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VOL. 3

MAY, 1942

NO. 4

DARING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVE	
PRISONER OF TIMEPolton Cross	10
Marked for death by the race she had created was the girl of eternal youth—the alluring, ephemeral daughter of time, who had lived five hundred years.	
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Published quarterly by Fictioneers, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 210 East 48rd Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter August 27th, 1941, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright 1942 by Fictioneers, Inc. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. All rights reserved under Pan American copyright convention. Single copy price 20c. Four issue subscription in the U.S.A. \$.30.



"WE RUSHED FOR THE WHARF. I yanked out my flashlight and turned it on the water. There in the icy river 14 feet below we saw a man struggling feebly...clawing at the ice-sheathed pilings as the out-racing tide sucked him away from the pier.





"QUICKLY I DARTED my light about and located a length of line on a nearby barge... and a life preserver on an adjoining pier. In an instant the preserver splashed in the water beside the drowning man. Dazed from shock and cold, half clinging to the preserver and half lassoed by the line, he was dragged to safety. Thanks to my 'Eveready' flashlight and its dependable fresh DATED batteries the river was cheated of its victim. (Signed) Trank J. Bahnel."

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The mailbag-that pride and terror of an editor's heart!—has been very full this month. We'll try to print as many letters as possible, letting the orchids and scallions fall where they may. And we'll get out of the way without further preamble, to give as many of you as possible a chance. So, without further ado, to the first letter....

Dear Ed.:

It's hard to decide upon which is the best story in the February Super, as there are three which strike me as being particularly outstanding. However, I'd put them in this order: "The Hunted Ones," "Atrakin and the Man," and "The Waters Under the Earth" for top places. Harry's yarn comes first because it has the most in it, a finely worked-out piece with believable action and situations, plus credible characters. "At-rakin" is splendid. While very short, there are no words wasted, and a very full picture is given. "Waters Under the Earth" has a fascinating style, which varies in spots, but holds the interest throughout. As a fellow writer, I can pay Harry, Kubilius, and Perry the compliment of stating that I'd be proud to have written the tales myself.

The rest of the stories struck me as being enjoyable: "Cross of Mercrux" was a bit disappointing in that it was rushed to a satisfactory conclusion. Wish it could have been about five thousand words longer, at least, to permit a more nearly complete picture of the New Spain civilization. The pace of the tale left the other world a little difficult to believe—but the concept was provoking, even so. And "Child of the Green Light" suffered from extreme vagueness in the telling, though it was okay once all

was clarified.

The other two, "Wicked People" and "Spaceship From Korl," struck me as being just good stories. Entertaining, well-done, but not particularly memorable.

In the artwork, Bok's pictures shone, as did Giunta's full page illustration; I liked Hannes' double spread best of his contributions, while Morey, outside of a neat spread for "Wicked People," was unappealing. The cover struck me as being more dynamic than that on the November issue—

though I hope that in the future, it will be an illustration for some story in the issue. While the scene depicted was rather usual stuff, still a very readable yarn could have been written around it, providing the author

didn't do the obvious.

Let's see now: what request can we make this time? Ah yes, of course: more letters per issue. I'm sure that all my colleagues in the game appreciate seeing comments upon their endeavours, whether or not that com-ment is of approval. It helps keep us on our toes.

Sincerely, Wilfred Owen Morley.

Brother Morley, we have learned our lesson. In the future, we'll try to have every cover illustrating a scene from some story. (Exactly eighty-six readers bawled us out for this omission.)

You are hereby enrolled as a member, Bill. How about it, you Frisco fans?

Dear Editor:

Out of the rut at last! Thank the good Lord. Even though yours is not the best STF mag on the market, it rates third best with me.

The following were the three best stories,

in order.

1. "Cross of Mercrux."
2. "Atrakin and the Man."
3. "The Wicked People."
"Cross of Mercrux" was well worth the

twenty cents.

"Atrakin and the Man" was a swell little short short.

"The Wicked People." I'd hate to meet Four up a dark alley.

The rest were so so.

Three best illustrations, as follows.

1. Giunta's on page 77 . . . 2. Bok's on page 11 . . . 3. Bok's on page 25.

Enclosed you will find my application for entrance to The Science Fictioneers. Do (Continued on page 8)



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no cost if I fail

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traptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your Strength through "Dynamic Tension" you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-owner in your own God-given body-watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real solid LIVE MUSCLE.

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Address...... City..... State..... (Continued from page 6)

you know if there are a few other members here in San Francisco that would be interested in forming a branch? Don't write telling me about Joe Fortier. HE LIVES OVER IN OAKLAND! I LIVE IN SAN FRANCISCO!

Bill Watson 1299 California St. San Francisco, Calif.

Mr. Wollheim, it's your argument. Comments?

New York, N. Y. November 19, 1941.

Dear Mr. Norton:

When I came into our office this morning, I had no intention other than getting seriously down to work and batting out a twenty-thousand word rewrite for one of our clients. Unfortunately, Fred Pohl had brought with him an advance copy of the February SUPER SCIENCE STORIES. So . . no work has been done today, and I hope that you can explain to an indignant client that the fault was not mine.

The issue was good, to say the very least. All the stories suited my taste; my quarrel is not with them but with your book reviewer. I consider Mr. Wollheim guilty of an amazing mis-statement when he describes "The Passionate Witch" as "Thorne

Smith to the dot.'

Yet he may be right, simply having neglected to explain that the dot in question is the very first period of the opening paragraph. From that point on, it becomes sheer Norman Matson. And as one who swears reverently by the memory of a departed master, I can't let that statement go

unchallenged.

Naturally, I can't vouch for the truth of this, but as I heard the story, "The Passionate Witch" was an uncompleted manuscript—rejected by Mr. Smith's publishers before his death and dragged out by them only to capitalize upon a hitherto unsullied record. It was finished and rewritten by Mr. Matson—and capable though he may be, he is not the incarnate spirit of Smith. His story-and I use the pronoun with full intent-lacks the light-handed madness that characterizes the other Smith books, has none of the mysticism and wistful beauty (yes, it was mystic and pathetic beauty that threaded through those others!) that Smith injected into his writing.

I realize with some regret that in writing this, I sink to the abysmic levels of all fans, but I consider it unavoidable. Could I, who refused "The Passionate Witch" a place on my bookshelves with an otherwise complete set of Thorne Smith, let such a poor

job of reviewing escape scot-free?

Sincerely,

Dirk Wylie.

Dear Editor:

Having just finished your Nov. issue and having read your invitation for comments, I've decided to drop you a letter about the mag. My opinion isn't of any importance alone, but along with other letters that you'll receive maybe it'll be of some help.

There were just two stories that I didn't read—Cummings' and Tanner's. I'd read "Tumithak of the Corridors" and didn't like it, therefore I didn't read this one. Cummings is a hack who bats out so much uninteresting wordage that all a story needs—to be ignored by me, at least—is his

name listed as author.
"Lost Legion" wasn't a new idea—several other authors having writ about something on the same order-but it had a freshness of appeal—and was intelligently writ-ten! I've read so much addle-pated tripe by authors who think that S. F. readers are only a few months removed from the threecornered-pants stage, that this story had as much attraction as an oasis in the middle of a burning desert. By the way, I'd like to compliment your mag for leaving muscle-bound heroes and dazzling, voluptuous goddesses out of it. You don't know what a relief it is!

"Pendulum" comes galloping up for second place. The idea? Never heard of it before. The writing? Excellent. The story itself? Swell, especially the ending.

Third place goes to "Red Gem of Merning place with the story itself."

cury." It wasn't too new an idea but interesting nevertheless. Could have been a bit longer.

"The Biped, Reegan" is fourth and last, mainly because of the threadbare insect invasion theme, an idea of which I have seen too much. HOWEVER—it was well written, had a different slant from other stories of the same type, and was written in an extremely interesting manner.

On the whole the issue was exceptionally good. Far outranking some of your competitors. But the cover! I don't know who draws it (you've had the same artist on the cover for the last issues) but I think he must be a refugee from a certain govern-mental institution. (Pardon the pun.) Please put somebody else on. Binder, for instance.

Interior artists are good—except Morey. Bok is excellent and Thorpe reminds one of

In closing I might add that I prefer stories with a trifle more scientific basis. Stories emulating "Crucible of Power" and "Darkness" would be welcome. (Nix on "Daughter of Darkness.")

> 'Til next issue, Frank Robinson. Chicago, Ill.

What's the matter with Miss Brackett, pal? We think she's pretty swell! For variety in artists, see present issue.

(Continued on page 89)

What—no Cummings?





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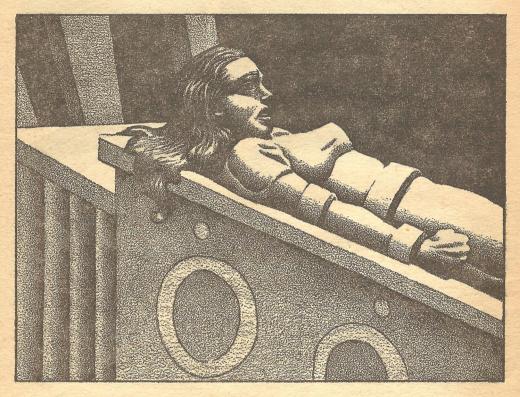
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# PRISONER OF TIME





Five hundred years had she waited, the girl of eternal youth, to live out her life span in a terrible tomorrow—marked for death by the race she had created!

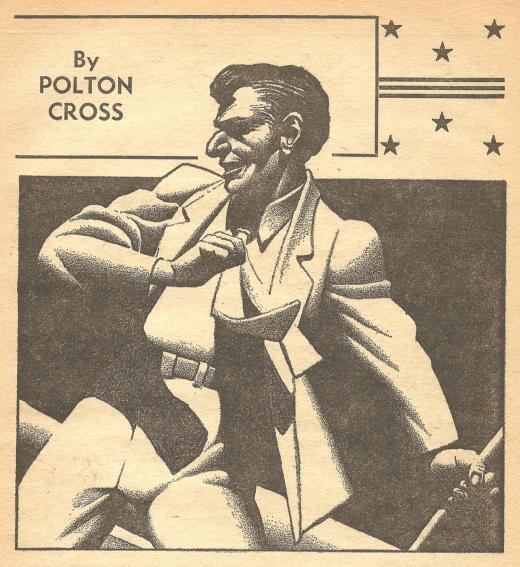


CHAPTER ONE

Science, Unlimited

UCY GRANTHAM stared in abject terror at the steadily leveled weapon aimed directly at her heart. It was not an ordinary automatic; it was not the sort of weapon she had ever seen before. Everything owned and created by Bryce Field was far advanced of normal. He was a master-scientist, a demon, cruel, ruthless. That much the girl knew.

Her eyes moved slowly from the weapon to Bryce Field's face. It was lean-



jawed, sunken-eyed. Lank, untidy hair sprawled across his massive forehead. Behind his spare, sinewy form sprawled the instrument-littered wall of this deep underground cavern.

"So you thought you could play around with the affections of Bryce Field, did you?" he asked slowly. "You thought you could make love to me, get me wanting you madly, then kick me out! Yes, kick me out for that two-cent salesman!"

"Bryce, listen to me!" Lucy's voice was trembling, imploring, as she made a hesitant step forward. "I married Reggie Dell because I love him. I never could love you; you are too clever, too brilliantly scientific—"

"Shut up!" Field thrust out his hand and sent the girl sprawling to the cavern floor. He went on savagely, "I called for you today to take you for a ride, you thought. Just old friends with a lot to say to each other! Old friends!" He spat the words. "I called to bring you here, deep underground, where you are now. I'm going to show you what it means to stand me up, Lucy. I've planned a mighty punishment for you!"

The girl stared up at him from the floor, her blue eyes filled with horror, panic.

"You're mad, Bryce! Stark mad! Otherwise you—"

"Perhaps I am mad with jealousy," he admitted callously. "All I know is that if I can't have you, then neither shall Reginald Dell, or anyone else! You didn't like my science, you say. You will like it even less by the time I'm through with you!"

Stooping suddenly he reached down and caught the girl's arm, dragged her to her feet. Brutally he sent her stumbling through the cavern doorway into yet another cavern.

Lucy stared around dazedly upon scientific machinery she could not hope to understand. Fear, overwhelming and complete, surged through her being as Field followed her in, locking the door behind him.

He stood with his back to it, his smile gashing his face like a crooked scar.

"This is one time, my dear," he said slowly, "when you will listen and listen well to some science. Take a look about you, upon these tubes, these magnets, that table with the straps."

She stared at the places indicated as though mesmerized. Then she found her tongue suddenly.

"Bryce, you've got to let me out of here!" Her voice was a hoarse scream. "You dare not do anything to me! You dare not, I say! Reggie will find you and—"

"Reggie!" Bryce Field sneered. "That miserable, narrow-browed dolt? What do you think he could do to me, one of the greatest scientists this age has ever known? No, my dear, he will do nothing. What is more, when I am finished with you I shall strike him down. Yes, him—and that squealing little brat you brought into the world. I shall destroy all three of you!"

As the girl stared at him with misty, hopeless eyes, he went on, "You have only yourself to blame, Lucy. You could have had me and all the power and wealth science has brought me. You chose differently—and for that I have decided there is a price!"

"Who are you to decide my life?" Lucy asked frantically. Flinging herself forward she drove her puny fists into his granitelike face. He did not budge an inch, but finally he threw her away from him.

"Mad," she whispered. "Always an egomaniac, and now it has completely gotten you! You're insane, Bryce! Insane!"

E WAS motionless for a moment; then, suddenly putting aside his weapon, he strode forward, gripped the girl in his powerful arms and dumped her on the long steel table against which she had fallen. Before she realized what was happening, the straps upon it were being buckled into place, across her throat, her waist, her knees.

"Bryce," she whispered. "What are you going to do?"

"Plenty!" He surveyed her pinioned form and smiled coldly. "But first I've one or two things to tell you, things connected with that science you so detest.

"You are going on a long journey, my dear," he finished. "So long a journey that even I, master-scientist, do not know where it will end. A journey into the future—alone!"

The girl wriggled desperately in the straps, relaxed again with rasping breath. Her eyes fixed themselves on Bryce Field's merciless visage.

"You, Lucy, shall be the victim of entropy!" he said softly. "Naturally, you don't know what entropy is, do you?"

"You know I don't!" she shrieked. "Bryce, stop torturing me like this. Let me go!"

"Entropy," he stated calmly, as though delivering a lecture, "is the increasing disorder of the universe, the process by which the universe gradually moves towards thermodynamic equilibrium. It can be likened to a perpetual shuffling, the disorder getting worse with every shuffle. Just like disordering a deck of cards when playing bridge with Reggie and your thin-brained friends,"

"Bryce, Bryce, in God's name-"

"If only you had read Eddington while at school you might know something about entropy," Bryce Field sighed. "However, I have made it as clear as I can. Recently-" His tone changed to grim menace— "I fell to wondering what would happen if I created a non-entropy state, wherein nothing ever happened! So I decided to create a specified area in this cavern to be exact—wherein molecular shuffling would achieve sudden and absolute equilibrium, a space wherein the ultimate of entropy would be reached instantly, instead of in a thousand, a million, ten million years time. Do you understand me?"

Lucy was beyond answering.

"Yes," he said, his voice harsh with grim triumph, "I discovered how to create an entropy globe—a globe of force whose walls have attained absolute equilibrium, whose vibrations extend inwards to everything inside the globe. Therefore, whatever is in the globe will be plunged into a state of non-time. Entropy will be halted. Progress will stop!

"You," he said slowly, "are going to be in that globe, Lucy! At your feet is one magnet, at your head another. Between them they will build up the hemisphere of the entropy globe, and within it, time for you will cease to be. You will be plunged into an eternal 'now' from which release may never come—or, if it does, it will be at a far distant time when scientists as clever as I find the way to unlock your prison."

"Bryce, I beg of you," Lucy implored huskily. "Let me go! I'll do anything you want! Anything! I'll divorce Reggie— But you can't do this to me! I've so much to live for. My baby, the future. You can't do it!"

"On the wall there," he said impersonally, "is a calendar, placed so I hope you can see it. See the date? Seventeenth of July, Nineteen Forty-one. Remember that well!"

"Bryce! You cannot-"

He flung a switch, keeping clear of the table as he did so. Immediately an impalpable bubble of unknown forces—clearer than glass—inclosed the girl completely, swallowed up the steel table on which she lay. She was stopped in midmotion of raising her head, her last sentence truncated.

BRYCE FIELD waited a moment or two, brooding eyes on the many gauges; then he turned and moved slowly to her, stood contemplating her.

Her lips were slightly parted; her blue eyes still stared at him, unseeing—eyes that were frozen and yet somehow still alive. Bryce Field's gaze went up and down her slim form in its brown silk frock, along the steel table, over the four leather straps that bound her, to the beechwood cradle that was supporting her head and shoulders.

Bryce Field smiled the smile of the godless when he saw her gold wristwatch had stopped at exactly 4:15. Time was no more inside that globe. Entropy was halted by reason of the globe's walls themselves having already achieved the ultimate of shuffling in their constitution.

"A year—fifty years—fifty centuries." Bryce Field said the words half to himself.

Then he turned back to his switchboard and examined the maze of instruments minutely. He waited perhaps half an hour, then cut the power out of the magnets at either end of the girl. A low, exultant sigh escaped him as he saw that the globe remained where it was, self-sustained, eternally balanced, a small fore-taste of what the universe itself must some day achieve by natural means.

"If there is a key to open it—a random element to restore the shuffling—I do not know of it, nor do I want it. None—none shall unlock this prison!"

Bryce Field nodded to himself, then, pulling out a plunger, he waited a moment and stepped back. In a sudden blaze of light and explosion the entire switchboard blew itself to atoms, tearing out part of the wall with it.

Field turned to the mighty door of the cavern, took one last look at the motionless girl in the motionless globe. Then he closed the door upon her and locked it. With the face of a dead man he went silently through the adjoining cavern, into the tunnel that led to the surface.

"Dell and the brat," he murmured.
"They must go too—"

But the thought was dashed from his mind as there suddenly came a vast and ominous rumbling. He looked up with a start, flashing the beam of his torch. He was in time to see the tunnel roof fissuring along its whole length. In a flash he realized what had occurred, remembering the crack in the cavern wall which had followed the wrecking of the switchboard. The underground place had been savagely shaken, and now—

The truth had no sooner formulated in his mind than he saw a vast mass of rubble and stone hurtling down towards him.

#### CHAPTER TWO

### Time Barrier

Roton Gun Engineering Company, mopped his face with his sweat rag and settled his steel helmet

a bit more comfortably upon his head.

"Guess another thousand feet should see this foundation space fully cleared," he commented, gazing around at the surging activity. "We've been cutting clean for the last month, and the next push should finish it."

Square-jawed, thick-necked Buck Cardew nodded. From appearances there was little to choose between the two men. They were both big and muscular. But in Clem Bradley there reposed the brains of the team, brains whose scientific bent had created the amazing blast gun which was the basis for the Roton Gun Company. In Buck Cardew lay the brawn and iron fists necessary to control endless gangs of men at work.

"Yes, this job came as manna from heaven," Clem went on reflectively. "If the City Planners hadn't decided to put a mile-high building here we'd still be trying to sell our gun to a bunch of moneygrubbing misfits. As it is, we're sitting pretty. The company's on its feet to stay. Even the Master acknowledges that."

"Yeah," Cardew agreed; then he let out a throaty bellow that went echoing across the great hollowed space. "Hey, there! What in hell are you guys wasting time about over there? Stop standing around talking and get on with the job!"

"Can't!" megaphoned the foreman.
"There's a barrier here that even the blast gun won't cut! Come and take a look."

"He's nuts," Clem growled. "That gun of mine will blast anything in Earth or space. Maybe they're plumb sick of groping about down here! And I don't blame 'em!"

"They're paid for it, good and plenty," Buck Cardew retorted. "I'll soon settle 'em. Let's go!"

They strode through the loose rubble to the flood-lit space where the men were standing around the apparatus. Cardew put his hands on his hips and stared at the barrier facing the gun's blunted nozzle.

"Turn it on there!" he ordered.

A blasting, ear-shattering roar instantly followed, but that stream of livid, tearing energy, which had been known to go through successive walls of steel, granite, and diamond, simply deflected itself in a coiling streamer of blinding blue sparks.

"Off!" Clem yelled. "What do you want to do, blow us up with a backlash?" Then, as the commotion died down, he clambered to the barrier and examined it carefully. It seemed to be black.

"Kill those lights!" he ordered. The moment they went out and darkness descended, it became clear that the area was not black but swarming with violet radiance. There seemed to be a multitude of pinpricks of light floating around in a vast bowl.

"What in hell is it?" Cardew demanded, as the light resumed.

"Stated simply—force," Clem answered, puzzled. "Force built up into a resilient wall which simply deflects our gun blast, much the same as the forceshields on our modern spaceships deflect meteorites. Hm-m, looks like we've struck something. Have to weigh it up."

He stepped back and started making a rough plan and sketch of the situation. Then, under his directions, prompted by Buck Cardew's bellowing voice, the gun was trained until it hit ordinary rock around the edge of the area. Gradually they forced a way around until the blue area remained isolated.

Mystified, the two men clambered through into a deep cavern and stood staring in the light of their helmet lamps.

"Wow!" Cardew ejaculated suddenly. "Take a look!"

LEM swung, then his jaw dropped as they gazed through the impenetrable wall of the thing that had deflected their gun. There was a

girl, strapped to a table, her eyes staring unseeingly, her pretty face terrified.

"She isn't moving," Cardew whispered blankly. "Say, she looks as though she's imprisoned inside a globe of force. But—but who the devil is she, anyway?" he went on in amazement. "Look at her clothes! Girls haven't worn stuff like that for—for centuries!"

Clem's mind swung instantly to the scientific implications. He hurried around the cavern, examining it quickly, the astounded engineers piling in after him and dazedly contemplating the girl in the globe.

At last Clem halted, rubbing his jaw. "Bits and pieces lying about suggest that this place was once a laboratory. God knows how long ago, though. What we've got to do is break down this globe of force somehow."

"How?" Cardew demanded. "If a blast gun won't do it, it's certain nothing else will."

"If it was created artificially—and it probably was—it can be uncreated," Clem replied. He turned to the men. "Okay, boys, keep on with your job. We've still got a time schedule, remember. I'll use instruments on this and see what I can find out."

The foreman nodded and blasting resumed, cutting a vast path at the back of the place. Clem gave quick instructions and had various instruments brought in to him. He figured steadily from their readings, quite oblivious to the shattering din going on around him. After a while Cardew came to his side, hands on hips.

"Well?" His keen eyes aimed eager questions. "Any clues?"

"Incredible ones," Clem answered in a marveling voice. "It looks as though somebody way back in the past solved a scientific problem which still puzzles us even today. That globe, if the readings here are true, registers zero! It isn't there!"

"You crazy, or am I?" Cardew asked bluntly. "Of course it's damn well there! We can see it!"

Clem waved to the instruments. Sure enough they all registered zero. Cardew scratched his head.

"What the devil is the explanation then?"

"It's something, so far as I can figure, that has no entropy. If that is so, it means it has reached absolute equilibrium. There is no intercharge of energy to register. A little universe all on its own which has achieved the state our own universe will one day attain. It is the same now, possibly, as when it came into being. It is apart from all known forces for that very reason. It is apart from light, radiation, heat—everything. You see it cannot assimilate anything more because it is assimilated to maximum. Nothing can go into this bubble, or out of it."

Cardew blew out his cheeks expressively. "Then how do we smash it?"

"Only one thing we can perhaps do—warp it. Gravitation alone is independent of all other forces. Today we know that for certain. Gravity is a warp in spacetime, not a force. We have gravitator-plates down here for shifting rocks. Maybe twin stresses brought to a focus would warp this ball of absolute force and cause a rupture—Yeah, it's worth trying!" Clem finished quickly. "This is the weirdest set-up ever!"

More instructions followed and gravitator-screens of vast size were erected in the positions Clem stipulated. A past master in stresses and strains, he knew just what he was doing; but whether it would work on the globe or not was problematical. It was an hour before he was satisfied, Cardew getting more impatient all the time; but at last the signal was given.

Simultaneously the power was flung on, a power duplicating exactly the etheric

warps of gravitation itself. What happened then was never to be forgotten!

HE globe burst with an explosion that hurled the men flat against the wall, pinned them there under an outflowing wave of gigantic, hair-bristling force. The screens overturned and went crashing into the rocks. A rumble, as of deep thunder, rolled throughout the underground cavern and died away in the far distance.

Slowly the sense of released electrical tension began to abate, but the place crawled with the odor of ozone. Clem stood up gradually, turned, expecting to see the girl blasted to pieces. But she was alive, moving.

"—do this to me!" she cried desperately, and strained and wriggled in her straps.

"Not only alive, but fighting!" Cardew whispered, seizing Clem's arm. "Why didn't she die when that thing blew up?"

"Because the force expanded outwards from her. She was as safe as though in the dead center of a cyclone."

Clem strode forward and gazed at the girl's face. A most extraordinary expression came over her delicate features as she stared into the grimy visages under the steel helmets. Her blue eyes widened in further alarm.

"What—who—who are you?" she breathed weakly, going limp in the straps. "Where is Bryce?"

"Bryce?" Clem shot her a baffled glance; then leaning over he unbuckled the straps and raised her gently. He fished in his hip pocket, spun the top from a flask and held the opening to her lips. The fiery liquid, something she had never tasted before, went through her veins like liquid dynamite, set her heart and nerves bounding with sudden life.

Flushed, she looked in bewilderment at the puzzled men.

"Where is Bryce?" she insisted.



"Bryce Field. He locked me in here."
"Never heard of him," Cardew said bluntly. "We—"

Clem cut him short, looked at the girl with his serious gray eyes.

"You said something just as you recovered. What was it?"

"I said 'Bryce, you cannot do this to me!"

"No." Clem shook his head. "You only said '—do this to me!' The first three words were missing. I remember, because it sounded so odd. I presume this Bryce Field was in here when you started to say those words?"

"Yes-yes, of course he was. He was

going to throw a power switch which would have—"

The girl's voice trailed off as she stared round the cavern at the unfamiliar blasting machinery.

"But—but everything's different!" Her voice caught a little. "There is no switchboard now, no door. Who are you?"

When they did not answer, her gaze swung to the calendar—or rather to the place where it should have been. There was only a mass of crumbled rock.

"There was a calendar there. It said July seventeenth, Nineteen Forty-one," she gasped out. "Where has it gone?"

"Nineteen Forty-one!" Cardew yelped.

"Hell! No wonder you're in such old-fashioned clothes! Do you realize that this is August ninth, Twenty-four Fifty?"

The color went from her face. "Twenty-four fifty," she repeated mechanically. "Why, that's—that's five hundred years! It can't be true! It can't!"

"I'm afraid it is," said Clem quietly, studying her. "But we can't even begin to understand until we hear your side of the story. Who are you? What happened in here?"

"I'm Lucy Grantham and—" Slowly the story unfolded. The men listened in grim silence, looked at each other when it was over.

"Wish I could have taken a sock at that Bryce Field," said Cardew reflectively, his fists clenched. "I'd have smeared him all over the cavern wall."

"Five centuries!" Lucy repeated again, aghast. "I don't understand it! What am I to do? Do you realize what has really happened to me?"

"You felt nothing during this enormous lapse of time?" Clem asked thoughtfully.

"Nothing whatever. Except that I seem to remember I felt a passing wave of dizziness when Bryce threw in that switch. Even then I hardly realized that he had thrown the switch. I could see nothing through the bubble wall. Then, in what seemed a matter of seconds, certainly no longer, you appeared. And so now," the girl finished hopelessly, "I am utterly alone. My husband long since dead; and my baby too, presuming he grew up."

"Unfortunately," Clem sighed, "we can't put back the clock. All we can do is offer you our hospitality." He rubbed his jaw uncertainly, explained rather uneasily, "You see, things have changed a lot while you have been a prisoner. Today everybody is tabulated and indexed, and you're a sort of odd girl out. If your lack of an index card is discovered you may be—executed," he finished somberly.

"Executed!" Lucy stared at them in horror.

"Anybody without an index card, without even a proven line of descent, like you, is deemed outcast by the Governing Council or else the Master himself, and promptly wiped out. Spying and sabotage is crushed that way. We have to be very careful. A new war is threatening."

"There is still war?" the girl asked wearily. "There was a similar state of affairs when I was trapped. Europe was in a ferment; so was Asia—"

Clem smiled faintly. "Long forgotten, Miss Grantham. This is Earth against Venus; something to do with planetary concessions. But it's war just the same, and that being so your position is extremely difficult."

"But surely you could explain the situation?"

"Not on the basis of what I know so far," Clem sighed. "I don't even begin to understand the genius of this man Bryce Field. I'll have to work out exactly what he did and then submit the proof to the Master. Once that is passed you will get City status and will be quite safe. But in the meantime—"

"There's my wife," Buck Cardew said. "She was to have Worker Thirty-nine Zee to assist her in house duties. I could arrange it that Thirty-nine Zee is bought off and Miss Grantham takes her place. It's been done before, and could be again. How about it?"

"Good!" Clem assented. "We'll do that; then I can keep in touch with you," he added, looking at the girl. "For the moment you had better stay here with us and then come along home after dark. We'll look after you—and you'll have an awful lot to see," he finished. "Things have changed a lot since Nineteen Fortyone."

"I can imagine," Lucy said, and gave her first smile. In THE wilderness of the City's major power room, Chief Engineer Collins studied the peculiarity with cold blue eyes. For the first time in thirty years' supervision of this master powerhouse something was wrong. The smooth night and day rhythm of the giant engines, fostered and tendered by slender robots, was being interrupted. There was the slightest flaw in the uptake of power. Perhaps it was only carbon dust. It had happened before—but that was years ago.

Collins summoned testing-robots. They came up with their many instruments and gathered about him, obeying all the commands he gave into their almost reasoning brain-pans. With mathematical exactitude, far keener than even his masterly reasoning could produce, they discovered the flaw and handed out the report.

"Intermission fault of one ten-thousandth of a second," Collins mused. "Bad! Definitely bad!"

He slammed in switches and was connected immediately with slave powerhouses in other parts of the city.

"What's your power report?" he snapped.

It was given him immediately. There was nothing wrong there, but there was here, and what was more it was getting worse. The sweetly humming giant had taken on a definite lobbing sound, like the thud of a flat on a smooth road.

Struck with the unbelievable thought that there might be a flaw in the steel, Collins turned to the gigantic balance wheel which formed the balance of the master-engine. He had just reached it when the thing happened.

A pear-shaped swelling appeared suddenly on the edge of the wheel, only visible as a mist with the wheel's rotation. It grew at lightning speed—and then exploded! Flung by centrifugal force, mighty pieces of metal went to all parts of the powerhouse. One struck Collins clean in the face and dropped him dead where he stood. The robots looked on impartially, their guiding genius lying mangled on the floor.

Immediately the other engines ceased to work as an automatic contact breaker clamped down on the whole area. The alarms rang. The emergency bulb went up on the desk of the chief power engineer at City Center.

Breakdown, for the first time in thirty years. Incredible!

LEM BRADLEY, Cardew and the girl were in Bradley's little autobus doing two hundred miles an hour down the traffic way bridge to City Center when the power went off. All of a sudden the vast, long line of light and steel which had held the girl in thrall went into total darkness.

"What in hell-!"

Clem let out a gasp of amazement, then his hands tightened instantly on the switches. Never in his experience had he met up with a sudden blackout like this. He slammed on the emergency brake, but either he slammed too hard or the steel was faulty, for the pedal snapped right off under the pressure! He was too astounded, too desperately busy to exclaim about it. Like a madman he tried to cut down the power of the engine as they raced onwards into the unrelieved dark bridge girders whipping past them against the stars.

"Hey, stop the damned thing!" Buck Cardew yelled. "There may be something ahead, and at this speed— Where's your searchlamp?"

"Switch it on for me," Clem panted. "I've all I can handle."

The girl sat in frozen alarm with wind rushing past her face as Cardew fumbled. Then suddenly the blinding cold-light brilliance split the dark ahead.

"Look!" Lucy screamed.

But Clem had already seen it too—the unbelievable—a titanic fissure glowing oddly across the traffic way itself. The bridge was breaking in two! And below was a mile drop into the brimming waters of the diverted Hudson.

"Jump it!" Cardew yelled. "Full belt! You'll just make it!"

The why and wherefore flashed unanswered in Clem's brain. He gave the autobus all it had, shot over the crumbling edge of the fissure and slammed with shattering force onto the other side of the bridge. So enormous was the shock the front wheel axle snapped like a carrot, slewed the car around, plastered it with splintering impact against the cross girders at the bridge side.

Then it came to a standstill, somehow still upright.

"Wow!" Cardew whistled. "That was close— Hey, you okay?"

He heaved Lucy up beside him.

"Yes, I'm all right, but—" She stared in terror at the waters far below, then back at the still enlarging gap in the bridge. "But—but what's wrong?" she finished.

"Search me!" Clem snapped. "First my brake pedal broke like a match stick; then this front axle gave way, and the bridge too is rapidly—"

He broke off and stared as headlights flashed into view on the distant dark stretch.

"They'll go over!" he yelled, vaulting over the car's side. "Got to warn them!"

He went pelting back along the bridge, pulling out the safety red light he used underground as he went. Desperately he waved it to and fro. He saw, as the first vehicle came hurtling nearer, that it was a public service bus. Closer—closer, until he saw its number plate. It registered mechanically in his mind; KT/897.

"Stop!" he screamed helplessly. "Stop, you fool!"

But the driver saw his danger too late. The bus went plunging over the edge of the broken bridge, the private autobus behind it following suit. Dazed with horror Clem watched both vehicles go hurtling down into the wastes below. The cries of the doomed people came up to him like a ghastly echo.

"My God," he whispered. "Oh, my God—"

"Can't call the emergency station, either," Cardew said, coming up. "If the bridge is cracked, the wires will be too." He stopped, his eyes goggling as he stared at the fissure. "Will you look at that? The crack's widening!"

"I know." Clem's voice was grim as he shifted his eyes from the depths below. "There's something damnably wrong here. First the light and power goes off; then this—"

"Altogether," Lucy said quietly, "an inauspicious beginning for the wonder world of Twenty-four Fifty!"

Clem did not even seem to hear her. "It's incredible that steel should start behaving this way," he whispered. "Forgetting the brake and axle on the autobus for the moment, take the case of this bridge. For a hundred years it has been regularly overhauled. Yet now it looks as though it has atomic blight. Remember, Buck, we had trouble with a blight some years back?"

GO URE, but we got over that. Still, it does look similar."

The three of them turned suddenly as an emergency official car came speeding up from behind them. A uniformed bridge officer jumped out.

"What's gone wrong here?" Then, with characteristic speed, he took in the situation, turned to his men. "Send a radio call to have the bridge closed at both ends. Had a smash, eh?" he went on, eyeing the crumpled autobus.

"Yeah, just leapt the gap in time," Clem said.

"I don't get this set-up at all," the

officer went on. "This steel here is like treacle, just melting away— Same thing happened in the chief powerhouse, I hear. Flywheel went soft or something and just blew apart. Well, let's have your index cards."

Cardew handed over his while Clem tried to do some fast thinking for the anxious girl. The officer got to the girl at last. She looked at him uneasily, fumbling needlessly in the borrowed tunic she was wearing.

"Well, well, miss, come on!" the officer snapped. "I haven't all night to waste!"

"I-er-I seem to have lost my card."

"Sure you did," Clem said, trying to sound at ease. "Remember, when we were out of town something fell? Must have been your card!"

The officer looked suspicious. "Number?"

"Thirty-nine Zee," Clem said. "She—"
"Zee is Domestic Classification," the

officer snapped. "What is she doing way out here, coming from the city outskirts?"

"Just a ride," said Buck Cardew steadily.

"Hmmm— See you produce your index card at Headquarters tomorrow, without fail." The officer handed her a ticket. "Now you'd all three better get off the bridge. What's left of your car will be returned to you later. Move along, please."

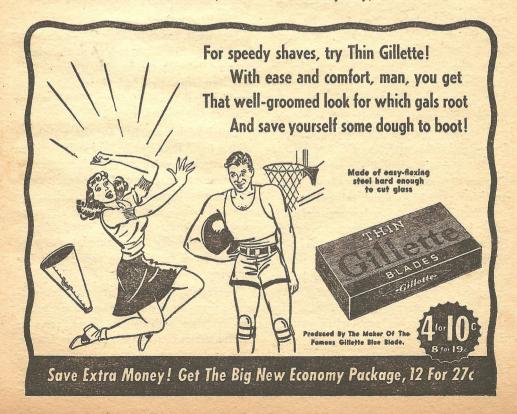
They turned away, glanced at each other in the dim light.

"That," said Cardew, "was an uncomfortably near thing. But I guess we can square it all right tomorrow with Thirtynine's card,"

"Yeah," Clem muttered absently.

"Queer," the girl said, "that a bridge of steel should melt like that, and a powerhouse flywheel, and the brake on your car! Or is it something quite natural in this weird world of yours?"

"It's a mystery," Clem said.



"Venusian spies, more like it," Cardew grunted. "They are every place, honeycombing the Earth. Some new scientific device of theirs, I'll wager."

They finished the rest of the journey on foot, and mainly in silence, and by the time they reached Cardew's home in the city's heart, the lights had come up again and power was working normally.

Mrs. Cardew, slim, dark, and practical, was clearly discomfited by the happening—in fact very discomfited, considering.

"Something the matter, Eva?" Cardew asked her in surprise. "Outside of the blackout, I mean?"

"Yes, Buck, I—" She stopped, looked past Clem Bradley to the girl.

"Friend of mine," Clem smiled. "Miss Grantham. We found her in rather peculiar circumstances and— Well, we'll need you to help us."

"Which you can," Cardew said reassuringly. "This girl has got to have protection, and she can't get it anywhere better than right here. You see," he went on more slowly, "she is really a girl from way back—Nineteen Forty-one! An ancient American. Remember America in the history recorders?"

Eva Cardew stared blankly; then she stared some more when the full story was told to her. Finally she looked at Lucy for confirmation and the girl nodded.

"I'm afraid it's true," she sighed. "Mr. Cardew thought we could contrive to get an index card from Thirty-nine Zee—"

"That," said Eva Cardew seriously, "is what has been making me so worried. Doubly so now, indeed. A report has been issued over the radio that thirty people met their deaths tonight in the big bridge collapse. A whole bus load—and Thirtynine Zee was among them. That's why I was looking so bothered when you arrived."

"Was it—was it Bus KT/897?" Clem whispered.

"Yes."

"Good God!" Clem said aghast. "The authorities know that Thirty-nine Zee is dead! And we told them—we told that officer—"

"Yeah," Cardew said, appalled. "So we did."

Walsh, master-agriculturist, walked slowly down the vast synthetic area devoted entirely to the cultivation of extra hard beechwood trees. Here, under his care, government-controlled, were some two hundred saplings fed by artificial sunlight and high-powered nitrates and fertilizers.

Then, as he continued his rounds, he wheeled suddenly at the sound of smashing glass. He fell back, astounded, eyes goggling.

