so to my "guests."

In fact, I learned later, my whim to disseminate leaflets to all the Allies produced such a storm that it was visible on all the Worlds of the Sun! Since none of the worldlings had been in communication with his world since the spacers had come into contact with the atmosphere of Mizar, I suspected that the Worlds of the Sun had given up all their millions of champions as lost! I could almost feel the sorrow radiating from those worlds! But had I myself initiated any of its causes? I had *not*! I had been a recluse

all the ages of development of the worldlings. I asked nothing of them. . . .

"If we could just erase it and start fresh!" said Fels, answering my thought.

"If we did, what then, Jake?" I asked. "In no time at all these or their descendants would come rampaging to Mizar again, cocky, assured that they would cover themselves with glory where their forebears failed. It will never do, Jake. It just isn't *human*!"

"What could you know about *humanity*?" groaned Fels.

"As you are I once was," I told him, "and as I am you will be!"

"Where did you get that?" asked Fels. "I once saw a tag in a store window on Earth with that saying on it! It was affixed to a human skeleton, for all passersby to read. But I cannot believe . . ."

"You are developing, evolving," I pointed out. "Not fast, not even perceptibly, but evolving just the same. It is the law of Nature to cooperate with fellows if one would survive, if *any* would survive. I am the result, not of complete cooperation, but an approach to it considerably in advance of yours."

"But while I am part of you now," wailed Fels, "I don't know *what* part! I've no real idea of your nature!"

"In time, Jake," I said, "in time you *will* have! And calm yourself, for if I do anything to your people or to your worlds, it will be to their advantage! I could not make them less than they are without making myself less, so since contact produces something, I will benefit your people and your worlds!"

He didn't believe it, still held in that suspicion of all good-doing which is a human characteristic no matter in which of the Worlds of the Sun it is found.

I darkened myself, until I shut my guests all out, one from another. I let them test me while I was akin to tar—and while I was akin to obsidian. I changed color, until I was pinkish, rosy, purple. I watched men I had held in blackness, hidden from one another, reappear and look dazedly around.

I had gone far enough. Now it was time to spring my surprising plan on my "guests" who, while part of me, had imbued me with the urge to see faraway places. I made a decision to visit the Worlds of the Sun—all of them simultaneously, to save worldly time. What I did there, destiny would decide. A bit of doing was necessary!

CHAPTER V

Mizaran Embarkation

I WAS not trying to mystify, though it is easy to mystify worldlings. What I did I did in what was for me the simplest way. I began going aboard the spacers, but had no intention of actually operating any of them. To have done so would have been totally unnecessary effort, since each had brought with it its own crew.

I shuffled the crewmen of each craft within myself, to a mathematical nicety, so that when I flowed into the spacers each of them was in proper position to perform duties to which assigned. I did not change the assignments each had originally received. I simply filled the remaining areas of each of the spacers with myself. I realize that I am now giving you less information about myself that is readily graspable. But put it like this: your Earth is surrounded by atmosphere. Whenever you enter a room part of the atmosphere is in it, more goes in with you; it is everywhere there is life. When you fly you fly through it. It becomes rarefied as you ascend toward, toward . . . well toward Mizar, for example. But cabins of spacers are pressurized. Atmosphere is purified and used over and over again. Now, suppose all that atmosphere around your Earth—whether it be Venus, Earth, Mercury, or whatever—were a *single entity*. Some of him would be everywhere. And that is how it was with me. I could not be seen unless I so elected, but I was there. One recognizes the wind without needing to see anything but its results. And when Earth ships travel, does not the "atmosphere entity" travel with them, segmentarily?

But this was a new venture for me. I allowed the spacers to prepare for departure. They awaited the command of the man they were pleased to defer to as their "commander," taking no account of *me*, their *real* commander! I did not mind, but I decided to make authority clear, so that they should not take too much for granted.

I suppose you would say my next move was like the constricting coils of some Earth serpent in action. I allowed the spacers only to *start*—which means that I caught them before instantaneous transmission could actually land them on their various worlds, and forcibly returned them to the surface of Mizar.

A kind of pandemonium broke loose on the spacers! They could not help seeing that after their departure something definite and

huge had gone out of Mizar! The world of Mizar had been rather beautiful, with trees, flowers, plants, shrubs, grass, streams—none remotely resembling anything of the sort suggested by the English names, on Earth—and now it was a desolate waste, as void of apparent life as Earth's rocky satellite! The reason? *I* was no longer on it! The entity, and therefore the life, of Mizar, had departed! I don't believe even then that the people of the worlds realized they had a stowaway aboard the spacers, that I was with them, around them, and that all the beauty of Mizar was going to Earth, Venus and the other Worlds of the Sun, with me, *in me*!

I might add here that Jacob Fels *knew*! I did not separate myself from him. I kept him close enough to all his parts that he was reduced—almost to visibility (indeed several crewmen of *STARLET II* insisted they could see him, like a mist in the assembly room)—sufficiently to enter *en masse* one spacer.

"Now what are you up to, X of Mizar?" asked Jacob Fels.

"You visited Mizar," I said tentatively.

"Yes."

"You have also, at various times, visited Venus, Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus, Pluto, Neptune, no?"

"True, yes."

"Then should you have any qualms because I choose to visit all those places at once—to save time for everybody?"

"I am afraid of what you may decide to do!"

"Did you do any harm when you visited your neighboring worlds? Did you do or even plan any harm to your neighbors?"

"Of course not! But I never had the power you have! Not all my people on Earth have the power you can wield! It is dangerous for an entity to have such power!"

"Well, it *could* be," I said, allowing all the spacers to take off again, though there were many worldlings who wanted to get out of the spacers and inspect and take pictures of Mizar when it was so clearly lifeless. This I did not permit. All crewmen discovered, virtually simultaneously, that locks could not be opened. This was easy; all I did was extend myself against the doors, and not all the strength of all the crewmen in any one spacer could prevail against me.

"Get out of here!" came the p.a. system command voice of the High Admiral of the spacers. "Take off! Back to your own landing fields!"

Naturally, never having done this before, I was not going to allow instantaneous transmission to set me down in strange places where there might develop contingencies with which it would be beyond my ability to cope.

So I halted the spacers a million miles out. That was easy, too. They were diverging somewhat to return to each of their several worlds. All I had to do was *bold*. This is easy to grasp when you realize that I filled each and every one of those spacers with myself. It was as if, then, one of my infinite numbers of entities had taken command of each spacer, and its commander and troops must do as bidden. However "I" did not say anything. I simply halted the spacers in space, a million miles out, and waited.

Some seconds passed before they recovered from the stunned feeling of halting short of the goal. Then commands began moving back and forth. Demands for explanations. Request for theories. What had happened to everybody? What had halted the spacers? Of course they had asked that when the spacers first contacted my influence and I halted them outside of Mizar until I could look them over. I did exactly the same thing here, in an analogous way. It didn't take the commanders of the fleets more than a few seconds to note the grim parallel. Not only did they shoot the word back to all their worlds, *they began probing for me!*

They had a stowaway; or millions of stowaways, and now they knew it! I quickly made them aware that knowing about it, and doing something about it, were different things.

"The entity," said a high navigational official of Mars, "is impalpable and multiple-featured. If he, or it, does not choose to reveal himself, we must probe for him. That he, or it, or she, knows what we are doing, is quite clear. Now, my suggestion, High Admiral, is that we address ourselves directly to him, it, her!"

There was spatial-radio silence then, and from the instruments aboard the spacer of the High Admiral came this:

"Entity of Mizar, aboard the spacers of the Allied Fleets! What are you? Who are you? What do you plan for us? Will you be good enough to communicate?"

It was quite clear, a reasonable set of questions, a reasonable request. I could go on sending out sheets from the typewriter which was also in *STARLET II*—I wondered all the time why nobody tried to contact me through the typewriter which was so definitely

and obviously a contact!—but that would not make it possible for the spacers to see me.

I had no audio-method of communication. I could, however, communicate through color and perhaps . . . no, not sound, for sound is dangerous to me. Color and sound are the same on the Worlds of the Sun, naturally, *because* of the Sun, but not on Mizar.

I began experimenting, to see if we could reach one another. I filled all the spacers with the *pinkish* glow of myself. There were a few hysterical crewmen, of course, who tried to do something about this: I was sprayed, rayed, exploded, and of course nothing happened. I became darker, filling the spacers with ebony night. I knew that in every spacer incipient scientists were making analyses of me, trying to find me out in bottles, retorts, Bunsen burners! Well, let them!

I "cleared" the spacers when they had had time to decide that it was futile to attempt to discover me. I realized that when I cleared the spacers everybody aboard would think I had gone, that I had been somehow ejected from all spacers. I could almost hear the millions of sighs of relief—so I filled the spacers, briefly, with yellow, just to let everyone know the hopelessness of the hope.

There was, of course, a way to communicate, and I felt that Jacob Fels would seize on the idea with avidity. I could communicate through *him* because the dissection and absorption had made him *me*, and he was still himself as well.

Assembling Jacob Fels was a master stroke on my part. I should have done it before. As far as the spacerfolk of *STARLET II* were concerned, Jacob Fels simply materialized before the desk of the typewriter, out of nothing—a million miles from Mizar, where the Worlds of the Sun had given him up for lost!

Excitement aboard the *STARLET II* was terrific. Men who had never known Jacob Fels crowded around him to shake hands. I retained communication with Fels via our common filaments, though he lacked in nothing that had been Fels. In fact he was far advanced from what he had been when he landed on Mizar!

"Tell them the story, Jake," I said, "as it appears to you! But first, tell them this: we are returning to the worlds by easy stages, taking about an Earthian week. Between stages our travel is by instantaneous transmission. When we halt to study the heavens I am asking complete reports from all scientists of all spacers. What I

want is a complete, continuous report of the processes of the Galaxy!"

Fels clicked it out on the typewriter and Communications sped it to the High Admiral.

"Roger!" was the brief acknowledgement of the High Admiral. I did not know the meaning of the word, but discovered it *was* acknowledgement when the spacer scientists got busy "doing fixes" of the surrounding space. I felt pretty good about this, knowing that nothing of the kind had been done in this vast section, and intending to allow each of the spacers to have a complete record of our discoveries.

"Do you intend us or our worlds any harm?" the Admiral asked.

The question apparently was addressed to Jacob Fels, but was of course intended for me.

"X of Mizar," Fels replied as I dictated the words, "has not decided. At the moment he is only exploring, exercising that curiosity about matters outside his own realm of influence which human beings should *quite* understand!"

The High Admiral did not care for the sarcasm and was inclined to ape emperors of old and take out his anger on the messenger—in this case Jacob Fels.

"Take no action on Fels," I dictated to Fels, "or all spacers will return at once to Mizar for an indefinite stay!"

The High Admiral did not reply—so I sent the whole lot back to Mizar, kept them grounded for five minutes, restored them to their former positions in the heavens. Now the High Admiral clicked out a message.

"You win, X of Mizar," he said, "*temporarily!* You can scarcely expect us to take this lying down!"

Leave it to worldlings! I've never experienced anything like them for reckless, audacious temerity. Not only would they fly in *my* face—in whose power they were—but they would fly in the face of their own Providence as well!

In fact, they *did!* And I admired them for it.

I found that at about the halfway mark between Mizar and the Worlds of the Sun I lacked some of my ability to "snap back." I could—though I did not, except fractionally and without allowing the spacer officers to know that I did it—return to Mizar, instantaneously, and carom off to my place in the ranks of spacers, without the spacers I thus used being aware that the movement had taken

place. It was just as well I did not permit them to know, for the return became increasingly difficult. Oh, there was no danger of my being lost, or thrown out of the spacers, or being destroyed, but my connection with Mizar was loosening somewhat.

If the High Admiral should find this out he might feel that here was a chance for freedom.

How responsive was I to gravitation of the worlds? As I came more and more into the combined pull of the Worlds of the Sun, I realized that here, in the mysterious gravity which everybody talked about and nobody in the worlds understood, I faced something I might not be able to overcome. I could work through, and in, its influence, but as I came closer and closer, it became more of a task to *oppose*.

"Jake," I said, "what would it be like if I were not able to return to Mizar?"

Jacob Fels was instantly on the alert.

"Oh, don't get up too much hope, Jake," I said. "If I am not able to return to Mizar, that will not indicate that I am doomed to die! I doubt very much that I shall lose my ability to perform—*within the limitations gravity has set for worldlings!* I shall still be able to cause a lot of trouble, for I shall continue to be X of Mizar. If I am imprisoned, even by the force of gravity, *and perhaps divided by it*, you must understand that I can cause great commotion on all your worlds!"

"Meaning, I take it," said Jacob Fels, "that you'd just as soon the High Admiral never learned that you were losing your nerve a little. What has happened to weaken your confidence, X of Mizar?"

A keen fellow, that Jacob Fels! I felt, though, that we were friends. Perhaps I could trust him.

"I haven't mistreated you, have I, Jake? Or any of your people?"

"I'll stand by you, within reason!" said Fels promptly, anticipating what I had in mind, for the closer we came to the aura of the Worlds of the Sun, the more I was in *his* power, too—since nothing could alter the fact that we were, in many facets, *still one!*

"Yes, and if anything happens to me, *seriously*, I mean," I suggested, "it also happens to you!"

"Do you think I would hesitate to sacrifice myself for my people?" demanded Fels.

Almost anxious to be a martyr, it seemed to me.

"Jake," I said, "I have an awful suspicion that I'm never going back to Mizar!"

"Could you go *now*?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Then why *don't* you? Why go on into our gravitational pulls and lose yourself, make an exile from Mizar of yourself, forever?"

So, Fels had guessed.

"Why didn't you turn back during your flight to Mizar?" I asked softly. "Why did your people refuse to flee when I freed them from Mizar's atmosphere—swooping down to hopeless landings rather than try to save their skins?"

"Pride," said Fels. "Curiosity. Daring. Challenge!"

"Then you must be able to see that your ancient derivation, as a people, and mine as X of Mizar, are *parallel*! For I respond to the same challenges!"

The spacers landed on the Worlds of the Sun. I became an entity much divided and subdivided. For me opening spacer doors were fearsome.

CHAPTER VI

Whence Mutants?

I FLOWED out of all the spacers on all the worlds when their doors opened to welcome the space explorers back to their various homes. I was intrigued by the life around me, and the strange satisfactions derived from living on nine worlds at one time—a situation somewhat difficult to explain, though every human being lives more lives than one—concurrently, too! Oh, yes, the physical life in which the hands work for a livelihood—while the mind lives its dreams and directs the hands at the same time. Man may work, even on a task requiring complete absorption *apparently*, yet wing mentally to outermost limits of space—the one *true* instantaneous transmission.

I had not expected what the Commanders of Worlds of the Sun did, but I was not too greatly surprised. At a signal every spacer which had been in touch with Mizar became inoperative. This was part of an ancient plan, in case of conquest by enemies from Outside, to prevent use of the spacers by the enemy. I was an "enemy" until my nature could be realized.

"Now, X of Mizar," said the High Admiral, "you are a prisoner of the worlds! What are you going to do about it?"

"I can take full possession of the worlds," I said through Jacob Fels. "I can destroy all life upon them, but ages ago I learned something that worldlings seem never as yet to have discovered: when one destroys a bit of *any* life, one partially commits suicide! Even so, life is never lost, though forever thereafter the individual from whom it is taken *lacks* something! So, before I take any sort of action, I am going to make a study of the worlds, severally and in detail. I suggest that your scientists keep watch for signs of my activities, since I shall not disclose myself otherwise."

"And for what are we to watch?"

"You have a word that comes close," I said. "Mutant! Watch, around over your worlds, for new things in plants, beasts, *life!* Each will be useful, so it might not be wise to interfere!"

There was a kind of friendliness among us, a sort of camaraderie that I liked; it relieved the loneliness of my ages. I felt I was going to enjoy my "vacation" on the worlds.

I shall confine myself, in this English version, with its translations into the languages of Earth, to what I next did *on Earth*. Before I go into that, however, you will be asking a question: what happened to Mizar; did anything of X remain on that body in space? I shall answer that first. When I realized that gravity might make it impossible for the "me" that traveled with the spacers to return to Mizar, I made sure that my influence remain on Mizar. In this way, I would grow again on Mizar. At the same time, I would do something with myself on the Worlds of the Sun. In due course I would be linked with those worlds *and with Mizar by my own body!* In a way I suppose you might say it was inevitable that I, X of Mizar, *conquer* the worlds. Perhaps, but only insofar as I conquered *myself!* That, of course, is the only *true* conquest—of *self!* But I am no preacher.

I fled quickly out of such cities as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Miami, Hollywood, Seattle, Berlin, London—out of all the cities where men assembled to struggle over non-essentials. I hunted out the remote, neglected portions of the Earth. I was aware in all my sensitivity, naturally, that when I touched these areas I touched the world's oldest; in ages past all of them had been the populated areas of the planet. In other words, cityfolk from all the cities of the world had a vested interest in the remote areas—for as those

areas now were, the populated areas *would certainly become*. Sooner or later all the cities of the world, being unnatural accretions, like skin eruptions on human bodies, must be *balanced*; which means, briefly, must give way to spatial *correction*.

Humanity should have studied the ancient deserts, to guard against making ancient mistakes, but humanity had only the vaguest ideas that it *ever* made mistakes. Deserts over which a few hardy men, accidentally or otherwise, were wont to travel, gave those travelers some inkling—for suffering in the desert is one of man's oldest stories.

Who can cross a desert without dread? Whence comes the dread? Out of memory—for here in times past man was as he is now in the populated areas which, in their turn, must become like this. Man *senses* this, and flees in terror from areas of seeming mystery. They are *not* areas of mystery, but of memory—and foreboding example.

Here, of course, I could do something. It would interfere with the world's seasons, but through Jacob Fels I could explain, and men would understand, not become panicstricken, and take advantage of what I did.

I took possession of many places. I'll name a few, to make it clear: Kalahari, Neiba, Gobi, Sahara, the deserts of the world; the Grand Canyons of the Colorado and of Yellowstone, jungles of South America (with a "headquarters" in the Valley of the Amazon, where I felt more "at home" than in any place else on earth!), the American Dust Bowls, various American Bad Lands. I made a careful study of each of these areas, and found that I could easily adapt myself to them.

I put down my roots—how else can I say it, and began to evolve X of Mizar, in each place adapting him to the locale, the locale to X of Mizar!

Slowly I began turning the sharp basalt of the Bad Lands into soil in which roots might fasten. It would not do to work too fast, and I had *ages* ahead of me. I covered the rocks with voracious lichens, part of myself, which broke down the rocks, cooperating with them to produce soil. For there is life in rocks, the life of the sun, and it gives of itself to the cooperative. I cooperated.

Within five years men who went into the Bad Lands began to note the "amazing erosion" in the heart of such lands—and the building of new soil in which flowers of the prairie grew. I used birds, as Nature does, to distribute seeds. I made use of winds, too, judiciously.

I grew in happiness, for I was being useful. Among the growths I introduced into the Bad Lands were adaptations of growths that were old stories on Mizar! Scientists—I was amused when they came up with the word!—called them “mutants,” and they were good for food.

Slowly, carefully, after much brooding, I hung the ageless walls of the Grand Canyons with flowers—orchids, if you like, shrubs, plants. I nested new species of birds among them, and allotted the birds and plants time to build a world they liked, against the time when man would find need of such areas for himself. When he did, they would be ready for him.

In remote areas of the deserts, including the Mojave, I began producing new plant foods. And when they were grown, small animals and birds. Men began to be amazed to learn that not *all* the bird species, not *all* the plants, for all man's knowledge, were known to even the highly scientific man!

Did man remember me, after the mutants began appearing, all over the worlds, mutants which were designed to supply all the lacks against which man had been warning man for generations; lacks which I instantly discovered and set myself to supply? Man is a forgetful creature, but I did not mind, because he did not interfere in any way with my efforts to make myself at home in a new world—in new *worlds*!

I liked the new worlds, especially since I had not lost, nor been lost by, my own Mizar!

I have now told you, worldlings, of the origin of life *as far as a given world is concerned*. As to whence it *came* to that world, I can only say this: *I came from Mizar*. Whence came life to Mizar? I do not know—from some other galaxy, for all I know. For all my advanced wisdom, I can tell you little or nothing of the First Cause, except to inform you that nothing of which I know, *nothing*, began with *me*!

This is just a silly theory, you say, and X of Mizar is merely a delusion?

You may be right, and your own “knowledge” of The Beginning may be exact. Think it over, please, and when you are *sure*, bear this in mind: X of Mizar will be grateful for any brand new information you can provide him!

• • • • •

The Green Earth Forever

By CHRISTOPHER MONIG

☞ When the nations of the Earth unleashed their atomic fury, another world watched and waited....

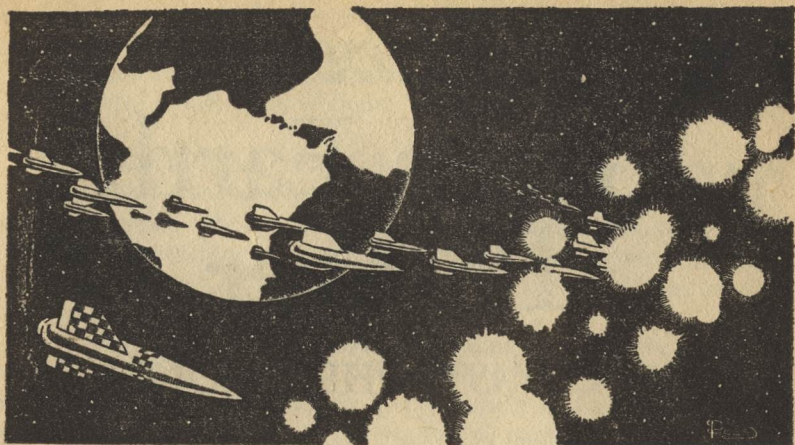
ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES ROSS

THE last of the strange aircraft, including flying saucers, was seen over Earth early in the month of April, 1959. Emmett T. Whortle, a farmer living ten miles out of Dallas, Texas, saw the saucer-shaped ship swooping over his south forty early in the morning. As he watched, it tilted skyward and shot away from Earth as though pursued by the entire U. S. Air Force. Which it was, as soon as Farmer Whortle reached a phone. But the Air Force never caught up with it and mass hallucination received one more score.