Four of the tender saplings had suddenly grown to titanic proportions and smashed their way through the lofty roof! It was impossible!

Yet it was there.

He went forward slowly, swallowing hard in his throat, stared up at the giants rearing through the broken glass. Their side branches too had thrust forth incredibly and smashed down all the young trees in the neighboring area. . .

Caleb Walsh reached for the visiphone with a hand that shook; he made a report in a cracked voice to the Controller of Agriculture. The controller listened sympathetically because it was not the only report he had received. From all parts of the country within a hundred-mile radius of the city, it appeared, news kept coming in of beech trees suddenly going haywire.

There was the beech tree at an old-world farm some distance out of the town, for instance. With his own eyes the astounded owner had seen it rear from a tiny sapling against the moonlight to a mammoth giant overshadowing his home. Being an old-world man, he wondered if

there had been some truth, after all, in Jack and the Beanstalk story.

### CHAPTER THREE

### The Past Is Present

LEM BRADLEY, though he left Lucy Grantham at the Cardew apartment for the night, hardly had any sleep. A variety of things twisted through his mind. Mainly, he was worried about the girl: her identity would have to be proven somehow, and with the unexpected death of Thirty-nine Zee it presented an almost insoluble problem.

After a sleepless night he ate breakfast. The news was on and he listened in amazement to a long record of inexplicable happenings. The W Bridge, which he had seen fissure the previous night, had eaten itself right away through the center—then the disturbance had stopped, as mysteriously as it had begun, leaving the rest of the steel intact. Engineers were already rebuilding it, but all traffic was detoured.

Further announcements of gigantically enlarged beech trees caused Clem increasing wonder; and at the final narrative he did not know whether to laugh or be dismayed.

"An extraordinary series of incidents are reported from City Center as occurring last night," the announcer said. "Several men and women, for instance, found themselves suddenly without any shoes as their footwear melted into thin air! The same thing happened also to men's pants belts, and women's handbags. The unfortunate men dashed for the nearest safety; women screamed that they had been robbed. But neither belts nor bags were found later, though in the latter case the vanishing bags' belongings were found flung about the sidewalks. Thousands took autobuses home to avoid any further walking in stockinged feet.

A well known war officer, inspecting our defenses in case of Venusian invasion, found himself with his ray gun charges and ray gun itself lying on the floor. Every supporting belt had disappeared.

"From Sector Fifty-two there is also news of a cattle disease. It appears that pigs, cows, bulls, oxen and various other varieties of animals are dying. The disease seems to be a form of old age, which so far has the veterinary experts baffled. But the authorities are beginning to suspect Venusian workers in our midst who are thus deliberately undermining our social structure. Any spies found will be mercilessly dealt with—"

Bradley switched the news off and sat thinking for a moment or two; then he hurriedly finished his breakfast and made haste for Buck Cardew's place.

"Guess we'll have to detour," he said, when they were ready to leave," according to the news. But what about Miss Grantham here? Any angles?"

"One," Clem answered briefly. "The only safe place until we dope out some satisfactory reason for the authorities is to take her to work with us. Once we have her underground she will be safe. Not even the authorities can get down there without my permission. Too dangerous."

"Right!" Cardew assented; then, glancing at the girl, "You'd better get ready."

She nodded and hurried off. Cardew looked at Clem seriously.

"Looks like a war isn't far off, eh?"
"Is it?" Clem looked surprised. "I
didn't hear all the news—"

"Yeah, it's bad," Cardew muttered.
"Our ambassador to Venus—Leslie Hurst—says the situation has become worse. But say, did you hear about those other queer happenings? Missing shoes—"

"Yes, I heard that. And somehow—" Clem stopped, then gave a little shrug. "Somehow, silly though it sounds, I'm beginning to think Lucy Grantham has something to do with all of this!"
"What! You're crazy, man! Or do

you mean the set-up we found her in was a phony and that she is a Venusian agent or something?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Clem said irritably. "Get your mind off spies for a bit. What I mean—"

He broke off as the girl came hurrying back.

"Let's go," he said briefly.

B UT at the end of the detour through the city, Bradley's neat scheme for wangling the girl out of the clutches of the law fell to pieces. He looked at Cardew, worried, as ahead of them loomed an armed cordon guarding a barrier, and each autobus or pedestrian who went through was being asked for his or her index card.

"Hell!" Cardew growled expressively. "We've sure driven right into it! And no way back either," he finished in anxiety, as he saw the stream of autobuses banked up behind them.

"Have to lie our way through as best we can; that's all," Clem shrugged. "I suppose this is the result of the odd happenings. There is a new spy clean-up going on. We'll get by—somehow."

But as they came closer, all hope collapsed, for the chief officer in charge of the examination was the very one they had encountered on the W Bridge the night before!

"Oh, you again!" he said grimly, as he beheld the three set faces in Cardew's autobus. "And you—" He looked at the girl— "said you were Thirty-nine Zee last night. We were giving you time to clear up the mistake: as it is, you can clear it up now. Thirty-nine Zee is dead. What's your explanation?"

"We can explain the circumstances perfectly," Clem said. "It is a case of mistaken identity and—"

"Case of spying you mean! What's

more, you three are going to answer several questions. Come on. Get out of that bus!"

The officer yanked out his gun menacingly; but the next second Cardew's mighty fist lifted suddenly from the driving control and plunged clean into the man's face. He went flying backwards off the running board and collapsed in the dust. Without a second's pause, Cardew flung in the switches and sent the car bounding forward.

It whipped through the line of officers tugging at their ray guns. Within seconds they were left behind. Clinging to the steering gear Cardew stared ahead with grim eyes, dodged around and behind the traffic in front of him, at last began to lose himself in the swirling tide flowing out of the city's heart.

"You dope!" Clem panted. "Do you realize what sort of a jam we'll get into for this? We'll be hauled up! We can't escape—"

"Give them a run for their money anyway," Cardew retorted. "Better all three of us are in it than just Lucy."

Clem became silent, mainly because he agreed with his impulsive friend. The girl herself said nothing, sat with tight lips between the two men, realizing more than ever the complicated, dangerous tangle she had gotten into since arriving in this amazing world of 2450.

"Okay, here we go," Cardew said at last, and twisted the little machine off into a side alley, thereby joining up with the normal route beyond the sundered bridge. Continuing at the same demoniacal pace, it was not long before he gained the immense underground slope leading to the site of works. Once below, speeding through the long dark tunnels, they all three began to breathe more freely.

"All set so far," Clem said grimly, clambering out at last. "Get the boys to work, Buck. Right now I've got some figuring to do, figuring that may save the

three of us from the lethal chamber. I've got an idea how we can explain away Lucy's presence. Carry on while I work it out. No telling when the police dragnet will catch up on us—yes, even down here."

AR out in space, beyond the Asteroids, Commander Neil turned sharply as First Mate Swanton came hurrying into the control room.

"Something extraordinary has happened, sir! Can you spare a moment? Down in the storage rooms—"

"What about the storage rooms?" Neil searched the man's face quickly. It was more perplexed than he had ever seen it.

"Our cargo! Something's happened! Part of it stolen—"

"The gold!" Commander Neil gasped.
"And not only the gold, sir—"

Neil's bulldog jaw set squarely, and he hurried out at Swanton's side. They went down into the belly of the mighty transport ship, and along to Hold 16. Swanton tugged open the steel door and pointed.

"There were twenty-five bars of gold here, sir; now there are only twentytwo."

"This is incredible," Neil ejaculated, checking up. "Theft in the void is not even possible! We—"

"Then there is this, sir," Swanton

went on, motioning to the numberless crates. "When we left Earth we had sixty cases full of live silkworms. Now six cases are empty and three more half empty."

"I could understand the gold being stolen," Neil said, totally baffled, "but silkworms! Even granting theft were at all possible, who the devil would want silkworms? They are only of use to Plutonians as edible matter, certainly not for silk. This," he finished grimly, "is going to need the best space investigator Earth has got."

He swung away, agitated, and back in the control room made space radio contact with Earth and reported the loss. The Controller for Space Exports listened to every detail; then he turned and switched the report over to the Master of the City.

The Master surveyed not only the silk-worm reports, not only the story of gold vanishing in space—but other reports as well. Reports of gold vanishing from strong vaults in many parts of the city; of the death of cattle; the collapse of steel in many places; the mystic affair of vanishing leather; the even greater problem of hypertrophied beech trees.

Finally, lips compressed, he flicked the switch of his desk communicator.

"Find Engineers Cardew and Bradley of the Roton Gun Engineering Company without delay," he snapped out. "Bring



them here. And with them bring this unknown woman who masqueraded as Thirty-nine Zee."

HE armed guards appeared suddenly in the underground workings towards the close of the day, but though Clem and Cardew put up a stiff resistance they were finally forced to give in.

"Where's that woman you had with you?" demanded the self-same officer whom Cardew had eluded in the morning—and his cold eyes flashed over the expanse of underground working.

"Suppose you try and find out?" Clem asked bluntly. "She is innocent of any harm, and no matter what the law does, or the Master either, she stays safely hidden. Understand?"

"You're a fool," the guard shrugged. "She'll be found. Search the place!" he added to his men.

Clem glanced significantly at Cardew. The girl, concealed in a high niche of the wilderness of workings, was not likely to be even seen, let alone captured, and the boys on the job would see she was kept safe and well provisioned, since they were on a night and day shift.

"Let's go," the guard snapped at last, nonplussed. "Can't stop here all the damned night. Go on, you two—move!"

He led the way to the official autobus in the tunnel, and in a few minutes it was whirling them through the city again. Finally they were taken into the presence of the Master.

He hardly glanced up from his lake of papers as he spoke; but his hand reached out and pressed a button so that the entire interview might be recorded.

"What is your explanation, gentlemen, for shielding a woman from the authorities because she has no official index card? What is your excuse for striking an officer of the law? More directly—" The Master looked up for a moment with cold eyes—"what is this woman's connection with mysterious acts of sabotage which began last night? Grave questions, grave implications—for you!"

"The woman," Clem said curtly, "is Lucy Grantham, of the year Nineteen Forty-one."

"Facetiousness will not help the case."
"You misunderstand me, sir," Clem said. "It is because she is a woman of Nineteen Forty-one that these things have been happening."

"I fail," said the Master icily, "to see the connection. But for your especial benefit, so that you may realize the seriousness of your behavior. I will inform you that Venusian invasion-according to Ambassador Hurst's report some days ago-is imminent at any moment. This Earth of ours is threatened by attack from the most complete scientific armada in history. It is a well known fact that Earth is riddled with spies, of which this woman-who evidently fooled you into thinking she is a denizen of Nineteen Fortyone—is a particularly blundering example. Only since her appearance has gold started to vanish and steel shown grave structural faults. Obviously atomic control at which the Venusians are adept. Then leather behaved queerly, and beech trees. Last of all we hear of a mysterious theft far out in space which not only included gold but silkworms. That, I confess, I fail to understand, but-"

"Gold—and silkworms!" Clem cried excitedly. "This cinches it! Now I know I am right!"

"Explain yourself!" the Master ordered.

Clem did so, gave in detail the story of the girl's inclosure in a non-entropy bubble, just as she had told it to him. The Master listened in attentive silence because he was scientist enough to understand every point, but at the end of it he looked skeptical.

"The theory is possible, of course—but

it still does not explain these acts of sabotage."

"It isn't sabotage, sir—it is natural law!" Clem cried. "I have spent today working out in detail a theory which I have had in mind since I found Miss Grantham. Now I'm sure it is right. You see, this scientist, Bryce Field, forgot something. If you place anything organic or inorganic in a field of none-time, you destroy the entropy. Everything in the bubble was stopped dead still. No entropy went on at all. But each article in the bubble gave off the energy which we recognize as entropy. Therefore the energy was there, but imprisoned."

The Master nodded. "And so?"

"For five hundred years," Clem went on, "a girl in a silk frock lay on a steel cube. She was cradled in a beechwood rack and tied down by leather straps. She wore a gold wrist-watch and had a gold brooch. You see, sir? For five hundred years energy was given off, but it could not escape. Entropy was there, yet held stagnant. Hence, when the globe was shattered, the energy of entropy-change went out in an overpowering wave and sought out the original atomic formations from which it had sprung. It had to, in order to catch up on the predestined entropy intended for those particular formations.

"What happened? Steel in the bridge went to blazes because of extreme age. It affected my car too, because the steel that formed the girl's table came from the same ores which later were used to make a bridge. But the parts of the bridge made from other ores were untouched. Everything suddenly became five hundred years old. Trees shot up to five hundred years of age—those trees which were direct descendants of the tree that had made the beech cradle. Gold vanished because in five hundred years it had changed its atomic form; leather vanished because it was made from the skin of animals whose

ancestors had provided the leather for the buckled straps. It worked through the whole line of descendants each time.

"Yes, even down to the silkworms," Clem finished. "They were the offsprings of the worms that had given the silk for Lucy's dress. Entropy caught up, right through the line again, evolved them five hundred years so that they vanished. Now, we hope, the trouble has achieved balance and the atomic set-ups are no longer a piece short in their normal progressive build-up."

"I believe," the Master said, after thinking for a long time, "that you are right. But you say the girl had a child? If that was so, her entropy surely would pass on through the child and all descendants, if any. Yet, nobody has been affected."

"Either the child died without ever marrying, or else this entropy shuffle takes time to reach higher matter," Clem answered. "Surely she gave off energy, same as anything else—"

He stopped, astounded, gripped Cardew's arm.

Something strange was happening to the Master!

His face changed by miraculous shadings into a mass of seams! He seemed to be unable to move, held in the grip of the astounding metabolism suddenly coursing through him. Heat seemed to spread from him as his life-energy took a mighty leap. With flashing seconds his iron gray hair went white; then he was hald.

His face caved in; the hands shrank to bony claws!

He spoke no word, but the last look in his masterful eyes was unforgettable. They were trying to understand: then they dimmed to burned out coals. His skinny frame flopped on the desk. Nor did it stay there. Unguessable age crumbled it to dust, and an empty suit of clothes fell to the floor.

"My God!" whispered Cardew, his jaw lolling stupidly.

Bradley stood fighting to control himself. Then the desk light went up. He pressed the button and listened to a city report.

"Emergency Communication! Unexpected senility sweeping the city! Severe within hundred miles radius. Isolated instances in remoter areas. Please advise."

"Later," Clem said, simulating the Master's voice; then he switched off the receiver and turned a rather scared face.

"Get it?" he asked.

"Like hell!" Cardew was sweating visibly.

"Entropy again. That child of Lucy's must have had several children after him. They married and had more. By now the number of original descendants of Lucy can run into thousands—and the Master was one of them! Remotely perhaps, but still a descendant. These others who are dying off are the same way. Five hundred years have caught up with them."

"We've got to get out!" Cardew panted. "We were alone with the Master. When he isn't seen again, the people will think— Come on!"

HEY got out of the building safely enough since it was presumed the Master had released them from audience, but by the time they had gotten back to their underground workings they were being harried with cries from the public loudspeakers proclaiming the mysterious disappearance of the Master. This was the chief news—but equally important was the record of ever-mounting senility sweeping the city.

With their short-wave radio down in the underground, Cardew, Clem and the girl heard every word—and the assembled engineers too. That they were loyal, knowing the true circumstances, was without doubt; but for the rest of the populace, Clem Bradley had no illusions. Then somebody released the news that invasion from Venus was imminent. This, added to the senility scare, was the last straw. Invasion, and the Master dead!

"They'll get us for this!" Clem said grimly, two hours later. "No use kidding ourselves. We're right in a trap. The death—or rather disappearance—of the Master will convince everybody Lucy is a spy, particularly as invasion is coming. Only thing to do is fight it out. You boys willing?"

They nodded grimy faces, then started to assemble themselves for the onrush they knew was inevitable. It came in another half hour—not only guards, but armed civilians came tumbling down into the underground workings, shouting for vengeance.

"One move more," Cardew roared, standing with flame gun in each hand, "and I'll let you have it! We're not spies—nor is this girl! It's entropy—"

"To hell with the science!" jeered a voice. "Go for 'em! What are we waiting for?"

"We can never hold 'em!" Clem whispered—then all of a sudden a vast paralysis dropped on the crowd. Clem felt it too.

But he knew the cause—a quite material one. A paralyser wave for mob-quelling was at work. His eyes rose expectantly to the underground entrance as through it, to his surprise, came a heavily-clothed man in space kit. It was Leslie Hurst, Earth's Venusian ambassador.

"What's going on in here?" he demanded, striding forward and signaling the officers with him to keep the crowd under control. "Having a war because we've just missed a real one?"

His eyes became grim. "Yeah, I know the facts," he said. "I got most of them over my space radio—all about a girl creating sabotage. Venusian work. It struck me as odd because I've a personal check on all Venusian spies, and she didn't fit in. I went straight to the Master the moment I got back, to give him special information. I found the place guarded, but no damned fool had had the sense to switch on the recorder button to see what had happened at the Master's last interview.

"I learned the truth," he went on, looking at Clem and Cardew. "Entropy! Entropy!" he yelled, staring at the crowd. "Five hundred years caught up with your relations; on wood, on steel— You will have the full story when you go home sensibly."

He signaled, and the paralysis lifted.

A voice shouted, "What did you come back for anyway? To invent this tale?"

"No. I came back from Venus in a hurry when a thousand of the best Venusian war chiefs died of old age and vanished! Invasion was thereby smashed to hell! Same thing again—entropy. Venusians are only Earth colonists, remem-

ber. Some of them were successors in multiple to this girl. Don't you understand? She's a heroine! She's saved us, not harmed us!"

Gradually the incredible truth began to sink in, and the mood changed. The ambassador stood grinning as the girl hurried for safety, this time to escape the eager praise. With Clem and Cardew she worked her way over to the ambassador.

"You don't know how close you came to missing us," Clem breathed. "I never thought of colonists, either."

"But it's true," Hurst said seriously.

"And that set-up of the interview will clear you. I'll see to that."

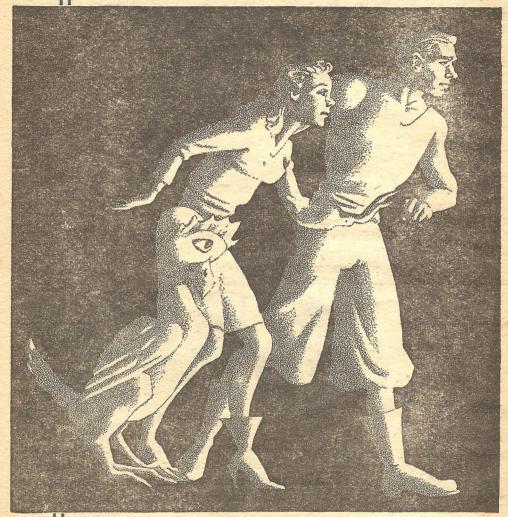
"Just what," Lucy asked in bewilderment, "is this all about? How can I have successors when I'm not dead? I don't understand."

"You will," Clem promised her, smiling. "Even if it takes the rest of our lives to explain."

OR DOUBLE EDGE RAZORS!



# THE MISSING DAY



### A NOVELETTE

CHAPTER ONE

Symphony of the Immobile

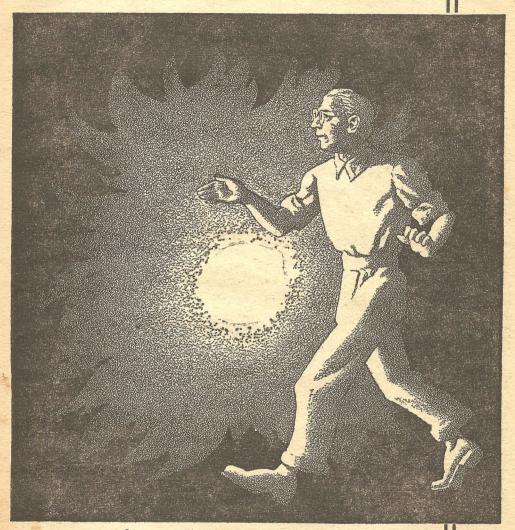
HE world does not know of the missing day. And perhaps that is best, after all, for there would be many uneasy minds, despite the virtual

fact that such a thing will not occur again. Only three persons know—four, if you count Rac. And, but for the fortunate circumstance of Rac's presence, it might have easily been a year, or a hundred years, or all eternity . . . instead of that grotesque day.

Chained by the shackles of the infinite it stood, a city of the living dead . . . until a man from Mars dared pierce the fatal veil that could make an astounding end to the day when the world stood still!







## by HENRY HASSE

Rac has returned home now, having become homesick despite his very enjoyable visit. It was inevitable that the good-natured and inquisitive little fellow should become a favorite with Earth's populace.

How very much more would he have

been honored and feted and idolized had they known the fate from which he delivered them!

But behold:

The night of July 31, 1981. Mike Bessini, big-shot racketeer and gambler, sat in the private office of his Aero Club, one

hundred stories above New York's streets. Mike was counting some of the night's receipts.

Standing with his back to the door, only casually interested, was Mike's body-guard. Such things were hardly a necessity any more, but Mike Bessini was romantic. He had read that bodyguards were an institution forty years ago, so he liked to have Joe around. From the casino beyond the private door came faint strains of the latest dance tune.

Presently Mike asked, without looking up, "Full house out there tonight, Joe?"

"Not quite, boss, but it's early yet." Joe glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Only one minute to twelve now."

Joe lit a cigarette, glanced idly around the room.

Suddenly he grew tense, shivered a little. "Say, boss, am I imagining things? It seems to be getting cold in here! That's funny!"

Bessini had thrust the receipts into a drawer and was making notations in his ever-present black book.

"Boss, I've got a funny feeling! There's something—something's wrong tonight."

Joe's tone made Bessini look up, and he too sensed something wrong, something about the night itself. With a bound he was at the open window, looking out at the city below.

A strange peace had come over the city. A stillness that was eerie. Not a sound—nothing.

Nothing, that is, but a thin, transparent blanket of palest yellow that rose up from the world below. Simply a color spreading upward and outward almost with the speed of light. And all was cold, a strange and sudden cold for July 31st.

"Gas! It's a raid!" Mike shouted inanely as he staggered back from the window. "They can't do this; I've been paying off regular! They can't get away with—"

But this was no gas, and those were

Mike Bessini's last words. The rush of atmospheric color had reached the hundredth floor and spread on out toward the blackness of space. In the merest fraction of a second Mike Bessini became as one frozen. He stood poised grotesquely in mid-step, one arm raised in futile gesture. His eyes were open but unseeing; his mouth was open too, the last of his frantic words unspoken.

Joe, halfway across the room, remained a statue of suddenly arrested motion. His look of bewilderment was now frozen permanently on his face. Even the smoke from his cigarette had become a part of the weird effect. It now remained motionless, in beautifully spiralled patterns of blue against the pale atmospheric yellow. . . .

Out in the casino the phenomenon had struck as suddenly. The dance tune had stopped in mid-note. The orchestra leader stood motionless with baton half raised in now nerveless fingers. Out on the floor, in their main number, the internationally famous dance team of Olandra and Leon had been halted in the process of a particularly intricate step. They now remained frozen in the circle of the spotlight, perfection in postural grace.

But none were there who could appreciate this perfect symphony of the immobile. The patrons at the tables were all a part of it. Some had glasses half raised. Others were quietly intent on the dance number. But all occupants of the large room were rigid and unmoving now, all eyes were fixed and unseeing. The white spotlight stabbed eerily through the pale, clear yellow which had invaded the atmosphere so instantaneously.

OTORS purred softly as the huge passenger liner slipped swiftly through the sky enroute from New York to San Francisco. In the pilot's seat Carl Bowman peered ahead at the tiny cluster of lights that was the

city of Cincinnati. Never, he thought, had he seen so clear and so dark a night. But suddenly the dark sky far off to his left seemed to shiver, to grow pale, to move! Startled, he looked around him. The entire sky behind had become a vast shimmering blanket of palest yellow, seeming to reach from the earth up to the stars. Even as he looked, the color seemed to leap swiftly toward him, swallowing up the sky! Instinctively Bowman reached out to make sure the gravity control was on.

But the swift color from behind reached and swallowed up the air-liner when the pilot's hand was still two inches from the control—and there his hand remained. The purring of motors ceased. The liner stopped in its forward motion as though a huge invisible hand had grasped it from behind. Then it plummeted earthward, carrying fifty-two persons to their death.

Through some mechanic's oversight the gravity control had not been on.

ISS DELLA JONES noticed nothing unusual about the stranger who entered Ye Nifty Tasty Shoppe. He was tall and well dressed and rather good-looking. He ordered coffee, which she served him. He lingered over it, and she wished he would hurry, for it was nearly midnight and she wanted to lock up. He finished finally, came slowly over to the cash register and said calmly, "Don't scream; this is a hold-up."

She looked up into the muzzle of a very large revolver. She felt her legs suddenly become weak, like wet macaroni. Foolishly she opened her mouth to scream, but the scream never issued—for at that moment it was midnight.

The girl's eyes remained wide and frightened; her mouth remained open, and the revolver in the hand of the stranger remained leveled as they faced each other fantastically across the counter, there in the suddenly motionless silence. . . .

N THE control room of the spaceship Terra, Vee Deering glanced up from the charts she had been studying. She suddenly laughed at what she saw.

"Heavens, Bob, look at Rac now! Did you ever see him more excited? Not even the time when you gave him the flashlight for his very own!"

Rac, the birdlike little Martian, was indeed excited as he stood at the prow of the *Terra* and gaped at the spinning blue globe ahead that was Earth. On his head and breast the soft down fairly glowed with its lichen-green lustre. His flat, stubby bill was pressed against the glass, and his peculiarly apelike face was almost radiant. The cowl-like frill arching over wide, staring eyes gave him a perpetual quizzical expression. It was the rapid ruffling movement of that frill, denoting excitement, that attracted Vee at this moment.

Rac simply could not stand still. He balanced himself on one spindly leg and then the other. He turned to Vee but she pretended she was busy. He toyed a minute with the flashlight, his proudest possession. Finally he extended his stubby wings and half ran, half soared along the forty feet of space in the *Terra*. He went back to his corner and pored over the simple English sentences Bob Stevens had outlined for him. But the transparent prow drew him irresistibly and he was soon back again, staring fascinatedly at the blue globe of Earth.

Rac caught Vee's eye at last, and his own beady black eyes glittered. "Rac—" he began in his excited staccato manner, "Rac arrive soon now?"

Vee sighed. "Not soon, Rac. Earth is still far away. One sleep period yet. One more sleep."

Bob Stevens, his lean face dark from four years of Martian wind and sand, looked up from the transmitter over which he'd been working incessantly for the past few hours.

Grim lines still showed around his mouth, but he managed a wry smile as he said, "Vee, that must be the hundredth time you've explained space distance to that brat."

"And how many times," Vee stormed, "must I tell you to stop calling him 'that brat'? I simply adore him—and so do you! Besides," she continued, "why shouldn't Rac be impatient? We've told him so much about Earth, and he wants so much to learn more. His inquisitiveness is fairly oozing out of him!"

Bob winced. "It always will!" He was remembering the almost incessant line of eager questions Rac had peppered him with in his limited English. And Rac was learning English fast.

They had found Rac and a few hundred others, the last handful of a dying race, burrowed beneath ruins of an ancient city near the Martian polar cap, almost in semi-barbarism, but with queer memory remnants of a long lost science.

"Yes," Bob said reflectively, "I thought man was an inquisitive cuss—until I met Rac and his friends! Man is merely inquisitive, but the amazing thing about Rac is his remarkable retentive memory. He does not understand—he inquires—and he remembers! In a few years we'll be sending colonies to Mars, and meanwhile Rac is the ideal emissary. He's learning fast and he's insatiable. When he returns he can teach his people. I'll venture to say that some day he'll be king, or whatever they choose to call it, of a new race."

"What! Not Rac, that brat!" Vee rocked with glee. "Do you hear, Rac? Some day you are to be king!"

But Rac, if he heard, did not care. He remained poring over the hand-printed sheets Bob had given him. He read a few of the sentences in his queer staccato voice. But he made occasional trips back

to the prow to stare at the blue globe glowing ever nearer.

OR hours more Bob worked over the transmitter, but it remained dead. His brow was knit into a puzzled frown.

"Vee, I simply can't make it out! I should be able to contact Earth. We're surely within the zone by now!"

"Maybe. But remember, we've been gone four years! Our return could hardly be suspected. We've probably been given up for dead long ago, just another futile space attempt added to the long list."

A small transparent square on the instrument panel lighted up with a green glow, flickered uncertainly. Bob turned to it feverishly, manipulating the dials.

"This may be it! I think I've gotten through!" The light dimmed; they heard a few ominous clicks—and then a thin voice came through:

"—York! W24X trying to contact the Terra! Answer Terra, if you're on our beam. W24X New York! W24X trying to contact—"

In a fever of excitement Bob switched over.

"Hello, New York! This is the *Terra*. We've picked up your beam! We're now about ten hours out, and—"

"Rac-c-c? Rac-c—" Upon hearing the strange voice come through, the insatiably curious little Martian was instantly at Bob's elbow, quizzical, aware of something unusual.

"Rac, go away! Can't you see I'm busy?" Bob exclaimed roughly.

But Rac was not to be denied so easily. He wanted to know.

"Vee, try to explain to him!" Bob cried at last in desperation. "I've got to keep on the beam!"

It was difficult, but Vee courageously tried to explain how the voice they heard was transmitted to them from the blue globe ahead. Rac never more than half understood, but he listened and bobbed his head and was satisfied for the moment.

Bob looked up triumphantly. "So, Vee, our return hasn't been expected? Well, I've just learned that we were first sighted by an amateur astronomer in Australia fourteen hours ago; since then scores of telescopes have been trained on us!"

"Oh, dear," Vee couldn't resist saying, "and I forgot to pull down the shades last night!"

"Sh!" Bob said as the voice of the Earth announcer came through again.

"—and although every effort has been made to keep your coming a secret until you had effected a landing, the news has leaked out that the returning Terra has been sighted. It's nearly midnight now but crowds are still converging on the spaceport by road, by plane, and afoot. You are not to be alarmed. All is under control here and your landing shall not be hampered. Remain on the present beam. Field lights shall remain on, all is in readiness. . . ."

Bob, with sudden inspiration, said to Vee, "I think I'll let Rac say a few words when W24X switches over. That should be a surprise to them!"

The over-zealous voice from Earth was still coming. "Speculation here is rife, for yours is the first successful space flight! There have been several other disastrous attempts since you left four years ago. The Haley rocket, two years ago, is thought to have reached the moon and crashed—"

"Still trying for the moon," Bob breathed. "I warned them it was folly to try for the moon, but they wouldn't believe me!"

"—other attempt, the Spurlin expedition, is believed to have made an erratic—"

Bob tired of the voice. He clicked it off abruptly, and sent his own through. "What about Dr. Broxted? Does he know we're returning? He'll be glad to know the fuel he prepared for us is highly successful!"

The answer came: "Oh, yes; but I'm not sure whether he's received the news yet. However, Broxted isn't experimenting with rocket fuels any longer. Instead, it's rumored that he's—"

It was then that the Earth voice abruptly ceased, without the slightest warning. With a muttered "Damn!" Bob tried to pick it up again. It was to no avail. He glanced quickly at the panel. It still glowed green, unwavering, and that meant he was still on the beam. But—

Suddenly Rac set up a clatter such as they had never heard before. He rushed to Vee and pulled her, crying, "Come! Come quick, see!" The cowl over his eyes was in rapid ruffling movement. Bob, certain that something was wrong, rushed over to see.



Rac was pointing excitedly at the spinning globe of Earth ahead. Even as Bob looked, he knew, and yet did not know, why the announcer's voice had been suddenly cut off.

Over the surface of the globe a strange and swift transformation was taking place. Before their very eyes they saw the bright blue color of Earth change to a pale yellow. They judged it must have started at a point not far from New York City, and it spread out in a perfect, unbroken, rapidly growing circle. They saw it expand over the Atlantic, over Canada, over the Great Lakes and Florida and beyond. It was only a matter of seconds, not minutes, until the usurping color had covered all the hemisphere visible to them; and it was not difficult to suppose that it continued, embracing the entire globe.

Bob and Vee stood there a full minute, watching, dazed and awe-struck. But that was all; nothing else happened. It was now a yellow-tinged Earth that spun out there before them. They looked at each other, not daring to voice the fore-boding in both their minds.

Rac was asking questions, but for once his curiosity had to remain unsatisfied.

### CHAPTER TWO

City of Silence

MILE above New York City the Terra streaked on stubby wings. Even at that height the magnificent panorama brought a nostalgic longing. There were no aircraft at their level, but far below numerous planes hovered. In spite of the brief glimpse, however, something seemed wrong. Those planes weren't moving. Everything was strangely quiet.

It seemed that their tiny shell was the only moving and only sounding thing in all the world. They braked gradually, and inside of thirty miles set the *Terra* down in a lonely rural spot. Rac was fairly dancing with glee, but Bob and Vee didn't notice his antics now. They peered curiously out into the yellowness.

"We'd better decide what to do," Bob said practically. "First we'll test that atmosphere. Frankly, I don't trust it any more."

The test proved the air fresh and pure, and Bob was surprised, almost disappointed.

"Had you expected some kind of—gas?" Vee asked.

"Yes, something like that."

"Me too. But now what?"

"Now we get out. This is the end of the line."

It was good to feel the earth under them once more. But they were even further mystified, for there was an uncomfortable chill to the air despite a morning sun that shone wanly now through the yellowness. And this was July!

Grimly silent, they made for one of the arterial highways they could see in the distance. Rac, with his funny skipping pace, stayed very close to them; he wasn't gleeful now; he was so over-awed at this strange new world that for the moment he could not even evince his usual curiosity at anything. Even to Bob and Vee it almost seemed that they had somehow missed Earth and landed on some alien world.

Vee stopped suddenly, holding up a finger.

"What's the matter?" Bob asked.

"Listen!"

Bob listened. "I don't hear a thing."

"That's just the point!" Vee exclaimed. "It just now struck me why everything's so eerie. It's the silence! No sound of a plane overhead, or a motor car, or a bird singing out here as there should be. Not even any of the tiny little sounds we're so accustomed to hearing almost sub-

consciously. And look at those trees over there, how still! There's not even the slightest breeze. It makes you almost want to whisper! Bob, it's frightening!"

Bob had been pondering, looking about him. Now he repeated her words almost to himself. "Yes, it is frightening. And I'm afraid that—" He did not finish.

"Bob, what is it? If you have any idea what this is all about—"

"No, no, of course I haven't," he answered too hurriedly. "I'm just beginning to form a theory. It may not be right. We'll have to wait and see."

HEY walked half a mile before they came upon the sedan, standing curiously in the exact middle of the highway, headed toward the city. The driver was the only occupant. He sat stiffly erect, staring straight ahead, both hands on the wheel. The motor wasn't running.

"Hey," Bob called as they walked around the side of the car. There was no answer. Bob reached in and shook the fellow, who immediately toppled over sideways on the seat. But his arms remained stiffly erect, parallel, in the position of driving.

Vee gasped and whispered, "Is—is he dead?"

Rac only stared in wide-eyed wonder. "No, not dead. It seems some sort of cataleptic state—but not exactly that either. It's peculiar! Well, I'll move this fellow to the back seat and we'll ride to town—if this car will still operate."

Bob soon had the motor purring, and they proceeded toward the metropolis. Rac's awe was beginning to fade a little. He was so delighted at this new mode of locomotion that he could not remain still. Soon they came upon another motionless car in the middle of the highway. They stopped to investigate. It had four occupants and all were in the same curious, wide-eyed, immobile state.

As they came closer to the outskirts of the city, this motionless "traffic" became so frequent that Bob had to drive slowly and with considerable caution, threading his way through it. Once he gave an experimental blast of the horn. The sound went shivering away into the vast silence, to die away finally, fainter and fainter. The effect was so mournful he did not try that again! Off to the right they could see a sportmodel plane hovering on its gravity control at about a thousand foot level. Soon they began seeing more and more planes. strangely motionless. At one place close to the highway they saw the tangled remains of one.

For some time Vee had been wanting to say something, but hardly daring to speak. "Bob," she said at last, "I'm scared and I don't care who knows it! I'd rather face those dust plains of Mars again than this. There's just something so—"

"I know exactly how you feel," he replied grimly, "and I'm afraid I'm thinking the same thing you are. Are we the only ones to have escaped this?" He shrugged, hoping Vee wouldn't see the hopeless look in his eyes. "But we've got to face the facts, Vee—and prepare for the worst."

Despite all morbid speculation, it was not until they entered the city that the full significance of an appalling situation burst upon them. As they drove through the streets they became ever more cognizant of the abysmal stillness. Their ears hearked for the accustomed noise, but all seemed one vast void of soundlessness that overwhelmed them in new awe.

Where was the thunder of the city? Where was the sound of traffic, of planes overhead, the cries of the inevitable newsboys, all the usual noon-day noise and bustle of a busy metropolis? At first the streets were almost deserted; but soon they began to see, here and there, the

grotesquely poised figures of belated pedestrians of the night before.

Once Bob stopped the car at a red traffic light that shone like a baleful eye through the ghastly yellow. But after a minute the light did not change, and Bob grinned foolishly as he drove through.

"There, I've just realized a life-long ambition," he said with an attempt at jocularity he did not feel. "I always wanted to drive through one of those red lights without worrying about a cop lurking around."

Ever more frequently now did they find the stark, motionless figures, revealing so graphically the frozen fate of this world. There a man was bowed low, just entering a taxi. There in a doorway a young man was just kissing his girl friend good night; there had never been a longer kiss! The fact that everyone seemed in the very act of making some movement or gesture, but did not, was most unnerving.

There a man was just stepping off the curb directly into the path of a car that was very close to him; the driver was tense, as though he were applying the brakes, and on his face was frozen a look of horror at the impending accident.

This tableau interested Bob exceedingly. "Wait a minute," he said, as he stopped the car. He walked over to the pedestrian and hesitated. Then, as Vee watched in amazement, he carried the man to the middle of the street and left him standing poised in mid-step, but beyond the danger of the approaching car.

"What was that for?" Vee asked.

"Just a hunch," Bob explained a bit foolishly. "But I may have saved that fellow's life."

Nearing Times Square the motionless traffic was so heavy they had difficulty driving through it. "We may as well get out here," Bob said at last. "We don't know where we're going anyway. Still scared?"

"N-no," said Vee, "I think I'm beyond that. I'm just a little awe-struck still. Rac too, judging by his silence. I just know what he's thinking: that this is nothing like the world we described to him!"

N GRIM retrospection Bob and Vee stared around. How many times had they traversed these streets rife with turmoil! What a contrast now! They walked along slowly, instinctively avoiding contact with the people, trying not to let the gruesomeness of it get on their nerves.

A beggar stood furtively in a doorway, and a lady was in the act of dropping a coin in his outstretched hand. A taxi driver had his head out of his cab window, bawling out a motorist. At the next corner a policeman seemed to be reprimanding a troublesome drunk, who stood there motionless now, leering at him.

"What a paradise for a pick-pocket!" Vee said, staring around.

Rac suddenly broke his long silence to say, "Terra returning earthward."

They stopped. "What did you say, Rac?"