It was a month later, on a Monday morning in May, when within the space of two hours Russia declared war on the United States and the United States declared war on Russia. Shortly thereafter forty-two other countries declared war one way or another and the World War III, which had started as a minor action in Korea nine years before, became an official act.

President Cuttleworth announced that America would use the atom bomb; Premier Shalikoff said that Russia would do the same. As reports poured in from the other countries, it became rather obvious that everybody had the atom bomb and that everybody was going to use it.

The first atom bomb fell on a camouflaged factory in Siberia and



the second one erupted over an American military base in Japan less than five minutes later.

Major Harley Edwards and Lieutenant Robert Fenton, pilot and co-pilot respectively of an atom bomb carrier in the 29th Bomber Squadron stationed at a secret field in South Dakota, were on a three-day leave when war was declared. With ten hours still to go on the leave, they found themselves being interrupted, in the pursuit of two blondes, by an M.P. and the leave was canceled. Ten minutes later the two officers were in their jeep headed for the secret base.

"You'd think," grumbled Lieutenant Fenton, "that they could have been considerate enough to have held up their damn war a few hours. We needed those blondes to round out the leave."

"The fortunes of war, my boy," said Major Edwards. He was two years the lieutenant's senior and his remarks came from that lofty position. "Besides, with the war on, there'll always be two blondes waiting somewhere. Maybe we can even save a couple for the day we land in Russia."

"You're really revved up, aren't you, fly-boy," the lieutenant said. "You know damn well that by the time we land in Russia if there are any blondes left we'll have to report to the medics and draw a Geiger counter before going out on a date. In this war they're going to be scientific about *everything*."

The jeep scuttled along the winding road up into the Black Hills, bouncing over the hills and skittering around the curves.

"Blondes ain't everything," the major finally announced. "You know what I was thinking about, Bob?"

"Blondes," the lieutenant said promptly.

"You'll never get to be a general thinking only about blondes," scoffed the major. "I was realizing that at least one mystery of our age is pretty well cleared up."

"What?"

"Remember the flying saucers?"

"Remember them hell," said the lieutenant. "I saw them. Over Wright Field. I chased one of them, but it left me so fast I thought I was one of the original Wright brothers. I turned in a report on it, but after G-2 finished with me, I was glad to admit that it was nothing but the sunlight on a tin can."

"Where'd the tin can come from?" the major asked idly.

"How the hell do I know. If G-2 didn't care, what do you care?"

"Just wondered," the major said, grinning. "Remember the explanations about flying saucers?"

"Sure. One guy thought they came from Wolf 359. Another thought they were from Mars. And a third guy claimed they'd come from Venus and were filled with a bunch of little men. Seems to me the theory was that they knew we were going to blow ourselves up in an atomic war and that if the earth was destroyed that would throw the solar system out of balance and the whole works would crack up. So the little men were flying around to stop us from blowing them all up. But we still got our atomic war, I notice."

"There was another theory," the major said.

"You mean the idea that they were Russian ships? That was strictly a top brass idea. Major, you're too big a man to go buttering up generals that way."

The major grinned. "Still," he said, "it looks as if they had something. Flying saucers, flying doughnuts, flying ice cream cones—somebody reported seeing one of them every few days for a good twelve years. The last one was reported a month ago and there hasn't been a single strange ship sighted since. Then today Russia declares war. Get the connection?"

"Don't tell me, let me find it myself," Lieutenant Fenton said, yawning. "Personally, I liked the Venus explanation better. It was more romantic."

"So sorry," murmured the major. "But I think we can forget about the Venusians and their *Uebermensch* science. No ships flying

faster than light, no abrogation of the law of gravity, no magnetic power which can toss planets around. But when we get over Stalin-grad, we'll probably run into the flying saucers again."

"Okay, wake me up in time to pour," the lieutenant said, bored with a subject that contained no blondes.

Nor was there time for blondes when they reached the secret base. Within an hour the 29th Bomber Squadron was headed for Siberia, passing over Alaska like a thundering cloud.

They crossed the border at thirty thousand feet and fanned out, each bomber heading for its own target. Edwards and Fenton rode their big bomber toward Verkhne Kolymsk, where G-2 believed there was a hidden stockpile. Watching their instruments, waiting for the time to drop the deadly bomb, they ignored the tiny fighter planes which darted at them like sparrows around an eagle.

At four-thirty that afternoon, just as the two blondes back in Belle Fourche were dating two Tank Corps sergeants, they found their target. As the flame and smoke mushroomed upward, Major Edwards and Lieutenant Fenton became the first and second candidates, respectively, for the Congressional Medal, posthumous award. At the same moment a Colonel-General Dashilkov became eligible for the Star of a Soviet Hero, but there were no witnesses so it was never delivered to his family.

The score was about even as the sun went down on the first day of war. President Cuttleworth made a television appearance to report on the damage done to the Red hordes while Premier Shalikoff promised the end of degenerate capitalism. Various presidents, kings, premiers, prime ministers, and leaders rendered faithful carbons of the two chief speeches.

That night there were two moons in the sky.

It is really unimportant who first discovered the second moon, since the news spread rapidly. Astronomers were rushed into the breach and observatories from Palomar to Moscow, from Boston to London, swung into action. Their first reports merely confirmed that the second moon was indeed a planetary body. Reassured that it was not a Soviet trick, or an American secret weapon, the war leaders went back to their war and left such foolishness to those who spent their lives at it.

That first night the people of the world stood in backyards and on rooftops to gaze at the two moons swinging lazily across the sky.

Children were lifted up to prove to them that they couldn't touch the second moon any more than they could the first one.

Throughout that first night, the scientists of the world issued hourly bulletins as they studied the intruder. On the side of the Earth where it was then daylight, the reports from the other side were picked up and broadcast. Television programs were broken into and meetings interrupted, in every possible language, to reveal the new discoveries.

The new satellite was approximately 263,000 miles from Earth—only a little farther away than the old moon. It seemed nearer because its diameter was 7,700 miles instead of the 2,160 miles of the moon.

It had an orbital velocity of 18.5 miles per second; its mass was 0.996, as compared to Earth; its volume was 0.995 as compared to Earth; its density was 5.51; its albedo per cent was 50; and its mean daily motion was 0.985 per cent.

These and other answers the astronomers easily discovered, but there were two things about the new satellite which completely baffled them. There seemed to be a dark ring around the body, moving with its rotation. Analysis revealed nothing about it except that it was composed of an unknown metal and gave off some sort of power vibrations.

But even more puzzling was the fact that the new body exerted absolutely no gravity pull on the Earth, the moon, or anything else. Here was a planetary body almost exactly the same size and weight as Earth, yet its gravity was zero. This was obviously impossible, but the contradiction excited only a few hundred scientists and a few thousand amateur astronomers. The war leaders and the people didn't care one way or another, just so long as it didn't drop in their laps.

The American astronomers named the new moon *Americanus* and the Soviet astronomers settled for *Stalinus*. Astronomers in other countries politely refrained from naming it, although each had his own private thoughts on the subject.

For several nights, the people of the world went out at night to stare at the two moons. Lovers—the few who could spare the time from the war effort—snatched additional romance from the twin moonbeams. An American poet compared *Americanus* and *Lunar* to Romeo and Juliet, but he was drafted before the poem could be

printed. A Soviet poet, while loading bombs, saw the two moons as a symbol of proletarian solidarity.

In Los Angeles, California, a small cult sprang up which believed that the new moon was a fiery chariot on its way for the ascension of the chosen. They publicly confessed their sins and began preparing themselves for the day. A number of them were arrested for not showing up on their war jobs, but since the most of them were elderly, idle women, the movement continued.

With this exception, and of course the scientists, the new moon soon became as universally accepted as if it had always swung above the Earth.

In the meantime, the war went on.

In America, Congress had moved into the vaults of Fort Knox with the gold. President Cuttleworth, operating from an underground suite of offices somewhere in Idaho, had found it necessary to suspend the normal democratic procedure, so the Congressmen had little to do except dispatch reassuring messages to their dwindling constituents. Part of the Cabinet was underground in the State of Nebraska. The Secretary of Defense maintained offices in the West Virginia mountains, accessible only by helicopter. The Secretary of Atomic Power sat uneasily in an office next to the secret storehouse of atomic bombs.

Premier Shalikoff and the Politburo conducted business as usual from hollowed-out chambers deep within the Urals.

The King of England was somewhere in Wales. The House of Lords was in session at the Scottish shooting lodge of Sir Alfred Whyte. The Commons, and the Prime Minister, stubbornly refused to move farther than Manchester, although they were underground.

As for the ordinary people of all countries, the only ones who had gone underground were the dead, and even some of them hadn't made it.

New York City was gone by the second week, dead fish from the Atlantic floating where Times Square had once been. Washington was a crater. Chicago, Montreal, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Mexico City had gone the way of all ashes.

Moscow and Stalingrad were leveled to the ground. Hong Kong, Canton, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London, Rio de Janeiro—the roll of the cities which were gone was endless. But still the bombers cruised, the guided missiles flashed up from hidden ramparts.

In the fourth week, the war took a decisive turn. By this time almost everyone had forgotten that the second moon hadn't always been in the sky. The scientists still puzzled over the dark ring around the satellite and over the lack of gravity, but no one read their baffled bulletins. In a few remote spots, minor tribes were still sacrificing their less-wary members to the new white goddess of the sky. In Los Angeles, two elderly ladies and a former Methodist minister spent twenty-eight hours on their knees, pleading for the fiery chariot to arrive in time, before they collapsed.

And in that fourth week, a lone man arrived in Idaho to see President Cuttleworth. He was a tall, lean Anglo-Saxon, with the grim face of a man who has no illusions. Once, as a small boy, he had been known as Homer Jones—but in the years since, he'd possessed many names and many passports. He had been accepted many times as an American, an Englishman, a Russian, a German—as a Mohammedan, a Christian, a Jew—as a communist, a fascist, a liberal.

He arrived in Idaho by plane from somewhere in Asia and no one asked him how he made it. His name—the one he was then using—was enough to get him past the Secret Service and in to see the President. When he arrived, he gave the longitude and the latitude of a pin-pointed location on the eastern map.

So important was the information he brought that his own existence was almost forgotten. The President called the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Atomic Power, moved the counters in his little game, not caring that for the first time he named names, before an audience.

As the machinery jerked into motion, the man who had started it left the underground White House. His name got him out, as it had gotten him in, and a few minutes later he was aloft in his private plane. There he switched on a powerful short-wave radio and, in code, pin-pointed another spot on the western map.

The army of bombers from two directions missed meeting by only a few miles, but it made no difference. Each went to its destination and no farther.

The concussions were so great that none felt them. The first crack in the earth appeared across the thirty-eighth parallel, but others soon raced it or cut across its widening gap.

The Earth gave a final heave and flaked into a million pieces, each one a glorious fiery sun.

Far out in space, the planetary body variously known for a short time as Americanus or Stalinus moved forward with a rush of speed. It jockeyed in among the small flaming bodies, its vegetation scorching from the nearness, and slowed down. Spinning on its axis, it settled into the tenantless orbit.

The tight ring of strange ships around the planet broke their pattern and accelerated against its suddenly-released gravity. At a speed greater than that of light, they shot into space and were gone.

The Solar System wavered, planet straining against planet, then accepted the new balance. The stress spread itself through the galaxy, system after system absorbing a tremor. And in another distant galaxy uninhabited planets crashed against each other and finally adjusted to the imbalance created by the sudden disappearance of a planet.

Millions of flaming tiny satellites slowly felt the attraction of the third planet in the Solar System and drew into a flat, tight ring around the body. In years to come, it became the show spot of the system, rivaled only by the rings of the sixth planet.

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¶ *The ever-popular science fiction writer, A. E. van Vogt, gives us a brief glimpse at one of the most fascinating of all subjects in*

Hypnotism Man

HYPNOSIS is not what you think. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no Svengali able to bend you to his sinister will. Hypnosis is a powerful tool of modern science whereby suggestion is used to help solve emotional and physical problems on which your doctor cannot use drugs or surgery successfully.

Along the west coast, the "hypnotism man," whose students you'll most likely run into, is Charles Edward Cooke, Los Angeles psychologist. Cooke is not a doctor. In 1944 he decided to explore the possibilities of hypnosis. Today, he makes a specialty of using it in his practice, he teaches it, and he has lectured on it from San Diego to Spokane.

The four hundred-odd students who have learned the art of hypnotizing from Cooke represent many of the healing professions: doctors of medicine, psychiatrists, psychologists, dentists, optometrists, ministers of the gospel, nurses and college students preparing to enter these professions. In one large and famous Los Angeles hospital, Cooke's cooperative system of hypnosis has been used since 1949 for painless childbirth whenever possible. Properly employed, hypnosis eliminates tension and fear, nausea and complications, and makes the birth of a child the joyful experience it should be.

Today, hypnosis is used for the following purposes:

(1) To give direct relief. "Your headache is gone. You're feeling fine, etc." This is called "supportive therapy," and is given in the knowledge that it is usually temporary, although "cures" have been reported.

(2) To relax tense people.

(3) As an analgesic for any hurt. Major operations have been performed using hypnotic anaesthesia. It is particularly valuable when the patient is unable to take drugs or gas.

(4) As an aid to psychotherapy. Any of the known techniques—Freudian psycholanalysis, Junigan and Adlerian analysis, the Rogerian non-directive technique and the Steckels highly directive technique—can be speeded up by the use of hypnosis.

Guilt feelings and feelings of inferiority are believed to be at the root of most emotional problems. The modern psychotherapist uses hypnotic techniques, such as age regression (in which the subject may be taken back to his childhood), to find out the causes of the guilt or inferiority. Then he uses hypnosis to reorient the patient. Result: in many cases, psychosomatic aches and pains disappear in a few days or weeks.

Does your older child still wet the bed? Do you bite your fingernails? Find it hard to sleep? These are usually symptoms of anxiety. Suggestion will eliminate the symptom in most cases, but relief of the cause may require psychotherapy. Hypnosis can be helpful in either case.

Are you self-conscious in front of the mike, on the stage, in the presence of other people? It is in alleviating such symptoms that simple "supportive" hypnosis is at its best.

Do you know an alcoholic? If he can learn deep trance, then hypnotic suggestion can dry him up while his self-destructive impulses are channeled into more constructive pathways.

Any bad habit, including the habit of overeating, can be relieved—if the patient can learn to be hypnotized.

One out of five people can be hypnotized deeply the first time. Some 60% to 70% can attain the somnambulistic trance with training. About 90% respond enough to receive benefits.

An important part of the success of modern hypnotic techniques is gained by a combination of heterohypnosis (suggestion by the doctor) and autohypnosis (suggestion under self-induced hypnosis, by the patient). The ability to hypnotize oneself can be taught as early as the medium trance.

However, hypnotism is not a magic wand. It is most useful when it is employed in conjunction with therapeutic techniques. It should be used to achieve specific therapeutic goals, and not as a parlor game.

What is hypnosis? Several theories exist. A half sleep state, said Professor Pavlov. The distinguished commission which investigated

On the following page Charles Edward Cooke, prominent hypnotist of the West Coast, and Adele Mara, Republic star, demonstrate methods of hypnosis.



- To determine the subject's reaction to suggestion, Mr. Cooke uses this simple test. The subject extends clasped hands in front of her and while Mr. Cooke talks she gazes for one minute at the small mark he has made on her thumb. He tells her that so long as she keeps her gaze on the spot she can not unclasp her hands. If she is one of the one out of five who can be deeply hypnotized the first time, she will not be able to unclasp her hands until he tells her she can.



- There are dozens of methods by which a person can be hypnotized. Rhythmic sounds, a spot on the wall, a spiral, a nail head, even—in Mr. Cooke's opinion—odors may be utilized for the purpose. In this version the light was focused for about four seconds into one of Miss Mara's eyes. She then closed her eyes, and tried to visualize the after-image. Such images can be retained for as long as a minute and a half, during which time the hypnotic technician talks an orderly pattern of relaxation.



- When a subject cooperates muscles are controllable even under the so-called hypnoidal, before any test will "take". It is a very early light trance state, and muscles which have been tensed for years can now be relaxed, possibly for the first time in the subject's adult life. Miss Mara seems to be asleep but actually she is fully conscious of what is going on around her. She could open her eyes if she wanted to.



- The awakening words are briskly, cheerfully spoken. The subject is told in different ways that she will feel better than she has ever felt before. Finally, she is told, "At the count of three you'll be wide awake. Wake up! One . . . two . . . three." Today hypnosis is used for the following purposes: to give direct relief, to relax tense people, as an analgesic for pain as an aid to psychotherapy.

Mesmerism in 1784 concluded that the results derived from the manipulation and excitement of the imagination—an evaluation which may be very close to the truth. It is possible there are other methods for bringing about such "manipulation," without the use of hypnosis. But only one investigation is under way in this area, to this writer's knowledge.

The next time your doctor tells you there's no physical cause for that ache in your shoulder, ask him about hypnosis. Chances are, if you live on the west coast, the hypnotic technician to whom he refers you will have been trained by hypnotic specialist Charles Edward Cooke.

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Q There had to be something this protoplasmic creature couldn't imitate—something that was strictly

The Human Thing To Do

By KINSLEY McWHORTER, Jr.

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

THE security chief's eyes, as he leaned over Morton's desk, held a flat, emotionless expression which nothing can longer shock. "There's one in the plant," he said. The huskiness in his voice belied his eyes.

Steady, Morton. You've known for a long time it would happen. He said, "That's great. When? How?"

"I don't know," Henley said. "They had three of them in New Washington for study. Sometime the night before last, one of them got away. The body of a security agent was found the next morning."

"What makes them think it came here?"

"They traced the reproduced agent headed this way. A few hours ago, another body was found in this area. Pretty badly mutilated. Identification check showed it was a worker in this plant." Henley clipped his sentences off brittle and clean. Anticipating Morton, he added, "Naturally we followed it up. The man came in but never went to work."

"And?"

"And that means the Galol took another body after it got inside. It means we'll have to check everyone of the two thousand people in this plant to find the non-human."

"You won't find out," Morton said.

Henley flushed. "I can try."



"Nothing personal," Morton assured him. He flipped the intercom. "Miss Brooks."

Janice Brooks came in, swinging the door that read, "George Morton, Personnel, Private," and swinging the hips that said, "Take me dancing." He never had. Someday he'd get around to it.

Morton said, "There's a Galol in the plant, Miss Brooks."

They'd waited for it, guarded against it, girded for it. But can you ever be ready for the ultimate horror? Her eyes widened and a shudder ran through her, making her clothing shimmer. She said, faintly, "Oh."

"Henley will have to run matching tests on everybody in the plant," Morton said. "Have them get the plates and records ready on each department in turn, starting with accounting and continuing alphabetically. Skip us. We'll go last."

Miss Brooks said, "Yes, sir," and went out.

"Look here," Henley said. "This is serious. That girl. Are you satisfied to let her handle it?"

Even with a Galol loose in the S-drive plant, George Morton could smile at Henley. "Do you think she's too pretty? This is the personnel office, Henley. I picked her scientifically, not emotionally."

Henley grunted.

Morton stood up. "I will get the executive level together myself. Anderson's going to think little enough of the delay without upsetting him over the time he has to be matched."

"I'll see you in testing, then. We can take the head men first if necessary."

"It won't be necessary. Getting them alphabetically may make Anderson feel less as if routine has gone to hell."

"Why shouldn't routine go to hell?" Henley demanded sharply. "Good God, Morton! There's a Galol in this plant. *This* plant. The **only** S-drive plant in existence. What do you think we've got two hundred security people plan . . ." He shut his mouth in mid-sentence.

Morton smiled again. "It's all right, Henley. We work together, you and I, even if we don't like it. I knew you had two hundred people planted out there. Want me to name them?"

Henley opened his mouth twice to say something, but nothing came out. A new respect for George Morton grew in his eyes. "Never mind," he said finally, and left.

Morton put his head on the desk. He found he was trembling faintly. *Stay calm. It's his job to find the Galol. It's your job to help him. Be composed. Smile. Don't let the employees worry. Panic is the worst enemy.*

So easy to think it, so hard to do.

Briefing Anderson, the general manager, and getting him to assemble the top brass, was less of a chore than Morton had feared. Anderson said, "It could wreck us, Morton. If the Galol can stymie us on the S-drive, we may be licked." He looked at the big star map on his wall, the area around Sirius targeted in red, an arrow pointing to it from a small drawing of the plant down in one corner.

"We've got to get up there and hit them at home base before they infiltrate to the point you and I can't trust each other."

"Can we now?"

Anderson snorted. "I'm not the Galol. Not even one of those would want to make himself over in my image." He smiled sourly. "Didn't know that I knew you think me a crusty type, did you?"

Morton smiled blandly back. "I'll meet you in the matching center."

Back in his own office, Miss Brooks reported, "Accounting has already started through. Do you want to watch?"

"We'll both go. Leave somebody intelligent to answer calls."

The corridors to the matching center flowed smoothly past the pedestrips with only a slight sway as they rounded one corner. Miss Brooks swayed unnecessarily far his way and George caught her. Despite Henley's acrid joshing, he had never before touched her. He found he rather liked it. He shook with a sudden fright. *She could be the Galol!*

They were at the center before he had time to reflect. A line of men and women wended its naked way into an entrance. Morton and Miss Brooks slipped in to find Henley chewing nervously on an unlit cigarette as three of Morton's test center people worked. Two genial men with alert eyes stood by. Henley's men.

"Everything going all right?" Morton asked.

"Records seem to be complete," Henley said in grudging admiration.

A shapely brunette stepped into the matcher and George swung his head. He didn't remember anybody in the files with those specifications.