"Terra returning earthward," Rac repeated.

"What the devil can he mean?" Bob asked, puzzled. "Oh, now I see!"

They were near a newsstand where a boy stood with an open paper thrust out toward the pedestrians. His expression was ludicrous, his mouth open wide in the act of bawling his wares. At any moment they expected the stentorian sound to emerge, but it didn't.

The paper was a "Special Midnight Extra" and the headline read: Terra Returning Earthward! Another paper proclaimed: Terra, Missing Four Years, Sighted! Rac read all the headlines aloud, laboriously but correctly, very proud of his ability.

Streets around the Times Building

seemed especially crowded, everyone looking up to where the news sign eternally moved. But it was no longer moving nor discernible in the yellowish atmosphere.

"I guess our return was being proclaimed up there," Bob said, "at the very instant this thing—happened."

"Bob," Vee said, suddenly deadly serious, "we've simply got to face this business squarely and—"

"How do you face a nightmare like this at all, much less squarely? Anything in mind?"

"Well, we've got to grasp at straws. I was thinking—maybe there are people somewhere who escaped this—people who were indoors?"

Bob shook his head. "I think not. Else why aren't some of them on the streets now?"

"Maybe afraid if they emerge they—they'll fall victim to this."

"Then why aren't you and I and Rac affected? No, I'm afraid that argument won't hold water, Vee. To get at this systematically, we can only be sure of one thing: the source of this must be local. We can discount that the Earth passed through the tail of a comet or some other gaseous matter, because we had a

grandstand seat in the *Terra* and we know that no such thing occurred. Besides we saw it start at a point right about here, and then quickly spread. That brings us right up against a blank wall. All I can think of is to explore this old planet from stem to stern."

"Bob! Do you suppose they had a war? Things were comparatively peaceful when we left, but a lot can happen in four years."

"Hmm. It's a possibility, at that. If so, all I can say is whoever thought of this sure had the ace card up his sleeve!"

"We must explore first, of course," Vee said dully. "There must be somebody . . . Bob, if there isn't, I simply couldn't bear to stay here." She suddenly brightened. "We can always go back to Mars and Rac's people. I was just getting to like it there."

"Liar," Bob replied. "Besides that's just what we can't do. You forget\_we're low on fuel now, and only Dr. Broxted knew the formula."

"He may have left it around."

"Not Dr. Broxted. Besides, we've been away so long trying for Mars instead of the moon, he probably thought the fuel was a failure."



S THEY walked along they noticed all the clocks had stopped at midnight; the hands were like single forefingers pointing mutely upward, as if calling the fatal minute to their attention.

"And we were wondering how we were going to escape the welcoming crowds!" Bob said. "I even had Rac rehearsing a little speech of greeting to the people of Earth. Ironic, isn't it?" He stopped suddenly, noticing they were in front of a pretentious cafe. He gazed ever so wistfully in.

"Do you know, Vee, I'd made up my mind that one of the first things I wanted when I got home was a decent meal!"

Vee brightened. "You get the most marvelous ideas! It's what I need to cheer me up."

"Besides," Bob added, "I can think better with a warm meal in me."

Rac staved close to them as they entered. He still gazed around at this strange world where everything and everyone was so still. But now Rac was pondering. He knew that this motionless silence wasn't the usual "sleep period" on this alien world, such as his two friends had to undergo regularly. No, this wasn't like that, nor was this anything like the world they had described to him in such glowing terms. This was different-and wrong! Rac had observed how perturbed his two friends were. He had a very sincere feeling for them, and appreciation of all the things they had shown and taught him.

From the very depths of his heart he wished he could help them now.

They had started to seat themselves at the nearest table when they both thought of something at the very same moment.

"We'll have to help ourselves; we can't order!"

They both laughed, the first heart-felt laugh since they had landed, and it seemed

to break the tension that gripped them. The scene in the room—patrons at the tables, waiters hovering about, a floor show in progress—now seemed like some bizarre marionette show halted in the middle of an act. They proceeded toward the kitchen, but Vee suddenly stopped. A waiter had just been in the act of emerging from there, bearing a tray of steaming food.

Vee stared and exclaimed, "Bob! This stuff should be cold!"

"What? Of course it should be, by now."

"But it isn't! Look—it's still steaming hot!"

It was true. But before they could marvel long over this miracle, Bob had discovered another. The door behind the waiter, being on swinging hinges, should have swung shut, but it had not! It remained ajar, precisely in keeping with the rest of the motionless phenomena.

And now Rac, who had been wandering around the tables, set up his "Rac-c-c" sound denoting that he too had discovered something of more than passing interest.

Rac was staring, fascinated, at a beautifully spiralled, but very quiescent pattern of blue smoke curled up from a cigarette in the fingers of a gentleman at one of the tables. They watched the still glowing end of that cigarette with a sort of fascinated horror. But it crept no nearer to the fingers that held it! Rac was delighted that he had shown them something of probable importance.

"Do you know," Bob said with a sigh, "this sort of thing would soon drive me batty if it weren't rather funny. But I'm beginning to form a theory which, if true, makes it not so funny any more." He fanned the air violently, and the tobacco smoke drifted and thinned.

"What is your theory?" Vee asked.

"It's—well, just fantastic enough to fit all this," Bob replied enigmatically. "But I don't want to spill it until I'm sure. Let's have that steak or whatever it is you want."

"It seems price is no object," Vee said, "so the best is none too good." She stared around at the tables. "See that roast duck over there? That for me!" She pointed to a table where a pompous gentleman had been about to begin the appetizing repast.

They soon were demolishing the duck dinner. Rac would touch nothing but three or four kinds of fruit that Vee brought him from the kitchen. The main provender of Rac's people had been a sort of sickly grayish fruit which they prepared in various ways; but evidently Rac thought the Earth fruit much tastier. He viewed the duck, however, rather dubiously. He may have recognized it as a sort of far distant Earthian cousin of his!

HEY were in much better spirits and Rac was almost jubilant as they went out into the streets again to observe a city halted in its stride.

Rac at last felt equal to testing his stubby wings. He would take ten or twelve long-legged running steps, then soar fifty feet into the air. Because of the denser atmosphere this was more height than he had ever been able to attain on Mars. But the stronger gravity would not allow his wings to sustain him for more than a few seconds, and he'd come gliding back down at them.

He would skip along beside them for awhile, quaintly pronouncing words on shop windows, on the theatre billings—proud of his ability, even if he didn't know what half the words meant. Then, suddenly tiring of his oral prowess, Rac would run swiftly ahead and soar upward again.

Once they stopped at a drinking fountain, and after persistent attempts, water gushed forth, to Rac's amazement. It all seemed every wasteful to him, almost sacrilegious. Water was a scarce commodity

in the barren caverns of Mars, something to be hoarded and treasured.

Once, stopping before a little coffee shop, they saw a startling tableau at the counter. A man stood there. In his hand was a gun, pointed straight at the girl behind the counter. The girl's mouth was open, as if she had screamed or was just about to. Vee tried the door and it was unlocked. She entered. She gingerly took the gun from the man's hand, then placed it firmly in the girl's fingers so that it pointed straight at him!

"What was that for?" Bob asked in amazement.

Vee smiled sweetly. "Maybe for the same reason you moved that pedestrian back there. Who knows?"

Bob shook his head sadly. "I'm going to watch the papers for this tomorrow—if there ever is a tomorrow!"

At last they gazed out upon the most breathtaking spectacle they had yet seen, but one that was very appropriate to this new motionless world. As far as the eye could see the ocean lay before them like a huge, flat mirror of greenish glass, unbelievably vast and placid! To the very horizon it stretched in absolute quiescence, not the tiniest ripple disturbing the surface. Words were unnecessary as they stood in awe before this expansive miracle which no person had ever seen before. The very placidity of the vast water seemed to grip them so they hardly dared move.

But not so with Rac. To him that great green expanse was simply another natural part of this alien world. He had taken another of his short soaring flights and was hovering fifty feet above the water. Now he began to glide swiftly down, straight for the smooth green surface. They shouted at him, but it was too late. A yard from the surface he balanced himself on his stubby wings and alighted with a little splash.

Rac sank from sight and came up sput-

tering, a very surprised Martian indeed. With instinctive strokes of his wings he made his way to where Bob, laughing, could help him out. Rac was more frightened than hurt, more astonished than frightened. Never had he dreamed that smooth expanse could be water. It was more water than he had ever dreamed existed! He simply stood there dripping and looked to the horizon, enraptured.

That ocean spelled doom to their waning hope; it was the final proof they needed that the condition encompassed the globe. Now it was nearing dusk, and they began to realize that for the first time in history the metropolis was going to pass a night shrouded in utter darkness.

"Let's return to the *Terra*," Vee said a little anxiously. "I don't think I could stand it here tonight. It's like some city of living dead!"

They found the same car they'd driven into the city and headed back out to the Terra. Bob left the car in the middle of the highway again, and carefully placed the driver in the front seat the way he had found him. They were silent, thoughtful, as they walked the rest of the way. Even Rac now was more quiet and a little scared. The moon peered palely through the lucent yellowness of the night like a poor frightened ghost of the moon they had formerly known.

#### CHAPTER THREE

"Bid Time Return"

AYBE we'd better try the radio again," Vee said as they entered the spaceship.

"Smart girl. We should have done that long ago."

For several hours they sent out messages, calls of frantic query on all wave lengths. But it was futile. The receptor remained dead. Bob gave up in despair.

"Well," he said at last, "it looks as if

the world is ours—but I don't know what we're going to do with all the people! Talk of your Alexanders and Caesars—those boys were pikers compared to us; our private estate extends for 25,000 miles and meets itself."

He went into the rear compartment of the ship and rolled out their small plane, which they'd used for scouting on Mars. "There's only one more thing to do," he said. "I'm going to play my hunch."

Soon they were flying back over the darkened city, Bob at the controls. He flew high above all traffic levels to avoid collision with numerous planes that still hovered. But all below was a sameness, dark and silent.

"What are you looking for?" Vee called. Bob shook his head. "I don't know. A light. Anything!"

They found it minutes later. They had criss-crossed the city. Rac's sharp eyes spotted something first, far to the right. He pointed excitedly. Far below them they saw a tiny bright parabola flash across the sky. It was followed by two more. Signal rocket flares! It meant that someone, after all, was down there!

Quickly Bob headed the plane for the spot. He zoomed and raced the motor as a signal, and the tiny flaming arcs continued. They seemed far away, out over Long Island somewhere.

As they came nearer, Bob called, "I know who it is now! Dr. Broxted! We should have known it!"

Vee nodded. Far below a little square of light loomed against the darkness. A minute later their plane was slanting down toward it. They recognized the huge white house and wide lawn, now ablaze with lights, the only light in all the surrounding darkness. They set the plane down, and a small, tense figure of a man came running toward them.

As they stepped out he stopped abruptly, stared, then rushed forward and grasped their hands. "Bob Stevens! And

Vee! Good heavens, I thought—Where've you been all this time?"

"Merely to Mars, Doctor," Bob replied.
"Your fuel was quite a success! But didn't you hear on the radio that we'd been sighted?"

Broxted shook his head. "No—I've been too busy. I did hear your motors tonight, and sent up my signals. But I didn't dream it was you. I haven't been into the city yet. I—I didn't want—"

"I don't blame you," Bob said. "It's not pleasant. But here, let me introduce you to a very good friend of ours." He drew Rac forth into the light. "Doctor Broxted, meet Rac."

But Rac was very silent again, as he always was when things happened too fast for him.

Broxted stared at the birdlike creature in amazement. "Wh-what's that?" he stammered.

"You mean who, Doctor, not what. Rac's a Martian. We've been on Mars nearly four years, and I must admit we expected a better welcome home than this. What's it all about? I can see how Vee and I escaped this thing, being in space, but I don't see how you—"

"I don't myself, Bob. It was only pure luck; I can tell you that. But—do you mean you can't guess what's happened?"

"I can do more than guess. It begins to look as if my theory—"

"Bob Stevens!" Vee exclaimed furiously. "You've been ranting about a theory as if—as if it were exclusive property or something. Well, I've got one of my own and I'll bet it's as good as yours!"

"Okay," Bob grinned. "Spill!"

"All right, smarty, I will." She turned to Broxted. "Doctor, you've been working on that time-experiment thing again. I thought you had given it up."

"That's right, Vee. But I had a new principle this time," Broxted began eagerly, "a different line of—"

"See!" she exclaimed to Bob.

"Yes, Vee, you're positively brilliant."
"Come on, I'll show you." Broxted eagerly led the way to the house. "But I must admit, I seem to have bungled things. Rather badly, I'm afraid."

"That," Bob said, "is only putting it mildly."

Broxted waved a defiant finger. "But my principle was correct, is still correct! Something just happened; I can't quite figure it out yet myself. You shall see for yourselves."

"And your time theory—it's the same as before?"

"Yes, just as I explained to you four years ago. Except for the device itself. Oh yes, I finally built it. I proceeded along entirely unprecedented lines, with a series of rotors of my own design connected in such sequence as to set up a definite stress in the time field."

"Well, isn't there any way you can—undo this terrible thing that you've done?"

"I'll let you be the judge of that," Broxted replied with a strange bitterness, opening the laboratory door. "Here we are."

The room seemed extraordinarily bare; at least there was nothing which might even remotely have been a time device.

"But where is it?" Bob exclaimed. "I don't see a thing!"

"Don't you?" Broxted said, and that same strange bitterness was in his voice. "Well, it's right there in front of you."

At these words Bob looked up sharply. A terrible thought had occurred to him. Broxted's brain had become unbalanced by the sudden world calamity.

"I know what you're thinking," Broxted went on, "but I assure you I'm not mad. The ttime device is right there. Just take a few steps forward, but carefully!"

Bob walked slowly forward, hand outstretched. Then he touched something. It was like nothing he had ever felt before. It didn't seem to be a substance at all, but a force, smooth, cold, impenetrable—and invisible! He passed his hand along it for a few feet. It seemed curved.

"Roughly it's about eight feet in diameter," Broxted explained. "And just inside that invisible barrier is my time device."

"You mean—you can't get in there?"
"My dear boy, what do you suppose
I've been doing here for the past many
hours? I assure you most positively that
I can't get in there!"

Vee stepped forward and felt along the barrier of force. "What about dynamite?" she said.

Broxted shook his head patiently. "I tried blasting; the explosion is only hurled outward. I've made every test I can think of, including acids. Nothing seems to affect that barrier. It's pure static force. My only solution is to build a duplicate time device, but it'll take months. What I hope to do then—and it's only a forlorn chance—is to use the second time device to go forward in time and release the first one."

"Then you mean to say," Bob exclaimed, "that beyond that barrier—"

"Is the future—yes. My time device reached into the future but, I believe, only for a fraction of a second! I'd set my experiment for exactly midnight last night. I stepped into the machine, and precisely on the second of midnight I released the power. There was a lurch, then a vast surge. Fortunately I was hurled backward as the machine slipped under me. I was dazed for several minutes. When I came to, everything was just as you see it now. That time surge had hurtled outward, almost with the speed of light, to envelope the whole world. I discovered that minutes later.

"As for this barrier—well, my only explanation is this: you've heard it said that time is only an infinite numbers of 'nows,' each impinging delicately, intangibly upon the next. This impenetrable

force is the barrier between our 'now' and the next one existing an infinitesimal fraction of a second beyond us! Ironic, isn't it? There sits my time device only a fraction in the future, and we can't reach it!"

Bob was vociferously skeptical. "That," he exclaimed, "sounds screwy! Time is only an abstract conception, not something that—well, that can be tampered with!"

"You're right on one point at least," Broxted agreed bitterly. "It's certainly not to be tampered with. I've learned that now, maybe too late. But look at it this way: we've been accustomed to regard time as we would some perpetual motion machine; it goes on forever. But throw a wrench into the perpetual motion machine and what happens? It instantly stops. Well, in effect that's what I've done with my time device; I've instantly and completely jammed the time-flow between the infinitesimal 'nows.' How else can vou account for that motionless world out there? It's motionless because it's timeless."

Vee spoke up eagerly, "Oh, I understand that! I read somewhere that time is what keeps everything from happening at once."

"Vee, don't try to be funny!" Bob exclaimed.

"That's not so facetious as it sounds," Broxted said. "Nothing can happen without time to happen in. And you, Bob, are wrong when you say time is only an abstract conception. My time theory is only a matter of logic, and I'll give you a lucid example. Suppose a book lies on a table. The book has length, breadth, and depth. Would you say, with those dimensions, the book exists?"

"Yes," Bob said positively.

Broxted turned to Vee, smiling in his best class-room manner. "And you, Vee? Would you say it exists?"

. "Well, I'll say no, but I think there's some catch in it."

"No catch, merely logic. No, the book would not exist. To exist any object must have not only length, breadth and depth—but also time in which to exist!"

"Then why are we existing," Bob persisted, "if time has stopped?"

"Time is still here," Broxted explained patiently, "it's merely static. Suppose I reach out and move that book to the other end of the table. I could not have moved, nor could I have caused the book to move, save through a certain section—a few seconds—of the fourth dimension, time. Or, very simply defined, time is merely the duration of movement. So now that my machine has jammed the time-flux, nothing can move except by some outside impetus."

"How right you are," Bob said bitterly. "Everything out there's motionless, from cigarette smoke to the ocean itself!"

"But what about decay, and disease?" Vee said practically. "Do you suppose that'll come, if things are—are left this way?"

"I doubt if there's any danger of that," Broxted replied. "But you're right; something must be done—and the only way is to reach my time device and release it."

"And you say it'll take months to make another one!"

Vee exclaimed suddenly, "Bob! Where did Rac go?" She was looking anxiously around the laboratory, but Rac was nowhere to be seen. "He was here.

He was standing right here by me just a minute ago! Rac, where are you?" she called.

And then, although they couldn't see him, they heard Rac's voice.

"Here I am," his voice said from somewhere very near. Then Rac suddenly appeared, out of the thin air, and walked over to Vee!

B ROXTED stood quite tense for a moment, staring. Then he yelled, "He came out of there!" He rushed over to Rac and exclaimed, "How did you do it? How did you get in there? Tell me!"

Rac cringed against Vee.

"Wait a minute," Bob said, "you're scaring him!"

"But he got in there—through the barrier!" Broxted was very excited. "Ask him how he did it. Tell him to do it again!"

"Now, Rac," Bob said to the little Martian, "this is very important. Tell us how you got in there. Or better still, just show us. This will be a big help to us, Rac. You understand that? Just do again what you did a few minutes ago."

Rac bobbed his head, quickly comprehending. "Like this," he said. He turned, walked toward that invisible barrier—and disappeared!

"But why?" exclaimed Broxted, puzzled. "Why can he do it and not us?"



"Rac," Bob called, "can you see us?"
"Yes," the little Martian replied, puzzled. "I can see you."

"Is there a machine in there?"

"Yes, all shiny."

"Don't touch it!" Broxted called quickly. "Come on out, Rac."

Rac emerged, pleased at the excitement he had caused. But he couldn't understand it! All this talk about barriers. All he had done was walk straight to the shiny glass machine he saw standing in the centre of the room.

"I simply can't understand it," Broxted was muttering. "Why, why—"

"Why?" Bob answered. "Because Rac's a very remarkable person, that's why, and he'd do anything for us!" He was pleased at this unexpected prowess of Rac's. But to himself he muttered, "No, damned if I know how he did it!"

"Then—if he can get through there like that, he might release my time device and bring it back!" Broxted pondered a moment, then added hopelessly, "No, it's no use. Too complicated a task."

"Doctor," Bob said, "we'll excuse your saying that this time, because you don't know Rac very well. But let me tell you, nothing's too complicated for Rac. You just draw a diagram showing him what to do."

"I can do better than that. I have a tiny model I made before the real one. But you don't understand. Even if I could get in there myself, I'm not sure I could bring it back. It's more than just pulling a lever or pressing a button. There will have to be certain calculations, adjustments."

"You just bring out your model and show Rac what to do."

Then Bob turned to the little Martian and said, very seriously, "Rac, all the other things you've learned weren't very important. What you must learn now is more important than all of them put together—but I know you can do it. In your hands lies the salvation of our entire

world, the world we told you about. You understand? You must listen very carefully to what Doctor Broxted tells you."

Rac understood. He bobbed his head solemnly. Using the tiny model, Broxted explained the complicated details no less than a dozen times, slowly, step by step. Rac merely watched, listened, sometimes nodded or asked a terse question. To him it was all very fascinating.

Then Rac showed them that he'd absorbed it all. He went through the whole process by himself, flawlessly. Broxted was amazed, for it had included a rather complicated formula. He looked upon Rac with a new but bewildered respect.

Bob said proudly, "See?"

HEY were moving over to the time barrier with Rac. Vee suddenly called, "Wait a minute! If this works, if Rac releases the machine, what will happen? Will everything go on just as before, from where time stopped?"

"Yes," replied Broxted, "I'm sure of it."

"And all the people out there, everywhere in the world—for them apparently no time will have passed?"

"Come to think of it, no."

"Then we've got to wait!" Vee exclaimed. "Don't you see? Time stopped precisely at midnight and it must resume exactly at that time, even if it is a day late!"

"Good Lord, that's right," Broxted said, looking at his watch. "Otherwise, according to all clocks out there, the sun would rise two hours late in the morning! It's barely ten P. M. now."

"And what about Bob and me?" Vee went on. "Crowds were waiting for us at the spaceport—including reporters and photographers, no doubt. It'll still be midnight of July 31st for them, and they'll still be waiting there. But no *Terra* in sight!"

Bob groaned. "I wish you'd quit think-

ing of these things! Well, tomorrow we'll simply have to give ourselves up to the reporters; we'll tell them we strayed off the radio beam, made a blind landing, and came on here to the doctor's house."

For the ensuing two hours Rac practiced his movements with the miniature controls, until they were sure there would be no slip-up. At last it was midnight and all was ready for the real test. Rac walked through the time barrier with ease, and disappeared. Breathlessly they waited. Nothing happened.

Rac appeared again, puzzled. One of the controls, he told Broxted, was different than the one on the model. He showed him, and Broxted remembered that he'd made a slight change. He explained the difference to Rac, who nodded and entered the time zone again. It was then two minutes past midnight.

Broxted hovered around the time barrier, nervously tugging at his thinning hair. Vee and Bob went out onto the lawn. Almost fearfully they waited for the change to come, not knowing quite what to expect. But all remained the same; the city was dark and still and motionless. What had gone wrong? Had Rac failed after all? Had he forgotten the instructions? Had all the calculations been of no avail?

And then it came, with a stunning, frightening suddenness. For many hours they had encountered an utterly silent world, and now, in the merest split-second, the city was as it had been before. A vast blanket of light leaped up and they heard a whole city roar back to life . . . .

B UT to the millions there had been no silence; there had been no cessation; nothing had been wrong. To all but three persons and a little Martian, it was still midnight of July 31st....

On the one hundredth floor of the Aero Club Mike Bessini staggered back from the window with a curious presentiment of disaster, words tumbling from his lips; then everything was normal, and Mike passed a hand across his bewildered brow.

"Funny!" he muttered, "I could have sworn— Say, I guess I'd better see the doc first thing in the morning; maybe I've been working too hard."

In the casino beyond his private door the music and the dance number continued, no one aware that anything had been amiss.

In the vicinity of Cincinnati the wreckage of the huge passenger liner was found; but it was considered strange that no one had seen or heard the fatal plunge.

The man whom Bob had moved beyond the danger of the approaching car, now looked back, terrified at the sudden screaming of the brakes, amazed at the alacrity with which he'd moved from the curb!

The roar of traffic and planes resumed; the stentorian newsboys shouted the headlines; the sign around the Times Building continued to spell out the news of the Terra's return. In a certain restaurant a pompous gentleman who had been about to attack the duck dinner on the table before him was amazed to see it vanish, seemingly under his very eyes! It was simply no longer there! After being revived he demanded to know what legerdemain was going on here. He stalked out furiously, refusing to pay his check and vowing that they'd no longer get his patronage.

And all Miss Della Jones did was make the front page with a heroic story and a three-column cut of her demonstrating just how she had held the revolver. The words over her picture read: Daring Girl Foils Bandit.

She told reporters, "I simply don't know how it happened. When he pointed that gun at me I was so scared my knees were shaking. But I was awfully excited too, and I guess I just grabbed the gun without thinking—because suddenly there

it was in my hand. I know I wouldn't do it again!"

There was a sensation when it was discovered that no less than forty-nine planes had crashed throughout the country that night. That many usually didn't crash in a month's time. Furthermore, it was discovered that all these planes had failed to have their gravity-control on. There were suspicions of sabotage; there were rumors of secret weapons in the hands of foreign powers; there were investigations galore, but they resulted in nothing . . . .

N BROXTED'S laboratory Bob and Vee saw the time device for the first time. It stood there in the middle of the room, very visible now.

"You're about to witness the end of the first time machine," Broxted said bitterly as he began dismantling it. "And it'll be the last one if I can help it. For three years I worked on this, and for what? So I could send it a fraction of a second into the future. But after all, it's for the best. I've proven that time travel is impossible; it must never be attempted again. I shall destroy my notes. And I could even rest contented if it weren't for one thing! I'll never be satisfied until I know why Rac could walk through that time barrier and we couldn't!"

Instinctively three pairs of eyes turned to the little Martian. At this, Rac fidgeted uncomfortably. They weren't really expecting him to speak, but Rac thought they were.

Rac touched the shiny machine again, lovingly, and said in a hesitant voice, "Maybe it would work on my world. Here your time does not affect me, so maybe our time would not—" Rac stopped, abashed, as though afraid they might laugh at his idea.

But they did not laugh. Broxted stared at him a moment, then sank down into a chair. "Of course, Rac, you're right. It's as simple as that. Why didn't I think of it before? It's a new time theory! There's no time in empty space, of course, except when there's something out there for which it can exist, such as your *Terra*. And so it must be with worlds, a different time field affecting each world and the people of that world. If our time has no barrier for Rac, the Mars time should have no barrier for us!" Broxted was on his feet again, pondering this new idea.

Vee said, "Well, Doctor, we saw some gorgeous ruins of ancient cities up near the Martian polar cap. If your time experiment works there, you could go back and see what the race was like that Rac's descended from!" The idea seemed to intrigue her.

"That's all very well," Bob said, "but tomorrow we introduce Rac to the world—the world we promised him—and something tells me that's going to be a job! So what about getting some sleep?"

"I cannot sleep tonight!" Broxted said. He was dismantling his time device, carefully packing the parts away until the day he could continue the experiment on Mars. Rac stood beside him, watching each of those mysterious parts as it came out. The cowl-like frill over his eyes was beginning to ruffle again, denoting his growing excitement. Bob and Vee looked at each other and laughed.

"What's the matter?" Broxted asked, looking up.

"You'll find out! Good night, Doctor."

So Broxted, in blithe innocence, continued to dismantle his machine. And Rac, who had already fallen in love with it, gazed at the shining intricacies with his perpetual wide-eyed wonder. And Rac, being Rac, could not remain silent long.

For an hour, valiantly, Broxted answered Rac's incessant queries. Suddenly he realized this had every indication of going on forever! He looked at Rac half in respect, half in a sort of horror. He decided, with a sigh, that he'd better get some sleep after all.



# SUNKENUNIVERSE



#### by ARTHUR MERLYN





Prisoner of the seasons was he, fighter against unseen hordes—Lavon, the king of the nameless ones, who must save the sea for his people.

In a little-known corner of this galaxy, the watery world of Hydrot hurtles endlessly around the red star, Tau Ceti. For many months its single small continent has been snowbound, and the many pools and lakes which dot the continent have

been locked in the grip of the ice. Now, however, the red sun swings ever closer to the zenith in its sky; the snow rushes in torrents toward the eternal ocean, and the ice recedes from the shores of the lakes and pools...

HE first thing to reach the consciousness of Lavon was a small, intermittent scratching sound. This was followed by a peculiar sensation, as if the world—and Lavon with it—were being rocked back and forth. He stirred uneasily, without opening his eyes. His vastly slowed metabolism made him feel queasy, and the rocking did not help. At his slight motion the scratching and rocking became more insistent.

His fogged brain demanded that he sleep a few days more, but whatever was causing the disturbance had no intention of permitting him to do so. With a groan he forced his eyelids open and made an abrupt gesture with one webbed hand. By the waves of phosphorescence which went out from his fingers at the motion, he could see that the smooth amber walls of his spherical shell were unbroken. He tried to peer through them, but could see nothing but darkness outside. Well, that was natural; the amniac fluid of the spore would generate light, but ordinary water did not, no matter how vigorously it was stirred.

Whatever was outside the sphere was rocking his shell again. Again and again he heard that whispering friction upon its walls. Probably some nosey diatom, he thought sleepily, well-meaning in its blundering, yet unhuman way, or perhaps a more dangerous organism trying to get inside to the tasty bit of food that was Lavon. Well, let it worry. He had no mind to break free just yet. The fluid in which he had slept for so many months had held his body processes static, and slowed his mind. Once out into the water, he would have to start breathing and look-

ing for food again, and he could tell by the dense darkness outside that it was too early in the spring to bother with that.

At the thought a vague memory obsessed him. There had been something he had planned to do—some reason for awakening before the appointed time—but his sleep-charged brain could not bring it to the surface of his consciousness.

He wriggled his fingers reflectively and watched the widening arcs of greenish light rebound in larger arcs from the curved walls. Here he was, curled up quite comfortably in a little amber ball. What reason could he have had for breaking free before the depths were warm and light? There was probably still some ice on the sky, and certainly there would not be much to eat as yet. Not that there was ever much, what with the voracious rotifers coming in with the first gust of warm water—

The rotifers! That was it! There was a plan afoot to drive them out. Memory returned with a rush. As if to spur him, the spore rocked again. That was probably one of his protozoan allies trying to awaken him. Nothing man-eating ever came to the Bottom this early. In sudden decision, he planted webbed toes and straightened his backbone as hard as he could, pressing with his whole body against his amber prison. With little sharp, crepitating sounds a network of cracks raced through the translucent substance.

Then the spore wall had dissolved into a thousand brittle shards, and he was shivering violently with the onslaught of the icy water. The warmer fluid of his winter cell dissipated silently, a faint glowing fog. By the brief light he saw, not far from him, a weird shape. A transparent, bubble-filled cylinder it was, a colorless slipper of jelly, spirally grooved, almost as long as he was tall. Its surface was furred with gently vibrating fine

hairs. The protozoan waited with the fatalistic patience of its kind while the human choked and coughed, expelling the last remnants of the spore fluid from his gill chambers and breathing in the pure icy water.

"Para, you!" Lavon managed at last. "Already?"

"Already," the cilia vibrated in even, emotionless tones. "It is time the Wise One also was awakened."

"Aye," agreed another voice out of the returned darkness. "Time and more than time, if we are to drive Flosc from his castles."

"Who is that?" asked Lavon, peering futilely in the direction of the sound.

"I am Para also, Wise One. We are sixteen since the awakening. If the Wise Ones could but reproduce as rapidly as we—"

"Enough," interrupted the first voice.
"Brains are better than numbers, as the
Eaters shall learn to their cost. What
shall we do, Wise One?"

AVON drew up his knees and sank to the cold mud of the Bottom to think. Something wriggled under him and a tiny spirillum corkscrewed away at a furious rate. He let it go; he was not hungry yet, and he had more important things to occupy him. Leader of the mankind of this watery universe, upon his shoulders rested a responsibility which frightened him. With the evil rotifers-the Eaters-swarming forever in the upper reaches of the sky, life for man was a miserable thing. These protozoan allies-greatest natural enemies of the Eaters in a world where evolution had skipped the crustacea—were all that made living possible; but even so it was a hazardous proposition.

He thought of Para's words. Brains were better than numbers, yes; but men were really not much more intelligent than the Protos, Para's race. A great

ability to plan, to think ahead, to think in terms of the group rather than of the individual—these were man's paltry advantages. He recalled how hard it had been for him, when first learning from his tutor, Shar, to get straight in his head the various clans of being in this world, and to make sense out of the confused nomenclatures.

When you said "Man," you meant creatures that, generally speaking, looked alike. "Bacter" were of three kinds, the rods and the globes and the spirals, but they were all very tiny and very edible, so he had learned to differentiate them very quickly, too. When it came to the Protos, things got worse. Para here was a Proto, but he certainly looked very different from Stent and his family, and the family of Didin was unlike both-and vet all were Protos. Eventually he stopped worrying about it, for he had learned that anything that was not green and had a nucleus was a Proto, no matter how strange its shape might be. Similarly, the Eaters were all different, and some of them sinisterly beautiful, but all had the rotating crown of cilia which caused old Shar to call them "rotifers." And everything which was green and had an engraved shell of glass, Shar had called a "diatom." Old Shar was very brilliant, and they had need of him, for the coming war must be fought with the mind.

He arose suddenly. "Come," he said. "We must awaken Shar. Where is his spore?"

"The Wisest One is sleeping on a plant frond, far up near the sky."

Lavon muttered to himself. Old Shar would never think of safety. Near the upper level, where he might be snatched up and born off by any Eater that chanced to be passing when he emerged, sluggish with winter's long sleep!

"We must go quickly," he said.

"Very well," one of the Paras agreed. "But you cannot see. Wait here. Noc is

foraging about nearby." There was a small stir in the texture of the night as the swift cylinder shot away.

"How may the Wisest One help us?" the other queried.

"You spoke but a moment ago in praise of brains, Para—or one of you did."

"True. But since he taught the Protos man's language, he has thought no more upon those things which we shall need. He thinks forever of the mystery of man's presence here. It is a mystery, for even the Eaters are unlike man. But understanding it will not help man to live."

Lavon turned his head to one side. "Tell me, Para," he demanded curiously. "Why do the Protos side with him? They do not need him to live, for the Eaters fear them."

There was a short silence. When Para spoke again, the vibrations of his voice were even more expressionless than before.

"The Wisest One has told you," he said, "that we are civilization here, brought painfully to flower before the coming of man, in long warfare with the Eaters. We have our pride, our beliefs, our science, although we think as the Eaters do, individually and not as a race. Man believes as we do, that the Eaters must be entirely exterminated. And man is better qualified to lead than we. But enough. Noc comes."

Indeed, as he spoke a brief flash of light was visible far overhead. In a moment a spherical protozoan had dropped into view, its body flaring regularly with a cold blue glow. Beside it darted the second Para.

"Noc brings news," the slipper-shaped organism emanated. "Para is twenty-four. The Syn are awake by the thousands in the upper level, too. He spoke to a colony, but they will not help. They all expect to be dead before the Eaters awake."

"Of course," said the first Para. "Are they not always? In any case, they are

plants; they would not help the Protos."

"Ask Noc if he will guide us to Shar," Lavon demanded impatiently. It was a nuisance, this not being able to understand the silent language of the Protos; and their unhurried nature was another. In a moment the flashing sphere had gestured its assent with a single short, thick tentacle.

"Let us be off," Lavon said. "There is much to be done."

The strangely assorted quartet rose swiftly through the liquid darkness.

O," SNAPPED Lavon, "you must come quickly. The Syn are awake and you know Notholca of the Eaters is due soon after. There is no time to stretch and yawn."

"Yes, yes," the old man said fretfully. "You are always in such a hurry, Lavon. Phil made his spore near mine." He pointed to a still-unbroken amber sphere farther up the leaf of the water plant. "You had better push it off into the depths so that he may awaken safely on the Bottom."

"He would never reach the Bottom," Para said. "The thermocline has formed."

Shar looked surprised. "Dear me. It is late, isn't it? Wait while I get my records." He began to search along the leaf among the debris and the piled shards of his spore. Lavon looked impatiently about, found a splinter of stone, and struck the wall of Phil's winter cell. It shattered promptly, and the husky young man rolled out, abruptly awakened by the shock of the cold water.

"Wough!" he exclaimed. "You're devilish unceremonious, Lavon." He took in the situation at a glance. "The old man would stay up here for the winter, so of course I had to stay too. But he's awake before me, it seems."

Shar gave an exclamation of pleasure and lifted a thin metal plate about the length of his forearm and half as wide. "Here is one of them!" he cried. "Now if only we have not lost the other—"

Phil kicked away a mass of bacteria. "Here it is. Give them both to a Para so they will not burden you. Where would you have us go, Lavon? It is dangerous here. Thank God, Dicran is not yet in evidence."

"You thank your gods too soon," a soft, evil voice said, and with an exclamation of horror Lavon looked around to its source—the armored, trumpet-shaped body of the rotifer Dicran, crouched on the frond above them, contracted for a spring!

There was a sudden violent stir of motion as the two Paras hurled themselves forward. At the same moment, the bent, shortened body of Dicran flexed in its armor plate, straightened, came plunging toward them. There was a soft plop and Lavon found himself struggling in a fine net, like spun glass yet infinitely stronger. He heard another similar sound and a muttered curse from Phil, and struck out fiercely, but he was barely able to wriggle in the tangle of wiry, transparent stuff.

"Be still," a voice which he recognized as Para's throbbed behind him. He managed to screw his head around, and then kicked himself mentally for not having realized instantly what had happened. The Paras had exploded the trichocysts which lay like tiny cartridges beneath their pellicles; each one cast forth a liquid which solidified upon contact with the water in a long slender thread.

The three humans and the two Protos sat on the plant frond, entirely surrounded and covered by a tangled hemisphere of those threads. Dicran backed away hastily, unwilling to become enmeshed yet hating to leave her intended prey, and swam around and around them, her corona buzzing malevolently, her savage mind forsaking the imperfectly understood human language for more natural

methods of expression. That crown of cilia did not actually rotate, but the rhythm of pulsation of its parts gave it that appearance.

Through the transparent armor Lavon could see the great jaws of her\* mastax grinding mechanically as the corona brought a funnel of bacteria-bearing water past her mouth. High above them Noc circled indecisively, illuminating the weird scene with quick, nervous flashes of his blue light. He was a flagellate, and bore no natural weapons with which to attack Dicran, yet he was loathe to flee and leave his cousins and his masters in such a dilemma.

Suddenly a movement in the darkness beyond caught Lavon's eye—a barrel-like creature, ringed with two rows of cilia and bearing a ram-like prow.

"Didin!" he shouted. "This way!"

The poison-bearing Proto, most feared of all his race, swung gracefully toward them and surveyed the huddled group. Dicran saw him at the same time and her buzzing became wrathful as she backed slowly away, crouching down upon a frond higher up on the stem.

For an instant Lavon thought she was going to give up and retreat, but he had reckoned without the natural ferocity of the genus. With a lightning-like movement the lithe, crouched body sprang outward, straight at Didin. Lavon gave an incoherent cry, but it was unnecessary; the slowly cruising barrel darted to one side and then shot in at Dicran with astonishing speed. If only he could sink that seizing organ into a weak point in the rotifer's armor—

Noc mounted higher to keep out of the way of the two fighters, and in the resulting weakened light, Lavon could not see what was happening. Only a furious churning and gyrating of the water and the hate-filled buzzing of Dicran came to him as he crouched in the gloom beneath

<sup>\*</sup>All rotifers capable of feeding and carrying on the other functions of normal water-life are female; the males are degenerate, short-lived sexual machines, and in some species are actually entirely extinct.

the Para's net. After a while the sounds seemed to be retreating. Then there was silence.

"Is it all right, do you suppose?" he asked in a tense whisper.

"How can we tell?" Para said emotionlessly.

More eternities went by. Then the darkness began to wane as Noc dropped cautiously toward them.

"What has happened?" Lavon de-

Noc signaled with his tentacle that he did not know, and turned to Para, who said, "He says he lost sight of them. Wait—I hear Didin."

Lavon could hear nothing, and correctly judged that what Para "heard" was some one of the semi-telepathic impulses which made up the Protos' language.

"He says Dicran is dead."

"Good!" Lavon exploded in relief. "Ask him to bring the body back here."

There was a short silence. "He says he will bring it. Why do you wish it, Wise One?"

"You'll see," Lavon said. He watched anxiously until Didin glided backwards into the lighted area, his poisonous ram sunk deep into the flaccid body of the rotifer, which, after the delicately-organized fashion of its kind, was already beginning to disintegrate.

"Let me out of this net, Para," Lavon instructed.

The two Protos closed their trichocysts, snapping the threads off at the base; the tangled mass rose gently with the current and drifted off over the abyss.

Lavon got to his feet and, seizing one buckled edge of Dicran's armor, tore away a huge strip of it. His hands plunged into the now almost shapeless body and came forth clutching two dark ovoids—eggs.

"Destroy these, Didin," he demanded. The Proto obligingly slashed each one open with his deadly seizing-organ. "Hereafter," said Lavon, "do thus with every Eater you kill." He regarded the inert mass grimly. "We will reduce the population of our world considerably before I die, I hope."

HE band of over two hundred humans, with Lavon and Shar and a Para at its head, cleaved swiftly through the warm, light waters of the upper level. Each man gripped a wood splinter, or a fragment of lime chipped from stonewort, as a club; and two hundred pairs of eyes darted watchfully from side to side. Cruising over them sped a squadron of twenty-five Didins, and the rotifers they encountered only glared at them from single, red eyespots, making no move to attack. Overhead, near the sky, the sunlight was filtered through a thick layer of living creatures, fighting and feeding and spawning, so that all the depths below were colored a rich green. Most of this heavily infested layer was made up of algae and diatoms, and there the Eaters fed unhindered. Sometimes a dving diatom dropped slowly past the band of men and Protos.

It was a month after the awakening of Lavon by Para, and spring held full sway in the sunken universe. These people were all the humans Lavon had been able to find. He tried not to think how many had made their spores in unsafe places, or had awakened too late in the season, to be snatched up by some rotifer lurking nearby. Of the group, approximately fifty were women. That was good; it meant that in another month, if they were unmolested, they could double the size of their army.

If they were unmolested—Lavon grinned mirthlessly and pushed a frightened colony of Eudorina out of his way. He remembered one of Shar's academic speculations of last year. If Para were left unmolested, he had said, he could reproduce fast enough to fill this whole universe

with a solid mass of Paras before the season was out. Foolish supposition! But, he thought grimly, these two hundred representatives of humanity would be as nearly unmolested as he could manage.

His hand flashed up and down, and in response the swift-darting squadron plunged. The light sky faded rapidly, and after a while Lavon became conscious of a slight diminuation of temperature. Again he signaled, and in answer each human swung his body so that he was diving feet first. Lavon wanted to strike the thermocline in this position. It would reduce the time of passage and hence the time they remained in the upper level, where every minute contained concentrated danger, despite the convoy of Protos.

His feet struck a yielding surface and with a terrific splash he plunged over his head in icy water, then bobbed up again to float. He could hear other splashes—although, since there was water both above and below, he could not see them—all along the level as his men struck the thermocline.

Now they would have to wait until their body temperatures dropped a bit. At this dividing line of their universe, the warm water stopped and the temperature dropped rapidly, so that the water below was much denser and buoyed up their bodies, causing them to float as a man of our world floats on the surface. All the area below was the lower level of colder, and hence denser water, reaching clear down to the Bottom. It was an area which the rotifers, who were not very clever, seldom managed to enter.

Something dropped down from above, beside Lavon—a moribund diatom, the greenish-yellow of its body fading to a sick orange, its beautifully-marked, oblong, pillbox-like shell swarming with greedy bacteria. It came to rest on the thermocline, and the transparent caterpillar-tread of jelly which ran around it

moved feebly, trying vainly to get traction on the sliding water interface. Poor stupid thing. Lavon reached out a webbed hand and brushed away a clot of vibrating rods which were trying to force their way into the shell through a costal opening.

"Ahsank—zee—Wizun," the diatom said in an indistinct, whispering voice. "Bu' cease—ahmuss—die—so—" The gurgling whisper faded out. The caterpillar-tread shifted again, then was motionless.

"It is right," a Para said to Lavon. "Why do you bother with those creatures? They will die anyhow."

Lavon forebore discussing the subtleties of human kindness with the emotionless Proto, for he felt himself sinking slowly, and the water around the lower part of his body no longer seemed cold, only gratefully cool in contrast to the stifling heat of that which he was breathing. In a moment the cool waters of the depths had closed over his head, and he hovered until he was sure all the rest of his squadron were safely through. Feeling a good deal more comfortable now that the long ordeal of search in the upper level was over, he streaked down toward the Bottom of the world, Phil and Para beside him, Shar puffing along with the vanguard.

A stone loomed, mountainlike in comparison to Lavon's tiny form. His keen eyes surveyed it by the half-light, which was all that trickled through to the depths. Almost immediately he saw what he was looking for—the sand-built house of a caddis-worm, gigantic and hated, yet relatively harmless cousin of the Eaters. He waved a brief signal and the humans glided up beside him. Quickly he explained what he wanted.

Cautiously the band spread out in a U around the stone, the mouth of the U facing the same way as the opening of the worm's tube. A Noc arose from among them and hung above, illuminating the

scene after the fashion of the star-shells men on another world had used. One of the Paras approached the door of the tube, its cilia giving forth a defiant buzz. Under cover of this distraction a detachment of men approached the back end. The worm's house was three times as tall as its attackers. The slimy black sand grains of which it was composed were almost as big as their heads.

There was a stir inside, and after a moment the ugly head of the worm peered out, glaring at the Para which had disturbed it. Para drew back a little, buzzing mockingly. The worm made a sudden lunge, half out of its tube. Lavon raised his arm and dashed forward with a shout.

Instantly the worm was surrounded by a howling horde of tiny, two-legged creatures, who were beating and prodding it unmercifully with clubs and fists. With a pained yelp it attempted to slide back into its home, but the rear guard had already broken a hole in the wall large enough to admit them, and the tail of the worm jerked forward again at their vicious attack.

Thus beset on three sides, there was only one way for the great larva to go—forward. Howling in anger and pain, it flopped an ungainly course down the side of the rock, and the humans swarmed around it and kept up the merciless flogging. At last it reached the Bottom and went hurrying off in search of a new home.

Lavon sent five Didin after it to be sure it started construction at a safe distance. The Didin could not kill it, for it was far too huge to be affected lethally by their poison, but they could sting it hard enough to keep it under control.

Lavon stood on a projection on the rock and surveyed his prize with satisfaction. It was plenty big enough to hold his entire clan—a great tubular hall, easily defended once the breach in the rear

wall was rebuilt, and well out of the usual haunts of the Eaters. He wished he could assign a few amoebae to clean up the muck the caddis-worm had lived in and left behind, but he knew that his control over the Protos did not extend that far.

They called the amoebae "the Fathers", and Shar had told him that they were indeed the original form of the Proto race. Consequently they never did menial tasks. Even in this world, ancestor-worship barred the path of progress. Lavon sighed and looked at his clan, the members of which were standing about in awed silence contemplating their spoils, almost frightened at the phenomenal success of their attack upon the largest creature in their world. Lavon knew that having accomplished this victory, they would never be as timid about the Eaters again.

"Well, come, and stop gaping!" he cried. "There is still much work to be done!"

LD Shar sat comfortably upon a pebble which had been hollowed out and cushioned with Spirogyra straw as a chair, and Lavon stood beside him, watching the maneuvers of his legions with great content. They numbered almost three hundred now, thanks to a month of comparative quiet in the great hall which they had made of the caddis-worm's house. A group of them were practicing the aquatic drill which Lavon was planning to use later, breaking and reassembling their formations, fighting a sham battle with invisible opponents whose actual shape they knew only too well.

"Noc tells me there is already much talk among the Eaters in the upper level," Shar remarked. "This is the first instance of close cooperation in all this world's annals. Never before have the Protos aided each other and man for the common good. And never before have the Eaters banded together, even in so

undisciplined a form as the mass attack we had last week. The failure of that attack worries them, too. They had thought themselves invincible in force. We are making history, Lavon."

"What is history?" Lavon asked uninterestedly, surveying his drilling squadron with a critical eye. The old man reached down beside him and caressed the mysterious metal plates which he carried with him wherever he went.

"These are history, Lavon."

The younger man turned curious eyes upon them.

"Let me see," he said, and Shar handed him one of the plates. They were of some pure, shining metal, uncorroded, a material unknown elsewhere in this world. The language of man had no word for them, nor that of the Protos. The latter called them simply, "That-which-is-not," signifying that they were neither wood, nor flesh, nor stone, the only three basic materials they knew. The surfaces of the plates were graven deeply on both sides in enigmatic characters which no one, not even Shar, could read.

"But some day I will be able to, for they are in our language. See, I have already puzzled out this first word. It is the set of symbols which means history. Look: ha ii ss tuh oh or ee—exactly the right number of characters. And the next two must be 'of the.' Using these symbols, I can piece out the rest, writing in the sand, thus, the symbols I already know." He bent and traced out the characters i-terste—ar e—e—ition. "I have left out the letters I do not know how to sound. Some day I shall know exactly what these records say."

Lavon put them back on the ground with a shrug. "We must make ourselves safe before we can afford to worry over such things. There has been no rest since the First Awakening."

A frown creased the old man's brow. "Yes, the First Awakening. Why is it

that we cannot remember back beyond that time, when we first burst open our spores and entered this world? So many of us died then. We were like children, ignorant of this life and unable to remember any lives before. That is what is meant by history, Lavon—memory of lives before.

"We are a history-less race, except for these plates, which I found lying in the spore beside me at the First Awakening, and which none of us can read. We are anomilies. We bring whole new generations to maturity in a month, and yet we live many decades as individuals. We are poorly adapted to this environment; we have minds which are obviously the products of civilization, yet we live in a universe as raw as creation. Is this bowl of water all there is to the universe? What lies beyond the sky? Whence comes the great light that makes our days bright, and why does it disappear for a period as long as the one during which it glows? These are things I must live to know, Lavon."

"I hope you will, old Shar," Lavon said soberly. "I, too, have wondered—but we must put aside our wondering for a time, so that others may live to know besides ourselves, and our children be able to move without fear."

He broke off as a figure darted between the guards at the door of the hall and swam toward him.

"What news, Phil?"

"The same," Phil said, shrugging—an expressive gesture when one is floating horizontally seven feet above the earth. "The Flosc proceed with their castle building. They are almost finished. It is still your plan to drive them out?"

Lavon nodded.

"But why?"

"First, for effect. So far we have been on the defensive; we must follow up the success of that defense with an attack of our own. Second, the castles Flosc build have many entrances; I do not like to think what would have happened had the Eaters thought of blockading us in here. And third, and most important, it will give us an outpost in enemy country, from which we may exterminate them more quickly."

"This is enemy country," said Phil. "Stephanost is a Bottom-dweller."

"But she is a trapper, not a swimmer; she spreads her nets for her prey and is always in the same place. She is easily dealt with. But the springing Dicran and Notholca, the vortex-generating Flosc, the pursuing, worm-creeping Rotar—these are ever-present menaces." He paused for a moment. "And now," he decided in a suddenly sharp-edged, cold voice, "is the best time. Summon all, Phil. We are leaving the hall."

As the call went out, Shar seized his precious plates. These were his furniture, to be moved from home to home.

7 AGUE forebodings, more disturbing because they were partly unresolved, obsessed Lavon's mind as the army swept away from the hall on the Bottom and charged toward the thermocline. Certainly there seemed comparatively little enough to worry about. There would probably be much death in the coming conflict, but death in any aquatic world was common enough. As his army moved, its numbers were swelled by Protos who darted into their ranks from all sides. Each man was armed with a long, seasoned splinter, which made an excellent sword, and swinging from an improvised belt, each had a stone-wort-flake club.

But there was a chill upon the depths that Lavon did not like and a suggestion of a current which was unnatural below the thermocline. Lavon knew that much time had been consumed in collecting his army and in securing the hall, and the month of recruiting both from stragglers and by intensive breeding, while essential, had added thirty-one more days to the time passed forever—he could not call it time wasted. But if that current and that chill marked the beginning of the fall turnover. . . .

Angrily he put the thought from him. This was no time for enervating speculations and nebulous fears. The immediate prospect of action was enough. He signaled to Para. Whether or not it was the one that had awakened him he did not know, nor did he greatly care, for the mental unity between these fission-reproducing Protos was so great that each cell sometimes seemed but a ganglion of one single generic brain. Each was in possession of all the knowledge of the species almost the instant it was acquired.

The jelly torpedo shot quickly up to him, and Lavon pointed ahead through the thermocline which the army was just entering.

"Are we well oriented, Para?"

"Well oriented, Wise One. There is a place where the Bottom rises toward the sky, and behind that we may approach Flose's castles unobserved."

Lavon nodded. Para meant the sand bar that stretched out from the north wall of their universe. He felt his speed accelerate suddenly, as if he had been shot out like a lemon-seed from the thumb and forefinger of the lower level. He looked over his shoulder to ascertain if the passage had been effected successfully by everybody. The brief glimpse gave him an unexpected thrill. He had not realized how large his army was. Even the individualist Protos were conforming to the tactical discipline Lavon had imposed upon the humans, and were flying in impressive, well-organized squads.

A single Noc was bowling along behind them, and Lavon watched it doubtfully. But then, the others would probably mask its periodic brilliancy enough to keep it from betraying their presence too early. Farther overhead an advance guard of Didin kept a sharp lookout for individual Eaters who might flee with news of the approaching horde.

A vast mountain range loomed ahead—the sand-bar. Lavon soared sharply upward, and the tumbled, raw-boned boulders of the sand grains swept by rapidly beneath him in a broad, stony river. Far beyond the ridge, towering up to the sky through glowing green obscurity, was the befronded stem of the water-plant that was their objective. It was too dim with distance to allow him to see the clinging castles of the Flosc, but he narrowed his eyes and cleft the sunlit waters with long, powerful strokes. In a continuous, orderly stream the invaders poured over the crest of the bar.

Lavon's arm swung in a circle, and with silent deadliness the squadrons glided into the long-planned maneuver—a great hemisphere, its axis aimed directly at the plant.

Briefly Lavon noted the low oxygen: content of the upper-level waters about him, and grimly he thrust the disquieting observation to the back of his mind. He could see the castles now and, as ever, he marveled at them. It was the only example of close cooperation Nature had supplied this world. They were built of single brown tubes, attached to each other until the ensemble looked like some great branching coral. In the mouth of each tube was a rotifer, a Flosc, distinguished from others of the Eaters by the four-leaf-clover shape of its corona and the single, prehensile finger on its back -located at a spot which would be between a human's shoulder blades-with which it ceaselessly molded its brown secretion into hard pellets and cemented them carefully to the rim of its tube. As yet the colony seemed unaware of the menace approaching it.

Then they were spied. As if upon a given signal, every Flosc vanished, con-

tracted violently into their tubes. Lavon laughed mirthlessly. But three months ago the Flosc would merely have waited until the humans were close enough to them, and then turned the vicious power of their vortexes upon them.

Now he saw the spectacle of a great and powerful group of Eaters hiding in instinctive alarm at the sight of a group of men and Protos! Well, he would teach them that they were wise to hide! His hand thrust out imperiously, and with a great composite shout the hemisphere swept forward. The Armageddon of the microcosm!

AVON had no time to observe the results of his carefully planned tactics. A petaled corona unfolded in his very face, and a buzzing whirlpool tore him toward a yawning mouth. He slashed out wildly with his sword and heard the rotifer scream as the sharp point sliced deeply through the ciliated surface. She contracted into her tube, and grimly Lavon followed.

It was pitch dark within the castle. He found himself buffeted by the currents the raging, pain-mad creature was stirring. He gritted his teeth and probed about with the sword. It met a yielding surface and a second scream rewarded his efforts, mingled with half-coherent fragments of his own language. He slashed until he was sure the invisible rotifer was dead, then groped into the torn corpse for the eggs. In a moment the tempered point had jabbed out the embryo life, and he pulled himself up over the edge of the tube and launched himself upon the nearest Eater. With a shock he found it was a Dicran. Reinforcements for the enemy already!

It turned viciously on him as he attacked it. It was used to maneuvering in open water, whereas the Flosc were sessile. Dicran's armor turned the point of the sword easily. Lavon sought with frantic

jabs to find a joint, but the agile monster gave him no opening. It charged in upon him irresistibly, and he found his arms pinned to his sides, a humming corona folding down over his head. . . .

The Eater gave a convulsive heave and went limp, floating slowly downward. A Didin drew back, pulling out its blunt, poisoned seizing-organ.

"Thanks," Lavon gasped.

The Proto darted off without replying. Lavon wondered briefly at the strange quirk their practical invincibility had given the character of the Didins. In them the normal unhurried fatalism of the Protos had become almost a devil-may-care irresponsibility—as nearly human an emotion as the Protos had attained. Somehow Lavon preferred the steady, unimaginative Para.

He was caught in a tearing whirlpool again and flexed his sword-arm. In the next five dreamlike minutes he developed a technique for dealing with the motionless, sucking Flosc. Instead of fighting the current and swinging the sword to left and right, he gave in to the vortex, rode with it, and braced the sword between his feet, point forward. The results were even better than he had hoped. Carried by its own current, the Flosc's soft, wormlike body was pierced half through before it could make a move against the human. Doggedly he went through the messy procedure of destroying the eggs with every victim he claimed. It was as much a ritual with him as scalping had been to Terrestrial Indians.

At last he emerged from a tube to find that the battle had drifted away from him. He paused on the edge to get his breath, clinging to the rounded, translucent bricks, and surveying the scene. It was difficult to make any military sense out of the melee, but as far as he could tell the rotifers were getting the worst of it. They did not know how to meet such a carefully organized attack; their minds

were not conditioned to act in coopera-

The Didin were ranging from one side of the fray to the other, in two tight, compact groups, and their charge was irresistible. He saw half a dozen different Eaters struggling futilely, each one imprisoned in a trichocyst net spun about it by two Paras, who were dragging it remorselessly toward the Bottom, where it would inevitably be suffocated. This late in the season the oxygen concentration beneath the thermocline was too low to permit the survival of most of the free-swimming types of rotifers.

Lavon was astonished to see the single Noc that had accompanied his army scourging viciously with its one blunt tentacle at a Rotar. The Rotar seemed too surprised to make a move, and Lavon grinned in spite of himself. He knew just how it felt. The Protos' lack of fear, of the instinct of self-preservation itself, never ceased to amaze him.

A figure swam slowly and tiredly up to him from below. It was old Shar, puffing hard, and upon his face was a look of stark tragedy.

"Gone, Lavon!" he cried. "Gone! Lost!"

"What? What's gone? What's the matter?"

"The plate! The plate!"

"What plate?" Lavon demanded impatiently. "Calm down. What happened?"

Slowly his tutor regained partial control of his emotions. "One of the history plates," he said sorrowfully. "I dropped it in the fight. I hid the other one in an empty Flosc-tube, but the first one—the one I had started to decipher, Lavon—I dropped it! It went down to the Bottom, falling slowly, spinning into darkness. We will never find it again. Gone, Lavon! We will never know—"

He hid his head in his arms, an absurd and pathetic little figure crouching in the green glow of the waters, perched

on the edge of the brown tube which was a turret of Flosc's castle. Lavon did not know what to say. He understood how keenly the old man felt the loss, and himself knew an empty fear at the thought of this tragedy. If the other plate were lost, they would in truth be a history-less race, the past before the First Awakening but a fearful blank. . . .

He was not long permitted to brood, for another man-shape approached. Phil.

"All is well, Lavon," he cried exuberantly. "The swimmers flee, and only the Flosc who are still in the castles remain. hiding in the darkness. If we could only root them out-"

Quickly Lavon ran the possibilities over in his mind. Their whole attack might yet fail if the Flosc successfully entrenched themselves. After all, mere slaving had not been his object. They had started out to seize these castles. A thought struck him.

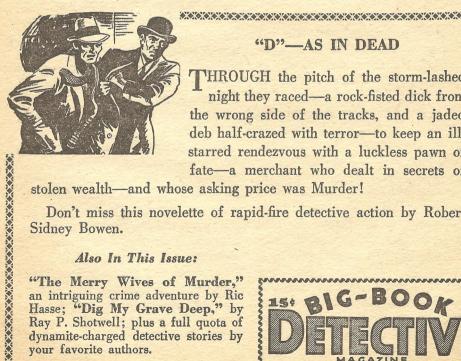
"Shar-do these tubes connect with each other?"

"Yes." the old man said without interest. "It is a continuous system."

Lavon sprang up. "Come on, Phil," he ordered. "We'll attack them from the rear." He plunged into the tube, Phil on his heels.

It was very dark, and the water was fetid with the odor of its late occupant, but after a moment's groping they found the opening which led into the next tube. Determinedly they worked toward the main stem, going always down and in.

Once they passed beneath an opening from which muffled shouts and a malevolent buzzing issued, and Lavon paused to probe with his sword. The rotifer gave a startled, shrill cry, and involuntarily released its toe grip upon the walls of its tube. Lavon moved on, smiling grimly, knowing that those above would do the rest.



#### "D"—AS IN DEAD

THROUGH the pitch of the storm-lashed night they raced—a rock-fisted dick from the wrong side of the tracks, and a jaded deb half-crazed with terror-to keep an illstarred rendezvous with a luckless pawn of fate—a merchant who dealt in secrets of

stolen wealth—and whose asking price was Murder!

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Reaching the central stem at last, they went from one to another methodically. spearing the surprised Eaters from behind or cutting them loose so that the fighters outside could get at them as they drifted out. Their eyes were used to the darkness, and the trumpet shape of the tubes prevented the Eaters from turning on them. The smallness of the connections and the dichotomous nature of the branching also acted in their favor to guard against being surprised from behind. The gutting of the castles was accomplished in a remarkably short time. Not fifteen minutes after he had entered Lavon was able to stand at the mouth of a turret and look over a metropolis completely under their control.

NCE more Lavon lay in darkness, all thoughts of action remote from his mind. The water was stuffy, cold, the blackness complete. Around him were the walls of a tube of Flosc's castle; above him a Para gently laid the last sand grains upon a new domed roof. The rest of the humans were in other tubes, similarly roofed, but there was no stir of movement or babble of voices. It was as silent as a tomb.

Lavon's thoughts were drugged, but very bitter. He had been right about the passage of the seasons. They had had barely enough time to consolidate their position before the annual debacle of the fall overturn had happened—the waters of the universe had revolved once, bringing the surface to the Bottom; and the Bottom to the Sky, and then mixing both indistinguishably. The thermocline was destroyed until next year's spring overturn would reform it. And inevitably, by Nature's law, the abrupt change in temperature and oxygen concentration had started the spore-building glands again. The spherical amber shell was going up around Layon now, and there was nothing he could do about it. It was a physiological process as dissociated from his control as the beating of his heart. Soon the light-generating oil which filled the spore would come pouring out, expelling and replacing the cold, foul water, and sleep would come, inevitably....

And just as they had made a real gain and had established themselves in enemy country, ready to sally forth and destroy every remaining Eater! Now the eggs of the Eaters would be laid, and next year there would be as many as ever—and one of the precious plates which contained all the ancient learning of Lavon's race had been lost forever.

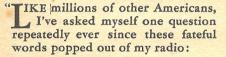
There was a soft *chunk* as the last sand grain fell into place on the roof, and the sound seemed strangely to bring him an obscure contentment. Para, faithful in his obscure, inhuman way, using his own last hours before spore formation to make his allies safe. And they were safe. They could not be ousted from the castle. There would be fewer Eaters next year, because of all the eggs that had been destroyed, and the layers of those eggs . . . they would have a better chance than ever before . . . even though they had not completed this summer's job . . . one plate still left. . . .

Lavon sank gently toward oblivion.

In a little known corner of this galaxy, the watery world of Hydrot hurtles endlessly around the red star, Tau Ceti. For many months life has swarmed in its lakes and pools, but now the sun retreats from the zenith, and the snow falls, and the ice advances from the eternal ocean. Life sinks once more toward slumber, simulating death, and the battles and lusts and high ambitions and tragedies of a thousand million microscopic creatures retreat into the limbo where such things matter not at all.

No, such things matter not at all when winter reigns on Hydrot; but winter is an inconstant king, and spring will return.

# "What can I do!



"'Japanese planes have bombed Hawaii!'

"Daily, nightly, I've turned this question over and over in my mind—with the reading of every news bulletin on the air and the appearance of every epic headline.

"What can I do-here at home?

"What can I do—while Americans are fighting and dying in the far reaches of the Pacific for freedom and for me?"

#### "What can I do?

"I've looked in my shaving mirror for an answer—and found none.

"I've seen only the perplexed face of a middle-aged man—a man too old to bear arms.

"I've glanced at my hands, too,

a thousand times, only to learn a brutal truth.

"They are soft and white—strangers to the production line where only skilled hands are wanted now."

#### "What can I do?

"Only last night I found the answer as my eyes fell on my wife's knitting bag and my ears caught the click of her knitting needles.

"I could give to the Red Cross. I could answer its urgent call for funds, now so sorely needed.

"I could give to the limit of my means to aid and comfort those who are giving so much more.

"Yes - I could do something. Not much-but something.

"And I have-today."

Give and give generously — to your local chapter—to volunteer solicitors. Give when you can, where you can, as much as you can.



## AMÉRICAN RED CROSS WAR FUND CAMPAIGN

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# Space Hitch-Hiker

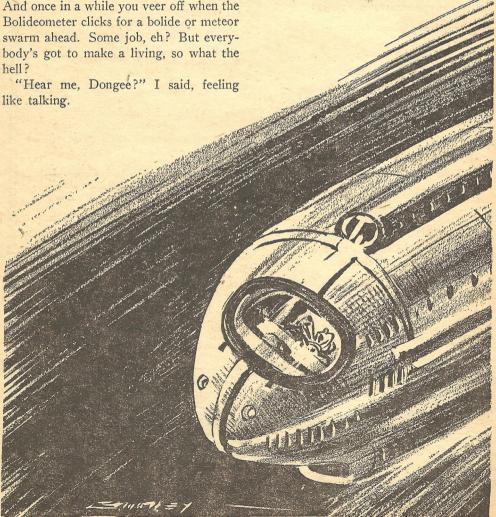
#### by EANDO BINDER

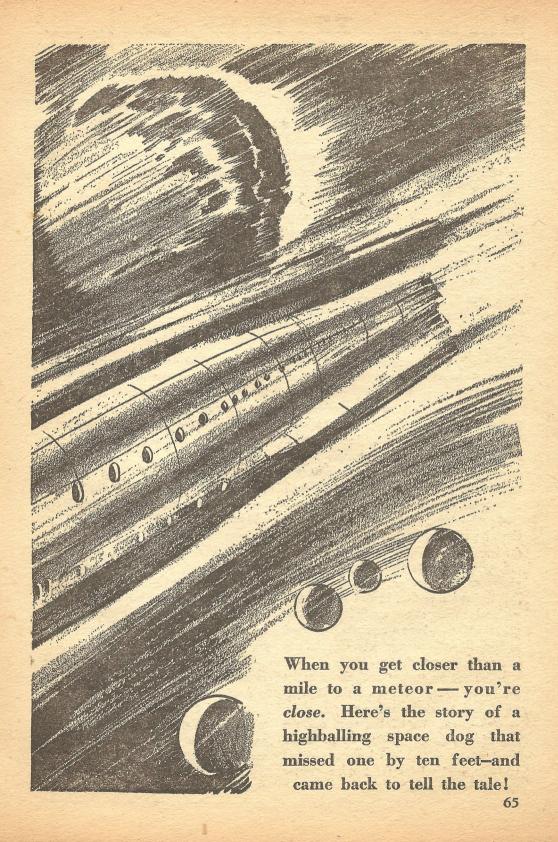
OU know, Dongee," I said to my Martian relief driver, "there isn't nothing more monotonous than this job of driving a trailer truck through space."

It's the truth. Four hours you drive. Four hours you rest or sleep. A dozen lunch and gas stops between Earth and Mars. Nothing else to do or see, except listen to the rockets and count the stars. And once in a while you veer off when the Bolideometer clicks for a bolide or meteor swarm ahead. Some job, eh? But everybody's got to make a living, so what the hell?

"Uh," Dongee grunted, which surprised me. A Martian don't talk much, as anyone knows. I bet this Dongee didn't let out more than ten grunts since leaving Earth. But he was a good relief driver, so I had no kick.

But suddenly he let out another grunt. The Bolideometer clicked and lighted up.





We read the dial and saw it was a small comet, due to cross our course in two minutes. Wonderful things, them Bolideometers. In the old days, without them, you never knew when a comet or meteor was going to stare you right in the face, coming lickety-split, and if you were quick, you lived. Nowadays, the Bolideometer gave you the warning before the dangerous object was even visible.

When the comet showed up, with a short tail streaming behind it, Dongee was ready with his camera. Yeah, he was a candid camera fiend. He bent his long, bean-pole body almost in a loop to get an angle shot like they all do, the dopes. He held the camera steady with three of his hands, and clicked it with the fourth. Then his leathery moon face split in a wide crack, which was a grin.

"Good snap?" I asked.

"Uh!" Dongee said, and went to sleep. An hour later I put on the reverse-blast brakes and slanted down toward PeeWee Station, the last gas stop before Mars. It's only a whistle-stop meteoroid, with an airdrome and a concession selling eats and rocket gas. No more life to it than an outpost on Pluto. But it was a break in the monotony, anyway. I had an hour's time, on my schedule, to land and stretch my legs.

I eased down to the parking lot, with plenty of underjetting. The job I was driving was a trailer, loaded to the gills with salt. Yeah, salt is worth its weight in gold on Mars, where the oceans they used to have all dried up ages ago, and the salt beds blew away as dust.

I plunked my trailer truck down in the sand yard so easy it didn't wake Dongee. So I had to shake him and ask if he wanted to eat. He blinked open one eye and then shut it, waving three hands. That was no. These Martians can go days without food. Besides, they're tighter than a Scotchman.

"Okay," I said. I hopped into my

space parka and went out the airlock of the cabin. I turned up the heat coil at the bite of space cold, with no air around. PeeWee Meteoroid is too small to have even a shred of atmosphere.

"Fill 'er up, sir?"

I nodded and the gas station attendant began pulling up the hose. But just then a bruiser jumped out of a truck behind me and grabbed the attendant's arm.

"I'm in a hurry," he said. "Fill me up."
"Hey," I said. "I'm first."

"Oh, yeah?" he growled, walking up to me and sticking his face plate against mine. "So what, punk? Another word outta you and I'll knock you five light-years away."

I'm a patient guy, but my blood boiled at that crack.

"You and how many Uranian bull-men? Think you own space, eh? Get back in line or I'll cram a quart of liquid helium down your noisy throat!"

He hulked up his shoulders and roared, "Why, I'll spread you all over the asteroids!"

He swung his fist gauntlet against my visor. Good thing they're made of unbreakable glasteel. I punched right back and rocked him back on his heels. There's no man in space can bluff me. I've met the roughest and toughest, and I'm no lily.

Well, we traded blows for a minute, and then I got a good left hook under his chin. His face flattened against his visor, blood spurting from his nose. That was enough for big-mouth.

"Back in the line, you refugee from a canal bottom," I told him. "Git!"

And he got.

"Now," I said to the attendant, who was a Venusian, and was shaking his head as though all Earthmen were wild animals, "you will kindly service me."

The tank took fifty-five barrels. Bad carburetion, eating it up that fast. The engine needed a good overhauling. I had

the attendant check spark-juice, liquid helium for the cooling coils, and the landing tires. And darned if she didn't need another quart of spark-juice. These Orion motors are spark-juice eaters, like the old cars they used to have on Earth that ate up oil. Oh, well, no skin off my nose.

"Charge it to Planet Trucking, bud," I said, and headed for the beanery.

And then I met the kid.

WAS half-way to the airdrome when I saw him. He was standing in a shabby old space parka with at least a dozen vulcanized patches on it, ready to split a seam somewhere else. The neonlighted sign of a thumb he held up was faded, too, as though the cosmic-ray battery was petering out.

He was shining the neon-thumb up hopefully toward the through-traffic zooming overhead. Spacemobiles zipped by, and some trucks that didn't need a gas stop. He blinked the thumb as a liner roared by, followed by a shiny space yacht with gold trimmings. No chance of a lift with them—only space trucks and mobiles would stop.

I shook my head. Tough racket, hitch-hiking. He was just a kid too. I passed him pretty close and made out the face behind his visor, pinched and thin. Half-starved and his heat coil probably on low-power to save current. Didn't have a thing in the world, maybe, except the outfit on his back—or a friend in the universe, the way he looked.

So what? No concern of mine. I pulled the handle for the airlocks and stepped into the airdrome, where I could lower my visor and breathe their air. The sign read:

The Space Kitchen—Home Cooking— Earth and Mars Menus. Welcome, Spacemen! (Venusian Swamp-men Not Allowed.)

No wonder. Any place a Venusian swamp-man visits smells like his native

swamp for at least a month afterwards.

I barged into the hash-house, where some other truck drivers and a dozen spacemobile tourists were on the feedbag.

"Hi, Monty!"

"Gerty!" I said, looking around where she was ringing up the cash register. "Good old Gerty! Prettier every time I see you."

Which is about the biggest lie from here to Andromeda, because Gerty is plump and moon-faced with a big nose and bigger ears. Plain as the side of a spaceship hull.

"G'wan, Monty Walsh! You're no television idol yourself, with your nose flat like a meteor hit it. What'll you have? Got some nice Martian garluksausages, guaranteed to give you indigestion."

"Swell! I'll have ham and eggs, Earth style."

Gerty left for my order, and I ambled up behind three men digging into their food like all truck drivers do—fast and furious.

"Pete Rand!" I greeted, clapping one on the back so hard he choked. "Whose truck you taking to destruction these days? Still on the Jupiter run for Solar Packing?"

"Yeah, Monty. Sit down. Meet Joe Peters, asteroid run. And Al Reuter, heading for Pluto—if he ever gets there. We was just discussing politics. Who you voting for next month?"

"Terracrats," I said. "Straight ticket."

"Atta boy," Rand said. "The blanketyblank Solar Party never gives the unions a break. The Terracrats promise to limit the immigration from Jupiter, so them strong guys don't keep beating Earthmen out of jobs."

Rand said it loud and jerked his head. Then I saw the Jovian sitting a ways down the counter. He shot us a dirty look. We kept it up till he finally waddled over, looking us up and down.

"Those are insults to my race!" he fog-horned.

"Want to make something of it?" I growled, standing up to him. Those Jovians burn me up. Nobody likes them. They're chiselers and bullies all over the system.

"We of Jove do not pick fights with Earthmen," cracked the Jupiter guy, "unless there're a dozen of you, to make it fair!"

I would have sailed into him then and there except that Gerty slapped down my ham and eggs and grabbed my arm.

"Boys, please! No rough-housing. Keep the interplanetary peace."

"Okay, Gerty," I said, as the Jovian left.

"You're the toughest mug in the space lanes," Pete Rand said, shaking his head at the thought of tackling a Jove guy, which I did once and came out a draw, anyway. "Well, so long, Monty. Gotta make time. See you around in space sometime."

The other two left with Pete. I still had fifteen minutes left, so I played the pin-ball machine in the corner. It was the new-fangled kind where balls with little rockets shoot all ways among holes named after the planets and satellites.

I was playing that when the door opened and the kid shuffled in—the hitch-hiker. I saw him carefully valve off his oxygen-bottle, turn off his heat coil, and breathe the warmed air of the beanery, like pinching pennies, when every penny counts. He stood just inside the door, watching the patrons eat. Must be a traffic lull outside, I figgered.

"Here, you, get out, you little chiseler!" came the voice of the owner of the place, a fat guy I never did like. "Always creeping in here to use my air I pay to have hauled from Mars. Get out! Gerty, shove him out!"

Gerty bit her lip kind of helplessly. It meant her job. What could she do? She started to shag him out. The kid made no appeal, hungry and cold as he was, just turned to go. The other patrons grinned like it was an act for their benefit and went back to stuffing themselves.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Come on, kid. Sit down and order what you want, kid."

He looked at me, and darned if he didn't freeze. "Thank you, sir. But I'm not hungry."

I thought fast. I knew his kind, pride and all that.

"Just won on the pin machine," I said. "The meal's on the house. Sit down, kid."

It worked. I didn't talk, just watched as the kid wolfed a meal down so fast I didn't lose any time on my schedule.

When I paid Gerty, she said, "Rand's wrong. You're the softest guy in the space lanes, underneath that ugly pan of yours."

And she only charged me half the meal's price. I didn't ask if she was paying the rest herself. I knew it. Gerty's gold.

EADING for Mars?" I asked the kid casually outside. He started to freeze again, so I added quickly, "You know, I get lonesome as hell driving. Need company. Hop in."

I shoved Dongee, who was still sleeping like a log, and made room for our passenger. I shifted into first and eased up off PeeWee Meteoroid. I'm always careful slanting into the traffic lane, but a spacemobile very nearly clipped me going by. Some people are maniacs in the space highways.

"Where's the fire, you—" The rest was a string of the best cursing I knew, and brother, I'm no slouch. But I cut it off, remembering the kid. I turned to him, after shifting into third.

"I'm Monty Walsh. This eight-foot length of suspended animation is Dongee.

Say, by the way, what's your name?" "Jim," he said. And that's all, no last name. He didn't say a word more.

I tried to draw him out a little. "We'll pull up at Mars in eight hours. Heading for the cactus harvest along the canals, Jim?"

"No. Just sort of-traveling."

But the way he set his lips, he wasn't any ordinary space tramp, bumming his way around the system. Besides, he was too young, no more than eighteen. His clothes were just beginning to wear, like he'd left a regular life on Earth for the first time. He must have picked up the patched space togs and battered neon thumb from a cheap store.

I saw the pin on his lapel, too—Culvard College. Skipping school, maybe, to try his luck around the planets. But why? What was on his mind? He was sure the grimmest, tightest-mouthed youngster I ever ran across.

Well, that was his own business. If he didn't want to talk, he didn't have to.

Dongee woke up finally, and blinked like he thought Jim was something he'd dreamed up.

"Uh!" he grunted, by way of greeting, when I explained.

Fine thing, I said to myself, as the monotony of space driving settled down. Cooped up with a Martian grunter and a kid who wouldn't talk. I might as well be alone.

The Bolideometer clacked after a while. A meteor ahead. I cut speed and waited for it to roll by. It was a pretty big one, maybe fifty feet across. It was spinning slowly and the sunlight from in back of us sparkled off the jagged edges. Pretty sight, like a diamond whisking by.