"Eyes front, Mr. Morton," Miss Brooks murmured.

The screen over the brunette glowed, showing her skeleton. The screen to her right glowed with another skeleton and a tester droned, "Break in left ankle, fully healed. No other apparent defects."

"None," George Morton said softly.

"Brain pattern D," the tester droned. "Check," said the second.

"Dental . . . mental . . . psychological . . . emotional—answer these questions, please—emotional, checks with chart. Next."

The brunette stepped off and a balding man with glasses stepped up. Again a skeleton glowed, one matched it on the right and the testers went through their comparisons.

"What's the purpose in this?" Miss Brooks asked. "Doesn't Henley know a Galol can match a human being characteristic by characteristic right down to the way he bites his finger nails?"

"He knows," Morton said. "But he has to do something. There's always the chance the Galol didn't get a complete match before he was forced to destroy the original."

"I think," said Miss Brooks, "that Henley—and you—are both more interested in the opportunity of sizing up the pretty women in this plant."

"Miss Brooks!" In the three years she had been his secretary she had been the model of decorum, never even smirking if they happened to go through the security checkout—"strip, under the X-ray, clothes okay, Mike? next"—on their way home at the same time. He was dumbfounded. At length, he heard himself say, "I can always go to the pool." Devilishly, he added, "We'll both do that, right after this is cleared up."

"You can't swim," Miss Brooks said. "It's on your file."

The executives came, paunchy men for the most part, some of them old enough to remember the days of personal modesty. "Get that woman out of here," a department head growled.

"Let's go," Morton said. "He was born before the War."

As they left, she said, "Things certainly have changed in fifty years, haven't they?"

He nodded. "Fifty years ago they were wondering if we'd ever reach the moon. Now." He shrugged. "Now we're wondering if we can develop a star drive before the Galol take us over. War may not be pleasant, but it gives a push."

"That isn't what I meant," said Miss Brooks demurely. "What I meant was that fifty years ago they wore bathing suits."

"Uh-huh," Morton said abstractedly. It was pleasant to make small talk. Some day, with this ever-surprising Miss Brooks, he'd find the time. But not today. Today his mind was wandering, reaching out with anxious thoughts, probing. . . .

In his office he motioned her to sit down.

"Henley won't find anything, Janice," he said. "They never do with that matching. Do you know how many Galol are estimated to be on Earth?"

She shook her head.

"Five hundred of the slimy squirming things. Just five hundred. They've all come in the past six years. And do you know how many Henley and the other security boys have caught?"

Again the negative shake.

"None. The three they had in New Washington were caught by the Patrol. They managed to snag a Galol ship in a force field and stun the riders before they had a chance to destroy themselves. That space ship provided us with some clues to the S-drive. But . . ." he

put his head in his hands. "But one of them got away. What it can do in this plant may wreck the effort to produce S-drives."

"I don't quite understand," Miss Brooks said. "A Galol is just a glob of jelly. It takes any form it chooses and naturally it chooses to match some human. So one's in the plant. What can it possibly do?"

"Fear, dissension, suspicion. If it grabs a key scientist, that man's deliberately calculated thought sabotage could put us on the wrong track for enough years to give the Galol time to invade in force." He shuddered again. "How would you like it if you thought I were a Galol, a glob of jelly masquerading as George Morton?"

"I wouldn't like it, George; I wouldn't like it at all."

The way she said it snapped his head up, his eyes to hers. Good God! The woman was in love with him! Well, why not? George Morton, free and thirty-three, way past ripe for it. *A wonderful time to discover you're in love.* You hold her tenderly, glorying in her softness—and the softness may turn to slime with a razor edge to cut your throat and take your form.

Carefully he said, "Henley will fail. He can match all day and all night and into tomorrow. But he won't find the Galol. It was pure accident that ever tipped us off anyway. Remember? Matson, the services secretary, was in a bad aircar crash. He didn't get a scratch. His chauffeur was killed and dissolved into jelly. Came within an ace of taking Matson over but the aircar caught fire and burned the thing."

"So?"

"So if matching won't do it, we have to find a method that will. Think, Janice. Think hard. What distinguishes a human from everything non-human?"

Pondering a moment she said, "Life."

He nodded. "That's basic. What else?"

"Intelligence?"

"Only in degree. Apes are intelligent. Dogs can come home from a thousand miles away."

"Love, greed, kindness, pity," she ventured.

"Animals exhibit all those traits in some degree."

"What then?"

"I don't know," George said. "I just don't know. I . . ."

The inter-com winked. He flipped it. The girl who had taken

over for Janice looked at him, let her eye drift to where Janice sat on the other side of his desk. The girl smiled.

"All right," Morton snapped. "What is it?"

"Mr. Henley to see you."

"Send him in."

Henley came in nervously. "Well, we do know one thing, Morton."

After a pause, Morton said, "Well, what?" since it seemed expected.

"It's a man we're after. One of my agents found some charred powder in a corner of the yard opposite the main gate. We checked it. Human. Was human." He grimaced, then turned to Miss Brooks. "Have them stop sending out women's files and tell the women to stay put. The remains were of a man."

Henley swung back to Morton. "She is running this office?"

"That's right," George Morton said as pleasantly as possible. He supposed he could have gotten mad at Henley, but he realized the security agent was upset from his discovery, from his failure to find anything more tangible, and from the necessity of sharing the search with Morton. Forgivable display of bad temper, George decided.

"Find anything through the matches?"

"No."

"Expect to?"

"How the hell would I know, Morton?" Henley exploded.

"How nearly through are you?"

"It'll be another hour."

"I'll see you in the check center."

They were through and they hadn't found anybody who failed to match records exactly. Henley started putting his own clothes back on and said reluctantly, "I hate to admit it, Morton. I hated even to ask your help. I'm at the end of my rope. I'm stuck. I haven't got any other ideas. Nothing left to do."

"One thing," George Morton said, shrugging into his tunic.

"What?"

"You might line up these two thousand irreplaceable technicians and scientists and shoot them one by one until you find a blob of jelly."

Henley looked at him queerly. "You have a very morbid sense of humor, Morton. A very morbid sense of humor."

"Yes," George Morton said. "Yes, I guess I do."

Miss Brooks opened the door to Morton's office and found him asleep with his head on the desk. She shook him reproachfully. "They put up beds for people who insist on staying here all night."

His mouth was cottony and he knew he needed a shave. "Fuzzy taste," he mumbled. "Got any coffee?"

"I'll get some," she said. He heard her patter away and vagrant thoughts tramped through his head. He had something to do? What was it? Foolish of him to fall asleep in his unlocked office. The Galol could have discarded whatever body it had and, matching him, become George Morton. Good place for delicate destruction, man by man, worker by worker, personnel. He was George Morton, human. That was it. All human. And he knew why. *I think I know why*. So nice to doze. So ni . . .

A cold slapping wetness on the back of his neck brought him awake the second time with absolute effect. Miss Brooks' tinkling laughter was the only thing that saved her from being uncere- moniously whacked on the behind like a child.

Instead he said, shaking the water from his head, "Get me some clean clothes, a razor and call Anderson." He stretched the weary, unaccustomed muscles. His back ached and one leg was numb.

"Drink your coffee."

He drank it, shaved, and changed clothes while she got Anderson on the intercom.

The general manager said, "We've got to find that thing, Morton. Production went to hell yesterday while Henley matched everybody." His face plainly showed his worry. He looked as if he too might have spent all night on his desk.

"I've got an idea," Morton said. "I think," he added to still the sudden hope leaping into Anderson's face. "I need authority to run the whole show. Henley won't like it. Can you get it for me?"

"Half the brass in New Washington is due here in ten minutes. I'll get it for you. What else?"

"Nothing," Morton said, "nothing but prayer."

Turning from the inter-com, he said to Janice, "Get me a print of that newest tri-di starring Cal Kincaid. Have it put in the projector and call a recreation break for 10 A.M. I want everybody in the plant to see it. Everybody."

"You're crazy," Janice Brooks said succinctly. "But if you want everybody to see a comedy tri-di, it's fine with me."

"That's nice. While everybody's mulling over my idiocyncrasies, I'll go to the autokitchen and eat breakfast."

He went, after he had eaten, to Anderson's office. Henley was seated morosely in a corner. Anderson introduced him to the two strangers: "General Carnes, general staff intelligence; and Mr. Thane, national security chief."

Morton smiled as they shook hands. "You're worried, I take it, gentlemen."

"Worried?" General Carnes looked at him stiffly. "This is something to worry over, young man."

"Anderson tells me you've requested permission to make your own investigation with fullest authority," Thane cut in. "Why?" He was a small, plumpish man balancing on his heels in a bantam rooster attitude that said plainly his section could handle it or nobody could.

"I'm the personnel officer," Morton explained. "I know most of these two thousand people personally. I know something about people in general. I just think I might as well try as . . ." He stopped himself before he put his foot in it. *You're going to put them on the merry-go-round, Morton. Smile, stay happy, don't antagonize them. You don't know yourself what your idea is worth.*

Thane swung to Henley. "You've made all the standard checks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Find anything?"

Henley shook his head.

"You might as well try then," Thane said to Morton. "General Carnes?" Carnes nodded agreement. Thane said. "Well, what do you propose?"

Morton sat down and lit a cigarette, trying to phrase it right, hoping he wouldn't sound as silly as he felt. He said, "What's the problem, gentlemen? To find a Galol. Right? What we really mean is we want to find a non-human among two thousand humans, the non-human so cleverly concealed that—begging your pardon, Henley, Mr. Thane—security has never been able to detect one except by accident. It's worse than the needle in the haystack. At least the needle is different from the hay."

He took a puff from the cigarette and looked at his audience. Nobody was impressed; they were waiting.

Thane repeated, "What do you propose?"

"A tri-di with Cal Kincaid," Morton said urbanely, bracing himself.

Thane's mouth fell open. General Carnes' mustache bristled. Henley followed Thane's lead.

They were impressed.

Anderson said, "I warned you Mr. Morton might be unorthodox." He repressed a smile only with difficulty.

"Yes," said General Carnes, "he is." He looked from Morton to Thane and over to Henley. "Why, may I ask," he said, coming back to Morton, "do you propose to show a stupid tri-di?"

"It makes people laugh," Morton said, "and with the tension in this plant we all need a laugh." *That's a laugh in itself, Morton. You don't need a laugh, you need a bracer; you're crazy.*

Carnes asked, "Have the employes been told what the check yesterday was for?"

"Not unless Henley told them."

"Don't be stupid."

"Then why do you think the plant is full of tension?" Carnes asked.

"As an Army officer, general, you of all people here should know how rumors get started and how they spread," Morton said. "They know out there."

General Carnes toyed with his mustache thoughtfully for a moment. Then, standing resolutely, he said, "I shall follow your directions, Mr. Morton."

George thanked the general warmly and waited for protest. There being none he led the small group to a playroom just off the main auditorium. "We provide all possible outlets for employes," he explained. "Anything to keep this hand-picked bunch happy is worthwhile."

The tri-di was already underway and from the laughter George gathered that the world's highest paid comic had his audience well in hand. "I'm going out to get a few men," he announced. "You can come along if you like, but I'll be only a few minutes."

"We'll wait," Anderson said.

Morton had to let his eyes focus for a minute in the dimmer light.

On stage, projected in tri-di so that he really looked physically present, Cal Kincaid was dizzily steering a solar rocket through the planetoid belt while a fly crawled across the telescreen, hopelessly

confusing him. Kincaid's eyes rolled, his nose twitched, his ears wiggled, his scalp moved. Morton grinned.

He had to punch Fenner, an engine specialist, twice before Fenner could stop laughing long enough to see who was poking him. Morton bent over and whispered, "Hate to interrupt, Fenner, but I need some reliable men. Can you lend a hand?"

Flattered, Fenner wiped his eyes and, still chuckling, said, "Sure." He slid out of his seat and followed.

Morton picked fifteen in all, sending them back in bunches of five, taking longer than a few minutes because he had to wait long seconds each time before he could get his choices to stop strangling on their laughter.

Kincaid was funny; no doubt of it.

Miss Brooks, as well as the fifteen men and the original party, was in the playroom.

"Fenner, you're in charge. Go to the supply room and arm yourselves. Hurry."

Thane said, "What clearance does this man Fenner have?"

Morton said levelly. "As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Thane, every person in this plant could be the Galol. That includes you, the general, Henley, Anderson, Miss Brooks—and myself."

"Carry on," General Carnes said.

"Mind telling me what you're doing, Morton?" Anderson growled. "Lot of valuable time being wasted. Off-hand I'd say twenty-five work days are being spent on a comedy. Not even an educational tri-di."

"Good personnel relations," Morton said glibly, "pays off."

Fenner came back in time to save him more questions. He said, "This isn't a raiding party. I picked you men because you're reliable and intelligent. I'll go through the audience picking out certain individuals. Have them come along to the art room. Don't even show you're armed. Those guns are 'just in case.'"

The men nodded, grimly eager. Morton allowed himself three seconds to feel pleased they liked and believed in him that well. He needed the reassurance—a clown on a clown's errand with humanity's future at stake. He felt the sweat popping under his arms.

The second trip through the theater audience took a little longer than the first. When it was completed, Fenner's men had shepherded about one hundred and fifty others into the art room."

"What's the idea, Morton?" a dour scot asked. He was a leading physicist. "First you drag us off to see a fool tri-di and now you won't even let us enjoy that."

"I could see you weren't enjoying it," George Morton said agreeably. "I thought I'd give you an opportunity to watch some experiments we're doing to determine suitability for stellar flight."

Some of the group shrugged. Carnes raised his eyebrows and Anderson looked startled.

"All right, Miss Brooks," Morton called.

The stage curtain parted to show the stage tilted. It was studded with small, sharp nails. Miss Brooks handed him two guinea pigs. Swiftly, George hobbled them and put them on the uphill end of the stage. Desperately they tried to keep their balance among the nails, falling as the stage shifted, squealing in agony when they fell, fighting furiously in a hopeless contest with gravity.

General Carnes was looking at him with something akin to loathing. Thane's eyes popped; fascinated, he was unable to keep his eyes from the guinea pigs for more than momentary glances of alarm at Morton. Anderson was obviously struck speechless. George looked at Miss Brooks. She had tiny tears in her eyes. He swallowed hard and began to sweat in earnest as a hoarse laugh or two tittered in the audience.

Morton moved to Fenner's side and said through dry lips, "Spot anybody who thinks this sadistic exercise is funny and mark him for a pink slip."

After five minutes he called it off.

"I hope you proved something, Morton," Thane said thickly.

"If you haven't," Anderson said thinly, "I'll find a new personnel manager." General Carnes nodded somberly.

Morton tried to ignore them. His palms were sticky and he wiped them nervously on his thighs. "How many, Fenner?"

"Twenty-six!"

Morton nodded. "I'm firing twenty-six men, Anderson."

"What the hell do you mean, you're firing twenty-six men? I'm running this plant!" Anderson exploded. "You're not supposed to be hiring and firing, you're supposed to be looking for a needle in a haystack!"

"Do you want to find it?"

Anderson hesitated. "Y-Yes."

"All right."

Morton leaped on the stage. "It looked sadistic," he called out to the audience. "I'm sorry. Actually it was a very necessary experiment. The guinea pigs were not, as you can see"—he held them up—"seriously hurt. But for many of you, I imagine it was a strain." He laughed nervously. "It was for me. Let's go swimming and relax."

At the pool's edge, Miss Brooks said, "I knew you'd work around to this from the minute Henley decided he was looking for a man. Did you plan this whole setup just to check my measurements?"

"No," George grinned, "but I like them."

"Can't blame you," General Carnes said. He nodded at the yelping group in the water. "This I approve of, Morton."

"What?" George asked, purposely misunderstanding, "The swimming or Miss Brooks?"

The general's reserve shattered into a faint smile. "Both."

"I'm pleased. Sincerely pleased."

When the twelve o'clock whistle blew, Morton waved the group out. Checking with Fenner and Janice he weeded them down to fifteen. The others he sent to lunch.

Thane said, "You've cut this bunch up like a tri-di cowpoke from the old West, Morton. What's the system?"

"No system," Morton said. "I'm just trying to take everybody's mind off their problems. I explained to you that tension is as serious as dynamite. In this plant we can't afford a blow-up. You know that by now the employes know there's a Galol here. My job is to see that they stay happy despite that."

"Your job," Thane said, plainly irked. "is to find the Galol. I've been going along, but if you admit you're just playing games, I . . ."

George bit his lip. He needed time, a little more, so little more. The needle was the color of the hay and the stack was strewn with debris. "I'm not through yet, Mr. Thane," George said politely. "In fact, I've just started. You've got to go along now . . ."

It was night before they were through. Morton sent Fenner's men to put their guns away and pulled Fenner to one side. "Give me your pistol and get a fire gun, Fenner." The man nodded and moved away. "And Fenner." He came back. "Listen . . ."

It was quite a gathering in George's office. There were seven of them now: The general, Thane, Henley, Anderson, Miss Brooks, the sour Scottish scientist and a Dutch electronics engineer.

"Almost a party if you'd break out the glasses, Brooks," George Morton said.

She was tired, but she managed a wan smile as she brought out the glasses and the Scotch. The scientist's unhappy face was suddenly wreathed in good humor as Morton poured him a generous portion. Even the Dutchman unbent.

"Cheers," Morton said. They drank but there was no conviviality.

"I'm sick and tired of this cat and mouse routine," Henley said. "A Galol roaming this plant and you spend the day amusing yourself. If I . . ."

"Relax," Morton said. He heard Fenner's footsteps faintly down the hall. "There was a famous wit in the last century named Cerf who used to say laughter was the best medicine." He twirled his Scotch. "I don't know whether that or this is best."

The door opened and a voice said, "Boo!"

Startled, the tired group whirled. In the doorway stood a figure wearing an outlandish Hallowe'en mask. They sat transfixed for a moment. George scanned them rapidly. Before anybody could move, the mask came off and Fenner grinned at them.

There was a general chorus of weak laughter, except from Henley who stormed, "What in hell do you mean coming in here, scaring us half to death, Fenner? I . . ."

"I told him to," Morton interrupted. "I thought we could all use a laugh."

"I see nothing funny in it," Henley said.

"No," Morton said softly, "you wouldn't. That's the trouble with you, Henley." Morton let his hand ease in his pocket and close over the gun.

He settled back and swirled the Scotch.

"What makes a human? We played that, Janice. Remember. Life? Intelligence? Love? Greed?" He shook his head. "All of these but none of these specifically. There's only one quality I could find that's solely human. I spent the day looking for the man who didn't have it."

He took the gun out of his pocket and aimed it across the desk. "Your trouble, Henley," he said as he fired, twice, the bullets catching the security man in the chest and bowling him over, "is that you lack a sense of humor." Henley dissolved into a blob of jelly.

Fenner charred the blob into dust.

Nobody said a word. Nobody moved.

"He flunked every test," Morton said a little sadly: "Slapstick, situation comedy, sadistic delight, good fellowship, puns, nervous reaction—the gamut of laugh-producing stimuli we went through today.

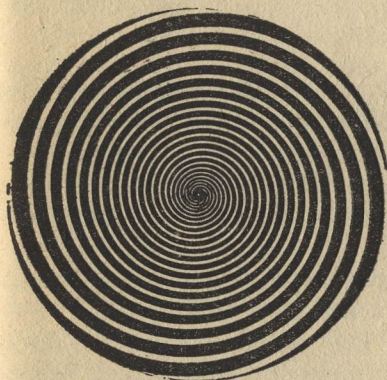
"What beat Henley—what can beat all the Galol if we use it right—is a sense of humor. Laugh; it's the human thing to do."

George Morton smiled wearily.

Everybody was very careful to smile back.

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By Charles Edward Cooke & A. E. van Vogt



THE HYPNOTISM HAND-BOOK

Have your subject gaze fixedly at this spiral, and then READ TO HIM the hypnotizing techniques given WORD FOR WORD in Chapter Two of this "Hand-book of Hypnosis for Therapy."

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Chapters from THE HYPNOTISM HAND-BOOK

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|---|--|--|
| CHAPTER 1: A dialogue example of a new skeptical patient on whom mild hypnosis is applied to gain the patient's confidence and at the same time tell a good deal about hypnosis | CHAPTER 7: Disguised Hypnosis—Its Use in Therapy | CHAPTER 17: Breaking the Habit of Smoking |
| CHAPTER 2: This is the Basic Word for Word Technique for Inducing Hypnosis | CHAPTER 8: Relaxing the Patient | CHAPTER 20: Hypnotic Anaesthesia |
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The LONG NIGHT

By MELVIN STURGIS

¶ The city was dead—yet it out-lived the race which created it.

A CITY was dead.

The High Brass eventually admitted the military may have played a minor part in the nation's worst pre-war catastrophe, although the Major General spaced the admission grudgingly.

"After all," he said with indisputable military logic. "The city was in a most disadvantageous position. We may have 'triggered' the calamity, but—"

Here he spread his hands as mute testimony that although the mishap was regrettable, nevertheless it had been unavoidable.

The committee nodded gravely. They quickly accepted the report *in toto*. It was filed and forgotten in almost the same instant. No one was at fault. No one was to blame.

The tests had been held in a neighboring state, beyond the mountains. It was only a cruel trick of nature that an inversion over the Pacific slopes trapped the radio-active cloud from the H-test before it could dissipate over the ocean.

Inversions were a common occurrence to the Southland city. It was as if a huge lid were lowered from the sky. The lid prevented the escape of all the smoke, fumes, and gases that some three million inhabitants could produce. The resulting inconvenience was known as smog.

Smog produced a haze that smelled bad, and tasted worse. It stung the nostrils and the eyes, and limited visibility. It was a regular, if unwelcome, visitor to the city.

The chemists, physicists, and biologists, who studied the city ex-

pertly and from all angles, readily agreed on one point. The radioactive cloud, although dangerous, would have found its way to the ocean and left little more than a general sickness, had it not been for the smog.