"Ain't nature grand?" I said.

And then I growled. Set up on one flat surface was a big billboard, glowing with radium-paint, advertising—Pinky's Pills for Spacesuit Rash. You couldn't go anywhere nowadays without some blasted sign like that staring you in the face every time a meteor passed.

Dongee was ready with his camera, and seemed tickled over the shot he got. He gave two grunts in a row. But there was another surprise. Jim was excited!

He grabbed my arm as I resumed speed. "That's a Clarkson Bolideometer, made by Solar Incorporation, isn't it?" he demanded.

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Is it—is it the 2097 model?"

"Sure. Installed when this truck was built. This is a '97 Orion. So the Bolideometer is '97. Why?"

The kid almost yelped. "They're untrustworthy! You can't go by them. Sooner or later it'll give you the wrong reading and you'll pile up!"

"Nuts," I said. "Solar Incorporation has the best reputation going. Any instrument made by them is Grade-A."

"Yes, but not that particular Clarkson model Bolideometer!" The kid was almost wild, staring at the gadget like it was a snake. "You can't trust it, I tell you—"

"Talk straight," I told him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing." He was quiet all of a sudden again. "I guess I just got rattled. Sorry, forget it."

I shrugged, figuring he'd lapse into his brooding. But he seemed willing to talk now, like he'd been jolted to life.

"They used to think space was empty, before space travel," he said. "They didn't know that between Earth and Mars any ship on a bee-line course would intercept an average of thirty drifting bodies. They didn't even know of the larger meteoroids, hundreds of them, like Pee-Wee Meteoroid, most of which are stopover stations today."

"You know your stuff, Jim," I said cautiously. "Taking it up in school?"

"Yes. Spacenautics course. There's nothing more exciting than driving a ship

through space — listening to rockets!"

His eyes were shining. I had to tell the truth, as an oldster to a youngster. "Boring, Jim. Monotonous as hell."

"I didn't mean ordinary truck driving—" He flushed then, and went on quick. "Piloting on the big liners and freighters, I meant. Where you wear a uniform and advance to captain's rating. That's exciting!"

"Yeah," I admitted, sighing. I once was on the way up there, schooling and all, when I threw it all up to join the radium rush on the asteroids, coming back broke. And—but never mind.

I said to the kid, "Keep it up, Jim. Never let anything stop you from that. You aiming for first mate rating, in school?"

"I—I was." All of a sudden the fire died down in his eager eyes, and he was the hitch-hiker again, mum as a clam. I didn't try to force any more out of him for the time being.

NSTEAD, I turned on "Information, Please," on the radio. Being close to Mars, it came through strong on the Martian Network. I understand that program's been on the air about one hundred and seventy-five years, since before space travel. I believe it. It's about that stale.

For instance, Fadiman Five, the master of ceremonies, says, "And here's a question from Zork Mool, of Saturn. Name three out of four bodies in the Solar System that begin with the letter P. Three out of four, my little master-minds. Ah, Kern has his hand up already!"

But Jim beat Kern, Planet News columnist, by a nose— "Phoebe, moon of Saturn, Pons-Winnecke Comet, and Pluto."

"What's the fourth?" came from the radio. "Just for fun. It's so obvious, gentlemen. The prison satellite and the Ellis Island of a planet?"

"Phobos!" Jim almost whispered it to

himself, reluctantly, staring straight ahead. That was on his mind, too, for some reason. I was beginning to wonder what it all added up to, especially when the Bolideometer clacked again. The kid sat bolt upright, gripping the seat arms like he was ready to jump.

"Take it easy, Jim," I said when we passed the meteor safely. "You sure don't trust that Clarkson meter. Why?"

He was mum. He kept staring out ahead, watching for bolides, making me nervous.

But I forgot about it and cursed when a big space-buoy ahead lighted up in my head-lights. Slow—Detour! There was a meteor swarm crossing the space-lane, and I had to take a cut-off to the left, following the detour signs on buoys.

"Those meteor swarms are nasty things, Jim," I said. "Sometimes it takes weeks before the whole swarm is past. Blast these detours! Lose a lot of time."

If that wasn't enough to rile me, a spacemobile comes blazing along the other way, shining his headlights straight into my eyes.

"Blast you, turn down your brights!"
We were still on the detour. Around a
turn, we saw a jack-knifed trailer truck
stalled, waiting for a tow car. And way
over to the left, where the meteor-swarm
was streaking along, a running series of
radium signs said:

There's Hardly
A Spaceman
Now Alive
Who Took
A Detour

At Seventy-five Birma Shave

You could have heard my cussing clear out to Saturn. "Imagine those billboard crews chasing down every blinking swarm and meteor and drifting body to hang up them silly slogans." The kid had to laugh, not knowing it was my pet peeve, seeing them over and over, trip after trip.

"It's estimated," he said, "that an average of a million eyes a day see them. The radium-paint lasts for centuries. It's cheap advertising."

Click! Dongee was awake, taking a shot of the meteors dancing by like a swarm of big fireflies in the distance. I looked at the chronometer.

"Okay, Dongee. Take over."

We shifted seats. My eyes were heavy, and I saw the kid's were, too.

"I'm grabbing a nap, Jim. How about you?"

He shook his head, still staring ahead all the time. "I'm not tired," he lied. "I'll sit up and watch—"

He didn't finish the sentence, but I knew he meant for bolides. He was getting me jittery. I couldn't sleep for an hour. And when Dongee woke me for the shift, three hours later, the kid was still watching ahead like a hawk.

TURNED my attention to my driving, where it was needed anyway for the mountains. Yes, mountains. Funny how before space travel, Earth people thought space was one smooth, continuous

### THE SCIENCE FICTIONEERS APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

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stretch. They didn't know of the etherwarps that pile up in dangerous eddies like mountains. And you have to circle and crawl through them or get spun on your ear way off course.

All the turns and twists were marked with danger-buoys. I shifted into low-low and snaked through the ether mountains. There's nothing to see, of course, like on Earth mountains. These are invisible humps in space. But brother, you know you're climbing up a space-warp when your engine begins to growl like a wounded bear. Then, on the down slopes, you keep the reverse blasts braking for all they're worth, or you fly straight off the next curve.

And yet, with all that danger, a crazy spacemobile came flying up and passed me like a comet. Ten seconds later I hear a space siren screaming, and pull over to let the speed cop pass. They patrol the mountains strictly. Ten minutes later we came across Mr. Speeder, parked off the lane, getting a ticket. You don't get away with speeding much these days.

I pulled out of the mountains in two hours.

"Home stretch!" I sang out. "Mars in two hours!"

"Uh!" Dongee grunted, as his home planet enlarged to a disk. I suppose that's the nearest a Martian can come to being excited.

But I was watching the kid. He looked like he hated to arrive and couldn't wait to arrive—both at the same time. What in the universe was eating his heart out?

While I was watching him, he jumped. The Bolideometer was clacking. His nerves seemed to let go.

"Turn!" he yelled. "Turn quick!"

"Calm down," I said. "The reading gave me four minutes."

"But you can't trust the reading—" And he actually tried to pull over on the wheel.

I jerked his arm away pretty roughly.

"Now look, Jim. I'm driving. I'm going by the Bolideometer. It says four minutes. I'm turning after two minutes, so as not to waste a lot of gas in a big, clumsy turn. Now sit down and bank your rockets!"

The kid obeyed, but bit his nails till I made the turn. Two minutes later, on schedule, the meteor sailed by.

"See?" I said. "This Bolideometer is as accurate as they make 'em."

"Yes, this time," the kid muttered. "But the next time, or the next, it'll slip. And you'll pile up."

"Dongee," I pleaded, "did you ever hear such rot? Tell me why, Jim? What have you got against the Clarkson Bolideometer, model '97?"

The kid looked like he was going to freeze up again, but suddenly he talked, his eyes going wild.

"Remember the crack-up of the Earth-Saturn liner, Star-Clipper, three months ago?"

"Yeah," I said. "Terrible. Meteor drilled right through. Half the passengers and most of the crew killed. Worst wreck in ten years. What about it?"

The kid swallowed. "It was equipped with a Clarkson Bolideometer, model '97."

"So what? The investigation proved that the chief pilot on duty at the time was negligent."

- "Proved?" the kid blazed. "The meteor wrecked every instrument aboard. There was no proof that its reading was right. And the reading was wrong. The chief pilot, James Ellory, said so!"

I waved a hand. "Of course he said so. So would I, to get out of a jail sentence for falling asleep at the switch. He was sent to Phobos prison for life, wasn't he, with his piloting license taken away?"

The kid nodded.

"But he's innocent. I was studying Bolideometers at the time, in school. I took a Clarkson model '97 apart. It has

one little flaw in it. The beryllium-alloy spring for the dial is subject to cosmicray hardening. After five years no Clarkson '97 is trustworthy."

Was the kid whacky, or did he have something?

"You mean," I said kind of nastily, "that Solar Incorporation doesn't know about this flaw? The leading space instrument makers for fifty years, and they put a dud Bolideometer on the market so as to put themselves out of business, eh?"

The kid didn't get sore.

"This is 2102," he said. "The Clarkson '97 was put on the market five years ago!"

And he looked at me.

"Say," I said, when it suddenly soaked in. "You mean the Clarkson's are just beginning to slip, after these five years? You mean—say, what do you mean anyway?"

He came right out with it.

"I mean that starting soon, ships are going to crack up all over. Those with Clarkson '97's. The *Star-Clipper* was only the first. Any ship with a Clarkson '97 is a flying coffin!"

"Uh!" Dongee grunted, turning over and going to sleep.

I couldn't swallow it, either. The kid was space batty, or something. I'd get him to Mars and see that he was put in good hands.

"Okay, Jim," I soothed. "Now take it easy. When we get to Mars, we'll check on all that."

"If we get to Mars," he said, and darned if chills didn't climb down my back.

"No one believes me," he finished. "No one."

I turned back to my driving, thinking the whole thing over. The more I went over what the kid said, the crazier it sounded. What was he going to Mars for? To try to reopen the *Star-Clipper* case, and get a hearing? LOOKED at the chronometer, One hour to go. I'd soon find out, when we arrived at Mars. If we arrived at Mars! The kid's words kept bothering me. I looked at him. He sat stiff as a board, hawking space ahead like he had all the way, not trusting that Bolideometer one little bit.

Suddenly it clacked, and I jumped a mile. Then I quieted myself. Jim was a foolish kid, soft in the head, and I'd go by that instrument. After all, the thing had been perfected by the System's best scientific mechanics.

"Three minutes, it reads," I said for Jim's benefit. "I'm turning in two minutes."

But suddenly, with a gasp, he grabbed the wheel and yanked it over before I could get a grip to stop him. The side pressure from the sharp swing banged Dongee against the wall, and me against him.

"Uh!" Dongee grunted in surprise, waking up.

I was more than surprised. I was mad. "You crazy little fool!" I growled. "For two cents I'd toss you right out in space on your ear—ulp!"

Yeah, you'd make a sound like "ulp" too if you suddenly saw a one-hundred foot meteor ballooning up in your face. Jim was still yanking the wheel over. And I helped him. I think we skidded around that patch of space in a forty-five degree angle. The meteor got as big as a mountain and shot by, with maybe ten feet to spare. Not a blessed foot more. When you get closer than a mile to a meteor, you're close!

I straightened the truck out, and then just sat there, gasping like a fish. Anybody says I'm a coward, I'll pummel him to Saturn and back. But believe me, that was one time in my life I was scared green.

Then I looked at the Bolideometer, and let out a yell that made the walls ring.

"Look at the damned, rotten thing!" I roared. "It says one minute to go! One minute to go—and the meteor's past!"

I turned to the kid.

"Thanks, Jim," I said. "If you hadn't kept your eyes open, we'd be mince-meat right now. And they'd put us down in the records as driving while drunk or something."

The kid was limp, too, and didn't say anything.

"Uh!" Dongee said. "Nice shot!"

Yeah, it must have been! The closest shot of a meteor ever taken, if you ask me. Can you imagine that nerveless Martian snapping a shot of the meteor that for all he knew at the moment was going to smear him along five million miles of space?

"Jim," I said, "the Bolideometer flopped."

"Yes, it did," he agreed.

"Jim," I said, "the Clarkson '97 isn't worth a plugged Venusian nickel!"

"No."

"Jim," I said, "when we get to Mars, I'm going to raise sixteen kinds of hell—"

ARS loomed up now like a big red moon. We didn't have to worry about meteors any more, thank heaven. We were close enough to be within the zone where the meteorsweeper crews clear out all hazards around a planet.

Space ferries appeared here and there, on their short round trip with sight-seeing passengers. Way off to one side a swanky space yacht was anchored outside the million-mile limit. Probably some wild party going on aboard, with plenty of Martian cactus wine spilling over the sides. Traffic got thick, and I cruised in on low blasts.

We slanted down on Phobos, where all foreign traffic is checked in and out. We dropped into the aerated dome through the automatic photo-electric locks. I plunked my trailer truck down in the Customs pit. It felt good to step out and stretch our legs, breathing good clean air.

"How long to check us in?" I asked the Martian Customs agent.

"About three hours."

Any other time I would have raised hell, like I always do over them pokey Martians.

"Take your time," I said, pulling Jim and Dongee along by the arms. "We have business to do. Solar Incorporation has a big office here on Phobos. We're going to raise a little hell. You too, Dongee. You're a witness."

I was even too burned up to suggest eating. We walked right to the business section. Solar Incorporation had a big, humming office in an Ioan glowstone building. I didn't bother asking to see someone. I just pushed clerks out of the way and stormed to the manager's office.

John Thomas, Manager, was lettered on the door.

Thomas wiped off a silly grin and leaned away from his pretty secretary as we barged in.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he barked, standing up indignantly. "Who are you?"

"I'll tell you who I am," I said. "I'm Monty Walsh, driving an Orion trailer truck with one of your rotten Clarkson '97 Bolideometers in it. And I'm here to tell you to withdraw every Clarkson '97 in use, or I'll raise a stink from here to Sirius and back."

"I don't understand," Thomas said.
"You'll understand." I told the story.
When I finished, I said, "Your '97
Clarkson isn't worth a plugged Venusian
nickel, see?"

"Sit down," Thomas invited. He sat down himself. "You're making a very serious charge, Mr. Walsh."

"Right," I said. "The Star-Clipper was equipped with a Clarkson '97 too.

It wasn't the chief pilot, James Ellory, who failed in duty. It was your rotten Bolideometer!"

"That's ridiculous!" Thomas snapped.
"Chief Pilot James Ellory is serving a life sentence now for negligence of duty."

"Says you. What about our experience?"

Thomas smiled a little.

"You have no proof, have you?"

"Proof? I have two witnesses, haven't I?"

"Meaningless," Thomas said. "Don't you realize your claims, upheld by court, would cost us heavily? We would have to make restitution on all the Star-Clipper's death-list, and its cost. Naturally we'll fight your fantastic accusation through every court in the System. We stick by our instruments. They're infallible. If this is some sort of racket, gentlemen—"

"Racket?" It was Jim who spoke up now, his eyes flaming. "Thousands of lives are in danger at this moment, in hundreds of ships equipped with the Clarkson '97. One by one they'll have the experience we did—with more disastrous results! You've got to believe me!"

"I don't," Thomas said. "You have no proof. It's silly. You're wasting my time."

Jim spoke tonelessly.

"That's the trouble—no proof. That's why James Ellory went to prison, a broken man. And there never will be proof. Just as with the *Star-Clipper*, all the instruments will be ground to shreds."

"Yeah, guess we're licked," I muttered. "Uh," Dongee grunted.

"Good day, gentlemen," Thomas hinted impatiently.

"Uh," Dongee grunted.

I turned on him before leaving. "For Saturn's sake, stop it, Dongee! Stop grunting all over the place."

Dongee was fumbling with his camera and suddenly handed me a print. That dumb Martian had one of the latest kind that develops the picture right in the camera. I took the print.

"What's this, Dongee? Yes, it's pretty, so what! Don't bother me-ulp!"

That's the kind of sound you make when something wallops you like a ton of neutronium. I stared at the print for about two minutes. Then I walked over to Thomas's desk and handed it to him.

He stared at it five minutes.

"The '97 Clarkson isn't worth a-a plugged Venusian nickel," he said.

Suddenly he was yelling into his desk annunciator.

"Get me Earth! Get me Venus! Get me every office we have. Call the Space police and have them put a warning through the whole System. Any ship with a '97 Clarkson Bolideometer is to pull to the nearest port at low-blast. Do you hear me? Yank every Clarkson '97 and smash them to bits."

The picture? I don't know how Dongee did it. Plain dumb Martian luck. When he snapped the meteor that nearly clipped us, he got half the instrument panel in the picture. The Bolideometer reading was one minute. And the meteor was already there, caught on film.

HE next day, Thomas promised that Solar Incorporated would take full blame for the Star-Clipper catastrophe.

"How about the chief pilot of the Star-Clipper?" the kid asked.

"Tames Ellory will be exonerated, of course," Thomas said. "And reinstated in full pilot rating. Now, if you will, come with me to Phobos Penitentiary to visit him-"

A gray-haired man was brought to the warden's office. I took one look.

"Kid!" I asked. "What's your last name?"

"Ellory," the kid said. "James, Junior." "Gosh, kid," I said, "I should have known."

Then I pulled Dongee and Thomas out. "Thomas," I said, "don't waste your time offering Jim a position in your firm. He's going to be a space pilot, like his father."

I grabbed Dongee's arm.

"Come on, Dongee. Back to space trucking for us. It's monotonous as hell, like I always told you, but what the hellmaybe we can pick up another hitchhiker."

# FOR NEW THRILLS IN MYSTERY FICTION

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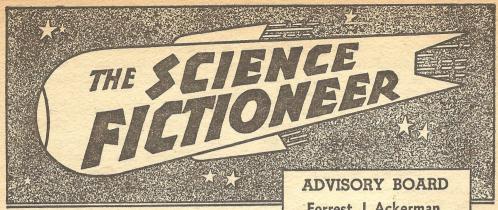
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Official Organ of The Science Fictioneers

ECENTLY we read an article in some fanzine declaiming that, for all the general desires of fankind for peace and justice to the peoples of the world (and to whatever beings may dwell upon other planets, so long as they maintain a like attitude toward homo sapiens), science fiction remained about as bloody, war-lusting, and battle-scarred a form of pulp writing as any in existence. The author of the article then went on to compare various other forms of pulp fiction with stf: the Western, detective, war, air, general adventure and so on, showing that the most sanguine of these could not begin to compare to the wholesale massacres of peoples, beings, races, planets, universes, etc., which is almost the norm in stf. Look, he said, at such classics of modern pulp science fiction as the "Skylark" and "Grey Lensman" series.

You'll have to admit he has something there: in stf the slaughter is terrific.

But science fiction is still based upon some aspect of reality, no matter how utterly fantastic and alien any particular example or examples of it may seem. You will find types of science-fiction stories varying almost as widely as types of people vary. The analogy isn't complete; there are restrictions as to what can be Forrest J Ackerman

Frederic Arnold Kummer. Jr.

Wilfred Owen Morley

Robert A. Madle Milton A. Rothman

Bob Tucker

Harry Warner, Jr.

Olon F. Wiggins

Donald A. Wollheim

printed and distributed through the mails and newsstands, while no such restrictions apply to what types of human or seemingly inhuman beings can develop on this planet.

But speaking broadly, as sciencefictionists like often to speak, we can say that there is a good comparison. And save for those stf tales which are essentially cynical, pessimistic and cold-blooded about the future, seeing therein nothing more than the past or present in an even less hopeful form, stf stories depict tomorrows wherein some of us might like to live. Most of the wars are wars of selfpreservation or are wars of revolt against the degradations of future despots who have in one way or another managed to obtain an unpleasant degree of power. Some of the stories have been brutal and realistic, some following the history of

the present in not too veiled form. Yet fankind as a whole, we think, sees peace and justice for the world of tomorrow and some are ready to do what they can, as individuals, to further that belief. There have been individuals in the fan world who foresaw the present conflict against the anti-scientific, anti-progressive, anti-human forces now infesting large areas of the world. But regardless of whether the realization of events came late or early, we feel that mankind has found no difficulty in choosing sides or in supporting the war effort in their own ways. In regard to this, our conceptions were strengthened by the following letter we received, dated December 10th, from John B. Michel of New York, Director of Branch No. 3 of the Science Fictioneers.

### A DECLARATION

HE Futurian Society of New York declares its unswerving sympathy and lovalty to the great struggle being carried on by four-fifths of the population of Earth, headed by the alliance of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China against the barbarian thrust of the Nazi-Fascist-Japanese Axis. It makes this declaration in the firm conviction that the further progress of science and civilization, upon which the visions and dreams of science fiction are mainly based, is dependent entirely upon an Allied victory. The shape of the future is being decided on the field of battle of the present. Science-fiction readers, writers, and enthusiasts have no other possible choice but to do all in their power to aid and speed the triumph of civilization over Fascism. To this end, the Futurian Society appeals to all other science-fiction clubs, publications, and readers to issue similar declarations and to do all in their power to help the United States to absolute victory.

(signed) John B. Michel, Director.

Needless to say, NHQ is in full accord with these views, and we trust that our other branches will issue similar statements.

### 22 CHARTERED BRANCHES

RANCH number 21 of the Science Fictioneers is the Futurian Society of Melbourne. The Director is Warwick Hockley, 183 Domain Road, South Yarra, SE 1, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Members are Keith Taylor, Marshall L. McLennan, and Peter MacBridge. The Australian fans have been extremely active, and send batches of mimeographed sheets relating to their activities at regular intervals. So far, luck has been with them; only one consignment didn't get through.

Branch Number 22 is the Western Pennsylvania Science Fictioneers. The Director is Leonard J. Moffott, 419 Summit Avenue, Ellwood City, Pa., and members include Lavelle Summer and Nick Kisco. The Western Pennsylvanians had intended to issue an official organ, but Director Moffott states that the project has had to be shelved temporarily due to circumstances beyond control. All Western Pennsylvania fans are invited to contact Mr. Moffott in regard to joining the group.

And before we pass on to the next order of business, we wish to apologize for the oversight which made us leave out mention of the Futurian Society of Melbourne in the last issue of the *Science* Fictioneer.

### BRANCH ACTIVITIES

E FEEL highly ashamed of ourselves for not reporting sooner," writes Paul Carter, Secretary of the Alpha Centaurians, Branch Number 19, "but that's water under the bridge. Before making any report,

I should like to correct a statement in the February Super Science.

"We are listed there as the Blackfoot Science Fictioneers. As is evident by our heading, and by the writeup in SSS for May, 1941, the correct title is the Alpha That may seem a trivial Centaurians. point, but we assure you it is not. Our whole organization is bound up around its name. The director and I are drawing up plans for the Centaurian solar system. so to speak, and, as an author, you should appreciate the joy of creating a made-toorder universe. With three suns as a start, possibilities are quite intriguing. Not only that but the director informs me that he has a theory about one of the planets therein coming from our own Solarian system. . . .

"The organization possesses a telescope of 50 to 100 power, depending on the eyepiece used. Various observations have been made and discussed.

"Actual meetings have been far too few, however. When it has been possible to hold a quorum of three, we have done so and discussed various items, chiefly the *Science Fictioneer*, your 'magazine within a magazine'.

"One of the most amusing things was the creation of typewritten fan mags, with limited editions of one copy each. When a member claimed to have seen a black streak on the moon which wasn't there before, we let our imaginations run riot, and in a column in the fan magazine, under the directorship of a mythical 'Oscar X', explained our theories. These ran all the way from a mere meteoric mark to a fourth dimensional tesseract, with all kinds of doom and destruction between."

On the whole, your Coordinator here at NHQ will try to keep his fine Italian hand out of the proceedings and let you lads and gals do the talking, but we can't resist that impulse at the moment. You see, you Alpha Centaurians are engaged

in just the type of thing which we always dreamed of doing years ago, before we managed to meet any other stf readers.

And the typewritten fanzines, while not a brand new idea, are still dandy. The only fault we have to find is that, with just one copy, you fellows are holding out on what might be a real interest and enjoyment to your fellow science fictioneers in other branches. So, might we suggest that you make a carbon to send to NHQ—and we'll publish whatever we feel is just too good to keep out in the confines of Alpha Centauri.

Oh, yes—and we do apologize for the mistake in listing your branch.

S THIS first letter is written," says Joe Fortier of the Golden Gate Futuria Society, Branch Number 16, "the club has been long in progress since the usual summer vacation.

"Our name has been changed from the Golden Gate Futurians to that of the Golden Gate Futuria Society. This is for three main reasons: (1) to distinguish from other Futurian societies, (2) better to explain our love for the future and all it holds, and (3) to add distinction by the finer title, the smoother roll. Moreover, we can be distinguished in our nickname. Before it was just more Futurians, but now, since Futurias sounds so odd, we are called the Golden Gaters.

"Just a few days ago our meeting place was changed from Berkeley to the old spot, 1836 39th Avenue, in Oakland. It's every other Sunday afternoon at 1 o'clock, counting from December 28. This is to give ample time for defense work, and to avoid meetings in and during blackouts.

"For the time the main steady factors are a large treasury, a fine library, some neat stationery, and refreshments every few meetings. For the information of those who cannot stand lengthy business meetings, only the first of each month is

devoted to business. And about every three months we have a bang-up time with various honor guests, including famous fans, outstanding authors, and special visitors. Most regular members include Jack Riggs, Everett Wyer, Bob Dougherty, Jim Bush, Eddie Corey, and Jimmy Cripps.

"Our official publication is the up-andcoming Tellus, while some new ones are appearing from this vicinity: Twilight and Selenite. Then, of course, there is the California Mercury, Dawn, and Fan Editor and Publisher.

"Am I right in believing that once a club has a charter in your organization, any new members automatically become members of your organization?"

(Coordinator's Note: No, Joe. All members of branches must be members of the parent body before they can become full members of aforementioned branch. However, this should not be any burden upon prospective Golden Gaters, or Alpha

Centaurians, etc. All that is necessary is to write to NHQ stating one's desire to join the Science Fictioneers. We want your name, address, occupation, and date of birth. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope to cover cost of mailing your membership card.)

"I believe that a service department would be of immense help to new fans. And I also believe that Louis C. Smith, who runs just such a column in Tellus. could be of invaluable assistance. All the members approve of the fanmag digest and the already instigated Spotlite on Stf is swell. Keep it going. Stfandom briefs might be nice, but why not incorporate this idea with the short-short story contest? It might be wise to print three articles and three stories, all illustrated by members, with a prize the next issue for best story, article, and illustration as decided by the readers. And the whole club is a hundred percent behind this stf quiz. Run an annual quiz, setting the

# "I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did - Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and—now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 33, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1940, Frank B. Robinson.

advisory board as sole judges, and award the J. C., B. A., M. A., Ph. D., etc., in terms of stfology! Have the quiz include something on art, too."

Sorry to have to cut your letter, Joe, but we are a bit pressed for space. The response to our last issue of the *Science Fictioneer*, while not tremendous, has been large enough so that we may have to enlarge the department a bit, and we know you won't mind that!

In regard to a flat policy of publishing in each issue three short stories, articles, and illustrations by Science Fictioneer members, we don't think that is exactly wise. You see, while the aim of this is to encourage those fans who have writing ability and ambitions, Super Science Stories still has standards to maintain. If, for a given issue, none of the submissions were exactly good, it would not be of much help to the writers, or to the magazine to publish them, would it? It would be giving the fan author a false sense of success and it would leave SSS readers, some of whom may not be as ardent fans as others, with a rather poor impression of the science fictioneers' talents.

We feel that all stories, articles, or artwork submitted for the Science Fictioneer special department must be up to definite standard as regards to writing, but—and this is where the members will be getting a break—their submissions will not be set in competition against those of professional authors. The contest could be open to amateurs only, to members of the Science Fictioneers, and would run indefinitely; whenever a new issue of SSS were about to be made up, the editor would go over all submissions from entrants, and select any mss. which were up to professional standards of writing, etc., for inclusion. If there were more than could be put in that issue, then the others might be accepted for the department, but used later.

## SPOTLIGHT ON FANKIND

CIENCE FICTIONEER MARY GREY, known to a multitude of fans as "Pogo", and the "High Priestess of Foo Foo" has-well, let's put it the way her telegram to the LASFS read: The High Priestess now has a High Priest. Lucky man is Russ Wood, recent addition to the roster of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, Branch Number 1, and long-time reader of stf. NHO gives three hearty cheers for the couple, and wishes them every happiness. . . . Helen (Mickey) Finn, also of the LASFS, will issue Stench, to deal in personalities, and calculated to outstink the Futurians' "X", the defunct Damn Thing. . . . Still more on LASFS activities: Walt Daugherty and Forrest J. Ackerman plan to collaborate, early in '42, on a plan to provide the dozen leading stf clubs of the country with an evening's fantasy entertainment in the way of recorded fonograf discs. A national circuit has been mapt out and if the majority of the important clubs wish to cooperate, the records will travel over the route on a rental basis for a very nominal sum. . . . Daugherty and Russ Hodgkins have been contemplating preparing a semi-annual Directory of Fankind-but they may have to issue monthly supplements if they intend to carry it out at all, to keep up with probable changes of address. . . . For posterity let it be recorded that Science Fictioneers Chapter Number 1 had an attendance of eleven on the first meeting after the First Declaration and with a trial blackout skeded and transportation to be discon-Those there were: Paul Freehafer, Bruce Yerke, Ray Bradbury, Henry Hasse, Morojo, Forry Ackerman. George Hahn, the Sisters Fin, Charles D. Hornig, and Ed Chamberlain. They decided not to consider the meeting an official one, due to the circumstances and inasmuch as the secretary and other important members were absent. Morojo and Forry busied themselves with a bundle for Britain (salvaged paper supplies for England's major fanzine, Futurian War Digest) while the rest conversed or played chess amidst the flinging of puns. . . .

What the War will mean to the Science Fiction Convention skeded for this year is difficult to determine at this early stage. An official armouncement will be released through the Publicity Personnel directly a decision as to the policy has been reached. Meanwhile, come blackouts and blitzes, while the clubroom stands it is expected that fans may be found at Number 4, 1055 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, each Thursday eve. Visitors welcome. Invaders will be repelled with raybuns and rejected manuscripts. . . .

Way back East, the Futurian Society celebrated Christmas at the Futurian Fortress, 136 East 28th Street, where reside the director and secretary of that organization, around a tree which the group is sure was crossed with a cat by the way it shed. Despite obeisances to Cthulthu and the Elder Ones, no snow would fall at any time during the holidays over New York, whereat all did gloom. The Fortress is lavishly decorated with covers from a number of stf and fantasy mags not least of which are the Blakeslee from the February Super Science, for which Futurians gratefully thank editor Norton and the artist himself, and a couple of Mayorga covers from Super and Astonishing donated by former editor Fred Pohl. Among the chorals sung at the festive gathering were Don Wollheim's famous "Aloft in Cosmic Magnitude" and "Ye Spays Flyghte", and Dick Wilson's "We Are the Science Fictioneers". Mayhap there will be room for the lyrics in a future SF column.

### PROSPECTUS

Story contest, Service Department, Fan Mag Digest, can get into operation right away. Send in your questions and answers for the Quiz; your submissions for the short-short story contest (2500 words should be the limit), any questions you'd like answered in the Service Department, and any fan magazines you publish for possible excerpts. Send us letters telling who's doing what and what your branch as a whole is doing. We'll publish as many and as much of them as possible.

## SCIENCE FICTIONEER BRANCHES

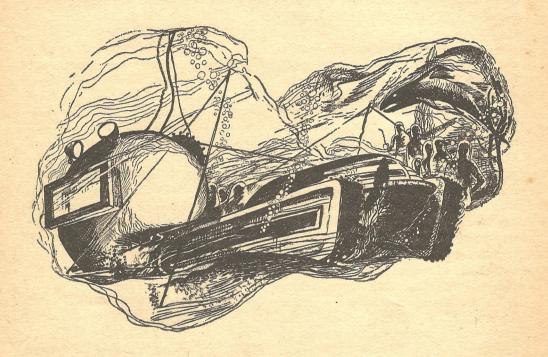
O START a branch of the Science Fictioneers you need but three members in all. There is no fee involved. All that is required is that the three desiring a charter must be members of the parent organization at the time this issue is on sale.

Merely list the names, addresses, and membership card numbers of your group when you apply for a charter. Please send NHQ a copy of your club constitution and carbons of all official minutes, as well as any publications issued in the name of your branch.



# ANDRYNE

by ARTHUR MACOM



"There's a finger beckoning from another world, a voice I must answer, nor ask the reason why. I'm—I'm lost, Roswell! I'm never coming—"

HAD always believed that Wilton Chase was a little crazy, and before we reached Haifa, off the Palestinian coast, I was sure of it.

For one thing, there was the war, which made expeditions such as ours an international problem. Who were we, anyway? We said we were Americans, scientists, but our little ship looked too much like a mine layer for the comfort of the British and the Turks, and probably—if they knew about it—for the Germans on Crete.

And then, it seemed ridiculous to come halfway across the world, lugging our unwieldy bathysphere equipment, for simple undersea explorations. There should have been plenty of sea in our part of the Atlantic and the Pacific, not to mention the Caribbean. Plenty for anyone except Wilton Chase.

"This is the place," he said, putting his finger on a spot on the map just north of the Isle of Rhodes. "I want to dive here."

"But, Wilton," I protested, "it's such a lot of unnecessary work. What did you do, shut your eyes and stab a pin?"

He shook his handsome, rather leonine head, raking back that great blond mane of his.

"Roswell," he said, "I don't think you're a scientist. You're a bookkeeper at heart. Oh, a bookkeeper of scientific things, perhaps, but there's no soul in you, no thirst for the unknown, no daring, no adventure—"

"You sound like a Rover boy," I scoffed.

And it was true. There was something in Wilton Chase which had not grown up. He was a man, all right—a brute of a man save for that infectious, good-natured smile of his—and one of our most versatile oceanographers. But always, whether in ichthyology or anthropology or any of a half-dozen lines, always he was a small boy reaching for the unattainable moon.

A little crazy, as I said. But I had got some inkling of his latest mania at Alexandria. Directly we touched port, Wilton was off to the famed Islamic university, with me, Dr. Emmet Roswell, tagging along and considering how foolish I must seem to be, pursuing this blond giant's whims.

An hour later Wilton Chase was still squatting, cross-legged, with an ancient scholar, one Abu Daoud, while I, knowing not one word of Arabic, amused myself by twiddling my thumbs. At last Wilton bade his wrinkled host an elaborate farewell, and we departed.

"Roswell," he said, "I'm positive now. My information seems authentic. We will find Andryne."

"And what in heaven's name is Andryne?" I asked.

He halted in the cloister. "You've never heard of Andryne, the great Chaldean outpost that was swallowed up— But why should I chafe you with legends of lost cities and their ghosts? You wouldn't

take my word for it, nor that of Herodotus nor Richard the Lion-Hearted, nor—"

"You're spanning quite a bit of history," I said, smiling.

Wilton tapped his fingers sharply upon my chest. "From history's dawn to now," he said. "And probably beyond. The history of ten thousand years to come, if we're lucky."

I should have laughed at him. Either he was slightly mad, or he thought me a fool. But somehow I did not.

E sailed immediately. Off Haifa we hove to while a British destroyer's commander went through our papers painstakingly, incredulously, and then waved us on. We had passed Rhodes, bristling with its fortifications, and were moving toward the Turkish coast. It was near dusk when Wilton burst from his chart room.

"Drop anchor here," he called, and rushed across the desk and peered intently down into the purple waters slapping at our hull.

Fortunately it was still calm, although a breeze was coming up. We dropped a sea anchor, and by then Wilton was returning to the bridge.

"I'm going down," he said. "At once, Roswell. You're to stay above to superintend my descent. This is purely reconnaissance, of course. Tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow," I said sarcastically, "we can go home. You'll know by then how idiotic all this business is."

He ran his fingers through his tawny mane. "Never mind tomorrow. You stand by the telephone. Who knows, Roswell, I might—" He glanced quickly at me.—"see a ghost."

He was laughing, but there was an exhilaration in his voice that disturbed me. For after all, none of us except Wilton knew the reason for this cruise. A lost city, yes—but where had he got his data, what had determined that this tiny spot of

Mediterranean was our goal? Wilton's vaulting imagination, for all I knew. There were, of course, his charts, and I meant to have a look at them. But not until later, when his strange, nervous excitement should have passed. He must have read something of my thoughts.

"Oh, cheer up, Roswell," he said, patting my arm. "My worst encounter probably will be an octopus."

A very cheering thought, that one. But the bathysphere was ready. Wilton climbed into it, waved gayly to me, and closed the lid. We tested the air lines and the lift, tried a word or two on the telephone, and then his voice came to me hollowly.

"Lower away, Professor! Look out below, Andryne!"

I nodded to the bathysphere crew. The huge steel ball dipped below the surface just as the sun vanished behind the horizon. For a moment the sky toward the east gleamed with dark red, as if the blood of those dying upon the ageless desert sands in this latest of wars were reflected there. And then, almost at once, the night had come. The timeless mystery of the Mediterranean's darkness swallowed up our ship. It was depressing, terribly depressing. We seemed so futile there, probing into the past, while all around us, east, south, west and north, the present was unfolding horribly. Our world, our modern world-and we had made such an unbearable mess of it. I could not blame Wilton for fleeing from reality.

I shook my head, disgusted with myself. I too was growing just a little crazy. And I had work to do.

"Wilton," I said into the phone, "you'd better cut this short. We're going to have no moon tonight, and our position here is rather exposed."

I heard him laugh. "What about my position in this egg? I'm dropping into pitch. I've got the electric beams cut on, but so far I've been able to see only three

feet around me. Guess what's here?" "All right," I said. "My guess is fish."

"Correct, Professor," Wilton said. "Fat ones. They're goggling at me."

"You're down two hundred feet," I said. "How about it? Had enough for tonight?"

"Is it tonight up there?" he asked.
"That's funny, it's getting lighter down
here. The beams are good for six or eight
feet now. The water's cleaner, I suppose.
Do you know how far we go to bottom,
Roswell?"

"I'll have it checked," I said.

"No, don't bother. I know. Two thousand feet."

"You're down four hundred now."

"I can get bottom, Roswell. The bathysphere will take it."

"Not tonight," I said. "If you're going to be smashed, I want to hunt for souvenirs, and I'll need daylight for that."

HEN, over the telephone, I heard him working with some piece of apparatus in the bathysphere. I called without getting an answer. Finally he returned to the phone.

"What's my depth, Roswell?"

"Seven hundred feet," I said.

"You're going slow, aren't you?"

"Yes, Wilton, I don't want any accidents."

His voice, reverberating in the bathysphere, seemed forced, unnatural. "I'm getting some nice scenery down here," he said. "My beams are piercing twenty feet, crystal clear. Lots of life, some of it odd enough to photograph. There's a gentleman following me as I go down, seems to be mostly head, with his own private electric plant in his eyes. I think he's jealous of my candlepower."

"Or hungry," I said irritably. "See here, Wilton, you're practically half way. I think that's test enough. I'm going to haul you up."

He didn't answer for a moment, then,

"No. Roswell. This is too interesting. My bright-eyed friend has fled. Stopped suddenly and peered down, seeing with his electric eyes into the depths below, and then turned tail. Gone like a bolt. I want to see what frightened him."

I motioned to the crew to stop the winch. "Not tonight," I called to Wilton. "You're coming up."

"Roswell!"

"You're swinging at a thousand feet," I snapped. "There's a wind up here, and we're bouncing stiffly. I don't want to make a yo-yo out of you."

"Roswell, not yet!" he called. "There's something here, if I can get my beam on it. Something important—"

His voice died out. I shouted in the telephone. Somewhere in the bathysphere I heard a clatter, sharply metallic, as of something falling heavily.

"Wilton!" I yelled into the phone.

There was no answer from the sea.

I jerked my hand toward the crew. "Haul up," I ordered. "Give it hell!"

The engine creaked into reverse. We dragged a scant few feet of cable back onto the drum. The straining winch exasperated me.

"You men! Reel in that cable! Something's wrong—"

Over the telephone I heard a muttered whispering, "Damned strange—"

But in that instant from beside me came the shriek of ripping gears. The winch was breaking loose.

"Wilton!" I cried, sick with the sight of all that cable whirling down into the depth, the winch spinning, the sea beneath our bow hissing from the splash of plunging steel.

And then, as suddenly as it began, the cable ceased unwinding and grew slack. I knew the bathysphere had dropped, unchecked, a thousand feet.

I called again, hopelessly now, for that terrific plunge surely had crushed the bathysphere. Or if, by some miracle—a deep cushion of sand or slime—it had escaped total collapse, the shock of its sudden descent must have smashed Wilton's body. Once again I called. There was no answer from the bathysphere.

My crew was working frantically to repair the winch. But that was sure to be a matter of hours, dismounting the machine and fitting new gears into it. I ran across the deck to check the air supply lines. The pressure in them showed constant. So far, then, the bathysphere was intact.

I tried the telephone again. There was a faint scraping, just possibly the movement of Wilton's body in the bathysphere. That was our ray of hope—and that was all.

The wind from southeast was freshening. The ship, bobbing, was riding on its anchor and the cable to the bathysphere. At any moment I believed our lines would snap, entombing Wilton on the ocean floor. But at least, I knew, death would be instant then. The pressure of those two thousand feet of water would ram through the air lines like a piston, crushing him. I peered over the side. Two thousand feet! I turned back, shivering.

HE night dragged on while we worked, cursing underneath our deck lights. Toward dawn the wind abated gradually, and when I checked again, our air lines were intact. For the hundredth time I tried the phone.

Wilton's voice, low-pitched, came back to me. "It's all right, Roswell. I'm alive," he said.

I shouted jubilantly into the transmitter. "Wilton, thank God! How are you, boy?"

"Stunned for a while; that's all."

I looked toward the winch. The men were fitting the new gear to it. "We'll have you out of there," I called into the phone in my heartiest voice. "As you've probably guessed, the winch stripped its

gear. Couldn't quite take the strain."

His voice came queerly back to me. "That's not it, Roswell. I was dragged down here."

"Dragged!" I cried. "A thousand feet?"

"A whirlpool, Roswell. A suction from the bottom. That was what my beameyed fish friend saw and dreaded. A moment after we last talked all sorts of life streamed past the bathysphere, pulled down by this infernal current. The cable must have held me for a while, before ripping out. Then it was like plummeting in an elevator through the aquarium. An instant before I lost consciousness, the current suddenly seemed to reverse itself. That's what saved me, but not enough to keep me from being knocked out cold."

"But you're safe now," I said.

"Am I?"

There was doubt in his question.

"Of course you are," I answered reassuringly. "As soon as we can start the winch—"

That faint, metallic scraping interrupted me again. Before, I had thought it was the movement of Wilton's body. But now a sharp clang followed it, like the snapping shut of a giant forceps.

"Am I?" Wilton repeated, laughing alarmingly. "I'm not so sure of that. The bathysphere is tangled in some kind of net. Or else—"

"Or else what, Wilton? What's that scraping sound?"

He hesitated a moment. Again I heard the clang of metal from the Mediterranean's floor.

"I'm trying to pierce this murk with my beam," he answered in a tense, strained tone. "There's something down here, Roswell. Something that's grappling for the bathysphere."

"That's pure imagination," I called sharply. "Listen to me, Wilton. There's no other boat up here. What could be grappling?"

"What caused the suction that first dragged me down?" he asked.

"Doubtless some ocean current—"

The clang of metal startled me again.

"You hear?" cried Wilton. "That sound came from outside, not from the inside of the bathysphere!"

"A derelict bumping against you!"

"No, Roswell, no! There—I've got the beam on it at last. Why, it's—"

Beside me, on the deck, a seaman pointed suddenly to the winch. "Look, sir! She's paying out."

Slowly the reel was turning as the cable moved into the sea. It meant the bathysphere was sliding on the bottom. That, or Wilton's inexplicable down-current was sucking at the cable.

"Wilton," I cried in warning, "the cable's reeling out again. Until this gear is fixed we're helpless here."

His voice came in a whisper. "Yes, I know. They've got me now."

"Wilton, what in God's name?"

"Andryne, Roswell. Or Andryne's ghosts."

There was such certainty in his tone, and such elation, that I knew the worst. The plunge down to the Mediterranean's floor, the awful tension of being trapped helplessly two thousand feet below, the imminence of death had cracked his all-too-imaginative mind.

"Ghosts!" I derided him, hoping somehow to soothe his mind. "Not even ghosts descend that deep. Get hold of yourself, my boy, or we'll be taking you back to New York in a straitjacket."

He laughed, deep in his throat. "They're in my beam, Roswell. I'm watching them. Amazing things, sheathed in a kind of translucent plastic, fashioned into diving suits. Swarms of them, Roswell, working with a huge machine of some kind they've fastened to the bathysphere."

"Wilton! Listen to me. For Pete's sake, man—"

And then I could not speak. From where I squatted by the telephone, I saw the cable reeling steadily into the sea.

OR a moment I found myself in terror, thinking that what Wilton said was true, that some unearthly creatures had captured the bathysphere. And yet my mind rejected that. It was just possible that in those depths some weird marine life had surrounded him, and to his tortured brain they seemed like men. Men could not work at a depth of two thousand feet. Wilton was babbling, and we could not save him for many minutes yet.

Desperate, I turned toward the winch. A crewman standing there was staring up into the sky, screening his eyes against the dazzling blue of the Mediterranean morning. Then I too cracked.

"Damn you," I yelled at him, "get busy with that gear. We've got a man's life in our hands, and you're stopping to rubberneck—"

The seaman turned slowly. "Excuse me, sir. But there's a plane circling above us, very high—a flying boat, looks like."

"All right," I yelled. "So there's a plane. Now get back to your work."

I grabbed the phone. Wilton was talking quietly, as if I had been listening to it all.

"They're men," he said. "Yes, I'm sure of it. The plastic suits are slightly opaque, and I can't discern their bodies very well, but their movements seem human and certainly they have human intelligence. They're doing a swell job, Roswell, dragging this bathysphere. We're working toward a subterranean cliff, a sunken mountainside. Wait, Roswell, here comes one of them—"

It was sickening, hearing him rave like that. I wiped my dripping face and clasped the phone tighter into my hand.

"He's looking through my window," Wilton droned. "Very curious. I'm sure I see a human face. An almost human face, at least. He's motioning to me, pointing toward an entrance in the cliff. We're going in there, Roswell. Yes, that's it—they're taking me into the cave."

The winch was creaking heavily. The cable now was nearly all unreeled. And soon, I realized, the bathysphere would reach the end of it. What would happen



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then, whether this incomprehensible movement would cease or the cable would snap, I dared not guess. But we were closer to the ultimate tragedy.

The seamen by the winch were staring up into the sky again. I glanced involuntarily. The plane, a flying boat, was spiraling lower toward us. Then, beneath its wings, I saw the black swastikas.

I grabbed the phone. Wilton was talking in a sing-song voice.

"They've got me inside now," I heard him say. "It's not a cave at all, Roswell. It's a tunnel, marvelously cut through solid rock. An engineering job, well worthy of the Chaldean scientists. We're waiting now. And, yes, there's someone coming through the murk in here. They're putting on some kind of underwater floodlights—Roswell! It's superb. This corridor is gleaming like the Aquacade. Remember that? And hundreds of these creatures are around me now. Hundreds of them, in their translucent diving suits. They're human, Roswell. I can see them now. And one of them—Roswell—"

The cable ceased unreeling. High above the Focke-Wulf Kurier was gliding.

"Roswell!" came Wilton's exultant voice. "She's beautiful. Incomparably exquisite, like the dream of things forgot. She's standing here beside the bathysphere, examining the air line and the cable. A door is sliding down across the tunnel now, shutting out the sea. I'm lost, Roswell. I'm never coming—"

A seaman jumped up suddenly. "The air line, sir! It's cut."

And, simultaneously, they got the winch started at last. The drum spun madly, reeling the cable in again, but too fast for the bathysphere to be attached to it. I heard the scream of diving wings. The Focke-Wulf Kurier, its black swastikas enormous in my eyes, bore down. "Roswell!"

Faintly, over the phone, came Wilton's voice.

"Roswell, the cable and air lines were severed by the sliding door. But the phone wire seems smashed beneath it. Possibly it's flattened out and yet intact. Can you hear me?"

There was no need to reassure him now. We'd lost Wilton Chase.

"I hear," I said.

"Good boy, Roswell. This is goodby. They've pumped the water from the tunnel. Beyond another waterlock, now opening, the tunnel spreads into a mighty cavern, the bowel of some lost, forgotten mountain. This is it, Roswell. This is where they fled, the ancient peoples of Andryne, when those ages ago the Mediterranean swallowed up their isle. They've lived down there. They have perfected their long-fabled science in this world, fed by an air cave from somewhere upon the Mediterranean coast. I'm sure of that. No other way does it make sense. I'm going out now, Roswell, I'm joining them. Their queen is waiting for me now."

A shattering explosion riped the phone line from my hands. A towering spout of water splashed upon our ship.

The Focke-Wulf Kurier's second bomb was true. The ship's stern splintered in a sheet of flame. I felt myself hurled through the air, crashing into the sea. A timber plunged into the waves just out of reach and I swam crazily for it, dazed.

Y RESCUE, hours later, by a passing British corvette is dull reading in these days of devastation on the seas. Perhaps it was just as well that it ended that way. Wilton, assuredly, was smothering in his bathysphere. He couldn't have survived long after his air lines were cut. And he was mad, insane, imprisoned on the Mediterranean's floor. But even as he died, his sparkling imagination lent him the semblance of new adventures. Great, incredible things.

Or could it possibly be. . . .

(Continued from page 8)

Dear Editor:

After reading the February issue of Super-Science, I must give credit where credit is due. Picking your mag up, in a mere two issues, from an unreadable to the second best of the readables is indeed a miracle. Yes, I said second best, and I

There is, to mar the greatness of the latest issue, one thing. The cover, man, the cover! It is drawn in the style common

in comic books. I didn't like it.

The interior art was all good, but please have a larger variety of illustrators. Bok and Morey are both good, and Giunta is fair, but have at least five artists an ish,

Now that you know my policy of truth telling, no matter what the truth happens to be, please try not to doubt it when I say that every single story was good. Yes, that's what I said!

The best was undoubtedly Ross Rock-lynne's "Wicked People." Rocky could have developed it a bit longer, possibly a novelette. The time-dimension explanation was comprehensible. And the destruction of Four, which seemed inevitable, came just in the right way. This is one of the most powerful shorts you have ever presented, topped recently only by Walton's "The Man Who Didn't Breathe" in Astonishing. Using a one-to-ten basis, the first-ranker gets an 8.9, higher than anything

last issue, in my estimation.

Second is "Spaceship From Korl" by
Fred Kummer, Jr. This theme of Martians,
yes, they were Martians, you know, on
earth in ancient times, while not old is refreshing and enjoyable. It needed only the astounding climax of Ethnor being Merlin the Wizard to bring it up to second. It receives 8.7, and is about as good as

"The Biped Reegan."

"The Cross of Mercrux," a powerful short novel by that up-and-coming master, Harry Walton, takes third honors. It was a disappointment not to see a full-length novel, but the story was good. Fine suspense, good drama and all the rest. Bok's spread, tied with Morey's for the first ranking story, was the best pic in the entire issue. Give the story an 8.6.

The best characterization in the issue was developed by John E. Harry, in his fine yarn, "The Hunted Ones." Don't ask me why, but this story seemed to be a lot like "The Rannie" in that May issue I finally obtained via the second-hand stores. In fourth place, even though emotions at times were stressed too much, it rates an 8.5.

Fifth is a surprise. It is rare, indeed, that a short-short is thoroughly enjoyable. Such a rare gem was Walt Kubilius' "Atrakin and the Man." It sort of stuck with me hard. The way Tasinov had his son killed for the restoration of the human race. A small sacrifice for such a great cause, but I wonder how many people would have made it. Let's have more from Walt. He

seems to be dishing out fine stuff. This

gets 8.3.

James D. Perry elaborated on an old plot and gave us the sixth ranking tale which wasn't bad at all. "The Waters Under the Earth" was nice, but none too original. It rates a 7.6.

I consider 7.5 as the averagely good mark, and only one story sunk below that, but still, it wasn't bad at all. Leigh Brackett's "Child of the Green Light" is seventh and receives a 7.0. Okay, so maybe Miss Brackett is convinced that it takes men to write science-fiction. Occasionally she turns out a nice yarn, but oh so rarely. Now I have plenty of pet criticisms as

to format, etc. So listen carefully, if you

can bear it.

First of all, the general appearance of the cover is fine except that you need a new artist. In other words, the face is handsome except for the nose, eyes, ears, mouth, cheeks, chin, eyebrows, forehead, etc. The contents page is somewhat interesting, and neat, but for one thing. It is too crowded. For instance, right under the words "Daring Fantasy Novelet" comes, with no space, "The Hunted Ones." If you could, try to alter that.

The number of stories is fine, except that I'd like to see one long one per issue. And this is the third time I've mentioned that in this letter, I probably even con-

vinced myself by now.

Missives and Missiles should not only be longer, but should also be a two-way. dep't. Also it should not be scattered all over the book. It should be all together, and there is absolutely no reason why it can't be, or no reason that I can think of. I am glad you are an editor who doesn't cut up readers' letters. That's the way you should be, print what you get, unless it has noth-

ing to do with the mag or science-fiction.

A few friends and myself would like to join the Science Fictioneers, even start a club branch. But we do not want to deface our magazines by cutting a coupon out from right smack dab in the middle of a story. Is there any other way we can join? I think a lot of fans feel the same way. Speak up, fellows, maybe we can create a

majority. The plan of making the Science Fictioneer a fan-mag is nifty and the most original in the field. The plan of running a short-short amateur story each time is even better. And provided I can become a member of the club in some way, I would contribute my bit of the stories. Right now I am a budding s-f author. (No one seems to take notice of the fact, save myself.)

I guess that about runs me out. So long. This is the "Happy Genius" signing off,

Milt Lesser, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sorry—the boss won't let us keep the (Continued on page 136)



# The WORLD WITHIN



SCHLATER had more patience than his companion. His method would have been to tie Alderson securely, then extort his secret in one of the approved fashions. The Gestapo had taught him many pleasant little ways of stimulating conversation. A hot flame applied to bare soles, the mute insistence of a foot of rubber hose, that little trick with fine wire and the eyelids.

But Koshu, being a Jap, was impatient, nervously impetuous. He scowled when the old scientist claimed he had no blue-prints for the instrument that stood in the center of the room, and when Alderson staunchly refused to explain its operation, the little man's hair-trigger temper flared. So did the automatic in his yellow fist. A look of stunned surprise came into the American physicist's eyes. He coughed, choked on his own blood, pitched forward, and lay still.

Schlater said ruefully, "That was not too clever, my friend. You should haveforced him to explain before you shot him. This looks like no war machine I have ever seen."

"We have no time to waste," hissed Koshu. "Someone may walk in here at any moment. We will not need any diagrams or explanations. We have the machine itself. That will tell us all we need to know. Let us take it to my place and study it. Give me a hand, please, friend?

Steady, there! Up with it. Aie—maledictions!"

He jerked his hand from the machine, mopping blood from his right palm with a not-too-clean handkerchief.

"Curse it, that metal flange is sharp! Well, let us make haste. We must get out of here. Lift, please!"

Schlater lifted. The hour was late, the sky black, the street deserted. No one saw them carry the odd-looking, projector-like instrument across the pavement, put it into a station-wagon. Schlater lowered the side-screens carefully. Koshu, still nursing his injured hand, waited fretfully. A few minutes later, gears ground; the station-wagon and its mysterious cargo sped away from the quiet laboratory in which lay the body of Dr. Robert Alderson, inventor.

OME time afterward, in Koshu's quarters, they stood before their stolen toy, studying it. Their styles of approach to the new problem were typical of their thought habits. More clearly than their appearances it typified the differences of the races from which they sprang.

Koshu was all feline eagerness as, black eyes gleaming, he strode about the machine in short, mincing steps, lingering here to touch a tube, there a coil, tracing with long, sensitive fingers the path of a



Unseen, mighty, they muster their marching armies, the secret sentinels of the last uncharted frontier the human body! wire; delving, conjecturing, leaping to half-inductive, half-deductive conclusions.

Schlater did not finger the instrument. He analyzed it with the cold, mental detachment of the Teuton. He, too, was identifying the purposes of the cryptic parts—but his probing was entirely cerebral. And he, too, was slowly reaching a conclusion.

As he studied, some untouched portion of his brain found time to be scornful of Koshu's nervous concentration. Schlater neither liked nor trusted the Nipponese agent. He collaborated with him only because to do so was in accordance with orders issued to all Nazi agents in the United States.

Inasmuch, read the general orders, as a friendly understanding exists between our two nations, members of our Intelligence will cooperate, whenever expedient, with agents of the Japanese government. It is recommended, however, that discretion be employed in permitting valuable secrets to fall into the hands of our allies—

Schlater had followed the first part of his orders. Learning that Dr. Alderson had completed a new war machine, an instrument which the childishly hopeful Americans believed might be the "weapon to end all wars," he had joined forces with Koshu to steal that secret. Their carefully plotted effort had been successful, as was evidenced by the glistening projector that now stood before them. And Schlater wondered how far his "allegiance" with Koshu should now go.

If this weapon were, indeed, all it was rumored to be, and a growing conviction assured him it was, it was "a valuable secret." As such, it should be communicated to the Nazi, and only to the Nazi government. A war weapon shared by two countries is quartered in value. Therefore. . . .

He glanced guardedly at the Jap, just in time to find Koshu's beady black eyes intent upon him. Koshu's voice was high-pitched with the excitement now. "Well, Schlater? You understand its purpose?"

Schlater did, now. Or at least he thought he did. The curious, parabolic arrangement of the convex lenses gave him the needed key, that and the wiring which determined the concentration of focal radiation on a point established by a series of verniers. It was a staggering conception; one, Schlater admitted reluctantly to himself, of unparalleled genius. It made of this innocent-appearing projector a mighty weapon, a weapon that could, indeed, end wars. Or, in the hands of the proper persons, it could pave smooth the path of conquest.

But he shook his head. He said, "I don't know. We may have been hoaxed. There seems to be nothing dangerous in this maze of wires and coils."

"You think," queried Koshu, "it is worthless?" And a frown creased his forehead; his eyes looked worried. Scorn, mingled with an urge toward laughter, stirred within Schlater. Then he had guessed right. Koshu's intellect was not shrewd enough to grasp this novel, terrifying concept. Such an idea was beyond the yellow man's mental powers.

"Utterly worthless," said Schlater negligently. He shrugged. "We might have guessed as much. You know these verdammt Americans. Always straining toward the fantastic, the impossible end. Oh, I suppose there is some slight logic behind the machine. Maybe it could be made to work." He paused. "Suppose we try? Let us attach it. Apparently this is a small scale model, designed to operate on house current. If you will plug it in, mein Freund?"

Koshu darted to the wall socket, inserted the plug that fed current to the strange projector. For a moment his back was to Schlater, and the Nazi agent's hand went toward his pocket. He stilled the movement with an effort.

This was, after all, Koshu's apartment. Undoubtedly he had friends here. The bark of a Luger at this hour might rouse them, end forever Schlater's chance of winning complete possession of the projector. And, there was another way. A better way. If the instrument worked as he thought. . . .

Koshu was again at his side, fretfully eager.

"What now, Schlater?"

Schlater stepped to the machine, pressed a button briefly, experimentally. As he did so, current sang its high, whining song. The muzzle of the projector brightened; from it diffused a weaving spiral of light.

Koshu squealed in delight.

"It does work, Schlater! What is it? A death ray? A sonic beam?"

Schlater snapped off the light swiftly, grateful for Koshu's single-mindedness. The Nipponese agent, fascinated by the spiral of color, had failed to notice the more significant result for which Schlater had been watching. The weird effect the beam had had upon objects on the far end of the room. The Morris chair, that picture on the wall—

He muttered, "A moment, bitte. There is an adjustment to be made." He fingered another of the verniers. The scale bore numbers. He set the vernier at the number "4." That, he judged, should be about right. Koshu would be about four feet away when the beam was turned upon him.

The Jap was staring at him narrowly. "What are you doing, friend Schlater?" "Just experimenting. You want to find out how the machine works, nicht wahr?"

"Yes, but—" Koshu's small hands gestured. In the movement he tensed the muscles of his wounded right hand; the cut split afresh and he winced. "You know more than you have told me. You're hiding something, friend Schlater!"

"Don't be a fool!" Schlater had fin-

ished his preparations now. All but one thing. An equalizing correction to be made on the projector lens. That done, it would be but the work of seconds to end this little farce. One swift movement of the projector, the pressure of a finger, and Koshu would be eliminated. The Reich would not have to share this knowledge with a publicly embraced, but secretly detested ally.

It was then that Schlater made his mistake. Eager to complete his task, he stepped to the front of the projector. His hands sought the lens. Then, from the corner of one eye, he glimpsed sudden motion. Koshu, a triumphant grimace on his lips, was leaping forward. Schlater bellowed harsh warning.

"Koshu-be careful!"

He spoke too late. With a shrill burst of laughter, the Son of Heaven clawed the button. A mist of golden flame flooded the projector's nozzle, suffused Schlater with a fiery pain!

LINDED, dazed, numbed, his flesh acrawl with a maddening sensation of contractile pressure, Schlater fought to stagger from beneath that radiant downpouring. But the golden mist followed him. Koshu, handling the projector, was training it upon his "ally" with deliberate, deadly accuracy. And there was gloating mockery in the Jap's gibes.

"So you thought Koshu a fool, eh, Schlater?"

Schlater screamed, "Turn it off, Koshu! Before it is too late! This weapon condenses matter!"

"I know," laughed the Nipponese.
"Your Aryan pride did not let you believe another mind could be as quick as your own, did it, Schlater? You underestimated Koshu."

Schlater tugged despairingly at his pocket, but once more the Jap anticipated him. Before he could shoot, Koshu's hand

stretched forth and wrenched the gun from him as if it were a child's toy. And Schlater saw now, with a burst of horror, why the weapon had been so easily torn from his grasp.

Because he was shrinking! Koshu's hand was gigantic. The walls were racing away from him at a frightful speed. The eye of the lens now above him was as large as his head, almost as large as his body! The ceiling had disappeared, lost in a vague nebulosity. The soft carpet beneath him seemed to slip in all directions from under his feet. He staggered and reeled, finding he must keep in motion in order to stay upon his feet.

The ray burned down upon him, and through its golden aura he glimpsed the Cyclopian face of Koshu grinning at him. A great, pocked visage, mottled and brownish, coarse with occasional weed-like tusks of beard. Koshu's voice seemed to be deeper. Its taunting was thunder in his ears.

"So, little one, the first man dies before the new weapon that will make my nation ruler of the world! How does it feel to be the size of a kitten? Ah, you run? You flee? It is useless. But take courage, Schlater. Koshu will spare you the final ignominy. When you have dwindled to the size of a louse, I will crush you—like this!"

A ponderable darkness came between Schlater and the blinding sun; like a colossal Juggernaut it moved inexorably down upon him. He screamed, his voice a high, thin bleating in his ears, and tripped and fell upon a spiny trunk of wool, rose and scampered from beneath Koshu's massive foot.

Fear lent wings to his feet. The Gargantuan boot missed him by inches. Inches that, even as he scrambled, became yards. For that brain-seething pressure still flamed in his body; in some dim corner of his mind he was aware that the beam was still upon him, he was still shrinking.

Where this would end he could not tell—nor dared he guess. The carpet that had once been a soft surface beneath his feet was now a granite-strewn plateau, grimringed with the leafless spines of fibrous growths. No longer was there a room, walls, or a ceiling, or a machine. There was just this drab, gritty wasteland, and an ochre sky from which hot, wracking beams scorched him deeper and yet deeper into the realms of nothingness.

A remnant of logic made him try to figure his present size, but the thought defied all computation. He was microscopic; that he knew. If grains of dust were, to him, mountains . . . if even now clefts appeared in solid terrain, tumbling him downward to imponderable depths. . .

Countless miles and aeons above him there was a dull and sullen roaring, cadenced but indistinguishable to Schlater. Stark fantasy had its will with him. It was the elder gods he heard, the gods of thunder, and the sun was blotted by their wrath. Actually, it was Koshu who now, upon his hands and knees, was seeking some faint sign of the "ally" whom he had thrust into the unimaginable. The thunder was Koshu's voice, screaming in rage and disappointment. "Then you think thus to escape me, mannikin? But you shall not. I shall crush the life from your puny body, hammer you to a pulp!"

His voice lifted to a bellow. Heedless of his wound, Koshu beat and pounded on the carpet. Dust rose thickly, and blood stained the dun as Koshu sobbed and cursed and clawed the carpet like a mad thing. But there was no sign of Schlater. He was gone. The Jap rose, weeping with rage, and cut off the current. A moment he stood there, gazing mutely at the empty floor, a long, long moment.

HE wrath of the thunder gods howled about him; a typhoon screamed vast winds about his ears, caught and spun him, hurled him viciously

into the depths of a spongy thicket. Jet blackness surrounded him, now that the sun had been blotted out. Somewhere above raged the fuller fury of the wind; the ground beneath him trembled and rocked. His world was a madman's dream in which small objects at his side grew while he watched, towered skyward, becoming monstrous, awesome impossibilities. New scenes sprang from nothingness. Valleys became ridges, pebbles boulders, as he slipped and skidded perilously through a treacherous universe.

Schlater dared not guess what yet might lie ahead. All he knew was that the persistent throbbing still tingled in his veins; that with each new breath his body became more minute. A memory came to him of a theory he once had heard; that there might be worlds within worlds, solar galaxies within atoms of the world on which once, a normal human, he had dwelt and dreamed and plotted for glory. If so, he was not far from learning the truth or falsity of this theory.

Out of the darkness came a strange, new feeling of sultriness and increased pressure. Warmth was about him, and movement. His mind reeling under the impact of this new mystery, he cast himself from his latest refuge and ran on tottering legs toward—he knew not what.

He had taken perhaps a half-dozen faltering steps when he felt upon him an insistent, wrenching tug, a sort of dreadful suction from above. He fought against it with the desperate fury of a doomed man, but the violent force became more potent every instant. He tried to cry out, but the cry died in his throat. Pain cut through him with the edge of a honed blade, his muscles knotted in agony, the very marrow of his bones seemed wracked with torment.

Once again, and futilely, he kicked out in a blind panic, but his attempt to free himself was waste and hopeless motion. There came a sense of lifting swiftness. A giddiness nauseated him. His head felt weirdly light; his body sagged with impotence. He had no longer the strength with which to fight his fate. He surrendered, suddenly and completely, and all was black.

It was a strange world in which he awakened. He lay on a narrow shelf, scant inches above the crest of a sluggish stream that poured endlessly down the corridor of a vast, high-domed tunnel. There was no sky above him, no earth beneath; nothing but this plunging stream and the smooth, washed, plastic bore that was its aqueduct. But faint and far-off, in the direction toward which the river coursed, Schlater could hear a sound familiar to his earthly ears. The rhythmic pounding of a machine.

He rose, weak, dazed, uncertain, but taking courage from the fact that he still lived! And in the equally hopeful fact that the scene about him did not change before his eyes. Apparently he had reached the end of his mad journey in size; the period of his diminution had ended.

And if so, hope was not yet dead! What if his adventure had brought him to some microscopic universe? What if there were no beings like himself (Schlater was a logical man) in this murky world? There must be intelligence of some sort. The mathematical perfection of the tunnel argued that; it represented an engineering feat of no mean scope. And the beat of machinery off in the distance—where there were machines there must be thinking creatures to build them. Could he but find these builders, win their friendship.

Well, he had studied the machine of Dr. Alderson. With persistence and effort, Schlater thought he could build its counterpart, return to the world from which he had come, and avenge himself on the traitorous Koshu.

Spurred by this thought, he studied his surroundings more carefully. The ledge

on which he now stood was not constant, it was an accidental hardening or encrustation on the wall of the tunnel. He could not, then, walk to his destination as a man might explore the depths of Paris in the bowels of the sewage system. And there were no water craft. All he could do, for the present at least, was trust himself to the mercies of the stream. Swim with the current down the tunnel or feedpipe, resting whenever opportunity presented itself, until he found himself in a more favorable location.

Gingerly, he lowered himself from the shelf. The stream was pleasantly brackish, and, so near as he could tell in the semi-gloom, a pale, muddy, yellowish color. The air he breathed was heavy and sickly sweet, but it bore no trace of the offal taint he had feared.

Apparently the aqueduct was part of a power plant, not a portion of a drainage system.

The current was deep and strong, the water viscous. It tugged at his foot. He loosed his hold on the ledge, and found himself drifting swiftly down the tunnel. He had but to paddle gently to keep himself affoat.

IS eyes were becoming more accustomed to the gloom now. He noticed, with increasing wonderment, several things he had not previously recognized. One of these was the intricate construction of the feedline in which he swam. It was not, as he had first thought, a single, large tunnel; it was a labyrinthine network of small corridors, all leading into this major aqueduct. His sweeping passage bore him, in short seconds, past a half hundred tiny doorways, each sealed with tiny, automatically-operated portals of what appeared to be a plastic substance of some kind. These seemed to move with a predetermined rhythm. As he swam past one, it opened momentarily, and a sudden gout of water cascaded upon him.

Something sharp and hard struck him, bruised him. His hand, instinctively leaping to the object, identified it as a bit of spiny bone, like the skeleton of a coral.

It had, he saw fearfully, been gnawed clean, and for the first time a doubt entered his mind. He had placidly assumed himself to be alone in this watery grotto—but could he be sure? There might be other life here, dangerous antagonists. He sought, and found, the case-knife strapped to his calf.

As though his newborn fears had fathered the actuality, he saw, suddenly then, the first of the denizens of this weird place. A trap vent opened in the wall of the tunnel before him, and from it wriggled a creature that brought a choked cry to Schlater's lips.

It was a sallow, slimy, serpentine monster, almost half again as large as Schlater. It had no eyes, but in its thick, wedge-shaped head was a gaping, toothed vent that was its maw; and from the tip of its proboscis writhed two wiry antennae that now stirred inquisitively in Schlater's direction. It spun, a hundred coarse-haired cilia palpitating, and darted toward him.

Schlater, shocked to action, churned the water in a swift, fearful desperation. The creature whisked toward him, its maw opening hungrily. His arm raised, his knife slashed once, twice, and yet again at the blind face of the monster. It recoiled before that biting edge. A thin ichor oozed from the wounds; the water churned and boiled as the injured water-thing sought to close in upon its quarry and still avoid the knifing pain.

Sheer chance saved him then, for suddenly beside him was another rimy ledge, similar to that on which he had found himself at first. With a scrambling effort, Schlater dragged himself onto this. The sea-thing followed his scent blindly, butted its still-dripping head against the ledge a foot below Schlater, then seemed to lose

him. A moment it lingered there, its triangular head weaving back and forth in mute querulousness; then it wriggled off to the other side of the tunnel. A moment later it was burrowing, with a series of nauseating snuffles and mouthings, a ragged hole right through the wall of the aqueduct.

To what purpose, for what purpose, Schlater could not begin to guess. All he did know was that his forehead was damp and cold, his body quivering with disgust, his stomach churning with nervous fear. What kind of monster was this that could digest smooth structural plastic—and why?

He saw, then. It did not add to the quietude of his nerves. For before his eyes he saw the snakelike beast curl up within the tiny cavern it had burrowed, proceed to split in half, and vomit up a hundred, tiny, slimy simulacra of itself! The beast's nauseous puppies, each as large as Schlater's hand, turned instantly on their parent, tore it to bits, and gulped every morsel of the rent body!

Nor did their feeding end there. His sharpened by this experience, Schlater saw now that there were still other life forms swarming in the humid cavern. Those pallid objects he had dismissed as stalactite growths, pending from the high, arched ceiling, he saw, now, were living blobs of matter. And in the water itself were still other mobile forms. Some, so tiny that they would have escaped his attention entirely had it not been for this sickening revelation, others very large. There was one form of fish or crustacean something like a clam, except that its "shell" was translucent, its shape that of a roughly hewn crystal. One constant form was a curious, disclike creature with almost invisible cilia; these were a pale, yellowish color. The serpent puppies seemed to find them a delicacy, diving eagerly into the stream to fish them out, ripping them apart with

sharp, hungry teeth. These platter-shaped things were completely defenseless apparently. When torn, they exploded with a sharp, popping sound, and Schlater thought he could detect the faint, ammoniac smell of ozone whenever this happened. They were like the blowfish of Gulf waters, terrifying to look at, helpless in battle.

And as the puppies ate, they grew. As they grew to the size of the parent that had attacked Schlater, they, as had the parent, ceased their feeding, burrowed new cubbyholes for themselves in the wall of the tunnel. Within the space of minutes, the entire chamber was pockmarked with their burrowings; where had been one monster, pregnant with loathesome young, now the corridor seethed with this hateful life form.

The tiny shelf upon which Schlater crouched, trembling, had long since been undermined by this horde of swiftly breeding beasts. It would not be long now, he knew, before it gave way, catapulting him into their midst. And when that happened. . . .

He shuddered.

B UT at that moment a wild activity developed amongst the wedge-headed monsters. A swift current seemed to course through them; then, as if advised by some telepathic warning, as one they turned for flight.

And Schlater saw why. There was splashing movement from the farther end of the tunnel. Out of the gloom appeared a solid host of colorless, transparent creatures that slipped through the water with the fluid ease of gigantic amoebae.

Even before the wrigglers had assembled for flight, the first of the newcomers had invaded their midst. Schlater saw its long, colorless body expand before his eyes, stretch, grow pseudopods, and ingest a wriggler. The transparent body wall veiled, clouded, as strong acids di-

gested the enemy—and the colossal amoeba was twisting toward another of its prey!

Everywhere the same scene was taking place. Here a wriggler, lashing out desperately with its countless cilia, swarmed high to the tunnel wall. Its pursuer calmly, coldly, stretched tactile arms up the wall until it reached its quarry, devoured it piecemeal. There a wriggler, ripping and tearing with that ferocious maw, sliced an invader in two. Imperturbably another of the pale amoebae took up the battle where its slain brother had left off, destroyed the wriggler, then proceeded to devour its comrade's carcass methodically!

Schlater saw, now, that not only from one direction had the tunnel-guardiansfor he guessed them to be that-come. Another regiment had swept down from the farther end of the tunnel; still others had entered the battle chamber from the side ports. Flanked thus from every side, with no reinforcements, the wrigglers never had a chance. Within the space of minutes, the river had been swept clean of all wrigglers, the host of pale guardians disappeared to their posts, leaving behind a scattered few scavengers who tidied up by calmly devouring the slain bodies of friend and foe alike. Nothing escaped their painstaking housecleaning save one life-form, the yellowish, disc-like, harmless creatures upon which the wrigglers had formerly feasted.

So fascinated had Schlater been by this battle that he had completely forgotten his own peril. Now he was sharply reminded of it. One of the tunnel-guards, scavenging the pockmarks beneath his tiny ledge, sensed his presence, quivered delicately, and stretched a pseudopod up toward him.

In panic desperation Schlater screamed and screamed again, hacked at that exploring arm with his knife. The blade passed through harmlessly; where it had gone, new flesh grew instantly. The tactile arm strengthened, crept up and tightened about Schlater, and then slid away again! The guardian, as though completely satisfied with Schlater, went on about his work!

He could not stay here; that was certain. And again hope blossomed within Schlater. Evidently he had been judged by the guardians of the tunnel and found harmless. Schlater wondered for a moment, fearfully, if these weird, amoeboid warriors were the ruling race of this new world in which he found himself. If so, his hopes were in vain. But if not—

Maybe, he thought hopefully, his presence had been discovered from afar by the real rulers? It was evident that they had some means of checking on all parts of their underground aqueduct. How else would they have sent this detail to destroy the invading monsters?

There was but one way to find out. Continue on his self-appointed journey toward the pump, the machine that continued to throb its rhythmic, hollow message of hope through the tunnel.

He hesitated a moment. Then, heart pounding, he dove once again into the racing flood. There was no attack. Instead, a gigantic, amoeboid watch-dog deserted its former tasks, slipped into the stream behind him, and followed him down the tunnel, for all the world like a patient bodyguard.

OW many miles he traveled, Schlater had no way of guessing. The traveler marks distance by the passage of time; Schlater wore no watch, and in this murky tunnel, where never occurred a change of light, it might have been night or day, twilight or dusk.

But he had the feeling, as time passed, that he was getting somewhere near his goal. For one thing, the aqueduct down which he paddled was now larger than that in which he had first found himself. The transition had come about gradually,

during one of many twists and turns. For another, he was moving faster now. At first the stream had been sluggish. But now, as the steady pounding of the central power plant sounded deeper, nearer to his ears, the flood waters gathered momentum.

For a time, his logical brain sought an analogy between this place and a possibly similar location on the Earth he had left behind him. But he could find none except in a dimly remembered passage from the poem of a mad Englishman of long ago.

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea..."

But that, of course, was nonsense. For there were here no "gardens bright with sinuous rills", no "forests ancient as the hills."

Koshu!

The memory of the Jap's perfidy flooded back upon him, stirring him to sudden, renewed anger. Again he was afire with impatience to reach that mysterious, distant chamber where were the engines that utilized this stream. There to find creatures, intelligent inhabitants of this diminutive world. There to begin work on the machine that would bear him back to his own, now macrocosmic universe.

The trip was not without incident. Once, as before, he was attacked by a denizen foreign to this tunnel. This time his antagonist was a creature so contrary to common sense that Schlater had difficulty defining it to himself as living. It was more like an animated problem in higher mathematics. Its form was that of a spiral convolute of the third order; it had no evident organs of digestion, breeding, or sense.

Yet, lacking these things, it gave Schlater a bad moment as it came spiraling toward him like a monstrous corkscrew, studiously intent on making him a piece de resistance. This time there was no fortunate ledge on which he could take refuge. Had it not been for his silent follower, his adventure would have ended abruptly there beneath the vaulted roofs of the dim, jointed caverns of the infinitesimal. But even as the looped attacker weaved toward him, the guardian amoeba charged past, brushing him out of danger's way, to fight his battle for him.