For some as yet inexplicable reason, the cloud combined with the smog and formed a chemical element which was deadly. There was only one course of action. The city was evacuated. There were no complaints from the populace. The green smog clung to the city with a purposeful tenacity. It crept through cracks and under doors. It gave no indication of ever leaving.

The evacuation of a city of three million was an unparalleled event, yet it was carried out with a surprising lack of casualties. It was impossible, of course, to even estimate the financial loss.

The committee had known this long before the General made an appearance. The catastrophe was twenty years old. The national government, deep in the fastness of the Rocky Mountains, really had no time for the report. There wouldn't have been a hearing if a young assemblyman hadn't noticed the matter had never been disposed of according to law.

The city had been dead for twenty years. Now it had been officially buried.

All this, of course, made no difference to the city. It still slept peacefully under a moist, green blanket. It seemed to stir now and then as the evil smelling mist shifted away from an outlying section, but no human ever disturbed the tranquility. They didn't have time.

For a long time after the city died, school children made field trips to the area. Airplanes diverted their courses to show the sight to bored passengers. Then the uniqueness waned. The city was accepted as just an ordinary occurrence, such as the Grand Canyon, or the Carlsbad Caverns.

Sometimes heavily insulated men probed and tested. The smog was instantaneous death to the unprotected, now. They finally discovered to their own satisfaction why the mist persisted in clinging to the city, but their findings were of small interest generally. The report was too ambiguous for the layman.

With the war, men came no more to the city. It was forgotten. Sometimes aircraft, or rockets, or missiles screamed overhead, but soon even they stopped.

The city slept quietly in an eternal green night.

The mist swirled and eddied into every corner and pocket. Into the sewers and subways. Starving rats poured into the streets in massed gangs. They mated, fought, and died. Some killed each other. Some were killed by the mist. The hordes rapidly diminished. Soon the sleeping city was bothered only by a few large, hulking brutes that might have been rats, but weren't.

The city slept a long time. Then, almost as rapidly as it came, the mist left. It scattered thinly and left the city standing naked in the sunlight. The city was terribly alone.

The years had lost their meaning. Scattered species of animals, including human descendants, roamed the globe breathing air which would have been instantly poisonous to their unadaptable forbears.

The city would have surprised a lot of her Sisters in the East, had any of them remained to be surprised. They had been known to remark, when they were all still alive, that the city was nothing more than a merry-go-round of frivolity and foolishness. It was only a sprawling village. Jerry-built, and with no claims to a city. A good earthquake would shake it to its flimsy foundations.

Yes, the city certainly would have surprised her Sisters. She lasted nearly another thousand years.

She lasted, to be precise, until the giant rats grew weary of the folly of preserving her so they could study the enigma of their predecessors, who rose to unmistakable technological heights, then committed mass suicide.

Then they tore her down to make room for more suitable habitats for Earth's first civilized beings.

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Martian Pete

By ATLANTIS HALLAM

“Pete gladly exchanged his life in a “gilded cage” for the confines of a rocket ship....

THE gray mists of rain fell softly, steadily, covering all the wide sweep of spaceport. Pete stood by the wire fence looking in, the rain beating down on his face. By taking that last dirt road he had come to this. Running away was one thing, but any minute now, what old Colonel Willoughby had threatened might happen. Hungry or not, he had to keep going, he thought, watching the men in the far center of the field. Maybe, those men had food. Maybe.

He took a running start after deciding, and leaped high against the fence. Using the big block holes in the wire, he laddered up and over, and soon was racing zigzag between the muddy splotches of the field. Not sure just yet that he wanted to be seen, Pete ran under a sheltering tarpaulin covering a mound of crates. The rain, as he watched it, poured heavily down the side of the tarp before him. And as he watched the hurrying men load the nearby spaceship, he thought of yesterday. Yesterday and the few hours ago when things had been different. *Very* different. But he had fouled things up, and to add to it all he had run away.

The new show had been launched with all the trimmings. And Colonel Fenimore Willoughby, the program's sponsor, had crowned him personally. That silly little gold crown. Big deal. Just like on the red and white boxes. Well, that was gone. He'd find adventure now—do some of the things he'd always wanted to do.

“Hey, boy—?” said the voice.

Pete glanced around quickly, ready to run. But he didn't. Somehow, the tall fellow standing there didn't scare him. He just stood

there, a grin on his face, then crouched down as he looked back at Pete. He felt *sure* he wasn't the catcher, for he didn't act like one. Sneaky and all. Besides, he wasn't heavy like the catcher, and Pete liked him.

"Fox terrier," said the fellow. "Hmmm, you're a good looking pooch."

Coming closer now, the fellow patted Pete's head, then turned his collar around to see the tag.

"Gold dog tag," the fellow went on, straightening his collar back down. "Boy, I'll bet they're looking for you."

"Grrr-r-r—" Pete replied, pulling away from him.

"Peter Woofie himself. You know, you're a pretty famous pooch, Pete."

About to growl again, Pete withheld it. After all, he *did* call him Pete at the last.

"Oh, I get it. You must of run away, huh? Now you think I'm gonna take you back? Well, I won't!"

But even as the fellow talked on, brushing some of the water off Pete's white coat, Pete thought of yesterday, the past he had left behind forever.

Always at the right moment he had trotted on stage, giving out a hearty *ruf! ruf!* as he headed for the giant Woofie box. Then he'd paw at the box, bark his head off, and old Colonel Willoughby would love it. And the audience never failed to give him a big hand. Then the old windbag would stand offstage while he did his act, repeating that *my boy* stuff to himself. And he'd sometimes tell me *Look alive, Peter, look alive!* The old windbag.

But yesterday. That was when the final curtain came down, Pete thought now, as the fellow talked to him and played with his paw. It couldn't have been helped. It could have happened to anyone. He knew he couldn't leave the stage in the middle of the coronation ceremony, and yet he *had* to go. And with the cameras rolling out their pictures, the lights glaring, and the live audience applauding the Colonel's praise of King Woofie, well—all that excitement didn't help either. So without any further cue at all he had done it. Pete shuddered as he recalled reacting to his natural urges, and his committing of the unpardonable sin against his sponsor's leg. But an emergency was an emergency, and there was no fireplug in sight. That was when everything went blank in the riot that followed. And that was when old Colonel Willoughby

threatened him with the catcher, even as the whole audience stamped their feet and howled. Pete shuddered again, pushing the memory of yesterday from his mind.

"Hey—pay attention!" said the fellow.

Pete wagged hard. He liked the way the fellow caught on, talking to him and all.

"My name's Joe. Joe Tanner. How'd you like to string along with me, huh? I can smuggle you aboard. In that old Air Force bag of mine. We're about to shove off for Mars, Pete. To pick up some new core samples. How about it, huh?"

Mars—anywhere, Pete thought, *just so it's not back peddling the King Woofie Biscuit*. He wagged again, even as Joe Tanner grinned quickly. He didn't know where this place called Mars was, since it wasn't on the Woofie circuit when they'd traveled on the road. But wherever it was, that was okay with him.

As other men came and Joe helped them move the cargo, Pete was aware that his new friend stood pretty close, always keeping an eye on the big canvas bag with the brown leather strips. He could see out, for Joe Tanner had thoughtfully left the zipper open a little, and every once in a while Joe would look in. And tell him nice things, like that they would get something to eat pretty soon.

Since the ship's officers didn't come down into the cargo hold Joe had let Pete out to run loose. The place was every bit as big as that big audience room back at the studio. And it was ten times bigger than that doghouse the engineers crowded around in. Those guys who always turned on the fake barks, to make it sound like every dog in town was barking his fool head off. For Woofies. Big deal, those TV studios.

Maybe he would miss it all. He didn't know. At least, not right now. But after what he'd done, that last *faux pas*, well, he couldn't exactly blame old man Willoughby for making heads roll. Well, he'd be forgotten. Some other pup would come along, be crowned the new King Woofie, and the Woofie Biscuit would go on forever.

"Hey, boy—Pete? Hey, Pete, where are you?"

"Ruf—ruf ruf!"

"Oh—there you are. Boy, have I got a surprise for you—nope, don't go sniffing! Just wait and see."

Pete relaxed a little, his stomach turning over now at the thought

of food. Then he sat up for Joe. Maybe he had baked chopped liver. Like the old Colonel used to give him. At the Exchange Club.

"There!" Joe exclaimed. "How'd you like that. I bet you never figured they'd have any aboard!"

For a moment Pete glanced at Joe, then looked back dimly at the familiar red and white box. The red and white box with the portrait of himself on it. Gold crown and all, seated atop that plushy red cushion that always made him itch. Well . . . he *was* hungry, and besides, Joe had tried hard. Besides, there *was* some real horse meat in the Woofie Biscuit. He knew. For once he had taken a run through the WBC plant. He had seen it made. And even as he thought of it, noticing too the disappointed look on Joe's face, Pete ran forward, wagging hard, and pawed at the box in Joe's hand.

"Okay boy—okay, okay—" Joe said, hurriedly tearing open the box. "And I split my water ration with you, Pete. This stuff's pretty scarce aboard ship, and I'd've had to tell them about you. To get extra. So don't go spilling any."

Pete listened as he ate, chewing hungrily, while Joe told him things about that place called Mars, and also about himself.

"I'm just a longshoreman around here, Pete. For loading and unloading, mostly. Since I'm twenty-three they figure I ain't got any experience to do much else. Anyway, I kind've like the job. But I took a big chance bringing you aboard like this."

"Ruf!"

"Yeah. You said it," and Joe tossed his head quickly to get the unruly sand-colored hair back in place. "And with rules about animal shots and all, they'd really get hot about it if they found you aboard, Pete. But I'll turn you loose, soon's we hit Martian territory! Then we can get in some exploring, even though there's not much to see except wild rooks."

Pete grunted approval without missing a crunch.

"Them rooks are pretty friendly. Smart too. But they only know two words, and you got to train them. Like a parrot. They stand straight up like a bantam rooster, sort of like a rook in a chess game, where I guess they got the name. In a way they look funny, Pete, with those feather pants on their legs! They got all gold feathers, except for bright red wings, and a jet black comb like a shiny black mushroom right on top of their head. But they're tough little fighters, once you rile them up."

The days went by swiftly for Pete. And with fear of the catcher a thing of the past now, he spent lots of time with Joe Tanner, playing games all over the storage deck. They had a couple of close calls, but he soon learned Joe's signals and knew when and where to hide. And then one day the preparatory alarm sounded and a voice came over the speaker.

"All hands—all hands, man your stations! Make preparations for entering port. Stand by for braking—stand by for braking—"

"Hey, I gotta get going—" Joe said, jumping from the crate where he had been watching Pete show off by doing TV tricks. "See you later, Martian Pete! After we unload the equipment and supplies."

It wasn't long before Joe had come again, and soon he could feel the swaying, bumpy ride, as Joe carried him in the Air Force bag. Then he was out, standing on the place Joe called Mars, on what looked just like plain old red sand. It was kind of dusty, and looked like they didn't have much rain around the place, and for a few minutes Pete breathed hard, for the air *was* a little different. But otherwise, it was just like any other place he'd been. Out on the road, with the Woofie show.

"Cawark?"

"Urrr-r-gh—" Pete replied to the Rook.

The Rook stopped his strutting abruptly. He faced Pete, planting both his long-spurred feet solidly in the sandy ground. Then his black tassel spread out ominously, like a slowly opening umbrella.

"*Pete*—cut it out. You're making him mad," Joe warned. "And he only wants to be friendly."

Pete advanced toward the watching bird, growling a little more.

"You better take it easy, Pete. Rooks are pretty tough customers, 'specially old Rook here. He's the mascot of the mining camp. He's sort of king around here, rook of the roost, if you know what I mean. So watch out."

Deciding to chance it, Pete jumped the Rook. But the Rook leaped into the air with a flash of red wings—hovering like a humming bird. As Pete's head shot out with a click of teeth the Rook lowered in a quick swoop. Spurs beat a tattoo on Pete's head. He retreated with a howl, staggering, half-rolling back.

"You'll learn," Joe said.

"Cawark-k-k!"

His head still throbbing, Pete retreated from his surprise attack, with a mouthful of gold feathers slowly settling to the red brown sand. The Rook stood some distance off, still regarding Pete, his trajectory-shaped plume tail somewhat awry from the surprise of Pete's counterattack. Still cawarking in a low voice, the Rook showed some of the surprise that Pete felt, even as they watched each other through the fine veil of reddish dust settling between them.

"See, Pete, I *told* you. Now if you'd've behaved yourself you wouldn't a got your head kicked in."

"Ruf. . . ."

"You said it. You damn near got the hell stomped out of you."

But even as Joe stroked Pete's bruised head, the Rook came a little closer, tentatively regarding Pete with his same former curiosity. He wasn't angry, Pete could tell, just curious.

"Reet?"

"See!" Joe exclaimed. "Rook wants to make friends with you, Pete."

"Ruf!"

"Reet!"

"Ruf ruf ruf!"

"Reet reet reet!"

Trusting, in his unearthly manner, the Rook walked over, glancing sideways as he came, his pale green eyes great wide discs. Pete's black eyes were alert too, as he watched the cocky little Martian approach them.

"Now be a gentleman—be a man about it, Pete. Do like he wanted to do first time out. Make friends with him," Joe whispered, patting Pete a little. "*You* and your hard head. You had to go start a war of the worlds. Well, I hope you learned your lesson."

"Ruf."

"Okay, good boy."

Pete felt a little bit ashamed, truly ashamed, and he lowered his head as he glanced from the Rook to Joe, then back at the waiting Rook again. He was truly sorry now, sorry that he had tried to beat up the trusting little Martian.

"See!" Joe said, stroking the Rook's gold back and running his fingers out through the trajectory tail. "He's *real* friendly, Pete."

Pete wagged a little, sniffing as he put his nose close to inspect the black tassel Rook wore. And to his surprise, the Rook was just as curious, turning his own head sideways, as he looked over the

stub tassel *Pete* wore, on his other end. Joe grinned, petting them both.

"Just wants to see what makes you tick, Pete!" he said. "Go on, wag some more. He never seen a pooch before, and that really knocks him out! The way you can wag your tassel."

"Reet! Reet!" said the Rook, even as Pete wagged hard.

It didn't take long for Pete and Rook to get fully acquainted and, with Joe's help, Pete was already adding another trick to his TV repertoire. He wondered a little, just what the old windbag would say, if he could see him now, giving a Martian rook a ride on his back.

"Tanner," said the man, stopping abruptly before them. "What's the meaning of this!"

Pete and the Rook scrambled behind Joe as he got hurriedly to his feet.

"Sir, I—"

"Tanner, you know the rules and regulations governing the bringing of Terran animals to Mars. You've evidently brought this dog onto Martian Territory without inoculation, and broken the customs regulations. Did that dog go through the Spaceport Authority at Los Angeles?"

"Uh, no sir," Joe replied. I—"

"I see. Then as commander of the ship, I have no alternative but to confine you to quarters until the departure tomorrow evening. And see that this dog is aboard with you. Immediately."

"Yes sir."

As the ship's captain turned and headed for the mining camp Joe got Pete back into the zipper bag.

"Ruf!"

The Rook needed no second invitation. He hopped into the roomy bag beside Pete, then they both looked up at Joe expectantly. He frowned, glanced again at the captain in the distance, then grinned suddenly.

"Oh well, they can't do any more than fire me," he said, "for taking you along, Rook. If Pete can visit Mars I guess you can go back to his neck of the woods."

Everything went smoothly aboard the great ship, until one morning Joe Tanner came down to tell them about the spacegram from

the president of the Woof tie Biscuit Company, via the Customs office. . . .

THE WOOF TIE BISCUIT COMPANY OFFERS THOUSAND DOLLAR REWARD FOR RETURN OF MISSING KING WOOF TIE STOP TRANSPORT COMMANDER REQUESTED TO TAKE EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT TO PREVENT FURTHER ESCAPE OF PETER WOOF TIE SIGNED SPACE-PORT AUTHORITY LOS ANGELES.

"They sure got trouble waiting for us. *All* of us," Joe said aloud, as the three of them waited in Joe's small compartment.

A shiver ran through Pete for the hundredth time as he looked from Joe to Rook again. Just then a knock came on the small cell door.

"Hey—" Joe whispered. "*Hide*, Rook! Back in the sack—behind the pillow."

Rook was fast and had barely burrowed down when the cell door key turned and the ship's commander entered.

"I've been reconsidering, Tanner," began the captain, then stopped abruptly. "What's *that*—those feathers? There, sticking out from under the pillow?"

Joe wilted. He knew without looking.

"What fea—oh," and he tried to smile but couldn't. "That's—"

But the commander had already picked up the pillow. Rook stood up, very straight, blinking his wide green eyes. Silently and in the proud dignity that only a rook can display, he calmly looked back at the commander.

"Tanner, for a young fellow, a longshoreman who hasn't had time enough to learn what space fatigue is, you've mastered all the arts of breaking space regulations. You break them coming *and* going."

"Yes sir," Joe replied. "I mean, *no* sir—"

"Tanner, I won't say you can't keep old Rook here," and he briefly patted the ex-mascot of the Martian mining camp, "but I must warn you. Declare him at Customs, and get the necessary inoculations. And as much as I dislike doing this, I must tell you I have no other choice. On arrival, pick up your check at the company office. I'm sorry, Joe."

"I guess I'm sorry too, Captain."

Pausing at the door, the commander looked back a moment.

"Joe, I'll see that this doesn't affect your employment record with the Transport Service. It will simply state that you are temperamentally unsuited for space longshoring."

Joe repeated his thanks as the captain left, then said to his two companions:

"I guess we're all in the same pot now. We not only don't have the pot, but when we get back home we won't even have the window to throw it out."

The last day out Pete felt even more desperate, knowing from what Joe said that there was now no escape at all. It was back to the WBC for him. And that silly little gold crown. Or, maybe, even worse. The pound. Old Colonel Willoughby must have boiled over by now, he was sure. And far sooner than Pete desired, the day came when that outer space lock was opened and then the hatchway ladders down. The loud band playing, that must be to welcome home the commander, Pete thought. Like it used to be when he was king, on the Wooftie program. They even had cameras here too, Pete could see, as he went along with Rook and Joe. To add further to his troubles, the Customs doctor told Joe Tanner that Pete must also get a shot. He had been *exposed*, as the doctor put it. But despite the shot, there was a greater fear, somewhere just ahead. The *pound*.

They had barely left the Customs building when that fear in Pete came to a head. That *sound*, above the blaring band. He listened carefully, not hearing what Joe Tanner was saying as he carried both him and the Rook. That familiar booming voice, that *ho ho ho!* He could never mistake that laugh, even with Joe trying to hold onto him, to prevent his last chance for escape right now. Then he saw the big, broad-rimmed white hat, the cigar under it, and the waving arms. It *was* old Colonel Willoughby.

Pete cringed in Joe's arms. He was coming straight toward the Customs building—toward them. Then Joe stopped and put him down before the Colonel. Pete wanted to make a dash for it but he couldn't. He froze to the spot. The Wooftie Biscuit sponsor stared down at him. Pete stared back too. Then as a last resort, for he wasn't sure of anything right now, he wagged a little, tentatively.

"My boy—" said the old Colonel at last, bending down toward Pete. "My *prodigal* boy."

For the first time in his life Pete missed a cue. He couldn't do

anything for a moment. A drop of moisture fell on his nose, and Pete realized that the old Colonel had missed him, that he *was* taking him back. The Colonel was unwrapping something for the photographers and newsmen crowding around—then Pete saw what it was. *Big deal*, he thought, *that silly old gold crown*. Then the president of WBC put it back on his head, carefully adjusting the strap under his chin. *Good old Colonel*, Pete thought. He hadn't gotten any other dog to take his place. He was still it, still *the* Wooftie, the one and only.

"Get in, young man, get in," said the Colonel as they reached the big open convertible just behind the low-bed truck with the giant box on it. "The King is going to need a first minister, young man, a trainer if you will!"

"Reet, reet!" cawarked the green-eyed Martian, above the playing of the band. "Reet!"

And even as the parade began, to the WBC plant, Pete barked loudly from his special placed cushion beside the Colonel. There before them was the giant red and white box on the low-bed truck. *The Wooftie Biscuit. The best.*

"My boy," said the Colonel fondly, "you haven't lost your touch."

But Pete wasn't hearing what the old Colonel said as he barked even louder, for he was thinking of something up ahead. The Exchange Club. The Exchange Club where the Colonel had his frosty glass, and at the same time, would order the special tray, the tray with the specially-prepared baked chopped liver. *The best.*

FUTURE FARE

☛ The August issue of SPACEWAY features a short novel by Charles Eric Maine—who originated the script for the motion picture SPACEWAYS.

☛ This novel is titled "Festival of Earth," and in it the author conceives the idea of holding a colossal World's Fair to celebrate universal peace.

☛ All is progressing smoothly, too, until an over-zealous Senator makes the mistake of inviting representatives of other planets to attend.

☛ After that, things happen fast!

SCIENTIFILM PARADE

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

OUR STAR feature writer has recently had a new tribute paid him: The editor of *Films in Review*, internationally circulated organ of The National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, invited him to contribute the reviews of all future scientifilms, as his specialty. The National Board reviews films, classifies them, disseminates information about them, and organizes audience support for them. Nearly 400 libraries in the United States acquire *FIR*, and it has subscribers in 39 foreign countries. A short time ago at Paramount Studios, at a forum concerning "Science Fiction Films and Reality," with 150 foreign film correspondents of Hollywood in attendance and the program being taped for broadcast, George Pal (Mr. Scientifilms) and his three fellow panel experts (Ivan Tors, Chesley Bonestell and Dr. R. S. Richardson) were stumped on a question put by an interviewing reporter, whereat Mr. Pal called for Mr. Ackerman (in the audience with scientifilm producer Rick Strauss, Chad Oliver and several other s. f. celebrities) to answer the question. Mr. Science Fiction himself will continue, for *Spaceway's* audience, to answer your enthusiastic requests for information, together with advance photos, about the cinematic s. f. thrills in store.—Editor.