It was no battle. At the sight (or sense, Schlater could not guess which) of the pallid protector, the spiraloid spun in panic flight. Futilely, for the gigantic protoplasm swelled to a huge cup, inexorably surrounded its foe, and once more Schlater looked with shocked, wondering eyes upon the filmy acid clouds churning within his guardian as it ingested its prey.

And ever the sound of the motors deepened. For this Schlater was increasingly glad, for now a new factor began to disturb him. Up to this time there had been air space between the surface of the stream waters and the roof of the tunnel. Now this space was being filled, more and more, by the waters, as from the countless tiny sub-passages came minor torrents to fill the aqueduct.

And the air, Schlater noted uncomfortably, was growing thicker, more offensive, less breathable. He had to labor, now, to breath, and in his nostrils lingered an offensive, almost sulphurous odor. A new fear entered his mind. Perhaps he had been too sanguine in presuming that arrival at the mysterious "machine" would mean his salvation? Suppose this feed line led directly into the bowels of some gigantic force-pump performing some fathomless function? What then would happen to him?

But, no, that was unlikely. The builders of this tunnel must have prepared exits. How else to account for the fact of his

silent protector. No, soon he would come to an open space. There he would find intelligent creatures. Perhaps not men like himself, but at least reasoning creatures with whom he could make peace, to whom he could explain his plight and his desires.

T HAPPENED so swiftly that he was unprepared. Not that he could have done anything about it. He was hopelessly within the grip of the forces that stirred about him, by will or main force he could not have prevented that which occurred.

But one instant he was drifting down the tunnel, the next the throb of the nearing engine had risen to a clamoring roar. A deep, booming torment of sound that threatened his eardrums trembled the fibers of his body.

The flood which bore him swiftened, foamed, became a swirling, churning maelstrom. He saw, with a burst of horror, that what little air space there had been was now vanishing as the frothy waters boiled against the portals of a huge flood-lock!

He had time for one agonized glance toward his calm "protector", time to gulp in one last, lung-filling draught of precious air—then that ponderous plastic gateway throbbed open! From inside came a tumultuous thunder of mighty forces at work, the ear-splitting rhythm of the machinery Schlater had dreaded. And then a terrible suction gripped him and the waters in which he struggled. Beaten, pounded, bruised by the weight of the torrent upon him, he was drawn into the heart of the clamorous chamber!

That he survived those next few seconds was a miracle in itself. The chamber into which the aqueduct fed was gigantic. Schlater caught a fleeting glimpse of tremendous, curved walls meeting in an arched dome over his head, felt, rather than saw, the brain-maddening, angry

crimson of those walls. Like the pulsant, scarlet drapes on the walls of Poe's House of Death.

Then he was being dragged down, down, down, into unfathomable depths. Water boiled and bubbled about him, frightful pressure racked his bones, threatened to force the last ounce of precious air from his straining lungs. All about him strange bodies seemed to live, fighting and struggling; he was tossed and spun like a chip in a steaming cauldron. Hungry fingers ripped the clothing from him, and his flesh was alive with pain from the brutal pummeling.

Then, as suddenly as he had dropped, he found himself rising. And again he was on the surface of the water, a spent tatter of humanity. He panted fresh air into his lungs, struck out violently for the nearest of the ruddy walls, hoping against hope he might find a foothold, a fingerhold on one of those smooth, curving surfaces.

Clawed hands scratched at the wall, but his effort was vain. For these walls, unlike those of the tunnel through which he had entered, were soft and yielding; they seemed made of a spongy, fibrous material. They gave beneath his frenzied attack. In his delirium it seemed that all the walls were suddenly racing away from him now; that the mighty cavern was expanding.

Then one wall sheared away entirely into a gaping vent, the retreating roof of the cavern came pounding down like the crimson gavel of the gods—and again he was seized in a terrific suction, thrust headlong through a second lock, into another thundering chamber.

Down again, down he went into the maelstrom, floundering, fighting, struggling like a madman to sustain that tremendous pressure; then up, up to a breath of air, up to clutch, screaming, at resilient scarlet walls; to claw horribly at barriers that shrugged him off, throbbing, pal-

ing, like the huge muscles of some giant.

Muscles!

The simile was born out of Schlater's madness. But the instant it occurred to him, sanity came back to his mind like the douche of icy waters. Muscles! Schlater was a logical man. And now, even though about him beat and thundered a cacaphony that had long since destroyed his sense of hearing, he brought the force of that cold, Teutonic logic into play.

He understood, now, wondering why he had not guessed the answer before, where he was. He understood the tunnel, the rimy excrescence on which he had found himself, the battle of the monsters.

He understood, suddenly and completely, the chamber to which the aqueduct had I true him, knew the purpose of the "watch-dog," knew what his eventful fate must be. . . .

There was no last, lingering hope now. No chance of ever returning to the world outside. For in these murky caverns were no intelligences to befriend him, no metals with which he might build the machine that would be his salvation. His destruction was a matter of time. Die he must. But with him could, and must die . . . .

CHLATER was a logical man. And he still had his case knife. He slipped it, now, from its sheath. Strangely, he found strength to do that which he must. Against the incessant pounding of the waters, he fought his way to the wall of the chamber, that great, towering wall of crimson muscle. All his strength, and all the fury of his new vengeance was in his right arm as he plunged the knife again and again into that yielding wall.

He had the satisfaction of seeing the wall rip into jagged shreds about him before the avengers came. The huge, amoeboid forms that had at one time protected him came swirling toward him in hordes as he hacked and carved at the

wall before him. Then one was upon him; its mobile body was expanding into the cuplike sac that, Schlater knew, would soon engulf him, burning his body into nothingness with its scalding acid secretion.

Once more and gloriously, with a choked laugh on his lips, he slashed at the faltering, throbbing wall. Then he thrust the knife deep and true into the wall, and turned to face his certain destroyers.

HE F.B.I. man nodded toward the odd-looking projector in the middle of the floor.

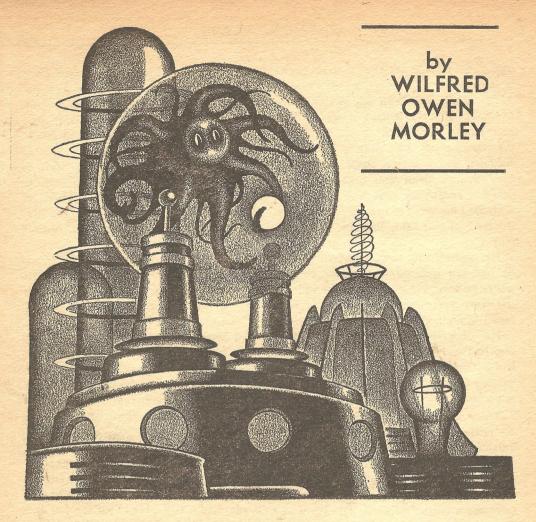
"Get that out of here, Peters," he said, "and keep it out of sight. From now on, that's government property. We mustn't take any chances on its being stolen again." He turned to the telephone in the room, dialed his superior.

"Chief? Thompson speaking. We found it. It hasn't been damaged. Young Alderson's with me. He says he knows how to operate it. And, Chief, you'd better throw a cordon around the city. The German is missing—Schlater. Apparently he and Koshu had a row. He killed the Jap and skipped. Get on his trail. Okay, Chief. I'll be back with the medical report."

He turned to the medical inspector, now rising from Koshu's side.

"I don't know, Thompson. I'll have to perform an autopsy to make sure. It's the strangest thing I ever saw. At first I thought it might have been death by poisoning—that open wound in his palm, you know. A virulent infection might have attacked him through that opening.

"But that's not it at all. It's some form of heart failure—but the most violent I've ever encountered in all my years of medical experience. His heart seems to have suddenly, and for no reason at all, burst like a rotten fruit! It's ripped into a thousand pieces. Just as if it had been sliced to ribbons—from the inside. . . ."



N THE hushed glow of the street lamps I could make out only that she was tall and somewhat ethereal. She moved like one in a trance, looking neither to the right nor left, and I thought of hypnotism and a vampire movie I'd seen a few nights before. But it wasn't the thought of Draculas lurking in some dark alley that made me follow her, nothing as romantic as that. Whoever she was, she'd likely be slammed down by a truck or bus if she didn't stop when she came to corners.

I'd never had any experience at tailing, but it was a cinch to keep tabs on her. She wore a light topcoat at a time when most people were draped in dark, heavy clothes, particularly around this

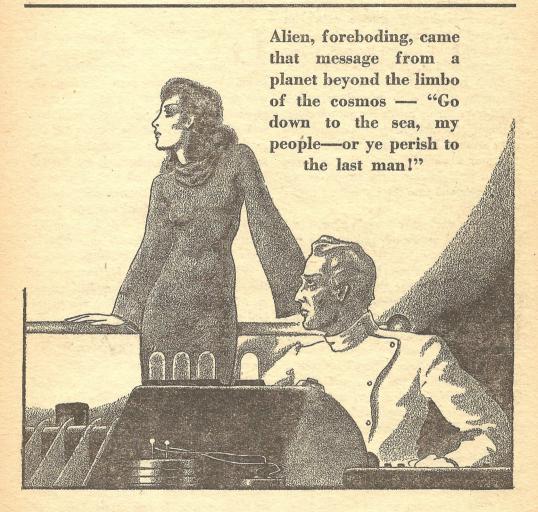
section where the wind from the waterfront was no zephyr.

Then I saw that, as I had suspected, she wasn't going to stop at the Bowen Street intersection. I sprinted forward and pulled up alongside, then nabbed her.

But I might as well have been a statue for all the attention she paid me. Just then the corner copper tooted his allclear whistle, and I let go.

I let her pull away and trotted along at a healthful distance behind, always ready to make a grand dive if the necessity arose. You see, I'd lamped an eyeful of her when I held her back at the corner, and she was pretty slick. Sort of snooty in a way, but the kind of snootiness that hits me hard. She looked as

# THE LEMMINGS



though she could talk pure algebra and psychoanalyze you between paragraphs.

Besides there was the mystery of it. What was she doing down here by the waterfront? Why the sleepwalking act?

There are no more intersections from Bowen Street down to the water. Bay Street is a wide alley running from one end of town to the other, and there's a nice solid railing all along to keep people from contaminating the fish. Up north, it becomes a neat, ritzy drive; farther south it's full of commercial docks. At this point, it was betwixt and between class and commerce. There was a line of more or less well-kept piers here.

She kept going straight ahead until she came to the railing. Then she stopped, but she stood there, trying to push ahead, apparently not realizing the strength of what was in her way. Finally she turned slowly to the right and started down the steps to a pier.

The possibility of suicide didn't hit me until she was halfway down the stretch of it. I jumped forward, yelling at her to hold it, and started after her. I didn't suppose she would hear, but if she were walking in her sleep and I could wake her up before she got too close, it might save her. And, if someone else were around, I might need a bit of help.

It was a waste of time, yelling. She walked straight down the length of the empty pier and into the icy waters, without a hitch.

And less than sixty seconds after, I had my coat and shoes off and was in the water after her.

Did I say icy waters? Terrific understatement; these were waters which had had centuries of practice in how to be cold. But I knew what I was after and I spent important seconds looking for her, surface diving until my eyes were so salty I couldn't see. There's always a light at the end of the pier, so I should have been able to find her, unless she sank to the bottom immediately and never came up. But I couldn't find a trace of her.

By this time my yelps had been heard. When I finally climbed out there was a reception committee waiting. I let them give me a hand and waited for the bluecoat to pitch in to me. But damned if they didn't accept my word that a pretty girl had just jumped off and I'd jumped after her without question. The bluecoat nodded, helped me get my own overcoat back on, told one of the other guys to fix me up. He asked me wait at the place where they'd fix me up with a change of clothes and some coffee so I could give

him the details about what had happened.

Later I spent about two hours answering questions about the girl. During the course of the interview, I learned that she was the sixth to go like that this week. The coppers didn't ask me a thing about my own doings.

AVY KNOTT told me quite a bit about the business after I'd managed to recover from the swim. We've always been chummy. He was at the desk when the first call came in—someone reporting that a man had walked off a pier. All the victims had the same earmarks. They all looked and acted as if they were hypnotized, all headed straight for the bay and walked in without a qualm, and no bodies had been recovered. After the third case, the police were on the watch, but the "Lemmings," as they were called, began to display a remarkable amount of cunning.

What I didn't know, for example, at the time that the smooth jane had led me on to a cold plunge, was that the patrol had been decoyed away on a false alarm just about five minutes before. The call had come from a store just above Bowen Street. Any reasonably fast walker canmake it from Bowen Street to the end of the pier in five minutes; the Lemming girl made good time for all her sleepwalking. They gave me an uncomfortable few minutes over at the station at first, because the copper at the Bowen intersection hadn't given the agreed-upon alarm whistle upon seeing the tall girl; he mistook me for one of the boys and figured the situation was in hand.

They'd dredged that section of the bay four times in the past month—the Lemmings had apparently started operating just about a month ago—and still found nothing. They sent divers down to see if something might have caught the stiffs, or if there was some unsuspected current at the bottom which might have

swept them very swiftly out to sea. Didn't I read the papers, Knott wanted to know. Or listen to the radio? What was happening in this town was nothing compared to the big cities on both the East and West Coasts. New York, for example, was under what amounted to a police dictatorship — very quiet, very much undercover, but there. They cracked down on the newspapers first; they made it clear that any editor who broke the news would find himself in a very unpleasant position and investigations afterwards wouldn't help him much. They got tough.

I told Davy that I'd stopped reading the papers after we licked the Japs, and Hitler and Benny were swept away like so much paper in the wind. Sure, I'm patriotic and I take pride in the Western Hemisphere Federation, but the write-ups on the proceedings aren't very exciting.

As a matter of fact, Davy confided, this town was being put under the censorship too. There had been some mention of the Lemmings in the local press, but it had been played down. They clamped on the lid after the divers came up from the bay—because what those boys found wasn't comforting, and didn't explain anything.

They found clothes.

Male, female and some child clothing. The only conclusion was that the victims stripped themselves as soon as they got into the water. Purses were found, with water-logged bills, make-up kits, coins, and what not.

Well, after I heard all that I felt that I just had to offer a bit of suggestion. So I sat there drinking coffee, thinking, when suddenly something popped into my head.

"Davy," I said, "you mentioned something about this business applying all up and down the coast. Have you fellows found out whether or not it goes beyond the borders of the USA? Or, even more interesting, have any of the victims jumped

into fresh water? A lake or river maybe?"

It was plain to see that I'd hit upon something.

He called the station and talked excitedly for about three minutes, then hung up.

"You've got something there," he exulted. "According to HQ, the Lemmings haven't shown any interest in fresh water at all. At least three of them were much nearer the lake than the bay at the time they got the urge. Yet they paid no attention to the possibilities of fresh water drowning."

I shook my head. "Mass suicide doesn't seem to explain it either. Why did they take off their clothes?"

T WASN'T until several days later, after my suit and coat had come back from a cleaner, that I found anything. I'd become pretty well het on the Lemming business, and the police were friendly enough after I gave Davy the suggestion on fresh water; that cut down the necessity of a lake patrol, among other things.

When the kid from Feldman's brought back my suit and overcoat he said something about a button in the pocket which didn't belong to the coat. Did I want it? I said sure and thanked him with a quarter, then looked at the button. There was a bit of thread and cardboard sticking to it. I recognized the latter; it was part of the cardboard tag Feldman's puts on coats for identification.

Then I remembered where I got that button. The tall jane! When I grabbed her at the intersection I remember feeling something come loose in my hand, and I slipped it into my pocket.

I hoofed it down to Feldman's.

Before I finished describing the tall girl, Mina Feldman nodded. "Oh yes, I knew her. That was Miss Kristoff. I was awfully sorry to hear about her being drowned. Was it really an accident?"

"It seems to be pretty definite," I said.
"But, look, Mina, this means a lot to me—and keep it under your hat, will you?
Do you know anything about this Kristoff woman?"

Mina's black eyes sparkled for a moment. "Not very much, Jerry. She was some sort of chemist; she had a Ph.D., was going around with some boy who's an instructor at the college. That's about all."

"Sure. Mina?"

"That's all I can think of."

"Well, did she act at all strange the last few times you saw her?"

"She was sort of preoccupied. I made a remark about something the last time she was here—don't remember what, but it was something in which she ordinarily was interested—and she paid no attention. I guess she didn't hear me. She seemed to have something on her mind—the boy friend, I suppose."

I groaned inwardly. Perhaps Mina knew important facts, and didn't know what she knew. "Think back, Mina. She died Tuesday night. Did you see her at all Tuesday or the day before?"

"She came in around noon, wanted her gloves cleaned. She was going to some sort of club, I think."

Wonderful, I thought. "She didn't mention what club?"

"No, but that was sort of unusual, Jerry. Anna Kristoff hardly ever went out—even with the boy friend. She was very much aloof, afraid of people, I think. It was only after she'd been coming here for almost a year that she'd say anything more than just what she wanted done, or ask the price."

"Did she ever talk to you about the boy friend?"

"Sometimes, Jerry. Is this important? We're getting into personal affairs now, you know."

"Do you know who the boy friend was?"

"Yes. Randall. Lives up on Fremont Avenue. I don't know what his first name was—she always called him Blackie. I think I was about the only woman in whom she confided. And I'm not going to tell you any more, Jerry."

"That's okay," I said. "You've told me enough."

She caught my arm. "Jerry, you're not getting into any trouble, are you?"

"Nope," I grinned. "Just following a hunch. There's something funny going on and I won't feel right until I learn something more about it."

HERE were two Randalls on Fremont Avenue; with my typical luck in such matters I got the wrong one first. But it did get me a good working description of Blackie Randall. It was toward dusk when I finished talking with one oldish man a few doors down. He looked up suddenly and said, "There's Mr. Randall now."

I followed his gaze to see a pale-looking man of about thirty turn a corner. Then I excused myself and started after him, because Randall was walking in the same manner as the Kristoff girl that night she took the plunge.

Not taking chances this time, I put in a hurry call to police headquarters and we grabbed Randall in about three minutes flat. He didn't resist; he just kept turning in the direction of the harbor and pushing forward.

He paid no attention to anything or anyone.

Down at headquarters we had a doctor look him over. He seemed normal except that he just didn't respond to non-physical stimuli; we had to strap him to a chair. He sat there, leaning forward against the straps, an engrossed expression on his face. After about three quarters of an hour, the doc gave up.

"I'd say hypnotism," was his comment. "Only I can't see how we are going to make him snap out of it. Call me if any change is observed."

Then, right while we were watching him, Randall gave a sort of strangled gasp and began to struggle desperately with the straps. His face began to grow purple; his eyes bulged, and he showed every indication of suffocation. We rushed to him, tore open his collar, took off the straps and threw open the windows. He threshed about frantically for about two minutes while we worked just as feverishly trying to give him air; and then he collapsed.

The doctor pronounced him dead. His comment was, "The man drowned."

Just why it seemed to be a good idea to snitch the little black address book out of Blackie Randall's breast pocket before anyone else noticed it was there is one of those things I can't explain. But that's what I did and it turned out to be a good lead. I checked on every address in that book and found one which didn't check. It said merely: La Mer, 87 Wentworth.

Huh, I thought to myself. Just some skirt, he's been seeing on the quiet. But even so, something might be found. I dropped in at Feldman's.

"Mina," I said when the place was empty except for us two, "did Anna Kristoff ever talk about a dame called La Mer?"

"La Mer, Jerry?" She seemed puzzled, then brightened up. "La Mer is French for 'the sea'. Anna did mention it once or twice offhand, but I got the impression it was some sort of club."

"Was her boy friend in on it too?"
"I think they went there together."

"Mina," I beamed, "you're wonderful. And now I'm off to the wars."

"Wait—Jerry!" She looked frightened.
"You're not going there alone, are you?"
"Why not?"

"Why not! Look what happened to Randall and Anna Kristoff!"

This complicated matters. I spent the next ten minutes comforting her. But it wasn't wasted, because I did a bit of thinking, too. And when I went out, the first thing I did was to call Davy Knott, tell him where I was going, and ask the police to follow me.

When I arrived at 87 Wentworth, I had to admit that maybe Mina was right. There was no La Mer listed. I rang the bell and waited. "I'm looking for La Mer," I said to the attractive blonde who opened the door. "I have a message for her."

There was something regal about her, and something that made me feel cold, too. She motioned me inside and shut the door. We went into an inner room which was curtained off and filled with swanky chairs and sofas.

"What is the message?" she asked.

"It's from Blackie Randall," I said on a burst of inspiration. "He met with an accident last night; I was there when it happened and he grabbed my hand and whispered, 'La Mer, La Mer.' I tried to get more out of him, but that was all he said. He started to say, 'Tell—' but that was all. I found your address in his book."

Her face was impassive and I didn't like the way those sapphire eyes bored into mine.

"Then Mr. Randall is dead?"

"Yes."

She arose. "I appreciate your coming," she said, and I thought I detected a sardonic note in her voice. "It means nothing to you, of course, but there is a great deal of meaning in it for me.

"But I owe you more than mere thanks. I will show you something." She touched a stud on the wall and the lights began to grow dim.

"Don't be alarmed," she said quickly. "You're only going to see some motion pictures."

At the other end of the room, curtains

were being drawn aside to reveal a standard motion picture screen. It lit up instantly, and a sound apparatus went into operation, playing music by Debussy, I think it was. It was just pictures of the ocean. But they were beautiful.

I've always liked salt water, always appreciated the seashore and gotten a kick out of the few times I've taken ferry rides; but it was nothing like this. There was some sort of spell worked in with the music and the pictures, I think, because I began to have a positive yearning for the sea.

The pictures went on and on until I began to wonder how long a session this was going to be. Then something on the screen caught my attention. It was a sort of flickering. Sometimes it would be the splash of spray on rocks, sometimes sunlight, sometimes the glint of jewels—but always the same strange flickering. It got so that at last I couldn't keep my mind on the pictures, just watched the flickers. And I began to grow sleepy.

I didn't want to go to sleep; it was much too pretty. But the effect was too strong for me, despite the fact that I should have been interested in what the commentator was saying, and my not liking to pull something like this on that blonde. I felt my head falling forward and the scene faded away.

The next thing I knew, Davy Knott was shaking me.

"Listen," came his voice, "will you snap out of it and tell me what happened at Wentworth Place?"

"Happened?" I sat up and looked around. This was my room; I was home. "Did anything happen? How did I get here?"

"Happened!" he snorted. "I'm asking you! You walked out of that place like one of the Lemmings, went right by

where the chief and I were going to meet you if we didn't have to come in after you. I wanted to grab you then and there, but the chief said no, we'd better follow you and see if you headed for the bay."
"Did I?"

"No, you just came home and crawled into bed. Now suppose you tell me what went on in there."

I opened my mouth to tell him, then realized suddenly that I couldn't. I couldn't tell anyone.

Davy nodded. "I understand," he said. "Don't worry about it; we have all the dope we need. Drop around to the station after you've had a good rest."

And all my dreams were of the sea; I was living in the sea, living there with people like myself. The land seemed ugly and unreal. Seldom would we come to the surface and look out. And among those who lived under the sea with me were the tall girl called Anna Kristoff, and a number of others whose pictures I'd seen among the Lemmings.

HE little white-haired man who had been introduced to me as Dr. Mason smiled.

"You are one of the few people, Mr. Holman, who seem to realize that the Lemming matter is much more than a local, or even an interstate disturbance."

I nodded. This Mason bird seemed to know his stuff. "Did you find anything when you hypnotized me, Doctor?"

"I'll come to that later, Jerry. You have imagination—much more so than the boys at headquarters—so I think I can safely let you in on matters which I wouldn't think of telling them.

"First of all, the Lemmings. An excellent name for them, by the by. I presume you've heard of the legend of the Lemmings, small rodent-like creatures who suddenly appear in swarms and rush into the sea. Well, these human Lemmings began to appear three months ago,

in Florida. Do you happen to recall anything in the papers about that time concerning Kellant's experiments?"

I shook my head. "Sorry, Doc, I don't read the papers."

"You should. Kellant was on the track of something big, I think. We'll never know now, because he was one of the first—perhaps the very first—to go.

"I'm not going to tell you much more right now, Jerry, because there's something to show you first. More movies. But they won't put you to sleep, I can assure you of that.

"Kellant was after something big, as I said before. He was sure it would be important; had some service men guarding him. These films I'm showing you were taken by one of his guards, as proof of what the man knew would not be believed otherwise. Without going into detail, I'll merely mention that the guard disappeared too—but the films were recovered. I got hold of them because he was my nephew."

"Oh," I said. "I'm sorry to hear about that, Doc."

He nodded. "It may be, however, that Len isn't dead. I've a theory—" He waved his hand. "But no more of that. We have business on hand. Come into the other room, Jerry, and I'll show you what my nephew dared not tell without documentary proof."

The film was a bit jumpy in spots, but that added to its reality. At first there were just shots of a work room full of various radio apparatus, some of which I thought I recognized. At one table, however, there was an odd-looking set equipped with headphones.

It wasn't too odd. But it looked queer, nonetheless. I couldn't figure out what those two terminal-like gadgets with the open space between them might be for. But my attention was taken away from them when the film jumped a bit and I saw two people putting on the phones.

"Doc," I whispered. "That girl—she's the one who's at 87 Wentworth Place now. The one they call La Mer."

"So? Good work, Jerry. But watch closely now."

The man was twisting the dials of the apparatus and plugging in switches. And suddenly sparks began to fly in between the two terminals. A strange, visible zigzag of sparks.

Then something began to appear there. It was small at first, but it grew rapidly, like a bubble, until it was about the size of a basketball. No—it was bigger than that. By this time I could see that it was gradually becoming transparent—

Then I almost jumped out of my seat. There was something inside of that bubble. It was alive; I could see it moving. It made me think of an octopus and a dragon and a crocodile all in one. It was green, covered with scales like a snake, had tentacles like an octopus. The tentacles were scaly, though—no suckers on them. And it had a little head like a young cabbage.

I couldn't make up my mind whether it was beautiful or horrible. I'll compromise and say it was fascinating.

In one of those tentacles it was holding something—something too small to make out clearly. The object looked like a little ball, with a beam coming out of it, like a flashlight beam. It shot out of the object, out through the walls of the bubble, and shone on the faces of the man and the blonde woman whose eyes were like sapphires. They were hearing something over the head earphones, too. I could tell by the intent expression on their faces.

This lasted for awhile, then the beam from the object in the bubble snapped off; the thing waved its tentacles, as if in dismissal, and the man spun some dials again. The bubble grew opaque and slowly shrank until it was gone and there were only the funny sparks darting back

and forth between the two terminals.

HE screen went blank abruptly. I blinked, bewildered, for awhile, then turned to Mason.

"What does it all mean, Doc?"

He shook his head grimly. "There is much we cannot comprehend as yet. But this we know. That creature is not of our world. We have looked upon one of the attributes of a science far superior to ours. Whether that science be friendly or unfriendly to us, we cannot be sure as yet. But I am positive that this has a direct bearing upon the case of the Lemmings.

"Tell me, Jerry, what strikes you as the outstanding feature about the Lemmings? Think carefully."

I cupped my chin in my hands. "It's hard to pick out one thing, Doc, there are so many. But what strikes me as most mysterious is the fact that no bodies have been found and that when they dredged the harbor they found the victims' clothes.

"It's all mysterious, of course, but you can understand people being hypotized and made to jump in the harbor. If you asked me for a second choice, I'd say it was Blackie Randall's death.

"Doc!" Something hit me then. "Could that have been hypnotism? Could he have been made to think that if he didn't get to water within a reasonable period of time, he'd drown? Was he killed by suggestion?"

"Yes and no, Jerry. He was impelled to seek the water; he did die because he could not get there in time. But it wasn't mere suggestion. I was present at the autopsy. We found things which ordinarily we wouldn't dare believe. Blackie Randall had been changed, Jerry. He wasn't an ordinary man any more. He was a fish!"

"Huh?"

"Remember your biology, Jerry?

What's the difference between a man and a fish, really? Why can't a man breathe water or a fish breathe air?"

"Why—why their lungs are different. A fish has gills through which it extracts oxygen from the water. A man has lungs which are adapted to taking it straight from the air."

"You have the right idea," he approved. "There's a little more. A fish's gills dry up in no time at all once they're out of water, won't operate any more. That is mainly because there's no apparatus for their retaining moisture, no mucous. Otherwise a fish might be able to come out of the water in damp weather, when the moisture content of the atmosphere is high. Lungs, now, are something else. They aren't equipped for the osmotic process that gills undergo, and they just can't get rid of water at all. They're spongy, you see.

"But—if a lung could be altered in some way so as to function in the manner of gills—extract oxygen from water through an osmotic process—then a man could live under water very easily. The only rub is this: he'd have to live under water. Without major alterations in his body, he couldn't have both lungs and gills."

"Wait a minute, Doc," I interrupted, thinking furiously. "You said something about mucous, didn't you? Well, isn't the mucous the stuff that's around your eyes and the lining of your mouth and throat and so on?"

"That's right."

"Jeepers, Doc, a guy would have to have more than his lungs fixed up. Didn't you ever go swimming in salt water? After awhile, no matter how careful you are, your eyes start to burn from the salt, and your throat gets sore. A person would go blind under water after awhile, or go nuts from the pain. Salt on that mucous is hell."

Mason clapped me on the shoulder.

"Good work, Jerry. I see you're not dimwitted at all. There is more to the Lemmings than just the alteration of their lungs. Just exactly what it is, I'm not certain, as yet. I only have a theory which seems to explain the matter. I haven't broached it to anyone else so far, because without substantiation, it would be dismissed as too utterly wild.

"I was in on one of the early cases of Lemmingism; we managed to capture the victim and subjected him to hypnosis. Before he drowned we made a recording." He took a record out of one of the cases lining the wall and placed it on the phonograph. "I'm just playing the third record, which contains the heart of the matter."

The needle scratched for a moment; then a voice spoke: "—room is filled with scientific apparatus."

Mason: Do you recognize the apparatus?

Voice: No. There is what looks like a coffin, with a glass top. There's a sort of lamp set over it so it will play upon the full length of the coffin.

Mason: What is happening now?

Voice: They have disrobed me. They are lifting me and setting me in the coffin. The top is being fastened down over it. Now they are setting up screens around it. The screens are very heavy.

Mason: Are they lead screens?

Voice: They could be; I'm not sure.

Mason: Please continue.

Voice: They have turned on the lamplike thing. I can see a faint glow around the rim of it, but no light seems to be coming out. I feel a sort of tingling.

Mason: Is it painful?

Voice: No. But it feels as if something strange is happening to me. I am almost afraid, yet it is not unpleasant.

Mason: It is later, much later. Are you still in the coffin?

Voice: Yes. The lamp is still glowing. The sensations have passed away now.

I feel as if it is almost over.... Yes, the lamp has been switched off. They are taking away the screens...

A scratching indicated the end of the record; Mason took it off.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I believe that the victim was subjected to a concentration of cosmic rays. Kellant was working on that just before the creature came. "Here's the theory though: we know that every human embryo passes through every evolutionary stage through which man has passed before it is born, a complete homo sapiens. There are still traces in the human body of rudimentary gills, and other apparatus necessary for a submarine existence. What has happened to the Lemmings is that their entire bodies have become adapted to under-water conditions, the entire make-up of the cells altered."

"Wouldn't autopsies show something?"

"Yes. And that is another queer thing about this business. No autopsies besides Blackie's have been taken. The deeper you go into it, the more it seems as though the organization behind the Lemmings is exerting a subtle influence upon the entire world."

JUST where the dreams began that night and reality ended, I cannot be sure. The events of the night following my conversation with him will always be confused. I'm afraid.

We were both up late that night because three more of the Lemmings found their way to the sea and were lost in it. Mason told me that after his successful attempt at hypnotizing a Lemming, the organization must have taken steps to prevent further interference. Now any Lemming put under hypnosis died immediately.

We tried desperately to piece together what we had found, checking against the staggering compilation of facts from all over the world. Mason insisted that it was useless to put forward his theory at this time, and I could see his point. What the situation was like that night in New York, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Liverpool, and other big cities will never be known. Perhaps this night was little different from other nights, perhaps a sort of apathy to the phenomenon had been reached. We heard very few reports; we heard that the newspapers were under military control, that great staffs of psychologists and propagandists were at work to divert public attention.

There seemed to be a sort of monstrous self deception in the way that the world carried on, for this affair had by now reached monstrous bounds. It was no longer possible in some cases to ascertain even the precise number of the missing. One factor stood out; the missing were not solely residents of cities, towns, or villages within easy access of salt water. From all parts of a country they came to these points and rushed into the sea. Patrols by police and armed soldiers were for the most part useless.

In New York it was discovered that any attempt to use counter-hypnosis upon the Lemmings resulted in the almost instantaneous death of the subject. Those which were held over a varying period of time, which never exceeded three hours, died like fish out of water. Some were kept in huge tanks and aquariums, but they died through a complete inability to feed themselves.

TRAMPED back to my apartment that night, my mind reeling with what I'd learned in the past few days. A weariness was upon me. As I climbed the stairs, the scent of salt water was in my nostrils and I breathed deeply of it, feeling a keenly refreshing aspect in it.

I threw myself on the bed with a half sensation that I was floating atop the crest of swelling waves. I lay quietly and let the movement of the breakers carry me along until at last all was still. But at once there came a tormenting dryness and a searing heat. I opened my eyes to find the sea had vanished and I was stranded upon the salty shores. The horror of that discovery nearly stopped my heart; I closed my eyes, striving desperately to will the sea to come back, but it was no use. So at last I arose and looked about me, searching for a sign which would show me the way home.

Around me stretched the reaches of a city, and I remembered that in the dim, misty past I and all men had dwelt in such places as these. It seemed even that this particular city was familiar to me, for I could recall specific landmarks and knew that one street led to this spot and another to that. But try as I might I could not recall what combination of streets led to the bay.

Along the empty ways, past the great eyes of deserted shops, many of them filled still with those goods which had been on sale before it came, I hastened, my breath coming in great gasps, a fire lancing through my being. As I strode along, a vision came to me of the last days-days when these ways were still swarming with people. I could see them here, all intent upon their business, oblivious of that which hung over them. Out of the deeps beyond the sky it came, a cloud which drifted into the atmosphere and let the winds of the world swirl it into every part of the planet. And the winds of the world breathed upon the city and those who walked its ways, smote them with the cloud that had come out of space, and the people fell, their bodies shriveling away until only skeletons were left. Even these dissolved after a brief time so that nothing of man was left save the cities he had built.

Another fear was upon me, a fear that I might not find my way home to the sea before the winds blew.

Then the thought came to me: there

is a woman at 87 Wentworth Place who knows of these things; she it was who learned of the cloud and who first showed men the way home. I will hasten there and seek the goddess with sapphire eyes, that the winds blow not my flesh away.

So, even as the fire within grew more and still more painful, I turned my steps along the way I knew and came at last to the small building on the cliff and rang the bell. The door opened and she stood there, a smile upon her face. I knelt at her feet and said, "I am lost; show me the way home." She beckoned me to enter and took me to an inner room.

I entered her shrine, and there she performed rituals and made vapors, bidding me to inhale of them. When I did so, the fires within me died and I felt again refreshed.

Then she led me gently to the doorway of the temple and said to me, "Go now, go home quickly; let nothing turn you aside, for that which I have given you will not linger long and should you still be away from home when the spell has died, then none can save you from your doom.

Again I thanked her and turned my steps away. And I cannot be sure, but I thought I heard a hammering upon the door and the blowing of whistles.

HERE'S little left to explain," said Mason. "That is—as regards the phenomenon of the Lemmings itself. But I'll begin as closely to the beginning as possible, going by Katherine Kellant's story.

"Kellant and his wife were working on a super-radio when they discovered the being. I think, while it is entirely accidental that they contacted it when they did, that contact would have been made sooner or later. Because whatever the creature was, it was friendly toward us; it brought the first warning of the gas cloud from space."

"But why hadn't astronomers discov-

ered it long before then?" I asked him.

"It was between Earth and the sun, and of so tenuous a nature that it simply could not be seen. We would have discovered it later, but by that time it would have been much too late. The cloud was a deadly poison to all life and could not be shut out by any combination except salt water. Some day chemists will tell us more about that.

"The thing read the minds of the Kellants, obtained from them the psychological data necessary for it to make plans for the most effective means of saving the best of the human race. It determined, from what it had learned, that to tell humanity what was up would have been to provoke disaster and war.

"There were many months to go before the cloud could be discovered. Thus, with the aid of the Kellants, an organization throughout the world was set up, an organization whose sole aim was to operate upon individuals of the race and replace their lungs with gills.

"Again, we shall have to wait to learn precisely what was done. But from the evidence we have, we know that there was a transition stage of several hours between the time of the operation and the time that the subject became a true fish; that further, the subject was given posthypnotic instructions to seek the water—salt water—without delay. The subject was further post-hypnotised in such a way that his heart would stop were counter-hypnosis used upon him. A necessary precaution.

"Why was the set-up not discovered until so late? Another thing we won't know for a long time. One explanation is that the actions of police and investigators, were, to a large extent, directed by the being."

"How were the subjects selected?" I interrupted.

"First of all, the scientists. Not just any scientist, but those who specialized in branches the use of which would be primary in adapting man to live under the sea. And, in addition, those individual specialists who were, as human beings, best suited to take positions of authority and responsibility.

"Then great masses of people—although again, not just plain people. At all times individuals selected were those who would rank high in tests for intelligence, meaning adaptability in this case, sense of social responsibility, and capability along directions which would be useful here."

He fell silent for a moment. "To me," he half murmured, "the most amazing thing is the really vast numbers of all types of people who were selected."

"But this cold-blooded selection-"

"Regrettable, but necessary. There was so little time, you see. What would have happened had the world as a whole been informed? There would have been panic, degeneration, mass hysteria. Could an organization have been openly set up to determine who was to live and who to be left behind? Suppose it was your responsibility to select people openly, living from day to day, knowing that thousands of people you saw or knew or cared for must be left behind. No, this was the only way. That is why it was done secretly, why the victims were hypnotised, why they were given post-hypnotic instructions to die rather than reveal anything. I still don't know how that was accomplished. There's a great deal to learn about all this, Jerry."

E ARE building a new world under the sea. It is a simple world in comparison to the one we left behind us, a world more restricted. It will be a long time before man can again become a star-gazer, Dr. Mason says, but he is confident that a way will be found.

I am almost constantly in a state of

amazement at what is being done here, at the role I am playing. Because my amateur detective work found Katherine Kellant, I had to be made a Lemming, and from what they found when they questioned me before the operation, Dr. Mason was added to the list. Although I think they would have taken Mason anyway.

Yesterday we had a general meeting and the Kellants told us the whole story from beginning to end. How the creature came and directed the entire organization. The thing lived on some planet in our own solar system way beyond Plutoa planet so far away that it could not be seen by our telescopes. This creature was a scientist there and had been engaged in some experiments which got out of hand and resulted in the cloud. It wasn't a very large cloud, but the gas was extremely tenuous. It could seep through anything on the surface of our world except salt water. So it came to our world to do what it could to keep our race from being completely wiped out as a result of its mistake.