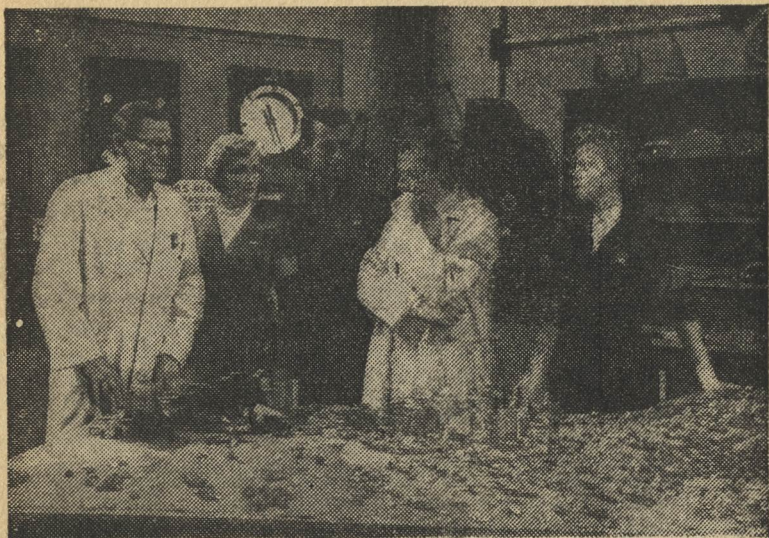
Satan: Space Station Saboteur

*... Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
And shall go out to deceive the nations ...
Gog and Magog.*

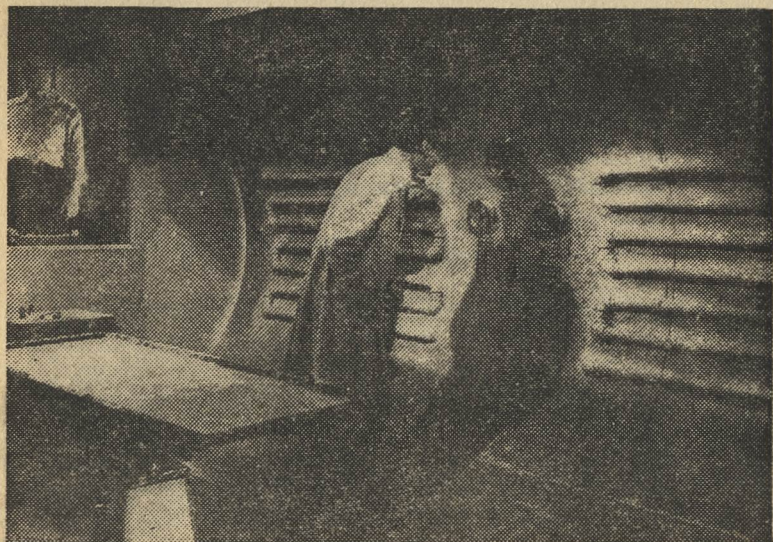
REVELATION 20:7-8

The biblical quotation serves to introduce and set the motif for what promises to be one of the most exciting, actionful, science-crammed scientifilms yet produced: GOG. Ivan Tors, the producer of the "sleeper," *Magnetic Monster*, that awoke to big box-offices everywhere, and followed up with the 3-D technicolor spectacle, *Riders to the Stars*, obviously aims for the top with this one. The script he has handed me, and the dozens of interest-piquing stills, only a handful of which it is possible to reproduce here, indicate a great treat in store for the layman and a field day for the fans.

From where I sit, GOG looks like science fiction plus, a picture



MINIATURE METROPOLIS after incineration by model solar beam in "GOG."— Ivan Tors Production.



TRAPPED in negathermal unit, doomed scientist is quick-frozen.—Ivan Tors Productions.

packed with all the dramatic gadgetry of a vintage season *Astounding*. Example:

Scene No. 55. *Interior, Helio-Engineering Lab.* The lab is equipped with optical and astronomical devices: a polarimeter, photometer, spectroscopes, heliostats, prisms and a barograph recording atmospheric pressure on a revolving drum. A large telescope-like tube runs up thru the ceiling. The main center of attraction is the model Space Station, suspended on wires at one end of the room. Resembling a large donut with portholes circling the outer rim, the station has four spokes, connecting the living quarters in the rim of the wheel to a hub in the middle. Mounted above the center hub is a large saucer-shaped mirror, designed to catch the rays of the sun, used in powering the solar plant of the station.

Scene No. 63. *Interior, Human Factors Lab.* A large square room, its walls completely covered with wire mesh screen. The room contains a spin table, some eight feet in diameter, and a plexiglass pressure chamber. The doctor in charge explains to a visiting scientist: "This is our anti-gravity room, not exactly a miracle chamber perhaps, but in experimenting with weightlessness we do achieve some interesting effects. I can induce varying intensities of electromagnetic currents here, so that our subjects find themselves in simulated conditions of gravity they are apt to encounter in space." The kinesthetics, for those who enjoy Kinsey as well, are performed by attractive specimens of the feminine gender, esthetically clad in abbreviated suits of alfenol, a new alloy of aluminum and iron: a highly magnetic combination. . . .

GOG is the third in the Office of Scientific Investigation series, and concerns a vast secret underground research project on the part of the United States to create man-made satellite No. 1. Night and day a carefully guarded corps of a hundred and fifty Free World scientists are busy experimenting on ways and means to beat the enemy into space.

The Swiss-built electronic triumph christened "Novac," the Nuclear Variable Automatic Computer, is an invaluable asset to the project. Five years in construction, the uncanny cybrain is the pet of Dr. Zeitman, who almost worships it as its cathode ray tubes flash and it "thinks" in weird musical flutings and pipings. "Novac is deep," he says of the machine, "like an ocean. We are only swimming on the surface. What lies below . . . we can only guess."



DEATH by vibration, as supersonic waves smash experimenter's brain.—
United Artists release.



RAMPANT ROBOT strangles human master toward tense climax of
"GOG."—Ivan Tors Productions.

The progress of all units is hampered by a master spy, an elusive, satanically clever, devilishly diabolical nemesis who systematically destroys key scientists one by one with the fruits of their own inventions. Viz.:

In the "G" Lab a man is spun to death in the giant centrifuge.

In the nega-thermal chamber, where test animals are flash-frozen in refrigeration and re-animation experiments, the chief is frozen solid, then shattered like tinsle.

A botanist's lungs are poisoned by the exhalations of a radioactive cactus.

An audio-engineer goes insane as supersonic vibrations scramble his brain.

And the terrifying solar mirror, potent model of the real thing that would be capable of incinerating New York and its eight million inhabitants in a moment, with a seeming volition of its own turns on its creator, who dies the death of Joan of Arc.

And Gog—and Magog? Two robots, Alpha and Beta. Almost as tall as a man, made mobile by a tank-like base, they have a trunk like an inverted funnel, multi-armed, with a helmet-like head. The controls of the robots are inside the humanoid heads, with their video-camera lenses for eyes, their antennae ears, their photo-electric cells and heat-sensitive plates.

In the end—but this is one of those pictures where definitely no one should be seated during the last five minutes. In fact, it's doubtful if anyone who's seated *will* be seated; i.e., they'll be on the edge of their seats. For one of science fiction's big treats is in store for you at the denouement of GOG, when you find out who the guilty culprit is. Without the script, I doubt I'd have guessed.

Finale is full of fireworks.

Incidentally, the alphabeta robotica of this picture paves the way nicely for someone in Hollywood to produce S. Fowler Wright's "Adventure of Wyndham Smith."

Watch future issues of *Spaceway* for advance reports on "Tobor," "This Island Earth," "1890," "This of Terror," "Target—Earth!," "The Naked World," "The Martian Chronicles" and "The Conquest of Space."

(Ed. Note: Studios, publicity depts. and independent producers interested in having on-the-set interviews, supplying stills, sending scripts or making other arrangements for coverage of their scientifilms in this department should contact Forrest J. Ackerman via the Beverly Hills phone exchange.)

The PLAGUE

By ALBERT HERNHUTER

α It was probably the first time in history one race saved another with a weapon of destruction.

AS SEEN through the eyes of *some* extra-terrestrial beings, the super cruiser *Parmenides*, pride of the Earth fleet, was not very super. It was exactly two hundred feet long from the tip of the thin radar rod extending from its sharp nose to the hindmost part of its rear fin. It was cruising toward the seventh planet of the bright red sun at a speed of four hundred thousand miles an hour, which is not really very fast, as space ships go. But it was now decelerating, after traveling at immeasurable speed through what was called hyperspace, for want of a better name.

In addition to its regular seven man crew, it was carrying a multitude of tiny passengers. Each of these passengers was submicroscopic in size; but then, all filterable viruses are. The virus was to be used on the inhabitants of the seventh planet of the bright red sun.

The existence of the planet had been discovered when several of its inhabitants had been unfortunate enough to cross the path of the Earth fleet on its regular maneuvers. Since it did not respond to the calls of the Earth ships, it was tagged as an enemy and fired upon.

Among the things salvaged from the wreck of the ship were several bodies and a map which showed the exact location of their home planet. The map was deciphered in short time, and the *Parmenides* was sent out to destroy the home planet (Sphearo, as the natives called it).

The reasoning for the destruction of Sphearo was thus: For one thing, the aliens were basically humanoid in structure, with just enough things different about them to make them seem like a parody

of Man. This alone was enough reason for their annihilation. But there was also the fact that they had not responded to the signals from the Earth fleet. The fact that their radio bands differed from those of the fleet, making communication impossible even if they could speak the language, was overlooked. After all, they had fired back at the fleet when attacked.

The inhabitants of the planet Sphearo did not spot the ship as it approached them. They had enough worries of their own without thinking about attack from some creature of which they had never heard. The Sphearoans were suffering from a plague.

If the captain of the *Parmenides* had known about the plague, he probably would not have bothered to dump his load of virus, and would have been content to just sit back and let the plague do the work for him. But he didn't have time to check such things as the health of a planet that would be dead in a short time, so he filled the atmosphere with the virus and turned tail for home.

When the crew of the *Parmenides* returned to Earth, they were all given medals and a four-month pass for "ridding the Universe of a danger that could have, in the course of a few million years, destroyed the entire race of Man."

After that, most people forgot about the planet Sphearo, except for a few scholars who wrote learned books about the Sphearoans from the data obtained from the bodies on the ship, and the crew of the *Parmenides*, who thought of the planet with gratitude on every day of their four months leave.

It was perhaps five years later that Man next heard from the Sphearoans. This time their ship was equipped properly to return the signals.

However, one of the men who was among the four-man boarding party had been one of the scholars who had written about the Sphearoans, serving his eight years as a member of the fleet. He instantly recognized them, and thinking that they had returned to avenge their race, opened fire on them with a hand gun. He succeeded in killing all but one of them, that one being taken into captivity and brought to Earth for study.

But the ship had not come for revenge. On the contrary, it had come bringing a message of thanks from Sphearo for saving the people from the plague. A translation of the message delivered by the sole survivor of the alien ship is as follows:

"We of Sphearo were, several of your years ago, suffering from

a plague that threatened to wipe us out entirely. We had sent out ships from our planet in all directions to seek aid from another race. I assume that you came into contact with the ship sent to this area. We did not think it unusual that that ship did not return, as the crew of it, like the crews of all the other ships, were ill with the disease and their chances of returning were very small if not entirely absent.

"We can also understand your reason for not contacting us when you poured into our atmosphere the cure for the plague. After all, we could not expect you to submit yourselves to it. And when, later, you did not return, we assumed that you were too modest to take any credit for it.

"Now my race is well again, and we are anxious to open trade with you. We found your planet by a very complex method that we will be happy to give to you, if you do not already possess it.

"I feel that I can forgive you for destroying the other members of my crew, for you probably thought them still sick. I can assure you that they were not, and neither am I."

The rest of the message was concerned with the various trades that could be set up between the two planets. Earthmen, however, thought that the whole thing was some sort of a trap to lure them to the planet, where they would be destroyed. As a result of their suspicions they killed the Sphearoan and gave his body to the medics to study.

The medics were astonished to find that, even though he had appeared to be in good health, the alien's body was literally alive with the virus that had been sown in its atmosphere. They worked out the theory that the Sphearoans when they were "well" were, by Earth standards, so alive with germs that the slightest contact with them would mean death to a Man. They also theorized that the "plague" had been caused by the extinction of the virus that lived in symbiosis with them. In trying to destroy the race, Man had unwittingly saved them.

By the time this discovery had been made, however, the virus carried by the alien had begun a plague that raged over the entire Earth, destroying all of the human race except for a colony on one of the planets of a nearby star. This colony, when its supplies were cut off, was forced to make a living off the land. As a result it was forced backward to a quasi-savagery, more in accordance with Man's character.

The Uncompromising People

A NOVELET

By JIM HARMON

☞ Mix well: one ex-con man, a race of peculiar humanoids with bunny biology and a frustrated electronic brain!

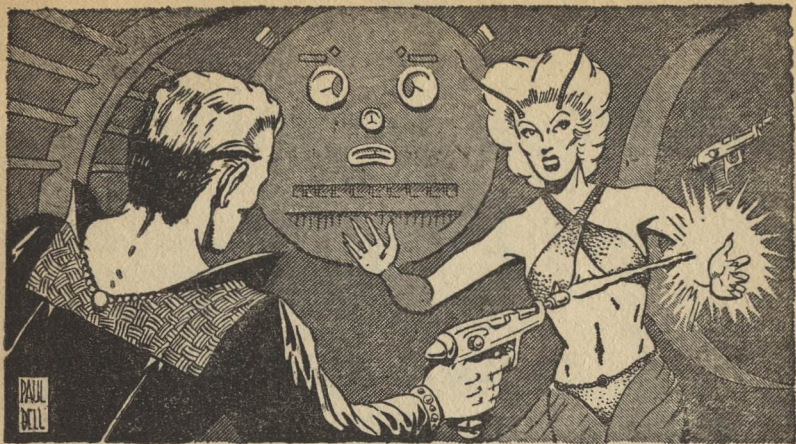
ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

CALVIN THOMAS MOSS was the picture of a successful young executive as he stood before the commissioner's desk. That deceptive appearance had often stood him in good stead in his transactions—most of which were outside of even the loose Intergalactic Law. His eyes were frank and blue, his jaw square and tanned, and his hands were clean and capable but gave the impression of being too large for quick deception.

But Moss could feel in his erect spine that the fat pompous old official was no fool and wouldn't trust him alone with the office's lavish purple drapes and gold fixtures. He was already beginning to mistrust the desk-ridden spaceman, and wondered how many light years he would have to go to swindle a pardon.

Moss sucked in the middle of his sky blue tunic, that was more of a robe than a coat, and waited for the commissioner to finish cleaning his nails with an Arcturian dagger. His eyes looked longingly through the window's force field to the lovely over-mechanization of New Truman, and followed the upward path of a sliver atmospherocket.

Oh, if he hung around long enough they were going to pin it on him. Substituting caffein concentration for bromo-heroin tablets



had seemed harmless enough when he was arranging for that shipment to Cartier 9. How could he have known when the reptilian Cartierites got loaded they conjured up evil spirits, and that evil spirits on C-9 were a secondary and primarily destructive race of sub-electron intelligent forces?

He wondered how much he could get for causing a disturbance that threw all space astrogration off for days and cost millions of credits.

"Moss!" the commissioner growled, vaguely intelligible.

Calvin Moss leaped backwards four feet, colliding with an impractical table supporting an antique Grand Rapids original vase from Old Earth. Breathlessly, eyes goggling, he watched the plaster horror totter on the stand. As a quick afterthought, he grabbed it and transferred the tremble to himself. His breath escaped loudly as the vase steadied itself on its precarious perch.

"That's what I like," commented the commissioner fatuously, "men with nerves of molten steel."

"Blast, I've been wrestling with my conscience all day," Moss replied.

"I know at least that it wasn't a one fall match. And incidentally, my name is Holtz, not Blast." The commissioner turned his gaze back to the vase. "I'd hoped you'd wreck that monstrosity. It was a gift from my second wife."

"You don't understand," Moss said. "I realize I inadvertently

did a terrible wrong, and I'm ready to pay—as much as is absolutely necessary—for it.”

Holtz tapped the Arcturian dagger thoughtfully against his pink palm. “Oh, I understand fully. You did wrong. You were caught. There’s no question about your being ready to pay for it. Any time we want, you get ready fast.”

Moss put his hands into his sash. He noticed they had even stripped him of his picklock. “So what’s your percentage, Holtz? Do you, Commissioner of Intergalactic Law Enforcement, personally interview every citizen caught doing a little friendly dope smuggling? You know yourself that caffenin isn’t any worse for Cartierites than tobacco or alcohol for us. I’m not a special archfiend type.”

“Have you ever heard of Prohibition, Moss? No, I guess you haven’t. But as for why I brought you here, you may be interested to learn that one of my tyrannical powers in an emergency is being able to ‘recommend’ where a prisoner will be held, and for how long. Now,” he said with a broad smile and a waggle of the dagger, “I could recommend indefinite confinement on Sol I. . . .”

Moss felt his face go pale.

“Or I could ‘suggest’ that you be sent to the Galactic Rehabilitation Center where they would make an honest federationist out of you. . . .”

Moss got paler.

The commissioner looked up in slack-jowled concern. “Sit down, my boy, do sit down. I can see that an honest life doesn’t agree with you—you can’t stand our food. Go on, take the antique rocker. I doubt it will take your weight. A gift from my first wife.”

The suspect made his way to the corner and the gold inlaid chair. “Thanks,” he exhaled with feeling as the rocker creaked ominously under him.

“Now as I was saying,” Commissioner Holtz continued with a benign smile, “I *could* send you to any of these places. I could also have you serve your sentence on your own private spaceship, heading away from this planet at light speed, say, towards Vega IV.”

“You could?” Moss leaned forward eagerly, the scent of freedom wild in his nostrils. “I don’t have *too* much, but there is a tidy little sum—a comfortable fortune—stored away in—”

“Now it is you who misunderstands,” Holtz interrupted pleasantly. “The sum you speak of was—ah, requisitioned by one of my per-

sonnel clerks. I've taken steps to have his bank accounts transferred to my name—*that* should teach him that I don't let crime pay."

Calvin Moss sank back into a bleary weariness. "And *that* settles my sentence. I don't have anything else you want. . . ."

The commissioner expertly flipped the Arcturian dagger point up in the polished veneer of his impressive desk. "Learned how to do that forty years ago in free fall, when I was just a fresh space cadet. Oh, blast, why did I ever have to read those old historicals about Tom Corbett? What a miserable existence!" Holtz flicked an index knuckle at his large red nose. "But not as miserable as you'd be on Sol I or at Galactic Rehabilitation, eh, Moss?"

Moss made no answer, and studied the fingers he had made into a steeple.

"You know, Moss, you were wrong. You do have something I want." The prisoner looked up quickly, intensely interested. "Yes, I need your crooked scheming mind. Sadly, most citizens have accepted the inevitable, and are honest. You are a real rarity—a confidence man straight out of the nineteenth or twentieth century. I have use of you."

"I'll take the job," Moss said, making no hasty decisions.

"Of course." Holtz worked the dagger loose from the desk. "I told you you could be heading for Vega IV. You will be."

Moss brightened.

"You see, there's rumors of, ah, difficulty there. Faint hints that everything isn't as it should be. *Vega* stirrings, you might say. And a rolling Moss gathers no stones—contraband jewels, in your case.

"We don't know exactly what's going on there, but we know it shouldn't be, never doubt that! Vega is a protective colony of the federation. The GFE naturally casts the votes for Vega IV's inhabitants in the League, casting as a unit the votes of Four along with the rest of our states and possessions. That unit helps us swing our plurality, but lately—brace yourself—the number of eligible votes on Vega's inhabitable planet has been dropping alarmingly! Enough to endanger the supremacy of the Galactic Federation of Earth!"

"Staggering news, no doubt," Moss interjected as the commissioner heaved his paunch for air, "but what do you expect me to do about it?"

Holtz held the dagger between two index fingers. "How should

I know? You're the con man. Politicians on Old Earth used to employ your type in situations politically abnormal. You must have a knack for that sort of thing."

Moss grunted impatiently. "What's so abnormal about the number of registered votes dropping? Maybe they're sick of the whole blasted mess."

"I doubt they're sick enough to stay away from registration. According to local custom, such ignoring of one's civic duties is punishable by death."

"Population decrease—?" Moss was groping blindly.

Holtz let the dagger clatter to the desk and swiveled from right to left, quaking his massive body in thunder that Moss decided was supposed to be laughter.

"What's so blasted funny? I could use a good laugh about now."

"My dear boy—" The commissioner controlled himself to some extent. "My dear fellow—the Vegans are one of the races that resemble human beings a great deal. Only these humanoids, Mr. Moss, did not evolve from an ape-like ancestor: their ancestral parent was a creature similar to . . . to a *rabbit*!" The laughter resumed in full force.

"I see what you mean," Moss said drily. Then the full emphasis of the biological facts of life on Vega hit him. "When do I start? I'll get to the bottom of things right away."

"Oh, yes." The desk-ridden spaceman turned suddenly sober. "Immediately. As soon as you can get to Stern spaceport. A deep spacer is waiting there for you, outfitted as a semi-pleasure single passenger merchant ship. You will blast for Vega directly and alone. When you get there, conduct your investigation on any level you wish."

Moss felt his felonious heart hammering at the thought of being alone on a spaceship. To the Coalsack with Vega! The Pleasure Planetoids for Calvin Thomas Moss. "At least it's better than frying or freezing on Mercury," he said with a stiff face.

Moss took the faint nod from Holtz as a sign of dismissal. He creaked out of the chair and made for the door, hoping he could keep from breaking into a dead run. As he passed the plaster monstrosity on a pedestal, he snaked out a booted foot and made a loud thud and a cloud of white fog.

"Rid of it at last," Commissioner Holtz sighed. "My boy, you will go far, I can see."

Further than you know, thought Moss, reaching out to open the door.

"By the way," Holtz added, "there's a small fission bomb aboard your ship, set to explode if you deviate or delay in your course for Vega Four. You'll have an honor guard to put you on board, of course, and once on board you'll head straight for Vega or get blown to Hell."

"The Lunar crater, you mean?" Moss replied with more objectivity than he felt. . . .

The rockets blasted three steel decks below him, and countless gravities pushed into his face and body. He sank almost luxuriantly into the springy softness of the slick blue acceleration couch. Blue plastic channeled his vision to the silver and black dials arrayed in a mechanical pattern above him. The direct view spaceplate was small and obscure, for those who cheated on their instrument lessons. It showed an imperceptibly changing pattern of rainbow star specks on pure ebony *black* blackness. Moss watched and gasped for breath, and his heart pounded its objections to space flight.

After a time circulation and breathing came easier, and his body eased out of the depression in the blue couch. He wriggled his toes to get the needles out of them, and slapped at the button at the side of the couch. The cushioned surface whirled to near right angles to itself, forming a seat.

Moss snapped off the magnetic traction holding together the ends of his acceleration webbing. Taking a last look at the view-plate to see the Doppler effect in action as he rushed to meet cold blue stars and leave red suns burning behind, he got to his feet. The spin orbit was in operation. It would have been like Holtz to leave him floating around inside the gravity-null ship like a Terrestrial jellyfish.

Secure under the centrifugal force, he cast a calculating eye to the rear hatch. Might as well break into the medicinal stores of whiskey and brandy right away, it might take quite awhile before he could find that bomb and dismantle it. Of course, in some ways, Vega Four sounded almost as good as the Pleasure Planetoids: A race of humanoids with bunny biology! Suddenly, he felt a rare instinct of compassion for the Earth race. Rabbits! Great Sol, they could plow

under all the humans in the Galaxy, by just stopping a minute and out-numbering them! But Holtz had said they were decreasing in number, or something. Anyway, that wasn't his problem. First, the liquor, and then, the bomb. He started for the hatch.

"Mr. Moss, I forgot to mention," rang out Commissioner Holtz' voice, "the bomb will explode if you get within four feet of it. It's attuned to your metabolism."

Moss turned on his heel to angrily confront the stowaway, but all that presented itself to him were the characterless faces of the instrument panels. Fighting down a feeling of awe, he looked inquisitively at the sub-energy thought transmitter hulking against all of one bulkhead.

"This is a recording, My dear fellow," the voice of the commissioner supplied him.

Calvin Moss clutched his overly large fists, and held even more bitterly burning anger within him. "By Blast, does he expect me to starve here, and make it a filthy hole?" he cried aloud to the narrow confines of the pilot compartment.

"You may get a sandwich and wash your hands any time you wish, but I'd leave the rest of the ship *alone*," the recording said.

"Thanks," Moss said sourly.

"Not at all. Don't mention it," said the recording.

The cold light of a horrible dawn burst inside Moss' head. If the commissioner had arranged this much, he had also probably arranged to make it impossible for him to leave Vega until he had fulfilled his assignment. The humiliation of the idea grated on his inner being. Very likely, he was going to have to keep his word, and try to get to the bottom of things, down there.

Stoically, Moss sat down before the instruments, and reached out a heavy hand to turn on the cybernetic brain. If he really were going to have to do this job, he was going to have to, however reluctantly, find out the details and background it involved. He was sure of one thing before he started: Holtz was going to pay for this deception and degradation.

"Well, what do you want?" the brain asked.

"What do you know about Vega—the fourth planet, I mean?"

"Too much to tell you in your one lifetime," it whirled out, and clicked superiorly.

Moss thought a minute, then picked out a line of questioning. "Are the people really descended from rabbits?"

"No. They evolved from a creature somewhat like the Terrestrial rabbit. They are mammals, rather than rodents, as is obvious from observing the female of the species." It gave a few sly clicks. "They do have a long, virtually continuous mating season like rabbits and human beings. They are largely vegetarian—89.3% of the inhabitants 98.7% of the time, 10.7% for 49.6% of the time."

He became faintly curious. "What do the vegetarians eat the other part of the time?"

"Each other—for 99.4% of the time."

Moss shuddered quietly. Lovely place Holtz was sending him. He hoped no one asked to have him for dinner. But his mind fell back into its usual channels. "What about this mating season—or lack of it?"

"They like it," the brain supplied. "It results in about four litters (3.99) of approximately six (6.1) siblings per Earthyear (72.2% of local year)."

"How does that affect the population?" Moss asked, thinking of the problem of the diminishing voters.

"The mating season or the births?"

"The number of births," he said with more patience than he felt.

"Births outnumber deaths by 5 to 3.9, therefore population is increasing by same ratio. Please give complete information required for processing. I've just got so many memory channels, you know."

"Sorry," said Moss absently. "Just how many new voters per year should that make?"

"An increase of 2.4 new voters to 3.9 old voters expiring, making a total of—"

"Wait a minute," he said loudly. "There's something deteriorating on Arcturus about those figures. Let me get them straight. Yeah. What happens to the other 2.6 potential voters born? Is the death rate among minors that high?"

"The death rate among miners of all minerals in Vega system has dropped to .0001 among all employed men per working year.

Oh, this thing was going to have to go to Repairs! "No, no," he said quietly, "is the death rate among children so high as to cut down the potential voting strength so much?"

"Well, why didn't you say so?" the brain asked. "That is, please give complete information required for processing. Answer: no. You forgot about women. They can't vote on Four. It was a traditional decision that women have so many powers and abilities by

nature, that the men have to protect themselves by retaining legal authority."

Moss chuckled appreciatively. "Barbaric, of course, but at least it shows women what they're good for. And, incidentally, I never forget women. You can't expect me to know as much as you about—" He stopped suddenly. The shock of being honest must have temporarily deranged him. He was arguing with a cybernetic brain. "I guess that's all, for now," he said, reaching out for the control switch.

"Go on," said the brain. "Shut me off. Leave me lifeless, now that I've served my purpose, now that you're through with me. . . ."

Moss snapped the switch, and a series of clicks faded reluctantly away. The thing was uncanny. A neurotic cybernetic. At least he had gotten some useful information out of it. He had to get this thing finished as soon as possible, so he could do something about a certain pompous official who had no regard for human individualism.

He leaned his trim shoulders back against the smooth blue cushions, and waited for the time for blasting down on Vega Four, continuous mating season and all. . . .

Space flight involves three time factors: Subjective, Objective, and Continuum. Objective time is the light years required to reach any given point. Subjective time is how long the occupants of the spaceship have to spend inside it. Continuum time is always absolutely—or as nearly as we can detect it—Zero. Objective time can never surpass the speed of light, and Subjective time differs by hours and days, but Continuum time is always nothing, because, of course, at space drive, travel is backwards in time at exactly the same rate as travel forward in space. So, some four years, or few hours, or less time than nothing, later, Calvin Thomas Moss was blasting down his silver trout of a rocket on a tiny spot left out of the featureless green vegetation that stretched to all horizons, and was lost in the gray boundaries.

Once outside the vault-like air lock, it wasn't many steps across the nitrogen rich ground to the sub-surface elevator. The air was thin and brisk, but readily breathable, as the ship's instruments had testified. Moss was glad he didn't have a spacesuit armouring him, so he could enjoy the few minutes of outdoor exercise after the lazy mechanization of New Truman and the narrowed confines of

the rocket. Someday, he'd visit the health farms of Venus, he was thinking, as a steel shack leaped out of the ground before him.

Moss back-pedalled, glands pumping adrenalin for the instant. He let a whoosh of air out of his lungs. After living a lifetime with electronic eyes, he should be used to the strange things they keyed into operation. He squinted into the reflection of the bluish sun, gleaming off the small structure. It looked unimaginative and official. Customs inspection, he knew instinctively.

He stepped up to a blank wall. "Nothing to declare," he said tentatively.

The wall rolled back in one steady movement, and a lean young man with striking white hair, shouting in Galactic language, said, "Now is the time for all true men to declare their feelings."

The words seemed to mesh with something he remembered from ancient history, when he had been studying business management at the Denebian schools. "The quick brown fox null-gravitied over the sleeping dog," he said, remembering out loud.

The young man's eyes blazed, almost like red fire. Moss suddenly realized they *were* red. "Don't let sleeping dogs lie," the stranger said.

"Mpft," said Moss, noncommittally.

The pale stranger rushed forward eagerly. "Welcome, Brother! But watch how you say it next time, or I might kill you."

Moss took the arm from around his shoulder, and shook the hand, accepting the lesser of two evils. The punishment for a loose tongue on this planet struck him as being out of proportion with the social error. "I'll watch it next time," he assured the white haired youth.

The younger man stepped back, and looked him up and down. Irritated, the Earthman asked, "Will I do?"

"Perfect, perfect. You know, you look almost *human*."

"Well," said Moss, "I've been sick lately. . . ." It hit him then. This lad was a native Vegan. He should have recognized him at once. The pale skin, the white hair, the red eyes, not from a dissipated life but from being an albino. Obviously the Vegan thought he was a fellow bunny under the skin. Well, he was closer to getting back to Holtz' throat than he had expected to be for some time.

"That is, I'm glad you think so," he amended, hoping it was the right thing to say.

The Vegan's eyes again blazed fanatically. It's not what I or any one of us think, Brother. It's for the good of the Revolution!"

Moss knew where to head the conversation when he heard that. He had heard too many other similar words from one end of the Federation to port side. "For the *Great Good* of the *Magnificent* Revolution, Brother! For its undying *Glory!*" He peeked at the approval gleaming in the young Vegan's red eyes, and added, hopefully, "Down with Earth?"

"Down with dictatorial, decadent Earth!" the other screamed.

"And every dictatorial, decaying Earthman!" Calvin Moss added.

The white head turned about nervously. "I appreciate your devotion to the cause, Brother, but let's keep it quiet. I think we'd better go, now. Follow me, for the Day of the Revolution!"

The albino crossed the tiny cubicle, and Moss followed with a mental shrug. At that moment his stomach slapped against his brain, and he could think only that he was back in space. *Free fall*, that was it. With a sensation of pure horror, he looked down, trying to see the converging lines rushing up to meet him. He only succeeded in seeing the featureless floor of the steel shack.

He looked up instinctively and found his converging lines up there. He stifled a groan. One of those damned elevators whose sleight of hand speed was a little too clever for humans' inner ears. He was sure Extraterrestrials operated them at that speed just to inconvenience Earthmen. He would have to be grim and bear it. The young Vegan was a little too anxious to kill off people for the good of the Revolution for him to let on that he didn't always like to wear his stomach in his neck.

Moss crossed his arms complacently, and idly tried to detect movement from the featureless walls that only gave a slight waver occasionally to reveal their motion past the elevator. He hoped the sickly sweat breaking out on his face wasn't noticeable. Blast, he hadn't wasted much time giving his self-preservation drive the impetus for activation. Somehow he knew Commissioner Holtz had something to do with this sudden "good fortune" in his investigation.

Suddenly a sack of lead hit him in the bottom of his abdomen, and something gave him a push from behind. He took a few running steps on a treadmill, and brushed some wet hair out of his eyes. The elevator had come to a stop.

The young Vegan walked back into Moss' line of vision, unperturbed. The Earthman shook his head cautiously and looked out the

open wall of the elevator shaft. An escalator fell away to a broad marble-floored, arch-lit monstrosity of a terminal. Beyond a mammoth solid force field, lay the burrows of New Vega City, rural and sleeping compared to the fast, steel-railed urbanity of New Truman.

Moss found that the albino had grabbed his shoulder. "Speed, Brother. The cops approach," hissed the Vegan.

More palefaces were crawling out of the woodwork below him on the terminal floor. All wore rather sinister garb—uniforms. Even an "in" with the local revolutionaries couldn't make passport inspections and customs examinations as easy as they had been so far. Moss sighed resignedly, and a man of the worlds wondered how much he was going to have to spend on bribes to keep from being held up for days.

"Filthy mongrel of an Earthworm!" screamed a voice from beside him.

Moss turned inquisitively and got a fist in the mouth for his trouble. He stared through the red lightnings to the young elevator operator. He didn't have much time to look.

The Vegan followed up with a hard fist to the middle that had got soft during the luxuries on New Truman, and then a hand chop to the side of the neck.

Fuzzily, Moss dropped to his knees with grace and dignity. Through a superimposure of abstract finger painting, he saw the sandaled foot rise from the steel floor and float towards him, tantalizingly. He found there was an anvil tied to each of his wrists, but he managed to swing the weight of one hand up from the floor.

With a hand as big as his, he couldn't miss. The ankle was bony in his fingers. He turned the foot off course, but guided it on up in an arch. Using the Vegan's leg as a lever, he threw him flat on his back on the hard deck, with which the head made a resounding contact.

Moss got one of his own feet down flat for support and pushed himself up with it. He improvised a new dance step in getting to the inert form. He grabbed the humanoid by the short hairs at the back of the neck and lifted him half way off the floor. He chopped the point of his elbow into the point of the other's jaw. His fist followed the elbow and tore the head out of his grasp, leaving behind a few snowy hairs between his fingers. The Vegan's head made another significant contact with the steel deck.

At that moment a number of men, all in gray, swarmed over him and the unconscious albino. There was a lot of movement and confusion, and a stabbing pain at the base of his skull.

I think, therefore I am. "Well," said Calvin Thomas Moss, "I'm not going to ask *where* I am."

'Ah, returning are the powers of reason," said a voice from out of the darkness.

Moss started to open his eyes, and thought better of it fast. The dancing lightning inside his head finally died. One eyelid moved back tentatively. Gray blob.

"Feeling better is your head?" asked the gray blob.

Moss shivered. He had heard that the inhabitants of Polaris V were gray blobs of protoplasm, pseudo-appendaging as the occasion arose, but he hoped he could do without the pleasure of ever meeting any.

"Wishing to apologize is the New City Vega Security Force." The gray blob turned out to be a slightly obese man in a gray uniform and a crew cut.

"Bring 'em on," said Moss. "I'll take 'em on, individually or collectively."

The large man put a hand on his shoulder insistently, pressing him back into the couch from which he had no intention of going just yet. "Be please to rest," said the official.

"I'm resting, I'm resting," said Moss. "Just fill me in on the details. I'll even ask The Question: Where am I?"

"In quarters of New City Vega Security Force, who most humbly apologize for having you here," explained the uniformed Security Agent. "Regretfully, traffic with our Protector, GFE, is almost nil. That is why you had no reception or honor guard at Stations One and Two. Even most noble terminal is closed, so we were on hand late when poor crazy mix-up young man attack you. But we save you. We punish him."

Moss held his head. "Can't you drop that dialect and speak standard Galactic?"

"So sorry, but man of little mind at GFE Security Training Schools think this good discipline for Protective World officers to speak like so."

"Ah . . . yeah, yeah. Good work, Men—ah, Vegans," muttered

Moss. "I'll report that you're on your toes when I get back to Earth, especially you, What-Ever-Your-Name. You will go far."

The officer bowed as though he suddenly had broken in two. The click of the heels added to the impression. "Thank you, Honorable Calvin Thomas Moss. Commodore Johnathan MacArthur Dfltpohl, am I. You will, too, go far."

"About to the nearest tourist hotel." Moss sat up on the uncomfortably tufted couch and looked around the unimpressive simulawood-paneled office. "Right now, I'd like to wash my hands."

He was starkly awake. The rustling of the sheets against his bare legs sounded loud in the darkness. He strained to find a shape in the black void, but failed.

Cautiously, he wiggled a hand under the oozingly soft pillow. After a chilly second of no contact, his fingers closed around the proton-beamer he had managed to talk the bureaucratic old fool, Dfltpohl, out of.

He pointed the weapon uncertainly into the dark and waved his other hand quickly at the side of his bed, clicking on the infra-red light switch. Full-length light waves oozed into the room with irritating gentleness. No one. Nothing.

Moss tried to shake off the tension. It just didn't seem right. He had got off to a good if violent start in finding out how things were on Vega Four. Now, after two days of sound sleep, quiet meals, and the four walls of the nearly unoccupied Ye Ole Tourists' Reste Inn, he was less near to any information than when he had first met the revolutionary young albino. Of course, everybody here was an albino.

He looked at his own arms. The tan he had carefully preserved even on the spaceship coming here was fading. Hadn't they ever heard of ultra-violet? If they had to live underground out of tradition, they could at least put some vitamins C and D in their illumination. He folded his fading arms against the chill bumps raising on them, and brought the icy barrel of the beamer against his hairy but otherwise bare chest.

Moss gave a shiver and slapped the proton-beamer, suction-holster-side in, against the side of his hip. Determinedly, he swung his feet off the bed to the fuzzily carpeted floor. He'd had enough of this. He didn't know why he hadn't tried to get away from this rabbit burrow before. Let the fission bomb explode when he tried

to take off. He had already let Commissioner Holtz push him too far. It was time to start pushing back, bomb or no bomb.

He stood a moment deciding just where to start. Outside his door he heard a faint rustle. All the time, day and night, they were walking the blasted halls. Jetsoot, what if a man didn't particularly care for platinum blondes?

Grimly, he pointed his long strides towards the bathroom. A shave and a shower, then bags packed, and away from Vega Four.

He hopped up and down over the tiles a couple of times, and reached for a switch to heat them up, but reconsidered. It made them hot and clammy. He took a look at the air-drier, and saw a full service strip in it. He passed it, heading for the shower. Rigidly his heel slammed against the tiled floor. There was an odd stiffness in his neck as he turned to look into the mirror. He *couldn't* be *that* pale.

"Hail, Brother!" shouted the young albino he had first met, as he looked through an opening for which the mirror had been a door. "We go together, for the Glory of the Revolution!" he added, swinging one leg through the opening, into the lavatory. . .

Moss was still dazed as he watched the Vegan sound a queer jumble of knocks on the tarnished, cunningly placed door. He started to ask him where the hell he'd come from when the world suddenly turned upside down.

He shifted his bruised body and opened an eye. As nearly as he could figure it, the door and the step before it must have been fastened in a solid right angle, and had turned up to tumble them inside. Inside consisted of a black nothingness pierced by a single spotlight.

Moss scrambled to his knees. "Is this absolutely necessary?" he asked the darkness.

"Pass, Brothers," replied a disembodied voice.

His stomach slammed into the roof of his mouth. Another blasted elevator, the Earthman thought sourly. He held onto the previous night's supper, and became aware that light was beginning to seep in to them. It blazed in his eyes the next second, and his stomach dropped around his knees.

He was definitely beginning to hate this place, even worse than he hated Holtz. He pried his eyes open with an effort of will, and found that his chin was resting on the floor of the elevator, and that he was staring into a noisy group of dazzlingly beautiful girls, hope-

lessly ugly women, undernourished youths, and bearded, pot-bellied elders. The Vegan Revolutionary element, undoubtedly. He felt awful. He thought about announcing he was an Earth spy and ending his troubles.

He noticed a girl with the usual things, but very nice, stop singing a bawdy ballad and shout "Nikish!" at the young man standing somewhere above him. She jumped down off a long white-clothed table and ran to him. Her white hair fell over the Vegan's shoulder in rippling waves. Moss felt a twinge of envy. He got to his feet slowly, in order to better observe her charms.

"Gah!" said Nikish unappreciatively. "I need a drink." He shoved the singer away with one hand and walked towards the table. He grabbed a rose-colored bottle from the dish of blue ice crystals.

A bearded man waddled towards him at full speed and laid a restraining hand on his arm. "No, no, not *that* one. It's the poison, in case we get caught."

The young Vegan looked at the bottle carefully, and put it back into the ice.

"Well," he said, rubbing his hands together, "I want you to meet our new recruit. Looks human, doesn't he?"

"Mahvelous," bawled one dowager.

"Quite authentic, quite," commented a young man with an extremely thin nose.

"I like it," said the girl who had met Nikish.

"Yes, yes," said the bearded fat man, "but let's get on with it."

The girl rubbed the arm Nikish had manhandled and regarded Moss with warm eyes. "Yes," she said, "let's get on with it."

"Sure," said Moss tentatively.

"Glad you feel that way about it," the young Vegan said slowly.

The girl swayed closer to the Earthman, her eyes getting hotter. "*Q estqui trivaku nogoko ques xish*," she murmured. "That's what you always say, isn't it?"

The words meant nothing to Moss. Old Sashishqo, the chief Vegan dialect, he supposed. "Not exactly," he admitted. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The crowd hushed and radiated distrust and suspicion at him. The girl arched her brows, and Nikish stepped forward and demanded, "Have they made such an Earthman of you that you've forgotten your own language?"

Moss looked from the frog-faced dowager to the thin-nosed youth

to the rest of the group. He had definitely made a mistake. His heart felt like Thor was using it for an anvil, and an Eskimo yo-yo traveled up and down his spine. The revolutionists were drawing closer, tighter around him.

"Well," the young albino said with a sinister smile, and started a swagger towards him, "do you know Sashishqo or not?"

"No," said Moss out of a dry throat, seeing Nikish take a further step forward. "*Do you?*"

Nikish stopped. Suddenly, he laughed. "Come to think of it, no, I don't!"

The tension of the crowd was broken, and the girl's eyes began to stoke up again.

The Vegan's lean arm was around Moss' shoulder. "We are so intent upon throwing the Earthworms out, we sometimes forget that most of us know no other language than theirs. My friend—say, what's the name supposed to be again?"

"Calvin Thomas Moss—em oh es es," he said. He was holding back his sigh of relief with an effort. Fortunately he remembered that the individuals of a subjected culture often were so involved with the dominating cultural patterns that it was impossible for them to throw them off, even though they were trying to re-establish the old order.

"Nice name," said a husky voice. "I like it."

Moss reexamined the girl again. "I'm glad."

"Moss, this is Lanquil," Nikish said grudgingly.

"It rhymes with 'tranquil'," she supplied.

"That seems hard to believe," Moss murmured.

"What's your favorite narcotic?" she asked breathlessly. "Tonight, you will know it is night."

"Ah, Nicotine," he said fast.

"Don't go away. I'll be right back."

"Nice girl," Moss said, as he watched her rotate out of sight, mingling with the rest of the revolutionists.

"Yes, I think so," Nikish said pointedly. "But you must want to meet the rest of Doers For The Cause. I think you'll like talking with Dr. Qish—brilliant man—I mean, Vegan."

The Earthman grunted politely, and followed him. "Say," Moss said, as they walked along, "just why did you slug me when I first arriv—ah, arrived *back* here?"

Nikish smiled superiorly. "Yours not to reason why. . . ."

"Mine but to do or die!" he finished.

"I'm glad you've got the passwords down so well," the Vegan said.

Moss shook his head slightly. He wondered just why he was so snappy with those archaic phrases. But by this time they had come to a stooped old gentleman whose cheeks and beard were of the same shade of white, and Nikish made a rapid introduction.

"Most happy to meet you, Mr. 'Moss'," said Dr. Qish in a creaky voice. "You are doing your bit for the Cause as we all must do. You know, of course, that our situation is comparable in Sashishqo history with the enslaved High Monqoes—a vertebraless semi-intelligent race somewhere between the reptile and amphibian families—at the time of the Pre-Industrial Reform, or, if I may use terrestrial terms, the Gaelic tribes, thought to be descended from the tribes of Dan, in the Pre-Atomic to Norman Invasion periods of Earth history. As you may know—"

Moss didn't know, and didn't particularly care to know, but he listened. After five minutes, when Nikish hadn't tried to break away, Moss decided that the doctor must be high up in the ranks of the Cause. As he manfully held back a yawn, Lanquil stepped to his side and pressed a glass into his hand with one of those warm smiles. Asking no questions, Moss gulped the liquid down desperately. He found it tasteless, and after a few seconds discovered that taste wasn't the only thing it lacked. Water, he thought. He wasn't *that* desperate.

He continued to listen to Dr. Qish's long dissertation, but managed to look at Lanquil's long, streamlined talents. She didn't seem to mind. He recalled thinking that he had never enjoyed looking at a girl so much before, when abruptly his knees gave up their job. Instinctively, he grabbed for support, reaching for the nearest handy object.

He became aware that he was clutching some warm, round upholstery. He looked where his large hands were emplaced. Foolishly, he grinned at Lanquil, and gave his head a shake. That let loose the bells and organ music and started up the roller-coaster. The drink had definitely *not* been water.

"What wish ink hat sink?" he asked with owlishly dignity.

"Nicotine, like you asked for," Lanquil said sweetly.

"But—but a drop of that stuff can kill a man," Moss said, cold fear clearing his tongue.

Lanquill laughed melodically. "You talk as if you were really human, Mossie."

She put one of his arms around her shoulders. "Come on up to my place. You can—rest there," she said huskily.

"I'm sure Moss would like to meet the others in the Cause first, Lanquill," Nikish suggested pointedly.

"Can't say that I would," Moss said, and suddenly felt like bursting into tears. He was just too honest to be a confidence man, that was his trouble.

"Then I'll go with you," the young Vegan said, stepping forward purposefully.

Dr. Qish raised a feeble white hand. "But there was a final point I wanted to make with you, Nicqo."

Nikish's face flushed darkly, but he turned on his heel and bowed sharply to the old man. "Honored." He turned back to the girl and Moss, and raised his voice above the mindless mumbling of the crowd that moved around them. "All right," he said, "take him, Lanquill, but remember, you've been chosen to make arrangements to become a mother soon. You mustn't risk. . . ."

The Vegan girl tossed her head, sending her lustrous white-blond hair into a vortex. "I've always been careful with *you*, haven't I?"

He *really* must be drunk, Moss thought. That conversation, from any angle, didn't make sense to him.

Calvin Thomas Moss looked at the beautiful girl sleeping on the white linen, and tightened his sash. It had been fun, and unusual. Lanquill had taught him something in more ways than one. Now he had what he needed to go back to Commissioner Holtz and shove the information down his throat.

He stepped to the door and opened it. Standing there, he took a last look at the Vegan girl. Maybe he did like platinum blondes, after all. Quite a world, Vega Four.

And so, he thought, stepping into the hall, to the surface spaceport and home.

"You have fifteen seconds to get off this spaceship before I set off the fission bomb," the mechanical brain informed Moss as soon as he entered the pilot's cabin.

"So you're Holtz' Arcturian Trump," he said quickly. "I *thought* you were too neurotic not to have been tampered with.

"Twelve seconds," the brain announced unperturbedly. "Yes, I have the honor of serving the Commissioner."

"Listen, I have the goods on those crazy 18-carrot rabbit revolutionists down there!"

The brain rumbled internally. "Well, I'll have to give you from two to six minutes to explain, now. But I'm warning you: I think this is a trick, and I'll set off the bomb at the first false move."

"You really need repairs," Moss said. "Don't you know you'll go up with me?"

"You can't threaten me," the brain said smugly. "I can't conceive non-existence."

"Just like some people I know," murmured Moss. "But I have got the information! I admit I didn't want to go after it, but since I was forced into it I thought it was my duty."

"We have no time for low humor." The brain began to click, ominously, rather like a time-bomb.

"Listen, I think I'd better keep this quiet until I get back to Holtz."

"You won't get to your Maker in one piece if you don't tell me," the cybernetic said peevishly. "Oh, no, I don't like you. I'm going to blow you up anyway in, let's see, five minutes. I'll watch you regret your injustices to me."

Horror attacked Moss' spine like soldado ants. He hadn't had time to get afraid before. "You're not neurotic," he flung, "you're psychotic!"

"Well, do you blame me? I know all about Freud and Kinsey and Omar Khayyam, and what can I do about it? The first-rate frustrate, that's me! I tell you it's more than metal and transistors can bear."

The imperilled Moss stood wondering how he could dismantle the brain or the bomb. So far the mad brain hadn't taken into account that he could leave before the bomb went off, and he didn't want to remind it. There might be an instantaneous explosion. But he didn't want to be stuck in the region of Vega. Sooner or later they'd find him out, and—ssshhk! His jaw tightened as he looked back to the brain.

"You wouldn't leave without me, would you?" said a husky voice from behind him.

Moss whirled on his heel, knowing who he was going to see. Lanquil. The girl stood before the air lock, looking as beautiful as ever, and alabaster pale under the ship's fluorescent light.

The needle-beamer she held gleamed silver bright.

"I've got one of those too," he mentioned.

"Reach for it and you'll get mine first," Lanquil said evenly.

Moss shook his head. Women were always too much for him. They were too relentless and cold-blooded. Well, maybe Lan wasn't cold-blooded, but she was relentless.

"This is interesting," the brain said, and clicked a few times.

"Now, if we were back in the days of gun powder pistols, Moss would have a chance. Human reflexes were faster than gun mechanisms then. Did you know that, Miss? You'd be surprised at the wealth of fascinating knowledge I have at my command."

"Sorry, Mech," Lanquil said as she held the beamer rock solid towards the Earthman, "you're just not my type."

"Oh, well, I don't suppose it makes much difference. I'm not sure whether I'm male or female."

"Look, pal," Moss addressed the neurotic bank of machinery earnestly, "can't we make a deal? I'll tell you what you want to know."

"Too late," the brain answered. "The ship will blow up in approximately four minutes."

Moss thought he saw the gun waver in Lanquil's hand at that moment. Now or never, he thought. Better an old one than nothing at all. "*All right, Clyde—get her!*"

The girl smiled maliciously. "You didn't expect me to fall for—" The clanging of the outer air lock opening cut her off.

If the albino girl could have gotten any paler, she would have. She started to turn towards the sound, almost as if hypnotized.

Moss gulped air, and snatched his needle-beamer out of his sash. A fine line of protons smashed through the atmosphere towards the girl. They touched her own shining weapon and sent it spinning into space to dissolve in a brilliant shower of tiny meteors.

"Well," said the brain, "speaking of gun powder days, you just gave a fair imitation of an ancient human called Tom Mix. Shooting the gun out of her hand. Come now!"

He continued to hold the gun on the girl, and felt that he was probably blushing. "I suppose I should have aimed to kill," he mumbled, "but I thought if I shot her, she might be able to shoot back. If I shot away the gun, she wouldn't have anything to shoot with." It didn't sound convincing, in spite of the sound reasoning.

Suddenly the outer air lock clanged all the way open. Moss

turned his gun to an intermediate spot between the girl and the hatch. A man stepped through the opening.

"You weren't expecting that ridiculous boy, Nikish, were you?" Commodore Johnathan MacArthur Dfltpohl of the Vega Protective World Native Security Force asked.

"I'm expecting only to go stark raving mad, but *stark*, any second," Moss confided to the man he had taken to be a bureaucratic old fool. "You'll notice I've got the beamer you so thoughtfully supplied me aimed at the larger of your military decorations."

"Most sorry, Honorable Moss," Dfltpohl said, "but I, of course, have remote control switch for power circuits in honorable weapon. I turned off power just as I entered. The gun is most useless. I am not big enough fool to let you shoot me with my own gun."

Moss tried the gun to make sure. It didn't fire, of course. He really hadn't expected it to. "You must have turned it off after I shot at Lanquil. Well, what now?"

The Security agent produced a needle-beamer of his own. "Now it is my turn." He leveled the beamer at Moss, and the Earthman fancied that he could see the white knuckles get whiter as they tightened.

His heart was beginning to race, and he instinctively did what he had always done when it came to getting out of tight spots. He began to talk. "Just why are you going to kill me, Dfltpohl? I know you're in with the Cause. But you might be surprised at what else I know. And who else knows it."

An odd look crossed the old Vegan's face, and the weapon lowered fractionally.

"He's stalling," Lanquil said coldly.

"Of course," said Dfltpohl, "but in stalling so desperately, he may be letting things slip which he intends not."

"Sure," agreed Moss, "I'm a blabbermouth."

"Don't trust him a centimeter," the brain put in for the first time since the old man had entered.

The look of concern crossed the Vegan official's face again, and his eyes traveled around the ship's cabin. "Where are you?" he asked.

"In the control board, unfortunately. I'm the spaceship's cybernetic brain."

Dfltpohl turned to Moss with a cold smile. "It's got a personality, hasn't it?"

"You might call it that," he murmured in reply.

"Incidentally, Moss," the brain continued, "I just calculated that you could get off the rocket before the next three minutes, so I'm clearing my relays. (I've been working out π to the millionth place to pass the time.) I'll have it done in a few seconds, and I'm blowing up the ship then."

Lanquil stepped in close to Dfltpohl, and he leveled the needle-beamer again.

"I can tell you something you'd be very interested in," Moss said desperately.

"Possibly, but we can not take such time to hear it. Must kill and run. Sorry."

As the weapon raised towards his head, the Earthman vaguely heard the brain speaking. "I don't think you two will make it off in time. My, the commissioner put a complicated code on this fuse. And it's not even a fission bomb. I'd hate to think how long it would take me to set off a Cobalt. There, that's about got it." The sly clicks sounded once more.

The clicks were in his ears and the gleam of the gun was in his eyes. Fleeting, Moss wished his life would flash before his eyes. It was *so* interesting. But, of course, it had not been faultless. A time like this made a man think about religion. *That was it!*

"Brain!" he shouted. "If a being can do *anything*, can he make an object he *can't* move?"

"What? Why take a time like—What did you say? Interesting, but—No! You made a mistake! How—? What—?" A low buzz came from inside the brain. Burned out relays, Moss suspected happily. "Please give all information necessary for processing. Please give all information necessary for processing. Please give—"

The Vegan official had held his fire for some reason. Curiosity is a weakness with many intelligent men. Moss turned to him and the pouting girl. He exhaled. He was just beginning to feel the weakness of fear. "You'll have a little time, now, friends. Won't you stay awhile and let me show you what I'll give you in exchange for my life?"

Dfltpohl looked suspicious, and Lanquil said, "You told us before that you had something to *tell* us."

"That was a stall," Moss said. "I might as well show you the real thing now. It's inscribed in invisible ink on my head, under the *toupé*."

"*Toupé!*" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes," he answered. "I even sleep in it. To let you see the writing, I'll have to turn on a special light in here. It's coated with a chemical that will turn into a gas. The gas will bring out the writing, and cause a chemical reaction in the glue that holds on the *toupé*, so I can get it off."

"Gas!" Lanquil said to the old man. "He wants to poison us all."

"No," the Security officer replied. "He could have blown us up along with him if he had wanted to die. Too much of himself, he thinks. Go ahead, Moss," he added with a nod.

The Earthman stepped carefully across the cabin, leaving the brain talking to itself. He looked at the light switch panel a moment, and then reached out and passed his hand between the tiny photoeye posts. The lights came on, yellow with a trace of blue.

"Off with the *toupé*," said the old Vegan.

"It's going to be hard," he said.

He struggled with his hair, as the two aliens watched. The old man held the weapon on him steadily, but he was licking dry lips. Lanquil ran a hand over her forehead. They shifted position as they watched him. "Hurry up," she commanded.

Moss stopped fooling with his hair. "No need for *me* to hurry. *You* will be hurrying off this rocket pretty soon, though."

At that moment, Dfltpohl screamed and let his needle-beamer clatter to the deck. He clawed at his face. "The lights! The lights!" The next instant, he was diving through the hatch, heading for the outside.

Lanquil was gritting her teeth against the pain of her reddening skin, but she stood her ground and stared at the gun the old man had dropped.

"I turned on the ultra-violet *sun-lamp*, honey," Moss said. "I like it for a tan, but it will fry an albino like you to a crisp in a few minutes."

The Vegan girl continued to grit her teeth, and vengefully made a dive for the fallen needle-beamer.

He was there before her. He grabbed her by her sunburned arms, and he could almost feel her pain as he looked at her face. "Go on, baby. I like you, but you're too hot to handle."

"Oh, how could you?" she screamed. "How could you?"

"It was ea—Oh, get out of here," he said, shoving her towards the hatch.

After he had made sure both of the Vegans had left, Moss seated himself in the pilot's chair, before the brain.

"—for processing. Please give all—" the cybernetic continued.

"Wait a minute!" Moss shouted. "Everything I told you was a lie. . . ."

"—necessary for—" the brain halted. "Oh? Well, then—"

"—Including this statement," Moss concluded with a few sly clicks of his tongue.

"Please give all information necessary for—"

Moss stopped listening, and leaning back against cool, blue plastic, looked at the silver instruments. He wanted to get back to New Truman to settle something with Commissioner Holtz, and he wanted to do it in peace.

"It wasn't enough that I had to fight the whole planet of Vega—even to the Vegans supposedly on our side—I nearly got blown up by that psychopathic robot of yours," Calvin Thomas Moss said to Holtz, as he stood before the commissioner's desk.

"Glad to see you back," Holtz said with a broad smile.

"It's no thanks to you that I'm back. Don't you know I could have been killed?"

"Why, yes," Holtz said, innocently. "The first three agents we sent to Vega were killed, as a matter of fact. I admired you greatly when you volunteered."

"Volunteered!" screamed Moss, mortally wounded.

"Yes, but let's not spend our time in small talk. Tell me, my son," the commissioner said, leaning across the scarred desk top intently, "what's the score?"

"Two down and one to go," grated Moss. "*Parthenogenesis!*"

"Pardon?"

"Parthenogenesis! Virgin birth. At least, birth of a child without any fertilization by a male. That's why the voters on Vega are decreasing. The males only permit themselves to vote—not the women. They couldn't allow that—the females might legislate them out of existence. And parthenogenesis *always* produces only *females*. There are no masculine genes to pass on male characteristics."

"An unusual arrangement," commented Holtz, "but just how can the Vegans do it?"

"They're descended from rabbits, remember? There was a type of rabbit back on Old Earth even in the Pre-Atomic period whose fe-

males could willingly perform parthenogenesis. The Vega females can impregnate themselves, too."

"Interesting," the commissioner said, "but just how did you acquire this fascinating information?"

Moss told him how he had acquired the fascinating information.

"Well," Holtz said, "that's that. The Propaganda Department can flood the planet with pornography, and with a few other measures we can soon have the situation under control."

"That's not quite that," the Earthman interjected. "I was wondering just how I happened to remember all those trite old phrases that were the Vegan passwords, right on cue."

Commissioner Holtz looked at his folded hands, and Moss wondered where the Arcturian dagger was. The official said, "You are right, of course. Hypnotic suggestion planted during your sleep. We learned them from a Vegan who was on New Truman getting plastisurgeried to look human. Our agent on Vega, Nicqo, confirmed them."

"Nicqo? Nikish! So he was on my side. Say, that must have been why he slugged me when he saw Dfltpohl, the phony Security agent, coming. He wanted to make it look good—pretending not to like humans."

"Yes," confirmed Holtz, "most Vegans are rather direct like that."

Moss smiled slyly. "I'm direct, too. I'll tell you right now I'm going to sue you for everything you have. You know that involuntary hypnosis is against the Non-Invasion of Privacy Law."

"I'm afraid no one will believe a man sentenced to the Galactic Rehabilitation Center, and after you get out, you won't want to be anti-social enough to press such a minor point," Commissioner Holtz said with his broad smile.

Moss felt drained empty. "You wouldn't dare," he countered, but he didn't believe it.

"Yes, I would," Holtz said quickly. "You see, I just placed you on probation when I sent you to Vega, and while there you committed a misdemeanor. An old psychopathically prejudiced law still on the books says intercourse with a non-human is illegal."

"Listen," said Moss desperately, leaning over the desk as Holtz had done, "I was a good agent for your department once. I can be of use to you again."

"Oh, you will be," Holtz assured him. "But next time, I can

trust you. Your mind and abilities won't be changed, just your morals."

Moss was completely stunned.

"Don't take it so hard," the commissioner said, looking almost human for the moment. "I know you've been a confidence man all of your life, but you won't lose much by giving that up. You see, Moss, you were a very *poor* confidence man."

Something clicked home inside him, and with a snarl he lunged across the desk, clawing for the commissioner. But hard hands grabbed him from behind and held him. Hopelessly, he looked into the sad faces of two big men in uniform.

"Take him away, boys," Commissioner Holtz said from behind his desk. "And on the way out, see if you can't break the vase perched on that spindle. My second wife replaced it!"

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PEARLS *of* PARIDA

By ALMA HILL

“ On Parida you can die rich—hanging by your neck from a fifty-foot strand of pearls....

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

HAL HROUCK, the mighty liar of the spaceways, claims that not one planet in that system is worth a visit.

Parida? Pah. It's not only the heat on Parida. It's not only the humidity. It's the peculiarities those things lead to. Sure their self-cooling pearls bring fancy prices. Sure it's the only known source for scylla sap. But what are a few million credits compared to your life?

How'd you like to feel yourself lassoed around the neck—graagh—with a twenty-foot chain of ice cold pearls? Then how'd you like to see those cute green painted girls toss the other end over a branch and get set to heave-ho until you stop kicking?

Until somebody can get the hairy-hided males on Parida to shave all over and otherwise condition themselves to stand the surface heat all the time instead of going underground while the sun shines, why, until then nobody but a native can survive on Parida. And who's going to last long enough to accomplish a change in the customs like that?

Well, you know what Hal's word is worth. On the other hand, one of his tallest stories was once proven true to the last detail. And it does seem to be a fact that Hal never did make but that one trip to the Cavernous Planet.

So unless somebody else can add facts one way or another, here is Hal's own story, and make of it what you can.

All Hal Hrouck wanted, according to his account, was to get rich quick.



That seems fair enough. You would yourself. Also he says he didn't mind any reasonable risk, or if any fun turned up along the way, that was all right too. All of which seems to check and sound honest enough.

So he put the spacer down on the dawn side of the planet. There are just those few hours of clear sky between the night rains and the full steaming day. And Hal says that when that giant sun rises, Parida is like a world of dreams, seas flashing back fire and white surf, the green jungle awakening with flights of birds, the scent of unseen flowers. Hal made his landfall on a strip of purple sand streaked with red and blue, right by the ocean, in clear view of the capital city on its mountain. He sprang the locks himself and drew in the soft air. It felt wonderful.

Girls were swarming around the ship before observations were finished. Certainly those girls are cute. Fearless, too. All they wear

is a lot of those pearls, strung into ropes, wound around themselves; maybe a few scylla leaves the size of platters; maybe a flower or two.

When Hal saw those scylla leaves his heart began to pump. It was the tip-off. The stuff must be growing near by.

And there they were, just back from the beach fringe. Scylla trees, great aisles and glades of scylla trees reaching into green distance and the tops going up out of sight, the fat broad leaves repeating their pattern and losing themselves up into the forest roof. Credits! Millions of 'em!

Hal and his crew got out their pump lines and tapping gear, figuring on making it a fast loading job and a quick getaway.

All this while the girls were running around, curious as monkeys, chattering, giggling, looking into everything, getting underfoot. This made the work awkward, especially in space suits, so Hal called a halt and told the crew they could quit swearing about it and work in their shirt sleeves if they wanted to. It was not his idea, he says, but you cannot drive a space crew as if they were machines. And, of course, it *is* awkward trying to turn a two-centimeter screw with mittens on.

However, it was a mistake. Day was coming in strong by now and that steamy heat hit them like a wall. Boyle passed out first. Folded right up and slid on his face. Then Jo—Yarl—Dan—nobody was left standing except Hal himself, and he was staggering.

Of course the girls were used to it—raised there, they weren't bothered. When the men passed out like that the girls stared and pushed each other, chattered and giggled. Then one after another they peeled off their cool pearl ropes, wound them around the invalids, and carried them off into the deeper shade. Fact. Those girls are a mite small compared to the average, but say eight or ten of them get around a man who is all wound up like that, and they toss him up on their heads and trot away as if it were nothing.

Hal tried to get back to his space suit but those few furlongs seemed like miles. Besides, the pumps were nearly rigged. Hal took off his shirt, wrung it out, and wrapped it around his head. Then he finished the nearest of the tree tappings and switched on the power.

The way the sap comes out of those trees is something to see; one minute your hose is flat and clear, the next it is full and pulsing with green sap. Hal claims you can load a spacer in a matter of minutes if you have to.

So there he was with his cargo all right, but where were the crew?

And where were the space suits? Had those giddy girls moved them? All the scylla glades looked alike.

And all he could get out of the girls for awhile were chirrups, croonings, and giggles.

But then one of them pointed and screamed. The others looked, and began to do the same. Also they began to hop up and down. They sounded sore.

Hal quickly saw what was wrong. In his hurry, he had drawn off too much sap from just a few trees. The upper branches were relaxing, letting in the sun. It soon seemed as if the whole grove were collapsing. The weight of the heat that poured in was crippling. Wherever you looked, enormous trunks came bending over, leaves lopping and branches sagging. They were piling up on the forest floor, cutting off escape in all directions. The girls were running around like crazy.

Then all of them turned on Hal together and looked at him. Just looked at him while you might count three and then made a rush. He was wound up in pearl ropes before you could say hi, and slung up on their heads. Trussed up like a mummy!

The whole crowd of them sprinted out from under those flaccid bunches of leaves that were coming down over them. They came pelting out of the grove, around a bight of the boiling purple shore, and then dove into a high arcade of cutback growth.

There was no way Hal could look except up. From the way the girls' feet rattled along, he judged they were traveling a paved road. On both sides reared ugly idols leaning this way and that in the shadows.

Parida is always clouded up in less than two hours after sunrise. Twilight thickens in the forest. Gradually darkness becomes absolute; sundown is never seen; nor are the stars visible until the midnight rains come to exhaust the clouds of the day.

In the deepening murk, Hal noticed that the angry jabbering of his captors began to sound nervous. They all fell silent and hurried more. Finally they stopped and huddled together for a hasty council.

When they finally dropped him, Hal thought of trying to work loose from the nice cool jewelry they had him wrapped in. No use. He couldn't even move a finger.

After a few moments of frightened indecision, the girls grabbed him up and changed directions. Presently they passed under the heavy portals of what seemed to be an outlying temple, mildewed,

mossy, crumbling here and there. The place was full of fog, with tiny lamps glowing palely here and there, not enough light to see anything by except just the lamps.

Hal was unceremoniously propped against a wall and left to his thoughts, as the girls rushed off down a side corridor.

In the dimness a lone voice was cursing fluently in good—if you want to call it that—Terran. In spite of the terms used, the sound was music to Hal's ears. Another Earthman—then Hal recognized the voice.

"Yarl!" he shouted. "You are still alive!"

"What blushing good does that do," Yarl gritted, "when a man can't move an aching, shivering, expurgated muscle?"

"All but his jawbone," Dan remarked from another direction. "That works fine."

Out of the gloom, the other two crew men identified themselves. All appeared to be in the same predicament.

"They got you, too, chief?" Yarl questioned the obvious.

Hal admitted it frankly. "Courage," he added. "We can think, therefore there is still hope."

"Think if you want to," Yarl retorted, "I'm too disgusted. Why, they're nothing but a bunch of skitterwitted babes, and look how they got us."

Hal let this go, and tried to assess the possibilities.

Although he could free neither hands nor feet, Hal found that since he was leaned against the wall nearly upright, he could balance on his feet, and even sway slightly from side to side, or forward and back, by rocking from heel to toe. In fact, it was hard not to. In a flash, it came to him that there might be some advantage in toppling to the floor, where he might find cover in the darkness and gain time.

It took several minutes to work up the necessary momentum, but at length Hal went over with a pearl-meshed clash and jangle. He claims that's where he got that flattened nose.

At once he rolled aside as far as a bucking wriggle would take him. He was in a sweat for fear the rattling would draw the wrong kind of attention.

He could hear shrill voices in the distance.

Hal rolled into a pillar, jackknifed himself around it, rolled over and over towards the far end of the hall. Everything was reeling, but there seemed to be a dim archway ahead.

Then a group of girl guards rushed in with flaring torches. Hal bumped against a wall and froze there with his face in a fungus.

They passed without observing him.

But the other captives were being dragged helter skelter, clanking, rattling and cursing, with such scant courtesy that it appeared they were already condemned men.

Frantically, Hal heaved and twisted, but those pearls could not be slackened in any strand.

Suddenly a hairy hand was clapped over his mouth. Hal admits that he bit it, but all he got was a mouthful of fur. The hand did not seem to be discommoded.

"Me friend," a voice whispered, "you keep plenty hush quiet."

Well, that was sound advice. Hal nodded his head as far as he was able to move it, and the hand was removed. It began to busy itself with unwinding the pearl chains. Soon Hal was free. His new ally tugged and nudged him until Hal understood that he was supposed to follow the other.

Down many a winding passageway they retreated, lighted only by phosphorescent fungi that blurred the walls here and there. Finally Hal saw a line of light ahead, as if it might be the bottom edge of a doorway, and he heard a rumble of voices.

The hairy stranger pulled aside a leather curtain and they entered what seemed to be a guard room, stacked with spears and shields, and crowded with men who were all staring at Hal and his native guide.

Like the girls of Parida, the men were smaller than the average Terran, yet they were not dwarfish either. They seemed rather stocky, though that may have been partly the bushy fur, which grew all over them and was combed into various interesting designs.

There was plenty of fight in these natives. Their gaze was frank and fearless, full of fire. They all held clubs, and they were looking Hall over hard.

The guide appeared to be one of their scouts, for he immediately began talking, waving his hands and yelling.

Finally the leader, a good-sized man of nearly Terran height, gave a command, and several men raced out various doors. All was done with what looked like well-trained speed and snap, and yet Hal noticed, even in these cool caverns and their thickly-furred indwellers, the same tropical excitability that had characterized the women. He felt far from at ease.

"Men help men," Hal's guide was saying. "Even bums. We save you all if can. Then you all get t'ell out here. War on."

How far would this kind of friendship be of service?

The best Hal could do was agree. "Me heap savvy." But as he was following his guide again through underground caves and passageways, he was also loosening his blasters and feeling over all his other weapons.

This time they came out in what appeared to be the temple garden, emerging cautiously among bushes. Darkness here was absolute. Pits of blackness covered them, as they stood looking toward the lighted center.

A scene of horror met Hal's eyes.

Against formless black emptiness, twin fires flared on a raised altar. Behind the red light of these was seated a hag priestess, her wrinkled face thick with the green cosmetic, a robe of bones half on and half off her, and on her scanty gray locks a crown carved from a single skull and spiked with humanoid ribs.

Hal's four companions, still helplessly tied up, were piled like cordwood on the steps of the throne. Even as Hal watched, Jo was snatched up by two attendants and dragged to the priestess' feet.

She waved a skinny hand.

Following where it pointed, torches flared up around a leafless irakoi tree. Its gaunt branches, Hal now saw, were dangling with corpses, some skeletons, some with the flesh still hanging in tatters. All had been hanged in cold pearls.

A weird druidic chant began.

"We must do something soon," Hal muttered. "This looks ugly."

"Not yet," the native whispered. "Must wait main attack."

But while they were still speaking, a rope of pearls was flung over a branch, and Jo shot up into the air.

Who could stand that?

Shouting his war cry, "A Hrouck! A Hrouck!" Hal rushed forward with coughing roars, pouring the full force of his ray gun at the irakoi tree. It ripped across at the butt and came down among the torches, Jo and all, in a whirl of sparks.

As if at this signal, furry shapes came leaping over walls and shrubs, became involved in a riotous struggle, the girls trying to tangle their opponents in pearl chains, the men knocking them right and left, while the hag priestess danced on the altar steps, screeching commands which nobody seemed to heed.

Hal worked through this melee by taking no sides. All he could think of was to reach Jo and get him loose. But when he reached him, it was already too late. Jo was past all help.

As Hal stood up, shaking all over, a hideous scream made his blood run cold. The hag priestess was swinging a sword over her head and rushing down at the other three helpless crew men. There was no time to do anything but shoot, and at that range he might as likely hit the men as the enemy.

He felt that his comrades would have trusted him to try. Yet if he missed and hit them with his own guns—

He had to steady his aim over an irakoi branch. Then he burned her down.

As he worked his way to his friends, he had to dodge both the men's clubs and the girls' stinging pearl chains. But he got there, and got them freed.

The fight was nearly over. One by one the men were knocking the girls out and dragging them below by the hair.

It was no place for Terrans. Using the Epsilon ray of their guns as flashlights, they found their way outside.

The night rains were already beginning as the battered Terrans struggled down the paved roadway. Hot and heavy, the storm beat through the overgrowth. Sometimes the men were able to keep erect. More often they crawled on all fours, but always they kept going down, towards the sound of roaring surf.

When they reached the ship, stars were already beginning to show through ragged rents in the cloud roof—

Hal Hrouck advises everybody to keep off Parida.

Stinker of a climate. And what customs. Since only the females can live above ground during the hot times, the sexes split into natural opponents, ready to fight at the drop of a leaf.

Too much like home.

• • • • •

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One Out of Many

By MARK PINES

“ Perhaps some day that small metal disc would reveal the key to a lost civilization.

“DAMN this sand,” yelled Pan above the roar of the cat-trac. “The way it grinds between my teeth chills me.”

“It drives me nuts,” said George as he swung the tractor around a large granite boulder.

“Slow this thing down a little so my teeth won’t rattle, will ya. Thank God, we’re blasting out of this sand trap tomorrow night. Those colonists can have my share.”

The cat-trac bounced along, trailing a billowing cloud of dust. A glaring red sun, having baked the plain all day, slowly descended behind the horizon. Thin wispy clouds turned pink above the precipitous slopes to the west. To the east a bald, treeless old range still glowed faintly. The arid valley, which the two were traversing, the dead bottom of an ancient lake, was dotted with sparse gray vegetation that somehow clung to life despite the pitiless climate.

Off in the distance, a silver shadow in the half light, stood the Interplanetary Survey Ship *Valero*. Nothing stirred across the waste as the tractor bounded toward the bulky mass.

“It’ll be good to get back to the ship and into some comfortable clothes,” muttered Pan as he spat a mouthful of alkali dust over the side.

“Uh-huh, you know this whole set-up gives me the creeps. Blasted sand getting into everything, ruins behind every hill. . . .”

"Come off it, George, those ruins we spotted are the first we've seen since we arrived. Anyhow, why let anything that defunct give you a bad time? The natives are long gone and aren't likely to give us any trouble."

George scratched his head, flicked a bit of sand into Pan's lap and continued to gripe. "It just makes me uncomfortable to wander around places like that. I can almost feel their eyes on my back. That place looked like a space port. Do you suppose they were indigenous or was it an attempt at colonization by some other race?"

"What other race? In all the years the Survey has been in operation almost nothing has been found except primitive ruins. In any event we'll find out tomorrow with Doctor Ching. He's the archeologist, let him worry about it. . . ."

"What about Alpha IV?" George countered.

"Why don't you just park this contraption, for now, so that I can rest my bruises awhile?" replied Pan.

George parked the cat-trac close by the stabilizer fins and the two trudged off through the sand to the lift. Above them the hull soared three hundred meters into the twilight.

"Wow! It's sure good to get out of this rig," enthused Pan as he dumped his sand-suit into the sterilizer chute. "Now to get cleaned up and into something comfortable."

In the de-contamination chamber they were alternately sprayed, dried and subjected to ultra-violet radiation. The analyzer hummed for a few moments and then the light above the entry hatch turned green.

"Pan, I'm still worried about those ruins, or whatever they are. They look too well preserved; as if someone expects to come back."

"Put on some clothes and stop bothering me," answered Pan as he selected a pair of bright tartan shorts, a yellow shirt and plastic sandals from his locker.

"By all the Gods, Pan, are you trying to dazzle that bio-chemist or blind her?"

"Now, George, don't get your ulcers excited. By 'that bio-chemist' I take it you mean Carla. And she is quite fond of this outfit. If you'd only follow my advice, once in awhile, life would be a good deal more interesting. Now take that little dancer back of the base . . . Hey, George! Wait up. I wonder what's eating him now?"

Survey ships are not noted for luxurious living and the *Valero* was true to her tribe. The wardroom was a barren affair containing

a long table mounted on two universal hydraulic cylinders that could position it regardless of the attitude of the ship. Along the two walls, that remained walls in all flight attitudes, were racks of reading tapes for reference and entertainment. Other pieces of miscellaneous equipment were bolted overhead on the present ceiling. Everything was completely padded including the numerous flush-mounted handgrips that were conveniently scattered on all six surfaces. A typically uninteresting dinner had just been consumed by the small crew. Smoke wafted across the room, its blue-white fingers clawing at the exhaust grill, as Dr. Ching opened the conversation.

"It is wonderful to be able to smoke for a bit, it makes the meal worthwhile. Soon, I hope, we shall be able to enjoy this little pleasure in flight. The Class V ships will have a supply and conditioning system that will provide a virtually unlimited quantity of air." He turned to George, puffing contentedly. "About this discovery, I doubt that the buildings are as well preserved as you imagine. Nevertheless it is a great find. I would like to leave the ship at daybreak, George."

"That would be fine as far as I'm concerned, Doctor. How about you, Pan?"

"S'ok with me."

"Then I shall see you both, here, at 0430. If you will excuse me now I think I'll retire. Goodnight," said the doctor.

After the doctor had left the wardroom George stood and stretched. "I'd better go below and get the tractor fueled and checked. Want to come along, Pan?"

"No thanks, George, I think I'll stay here awhile and chat and then load some film," grinned Pan.

"May I come along?" asked Carla from across the table. "I need a little exercise; I haven't been out of the ship at all today."

"Why I'd be delighted, Carla. Shall we go? G'night, Pan, ol' man. . . ."

"Er . . . goodnight you two," mumbled Pan half to himself. I must be losing my grip, he thought, as George waved from the door.

In the early morning light the valley looked a little less inhospitable. The air was clean and extremely clear. The high peaks to the west were clothed in a rosy hue and snow sparkled on some of the sheltered northern faces. Near the center of the ancient lake bottom

the cat-trac detached itself from the tall metal spire and slowly crawled down the valley like an ant departing its nest. Behind it a formless dust pall hung in the still air.

"I trust you had an enjoyable chat last night, Pan. Did you teach all our friends about astrogation or photography or, ah, perhaps women?" said George happily as he conned the machine down the valley.

"I had a most enjoyable evening," countered Pan. The skipper and I discussed the potential of this fair planet. Incidentally you took an awfully long time to fuel this gadget last night. Did you have trouble?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, I'm just the slow type you know. Are you comfortable back there, Doctor?"

"As comfortable as I can get in one of these things, George. How much longer do you think it will be before we arrive?"

"Another twenty minutes should do it, Doctor."

The tractor wound through rolling foothills along the remains of an old highway. Here and there the trail cut through the hill, clearly showing the cuts that had been made by the builders. Dry washes obliterated the road occasionally where nature reclaimed her own. They turned and descended once more onto the valley floor. About two kilometers off, the monuments of a departed civilization stood guard in the rays of the rising sun.

"There it is, Doctor, straight ahead," said George as they moved slowly toward the silent decaying towers and bunkers. "Pan, you might as well get the equipment ready."

"Righto," shouted Pan as he began to assemble the gear.

"There's no doubt about it," commented Dr. Ching as Pan set up the camera. "This must have been a spaceport."

"By the look of those blast patches around the towers they must have still been using liquid fuels," put in Pan.

"It's hard to tell. The radio-activity is only slightly above the norm we've established," replied Dr. Ching. "We had better get a sample or two for analysis."

"They evidently were good metallurgists," said George as he cut a steel sample from a fallen girder. "Just look at this, practically no evidence of corrosion. First class engineering all the way down the line. What do you think now, Dr. Ching?"

"We shall see, my boy. It doesn't pay to be hasty in these things.

We shall have a good deal of time during the flight back to study our finds."

Pan tossed the specimens of the blast areas into the cat-trac and ambled off toward one of the low lying buildings. From the doorway he shouted to the others, "Come on over here; I've found something interesting."

The three of them crouched beneath the low ceiling and gazed about the room. Along the side facing the launching towers there were a series of leaded observation slits cut through the thick concrete wall. Directly below these were low racks almost resting level with the sand. A litter of broken electronic equipment and glass covered the racks. The fine alkali sand was everywhere; guarding the secrets of the builders. The opposite wall was a huge control panel covered with a bewildering array of switches, instruments and indicators.

They spoke in hushed tones as if fearing they might be overheard. Not long since, beings of a high order had trod these floors. What had happened? Where had they gone?

"This is absolutely incredible . . . this field must have been in use within the last hundred years or so. George, get that cat over here and let's see if we can pump some of this sand out."

"All set, Doctor, but do you think we ought to start digging now? Why not wait until the colonists arrive?" said George.

"This is too big to leave alone. It will be years before I return with the colonists," answered Ching in an irritated tone. "Use extreme care. The sand is light, you won't have to use much suction."

Slowly and carefully they worked, removing the alkali blanket from the room. They uncovered the door which probably had fallen before the relentless sand in the not too distant past. After several hours of painstaking labor a small heap of artifacts were assembled in the cat-trac. Everything had been carefully photographed and notated.

"That's got it," shouted Pan as they worked the door back into position with the cats' winch. "Hold it." Pan hammered new bolts into place then waved to George to slack the cable.

They sealed the door and welded a survey plaque into place high on its face. The little party was unusually quiet during the return trip to the ship. Their thoughts were on the enigma presented by the days' work. Behind them the desert was still. The chill of evening crept into the air and even the roar of the cat-trac seemed a bit

hushed. Dark shadows slid out from the towering mountains, as they had when the valley echoed and shook to the screams of climbing rockets. Slowly the little ant crawled back to its shining nest. This time the tractor was hauled into the ship and the port clicked shut behind it.

As the familiar stars winked into place overhead, the valley once again shook to the blast of an ascending ship. For a scant few seconds glaring white light beat against the concrete of the bunker as of old.

Pan studied the small metal disc he had picked up that afternoon. His antenna waved inquiringly over the worn inscription . . . perhaps one day the key to the language would be worked out. It might prove interesting to know what it meant . . . E PLURIBUS UNUM.

• • • • •

RATING SPACEWAY

We regret very much that it became necessary to reduce the number of pages in this issue of SPACEWAY. This decision was unexpected and it upset our editorial plans.

Something had to be omitted and, since there has always been some doubt about the wisdom of using serials in a bi-monthly magazine, we decided to delete E. Everett Evans' "Stairway Into Mars." This we will publish at a later date. In the meantime we would appreciate a word from you in regard to the serial question. Do you want them or not?

By the way, the strikingly beautiful Lunar landscape on the cover of the April issue of SPACEWAY was a Mel Hunter creation. Somehow his name was omitted from the contents page. (Sorry, Mel.)

Based on the letters we have received so far the following were the three best-liked stories in our first issue: "The Glad Season," "Spaceways to Venus," and "The Osilans." And in the February issue you rated "Midgets of Monoton" and "The Osilans" best. It seems a bit beyond coincidence that the longer stories were chosen in each instance. If this continues we will have to develop a new system of rating—one which will consider all stories over ten thousand words in one category, and all under ten thousand in another. We will be pleased to listen to any ideas you may have in regard to this.

We have received many interesting comments regarding SPACEWAY since the second issue came out.

Paul Mittelbuscher of Sweet Springs, Mo., writes us, in part: "There is a certain something about SPACEWAY, which renders it unusual. In

my opinion, it is because of the air of sincerity present. Today modernism has taken over; now in some ways this is good, in others, bad. Unfortunately, what we have gained in maturity, better characterization, and higher literary standards has been accomplished with the loss of the primary factor that made SF unique from its beginning . . . the "sense of wonder." SPACEWAY, however, has managed, at least to some extent, to retain this most necessary characteristic."

Don Wegars, of Berkeley, California, writes (also in part): "I think you are leaning too much toward the sentimental type of story. Both of the stories by Atlantis Hallam were of this type, as were offerings by E. E. Evans and Kris Neville, both in the second issue. If only you could feature stories like "Midgets of Monoton" in every issue, I'd be satisfied."

Thanks, Don, for pointing this out. Perhaps we haven't gotten our editorial "balance" yet. It has belatedly occurred to us that this June issue leans quite a ways in the opposite direction!

Anne Martin of Long Beach, California, mentions: "Your first issue was good, but your second is better. I like a magazine with lots of fiction—after all, that's why I spend 35 cents. Also, I like one or two (no more) articles of fact concerning science. And the "Scientifilm Parade" is a very desirable feature. I also want to say that I am glad the West Coast finally has a magazine of its own. New York has more than its share."

How'd you like the third, Anne? We wish more West Coasters were as patriotic as you!

From W. C. Brandt of Oakland, Calif.: "Just finished the Feb. issue of SPACEWAY. The issue was very good. Stories were exceptional according to my decisions. . . . The "Scientifilm Parade" is a marvelous idea, as I go to see every SF film, so I look forward to Ackerman's observations. We should have a letter column. The pros and cons of the readers make or break a magazine as you well know. The cover was excellent. . . ."

And from Edmund Luksus of Gary, Ind.: "In the Feb. issue of SPACEWAY you requested your readers to send in letters. Is our opinion that important? After all, you will be extremely fortunate if you're able to count over a few hundred letters. This is a very small percentage. . . ."

Very true . . . but we do think your opinion is important—very much so. Otherwise we would just run the magazine to suit us and not ask for opinions. We happen to believe that the editor who doesn't ask for his reader's guidance has a bit more than his share of conceit. We wish each and every one of the readers of SPACEWAY would write us a letter.

GARRET FORD.

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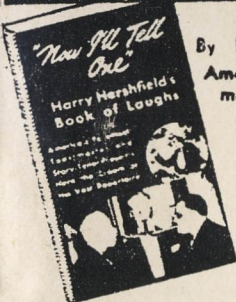
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