However, the crowning point of that meeting came later. The co-ordinators—that's the closest thing to government we have here—thought I might make a good mate for Anna Kristoff.

Well, I'm not kicking. What I said about Anna back in the beginning still goes. And best of all, Anna doesn't seem to find the idea of marrying me objectionable either.

Right now Anna is working in the chemistry department and says she's just about broken down the problem of a paper which will stand up in salt water. That's good news, because, as I mentioned to Mason some time ago, we'll go to seed in a generation or less if we don't have books. Offhand, I'd have said the problem couldn't be solved, but I've already seen so many impossible things here.

# THE WEAPON

by H. B. OGDEN



"You ask us of Mars for a weapon to save your world. We have it—but it is not for you, Earthman. Men may die and planets perish, but we break not the law of the universe — 'Every civilization must work out its own destiny!' "

HE council-room was in absolute silence. From a raised dais, five Martians looked down upon the Earthman standing before them. Their strange feline faces were entirely expressionless. Only their eyes exhibited signs of life. Glowing greenly, they seemed to pierce the innermost core of Preston Calvin's being.

The Chief Elder of Mars spoke from his seat in the center, "Your request for an audience has been granted, Earthman. What do you want of the Elders of Mars?"

"Assistance." Calvin's voice cut like a knife. With these Martians bluntness was the best diplomacy. "Assistance in our fight against the forces of ruthlessness and evil."

The Chief Elder's gray vibrissae twitched. "Mars does not interfere with Earth. We give no assistance."

"You are doubtless unacquainted with the facts, Excellency," Calvin urged. "In the name of all humanity, I beg for aid. Democracy must not lose."

"Affairs on Earth have been followed with keen interest," came the calm answer, "but every world must work out its own destiny."

Calvin's shoulders sagged. He had been warned of this emotionless super-race, this product of countless eons of evolution, but the reality was hard to face.

He shifted his ground. "Aid us for your own sakes then, if not for ours. If the brutes win, Earth will be dominated by a cult of hate. Mars itself may not be safe from danger."

"We don't fear Earth; you should know that." There was no anger, merely the coldest indifference in the Martian's voice. "We allowed you to colonize the Jovian and Saturnian worlds which we ourselves had forsaken long before, but Mars itself we will keep."

Calvin sighed. "I do not ask for material assistance. I want only a weapon. You, who are so powerful and wise, who could have had a universe yet rejected it. Surely of your vast knowledge, you can spare a crumb to the younger civilization of Earth, that we, too, may wax great and flourish?"

There was a low murmur from the five assembled Elders. The Chief Elder spoke slowly in answer. "You are right—our wisdom is great. It is so great that we know this: Every civilization must

work out its own destiny. We shall give no assistance."

Their indifference seemed impregnable but Calvin forced himself to one last effort.

"You fear, I suppose, that I ask for a powerful instrument of destruction with which to lay Earth waste. That you would be right to refuse. The fact is, however, that I ask for the opposite—for something which played its part in your own history.

"We have studied the history of Mars and discovered a few things. Your early history, like ours, is one of war and destruction; then, overnight, you emerged into your present emotionless state, in which war and evil cannot exist. We have discovered how that change came about, and we ask for a similar change back on Earth."

A pause here elicited no answer other than a motion to continue.

"There exists a gland in the human body, atrophied and apparently useless—the pineal. There is a way, known only to you, to activate that gland and restore its proper functions. These functions, we feel sure, are to act as counterweights to the fear and anger-producing adrenal glands.

"A world with functional pineals would then be a world without anger or fear, a world of reason. Is Mars ready to refuse information so beneficial? It would be against reason."

"You are wrong," the Chief Elder informed him. "It is not against reason. Does Earth wish to be as emotionless as Mars?"

"No," Calvin admitted, "but to go that far is unnecessary. Yours is an extreme of hypertrophied pineals. In great dilution, the chemical I seek would merely soften the violent emotions of fear, anger, and hate. That is all."

"You know then that it is a chemical that produces the desired effect?"

"Yes, and an inorganic one," was the answer. A small bottle of iodine dropped in a city reservoir will restore to normal the thyroids of the entire city. The 'pineal chemical' would, no doubt, react similarly. I ask only the method of preparation of this chemical. That is all the weapon I wish."

The Chief Elder of Mars leaned closer to Calvin and spoke very softly indeed. "Once Mars, facing destruction, found the means of its own salvation. Earth must do likewise. Were the raising of a finger all that were required of us to save it, the finger would not be raised. Earth must save itself."

Calvin's lips twisted in a wry grin as he realized that his last bolt had been shot. His hand was played; his aces trumped. He turned away in despair and left the assembly room.

His mind worked feverishly as he was whirled upward to Mars' dead and barren surface. Somehow, he must snatch the knowledge from the reluctant lips of these living icebergs. Without it, he could not return to a world where democracy clung precariously to its last foothold on the western seaboard of what was once the United States. Rather he would die in space.

It was then he thought of Deimos!

EIMOS! The giant laboratory of Mars! There, the scientific secrets of the race were assembled—even that of the weapon he had asked for. And he formed the mad plan of assaulting that impregnable fortress of knowledge and carrying off by force what he could not obtain by his pleas and prayers.

He refused to consider, for reasoning would have halted him. Once, before the super-race of Mars had been discovered, an exploratory expedition had attempted a landing on Deimos and been warned away by a strange space-vessel. When a second and larger expedition ignored the warnings and pressed on, they never returned.

Calvin had no illusions, then, as to the certain failure of his attempt—but he did not care. The alternative to success was martyrdom, and in his present state of mind that would have been as welcome.

The hours it took to reach the little moon passed with incredible slowness but finally its jagged crags loomed before him. As he circled it cautiously, he wondered if there were some sort of protecting screen surrounding it. That was the first obstacle, for Calvin dared not land until he could assure himself he would not be killed in the process.

He made a few adjustments and one of the two lifeboats with which the ship was equipped slid from its sheath and slowly floated down to the moon beneath. It was an old trick but an effective one.

Under the infinitesimal pull of Deimos, the boat seemed scarcely to travel, in spite of the initial push. Half an hour—three-quarters—a full hour, and then the tiny projectile hit the surface. There was a small smudge visible as it landed, a tiny cloud of dust raised by its impact, and there it lay, entirely unharmed.

A faint glow of triumph welled within him. There was no screen!

Gently, he lowered the ship and landed in a hollow, a miniature valley on the side away from Mars. The sun would not reach it for a while yet; and there the ship, hidden in the dark recess, might most easily escape detection.

He emerged, a muffled, space-suited figure, teetering uncertainly on Deimos' rocky floor. First, he impressed the surroundings deeply on his mind that he might have no trouble locating the ship when and if he returned, and then turned his thoughts toward the laboratory itself.

His problem was threefold: to find a way into the lab, to avoid notice, and to locate the pineal chemical.

First, he must locate the entrance. He tried to move, but scarcely had his leg muscles contracted when he felt himself thrown off his feet, arch high into the air, and float downwards with tantalizing slowness. When he attempted to raise himself, he went into a second crazy, tumbling somersault.

Calvin cursed bitterly. On Deimos, he was practically weightless and almost entirely helpless. It was a case for ingenuity. Clutching an outstretched projection of rock, he pulled himself forward, using an absolute minimum of force. Over he went, heels high above his head, his grip broken. This time, however, he had made horizontal progress, and when he came to rest, it was some ten yards from where he had started.

He had no idea where he was going, nor did he care much. Obviously, remaining in one place would get him nowhere, whereas moving, he ought to stumble upon something sooner or later. That was his vague rationalization. Then, in the midst of one of his weirdly-flopping handsprings, he went rigid and fell flat, scarcely breathing.

The harsh, discordant tone of Martian speech sounded from somewhere ahead. His receiver picked up the sounds clearly but he could understand nothing of it. He understood Martian only when spoken slowly and as for speaking it himself—well, it was organically impossible for an Earthman to imitate the Martian sounds.

There were two of them. Calvin saw them through a cleft in the boulders at his right. He scarcely breathed. Had there been a screen? Were they searching for him? If so, he could not long hope to remain hidden.

Then, suddenly, he caught the words rest period, and speech halted as quickly as it had begun. One of the creatures walked speedily toward the ridiculously near horizon. Calvin envied his normal gait, while the other approached a wall

of rock, touched a spring, and entered the cavity that yawned in response.

The Earthman's heart leaped in joyful astonishment. The gods of space were beaming kindly down upon him, for there before him was the means of entrance. He felt a bit of superiority over these Martians who hid their secrets so poorly.

Laboriously, he inched towards the wall into which the other had gone. The tiny metallic lever was easily found; no attempt had been made to hide it. On Earth, he would have immediately smelled treachery in this, but he knew well that the Martians were far too powerful and far too emotionless to stoop to trickery.

He entered, as he had expected, into an airlock. The inner door opened; he found himself at the threshold of a long, narrow corridor, the walls of which shone with a soft yellow luminescence. It was perfectly straight and its lack of cover dismayed Calvin. Yet it was empty and he could do nothing but step inside.

Even the light Mars-normal gravity felt comfortable after his weightlessness, as he strode the length of the corridor, his steel-shod shoes making no noise against the shock-absorbent floor. The corridor ended in a balcony, and there Calvin stood for the barest moment and gazed at the prospect before him.

HE whole interior lay exposed, carved into one gigantic room, partitioned into levels and sections. Elevator shafts and supporting pillars shot up dizzying heights in bewildering multiplicity. Down below, so far that it seemed lost in haze, bulky machinery loomed. Nearer at hand an astonishing variety of apparatus of all types could be seen. And all about were scurrying Martians.

A door was ajar behind him and into it he leaped. It led into an empty room, a closet or storeroom of sorts. There he unscrewed his helmet, took a deep breath of the fresh, invigorating air, and paused to consider his next step.

For the moment he was stalemated, for the place simply swarmed with Martians. His unbelievable luck was bound to break soon, and, indeed, he was not over-safe where he was. Then, suddenly, the yellow glow of the walls faded and died and in its place a dim, ghostly blue appeared.

Calvin jumped to his feet in tense anticipation. Was this a signal which warned of his discovery? Had they been playing with him after all?

And then another change forced itself upon his attention. The busy noise that had pervaded the entire place had died down and given way to deep silence. Fear gave way to curiosity, and Calvin edged the door open very slowly and tiptoed out. The entire giant laboratory was bathed in the same weird blue light, and Calvin felt little cold fingers of uneasiness dance up and down his spine as he surveyed what was now a realm of dimly-seen shadows and dark, sad-looking light.

He remembered the two words he had heard one of the Martians on the surface utter: rest period. This then was what was meant. His spirits rose again. His luck had held!

The next step was to locate the secret of the pineal chemical. As he glanced about at the murky expanse, so terrifying in its vastness and so mysterious in what it hid, he first realized the immensity of the task he had set himself.

He stopped and considered. The laboratory would have to be arranged in an orderly fashion to suit the Martians. He would first have to locate the section devoted to chemistry and if that proved useless (supposing he still remained at large) he would try the biologic section.

The elevator, dimly seen in the blueness, was a short distrance to the right. Fortunately, its power had not been shut off for the duration of the *rest period* and Calvin descended to the lowest level at a

speed that left him standing, gasping.

Calvin drew his flashlight. He would have to use it now, daring all risk of discovery. Its thin shaft of light revealed him to be among giant structures which stretched higher than the beam could reach. The Earthman did not recognize them, in spite of a familiarity with Terrestrial science, but they seemed to have nothing to do with chemistry. Picking his way carefully through narrow lanes running between these structures, with the flashlight pointing the way at all times, he finally emerged into relatively open space.

Evidently, he was in a power-room of sorts. At his right, a gigantic motor lay idle, even in rest giving out a terrifying aura of strength and power. Directly ahead was a small atomic-power generator. It was with some interest that he inspected this for Earth had as yet made only the first few stumbling steps in the direction of atomic power. But his time was limited and he passed on.

E WANDERED into a spacious section of the laboratory occupied only by low tables on which shrouded objects lay, bulking dimly in the blue light and jumping suddenly out of the shadows as the flashlight swept over them.

The odor of formalin stung Calvin's nostrils and it struck him that he was in a dissecting room. He shuddered at the thought of what might lay under those concealing shrouds and hurried on quickly.

A little further he passed among wire cages and the sickly smell of animal life rose to meet him. Martian "womboes", Europan "skorats" and common Terrestrial white mice squeaked and whined at the intrusion. Calvin scarcely glanced at them and passed on.

There were shelves and shelves of cubical bottles containing the quick-breeding Martian insect that had displaced the classical fruit-fly—even on Earth; rows and rows of bacterial cultures; piles upon piles of lenses, mirrors, and other optical paraphernalia. Calvin felt as if he were in some museum which at every turn presented something new and startling, but which never, under any circumstances, repeated itself.

He estimated having spent over an hour and a half in a vain search before stumbling upon a chemical supply room. Partitioned off by a low waist-high wall, its walls were laden from top to bottom by myriads of containers—glass, wax and rubber, containing test solutions in infinite variety. Over all hovered the odors inseparable from chemicals, the sharp, tangy atmosphere which recalled vivid memories of chem courses back in college.

Upwards went the flashlight, to be stopped short by a "ceiling" which marked the bottom of the second level. One of the ubiquitous elevators was almost at his side. He stepped in and shot noiselessly upwards.

On the second level, and the third and the fourth, much the same sight met his eyes. There were hosts of other supplies necessary to chemistry; beakers, flasks, burettes, all sorts of complicated glassware, rubber tubing, porcelain dishes, platinum crucibles.

Then he reached the experimental labs and here he could not help but linger. There was a vat filled with a green, miasmic gas, evidently chlorine, connected through a series of intricately arranged tubing (at present shut off by stopcocks) into a small beaker filled with a colorless liquid. Further away a pair of yard-long burettes dripped, ever so slowly, drops of cloudy fluid into two flasks filled with a simmering purple chemical.

At the far end, almost beyond the reach of the flashlight beam, was a complicated web of glass tubing, in the center of which a beaker sat spider-like over a small flame. A viscous, red liquid gurgled and bubbled within, and Calvin smelled the faint, tarry odor that issued.

The levels through which he rose seemed endless. Past the seventeenth, he came upon the analytic labs. At the twenty-fifth he recognized organic chemistry set-ups; at the thirty-fifth, physical chemistry; at the fortieth, bio-chemistry.

It was a complete achievement worthy of the Martian supermen, yet through it all Calvin saw only defeat. All that he saw gave no slightest hint of the nature and identity of the pineal chemical, and upon not a single level had he been able to locate a single file of notes, let alone anything in the nature of a chemical library.

There was only the top level to be investigated now and it was all but empty. It was very large, more than a hundred yards in each direction as nearly as he could estimate in the blue gloom, but all that occupied it were squat, cubical structures which stood flush against the wall.

There were hundreds of these, circling the entire room, all alike. They were a yard high, equally wide and equally deep, and each stood on four stubby legs. The side towards the center of the room was of cloudy, glass-like material, the rest were of featureless metal.

And on the top of each was etched in golden letters a single Martian ideograph, and below it a Martian numeral. Calvin understood its meaning immediately. It said "Summary 18."

Calvin's eyes narrowed—summary of what? The logical explanation would be that it was a summary of all chemical data known to the Martians, a chemical encyclopedia. He approached the cubes again with devouring curiosity, noticed further that each cube was marked by a separate number, and selected the one maked "1".

Probing fingers located a protruding segment on the upper right hand corner of the side facing him. A slight pressure shoved it aside revealing a small lever protruding from the center of a halfmoon slit. Without hesitation, he edged the lever slightly to the left. Immediately the vitreous frontal face came to life-a bright illumination from within making it resemble a television screen back on Earth.

Nor did this constitute all, for from the bottom of the screen a long column of print began working upwards slowly. Calvin read it slowly and laboriously, for the language was technical. It is difficult to learn a language one cannot pronounce and recognize, at once. His guess had been correct. It was an encyclopedia. alphabetically arranged.

He turned back to the lever and replaced it in the center, whereupon the movement of the queer, graceful Martian script stopped and the light went out. Again he moved it to the left, further this time, and the movement of the writing was measurably faster. Further and further he pushed the lever, and faster and faster flew the print until it became a grayish blur. Then Calvin stopped for fear of harming the mechanism and brought the lever back to center.

Now he pushed it to the right and the

print moved in the opposite direction speeding backward over the ground it had already covered, until the beginning was reached and the light extinguished.

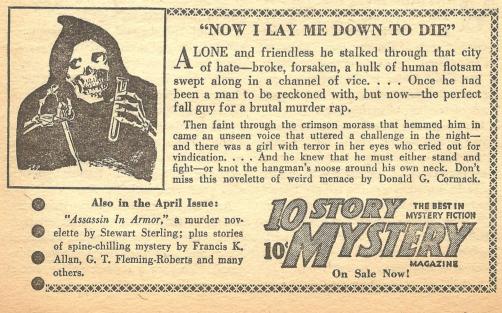
ALVIN rose with a sigh of satisfaction. It was quite evident what the next move was to be. Find the article under the Martian word for "pineal gland" and there, if anywhere, he would find the information he had come to seek.

Now that he was so near his aim, Calvin felt a weakening in his knees.

But even as he felt all sorts of clammy fears rising within him, he skimmed down the row of cubes, searching for that article, and thanking his stars that the Martians saw fit to use an alphabetical arrangement.

Upwards drifted the cold, emotionless print, thousands of words on every aspect of the pineal gland. Calvin followed it breathlessly, understanding not more than a tenth, and watching, watching for the one vital fact he was after.

And then it came, so suddenly that it caught him unawares and passed him by. He laughed hysterically as he turned the machine backwards, and for five minutes



### "NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO DIE"

shut if off altogether until the almost painful sensation of relief that overwhelmed him had subsided.

Over and over again he read the short description of the chemical and its method of production. It was only bromine, an element that sea-water was filthy with, yet with a difference. The pineal chemical was an isotope of that halogen; an isotope that was not to be found naturally and that would exist for only a limited period when produced artificially. In terse and cryptic language the nature and strength of the neutron bombardment which produced the isotope was described and the description sank deep into Calvin's brain.

And then he was through, all through. To return to Earth—only that was left. Surely, after having completed so much against the laboratory and all of Mars, the return need not frighten him. A sense of bubbling triumph pervaded him, a triumph that shrieked aloud with laughter, and then died suddenly.

The light changed! Dull blue gave way to bright yellow with a suddenness that left him gasping, bewildered, and blinded.

ARTIANS sprang from nowhere and surrounded him. Calvin fell back, utterly bewildered at the sudden change of the situation. Then, as he recognized the stern, immobile visage of the Chief Elder in the midst of the throng, all emotion was drowned in one flood of tearing, blistering rage.

His needle-ray was drawn, cocked and aimed in one motion, but in the icy gaze of the Martian potentate he felt his arm grow numb and lax. Struggle as he might, he could not compress the trigger finger. Dimly, he heard the gun clang to the floor.

A long silence ensued, and then the Chief Elder spoke. "You did very well, Earthman. You were a little reckless but quick at seizing opportunity."

A look of astonishment spread over

Calvin's face. "You were playing with me?" he demanded. "You allowed me to hope and to all but attain my object that you might snatch it from me in the end?" He felt it difficult to breath. "Then Martians are sufficiently emotional to indulge in cruelty, aren't they?"

Calvin suddenly felt weak and futile. "I knew your moves from the first," the Chief Elder was saying. "We recognized the possibility of an attempted raid on Deimos as a result of your own individual psychology, and consequently removed the screen from the satellite; showed you the means of entrance; introduced a fictitious rest hour; and refrained from interfering until you had discovered your precious weapon. The experiment was an entire success."

"What are you going to do now?" Calvin asked bitterly. "All your explanations are of no interest to me."

"Do? Why, nothing!" came the answer in slow, measured tones. "Your ship is safe. Return to Earth with your weapon."

Calvin's eyes snapped wide open. His first words were but a meaningless stutter. When he had recovered sufficiently to speak, he cried, "But you refused to give me the secret back on Mars."

"True! But we said nothing about refusing to let you take it. Earth as a suppliant for help, we would refuse, for every world must work out its own destiny. However, when Earth refuses to accept our refusal, but, in your person, attempts a plan foredoomed to failure and carries it out without a moment's hesitation, we no longer refuse. It had not been given you; you have taken it. Return to Earth with your weapon."

And finally Preston Calvin gained an inkling of the mental processes of these alien, incomprehensible people. His head bowed and with trembling voice he whispered, "You are a strange people, but a great one!"

# FANTASY REVIEWS

### "Someone in the Dark" by August Derleth. Arkham House. Sauk City, Wis. \$2.00

The first in a new series of collected fantasies, this features the best weird tales of the well-known August Derleth. There are sixteen titles of three main types. The first section "Not Long for This World", dealing with apparitions, contains some fine gems of restrained ghost story writing. In particular, the stories "Glory Hand" and "Bramwell's Guardian."

The concluding section consists of two novelettes written in the technique of the Lovecraft cycle. "The Return of Hastur" and "The Sandwin Compact" both very successfully carry on the eerie Necronomicon mythology. Mr. Derleth is perhaps the best successor of the mantle of the late H. P. Lovecraft.

# "The Incomplete Enchanter" by Fletcher Pratt & L. Sprague de Camp. Henry Holt. New York. \$2.50

There is no reason to assume that this is the only existing world. If we can but convince ourselves that other systems of logic and law are permissible and if our process of thought is really convincing to our ego, we may well find ourselves in the world of a different type of natural order. Such is the proposition upon which two accomplished writers construct one of the most enjoyable and wacky fantasies.

Their heroes are thrust first into the world of the Norse mythology in time to participate in the "twilight of the gods," and then secondly into the world of the "Faerie Queene." In both these places they find themselves involved in the issues of the time and find that in order to get anywhere they must work out laws of magic which operate in each of these spheres and apply them. Science will not work, hence they become enchanters, aid-

ed only by their knowledge of the scientific method.

## "The Face" by Thomas P. Kelley. Adam Publishing Co. Toronto, Ont.

The face referred to is "the face that launched a thousand ships," meaning the Greek Helen. This is a story of ancient and modern adventure, strange survival, and reincarnation.

Thomas P. Kelley has given us in this novel a thriller of a standard type. A survival of an Egyptian leader over three thousand years, a terrible tomb lost in the desert and a long tale of ancient magic and strife told to a modern who is the incarnation of a major participant of the ancients.

### "Lord of the World" by Robert Hugh Benson. Dodd, Mead & Co. New York. 1941. \$2.00

Originally published in 1911, the publishers have seen fit to reissue this extraordinary work. It deals with the future from the viewpoint of the absolute truth of religion.

Robert Hugh Benson was both a Catholic priest and an accomplished writer. He has taken for this book's field the proposition that the rise of materialism and the trend against religion continues to a point in the future where mankind has achieved a world "scientific" dictatorship and Christianity is a thing hounded and persecuted to the point of extinction. The protagonists are leaders of the Catholic Church and we see their trials, their efforts and their battles against the allencroaching destruction. There is a strength of writing and power of character building that compels the reader, whatever his faith, to follow the book through with keen interest up to the very startling and sensational conclusion.

-Donald A. Wollheim.

# DREADNOUGHTS OF DOOM



## by HENRY ANDREW ACKERMAN

Silent, watchful, a stowaway waited for the space gods to grant him the moment a world had prayed for—a chance to die, that his planet might live forever!

N THE morning of 2114, Sol 8, a Lunite ore ship sighted a large cluster of wreckage drifting in space several thousand miles off Luna. Upon inspection, they found it to be a fused mass of metal, the remains of some ill-fated spaceship—apparently of foreign

manufacture, although of this the crew of the ore transport could not be certain. No sign of a survivor was apparent.

A little later on the freighter picked up other drifting pieces of flotsam, over a rather wide area. The crew of the ship came to the conclusion that perhaps more than one ship had been wrecked. Just before landing on Luna, the freighter contacted a scout ship of the Satellite Patrol. They reported their discoveries and, after giving the Patrol men the derelict's location and approximate ether-drift figures, they forgot about the matter.

The Patrol ship, after the transport had made its planetfall, proceeded immediately to the spot where floated in space the unidentified wreckage. They had smiled a bit grimly but had said nothing when the freighter's crew ventured the opinion that there must have been at least two or three ships wrecked.

Grimly and systematically they destroyed the bits of spaceship wreckage.... And so it was that Earth did not learn, until later, how close it had come to sudden destruction and swift conquest in the early dawn of 2114, Sol 8. But the Space Legion knew—and the Space Legion had been ready.

XACTLY a week before, the Kinetogen-powered, Terran, ether-mining ship, Gold Dust, had been cruising along lazily above Luna. Although everything was running smoothly on board, Captain Bart, her skipper, was in a stormy mood. The Gold Dust's storage holds were annoyingly empty of the precious dust. To be exact, they were empty of any kind of metallic dust, although the ship had been out a full week now. He blamed two things for this condition. One was the Jovian mining fleet, which was seriously depleting the void around Luna of its invisible treasure of the precious dusts. The second, every time the Gold Dust did locate a good mining area, this dunderhead, Joel Rogers, would order full speed ahead, and the *Gold Dust* would go shooting off on another tangent, apparently without rhyme or reason.

Jefferson Bart was a good captain, which meant he could take orders as well as give them, but he was making stormy weather of his present unhappy situation of having somebody else bossing his charge.

Just before the *Gold Dust* had made the leap into space, a tall, broad-shouldered young man, dressed in sailor's dungarees, had come aboard, presented himself to Captain Bart, and said briefly, "I'm Joel Rogers. Here's a note for you from the owners."

The note—Bart had been careful to check its authenticity—had merely said that Joel Rogers was to go along as a member of the crew, but that any suggestions or orders he gave were to be followed implicity. That was that, as far as Captain Bart was concerned. The owners apparently knew what they were doing.

But he wondered morosely, as he stood in the control room now and watched with grudging admiration the way Joel Rogers deftly handled the congested rows of switches, levers and what-not before him—did this young fellow know what he was doing?

Bart's natural taciturnity would not permit him to ask questions, but he couldn't help a sarcastic dig at what he considered a colossal waste of good mining time.

"Well," he said glumly, as though talking to himself, "we haven't been to Luna yet."

Joel Rogers looked at him quickly. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's about the only place we haven't been since we left port," Bart snorted. "Running all over blue space, like a—like a cat chasing a rat."

"I haven't seen any rats yet," Joel said

equably, "unless that's one ahead of us there." He gestured toward the televisor. Captain Bart peered at the screen, then

swore roundly.

"It's another of those damn floating tin cans from Jupiterm," he said. "Why can't those red devils stay at home and mine their own section of space, instead of coming clear across the Solar System and grabbing our supply?" He banged the nearest port with an angry fist. "And why in blazes doesn't the World Federation or the Space Legion drive 'em out!"

"You forget the niceties of interplanetary law, Captain," Joel Rogers said drily. "Federation space areas extend only to the thousand-mile limit, and we're a good fifty thousand miles away." His eyes turned back to the televisor screen, and suddenly hardened.

"Speaking of rats—" he muttered under his breath. Then he straightened, clipped out a brisk order. "I'll take over the control room now, Captain!"

Bart started to protest, realized in the same instant that this mysterious stranger was not asking him to leave the control room, but commanding it—in the tones of one accustomed to unquestioning obedience.

With a half-angry, half-defiant glance at Joel Rogers, the captain stalked down to the main deck.

There, leaning against the hull and staring moodily out a port, Captain Bart grumbled to himself as he watched his ship draw near the Jovian miner—then grumbled aloud as he saw that Joel Rogers, at the controls, was taking the Gold Dust dangerously close to the other craft.

Suddenly he snapped erect, bellowed up at the control turret, "Hey, you, up there! Watch where you're going! Change your course!" He was off at a run, bounding up the ladder to the control room again. Aboard the ship from Jupiter there arose a similar clamoring and running about,

for the nose of the *Gold Dust* had suddenly swerved, cutting over in an arc and heading straight for the other ship.

Captain Bart flung himself into the control room, shoved Joel Rogers aside from the instrument panel and pressed the buttons that would change their course—too late. The needle-nose of the Gold Dust missed the Jovian, but the beryllium sideplates of the Earth ship, still swinging in an arc, sideswiped the landing fins of the other ship, leaving them a tangled mass of wreckage against the stern, almost wiping out the name, Agfah, painted there on its side.

"Now you've done it!" Captain Bart shouted at Joel Rogers, jumping up and down in his fury. "You've wrecked us both, you damned fool!"

Joel, apparently unconcerned over the collision, was staring intently at the gesticulating, shouting figures that suddenly appeared on the televisor screen, the *Agfah* officers.

"Only a few dents in your side, Captain," he said deprecatingly, "and the Jovian ship only lost her landing fins. Sorry I lost control."

"But now we'll have to tow them with the magnetic grapplers into port for repairs!" Captain Bart stormed.

"Yes," Joel said quietly, "we'll have to tow them into port for repairs, just as you say. That fin will be a cradle job." He turned, stepped lightly to the door. "I'm going below now, Captain. You may notify me when we reach port. By the way, Captain, I'd tow them to an Earth port if I were you—Niagara, say."

In the instant before he started bellowing orders to his crew, Captain Bart stared wonderingly at the retreating back of Joel Rogers.

"Lost control, hell!" he snorted. Then he muttered speculatively, "Maybe he does know what he's doing!"

And Lieutenant Joel Rogers, World Federation of Earth Space Legion Intel-

ligence, playing a lone game in which the safety of Earth was the stake, nodded grimly to himself as he sped toward the crews' quarters. No question about it. That ugly red face, that had stared so imperturbably from the control room of the Agfah, had been the face of the man he sought—Phox Sci, captain in rank, the most dangerous man in the Jovian espionage service. . . .

STILL dressed in the nondescript garb of a space sailor, Joel Rogers sat across the desk from his chief in the latter's office at the Niagara Legion Base. Captain Hubbard looked up from a sheaf of papers on his desk, appraised Joel keenly.

"So far so good, Lieutenant," he said crisply. "The Agfah, as we suspected, is merely a fast commercial ship, in no way fitted for warfare. Her engines and shortwave set are powerful, but we can't challenge her on those grounds. Repairs have been completed on her landing fins, and she makes the jump-off at midnight for space."

"The device has been attached to the hull?" Joel asked.

Captain Hubbard nodded. "Yes, on the hull, towards the stern, at the base of the lateral fin."

He cleared his throat and continued, "And what is more important—the Jovians are not aware of it. The key, connected to the device by a wire, is on the underside of the left handrail in the main deck corridor, just aft of the captain's stateroom. Our plans are now complete. The men at the Sentinel Cylinder have been ordered to stand by for action. As soon as the *Agfah* passes Luna, the Meteors will blast and will keep on blasting."

He glanced at his wrist watch. "It is now five o'clock. You have your orders. You know where to go, what to do, if you can possibly do it." He stood up and Joel rose with him. "You know what it means to Earth if you fail," Captain Hubbard went on.

"I do, sir," Joel replied.

"And you realize what your own fate will be if you succeed?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain held out his hand impulsively. "A brave lad," he murmured. Then he snapped to attention, saluted first, Joel returned the salute.

Captain Hubbard could well afford to disregard legion etiquette by saluting first, for he was saluting a man who was about to die. If Joel succeeded in his plans for the next few hours, his death was a foregone conclusion.

T IS a matter of public record that before the Red Men of the monster planet set out to conquer all of the outer planets of the Solar System in 2111, to weld them into the huge Five World Entente, there were more than three hundred thousand of them living on Earth. Many had undoubtedly returned to their native world, to fight for glory and the dictator, by 2112, Sep, but many thousands had remained behind.

The majority of those in Niagara, Joel Rogers knew, still constituted a little world to themselves in the squalid maze of slums about the spaceship terminal. It was toward that unsavory region that Joel headed as he left Intelligence Headquarters.

Joel's first action, just as dusk was settling down over the space port, was to buy a bottle of cheap *Hoaszz*. He stepped into a darkened alley, gargled a mouthful of the fiery liquid and spat it out, then doused the rest of the malodorous stuff over his clothing. Reeking like a barfly, he staggered out of the alley and down the street. Like a man who had been on a three-day jag, he reeled uncertainly through the door of the Red Spot Tavern, a favorite hang-out of Jo-

vian characters and space sailors.

Joel slapped a five-dollar bill on the bar and ordered drinks for the house.

"Set 'em up," he said with a flourish to the bulbous-eyed alien behind the bar. "The drinks 're on me. I'm a guy that's just struck it rich!"

If his intrusion was unwelcome, he didn't seem to notice it, and when the glasses of the half-dozen scowling Jovians scattered about at the tables had been filled, Joel raised his glass in unsteady fingers, declaimed owlishly, "To the Sentinel Cylinder!" and tossed off the drink.

If he had been expecting a reaction, he got it, although only his trained eyes would have noticed it. As he peered through half-closed lids over the rim of his up-turned glass, he saw an electric tremor of surprise pass over those scarlet masks. The low hum of conversation stopped for a split-second, then went on steadily. The barman's naturally bulging eyes took on an even more pop-eyed aspect as his gaze flashed to Joel's flushed face, then dropped to the bar he was polishing.

Joel realized, tautly, that he had struck home. Closely as the Space Legion had guarded its secret—the secret on which it had been working for many years—word of it had seeped out to espionage agents from other planets. The Sentinel Cylinder, Earth's mightiest defensive arm, was known by name, at least, to these chunky men who envisioned themselves as future rulers of the Solar System. Just how much, he wondered grimly, did they know about it? That was what he must discover tonight.

Joel sloshed down a second drink and a third, then picked up his change and turned to go. The bulky bartender hurried up, pushed a bottle across the bar.

"You have drink on me this time," he said. When Joel had taken that one, the barman urged another on him.

"You know something about the Sen-

tinel Cylinder, eh?" he said with what was meant to be an affable grin but which utterly failed in its intended effect. Joel shuddered a little as he saw this facial abortion.

The Earthman winked a bleary eye at him. "Plenty," he said, "plenty." Then he straightened himself with a jerk. "But I'm not talkin'."

"Maybe," the maroon-skinned lump from Jupiter went on persuasively, "you'd like to make some money—a lot of money?"

"Not talkin'," Joel mumbled, and staggered toward the door. He knew they wouldn't try to take him there—the place was too public—but they wouldn't let him out of their sight. As he stumbled along toward Sun Spot Way and the spaceship cradles, he saw, from the corner of his eye, the flitting shadows that gradually encircled him.

When the attack came, they wouldn't hurt him—too much. They wanted him alive. But Joel knew how *Ka-lang*, the Jovian art of wrestling, can permanently disable a man who isn't expecting it. When the shadows did close in, silently and swiftly, at the mouth of an alley, Joel swung into the fray with both fists and both feet.

He cursed and fought like a drunken sailor, but they were hauling him down by sheer force of numbers when a lumbering figure in blue came pounding up. It was a cop, Joel saw with an inward curse—a fighting cop.

"Scatter, you imps from hell!" the patrolman shouted. He began flailing away so furiously with his nightstick that the tide of battle turned in an instant.

Desperate at this interference with his carefully laid plans, Joel swung a wild roundhouse right and, apparently by accident, caught the cop squarely on the chin. As the cop went down, Joel fell with him, and the two of them were promptly pounced upon. Joel felt suddenly sick as

he saw a scarlet heavyweight aim a kick at the cop's face. Then he could see nothing more, for adhesive was quickly slapped over his eyes and mouth; his wrists and ankles were strapped.

HEY carried him, running, to what he judged was the other end of the alley. He could tell that they were forcing his helpless body into the fuselage of a rocket plane. There followed a hurried, short ride; then Joel felt himself being carried again, up endless stairs, along interminable corridors. Finally he was dropped to the floor, the bandages ripped roughly from his eyes and mouth.

Joel looked up belligerently at the circle of his captors, started to curse them drunkenly, but a brutal kick in the side silenced him.

"This foolish one babbled of the Sentinel Cylinder, so we brought him to you, Captain Sci," said the giant red man who had kicked Joel. "The low Earthling is stupid with drink."

"There are ways of making even drunken men talk," came a quietly derisive answer, and Joel lifted his head to leer up at the saturnine, masklike countenance of Phox Sci, captain of the Tovian espionage service.

"Let me up from here," Joel growled, "and I'll talk for you plenty-with my fists." Then his head lolled back, and he hiccoughed.

"Quick!" Sci ordered. "Bring matches before he becomes too drunk to talk!" He knelt swifty beside the prostrate Earthman, seized a handful of Joel's hair, jerked his head up.

"Tell me!" he commanded. "What is the Sentinel Cylinder?"

"Go t' hell," Joel muttered thickly, and closed his eyes sleepily.

Someone thrust a book of matches into Sci's hand. Dropping Joel's head, the man from Jupiter tore a match from the book, jabbed it viciously under Joel's

thumbnail, lit it. As the flame curled down, licked around the nail, Joel opened one eve drowsily, flickered the match loose with a shake of his hand, closed the eve again.

With a snarled curse, Sci lit another match, seized Joel's head firmly and held the match to his cheek.

Toel almost cried aloud at the searing pain, but he did not quiver. Then, as the odor of burned flesh struck his nostrils, nauseating him, and the torture seemed more than he could bear, he opened his mouth-and snored.

Phox Sci, with a cry of rage, sprang to his feet, and just in time, for Joel could not have endured that gnawing flame an instant longer without crying aloud.

"The stupid fool is unconscious from liquors," Sci hissed, and he spat in Joel's face. That, even more than the torture he had endured, filled Joel with a furious desire to lunge upward into battle, but Phox Sci's next words forestalled any such foolish action.

"We have no time to waste on him here. Zero hour is rapidly approaching, and we must embark for space. Come: we can work on him at our leisure aboard the Agfah. Bring him along."

That, Joel Rogers realized, was just what he had been waiting and praying for. Had he tried to stow away on the Tovian ship, he would undoubtedly have been discovered and unceremoniously pitched out the airlock. Now he was going aboard at their insistence, and it was all-important, for Earth's sake, that he be aboard when the ship took off, even though torture and death awaited him.

UNA is more than two hundred thousand miles away from Terra, yet when Joel Rogers woke up from his brief cat-nap, the Agfah, traveling with the speed of a destroyer, was already past it. Toel had been flung into a cabin bunk to sleep off what the Jovians thought to be his drunken stupor. He had managed to snatch some sleep, for he knew he would soon be needing all of his strength and mental alertness.

It was not two hours later, however, that the cabin door was opened, and two armed sentries entered, prodded Joel to his feet, and curtly ordered him to fall in between them. As they escorted him forward towards the captain's cabin, Joel noticed that the *Agfah* had undergone a startling transformation.

Gone were the slovenly sailors and metal extractors who had swarmed her decks when the *Gold Dust* had sideswiped her. Now the men were dressed in the natty black uniforms of the grand Jovian space fleet, and they stepped about their duties in the brisk manner of trained fighting men.

Captain Phox Sci had also changed in appearance and manner, and was now resplendent in the uniform of a high officer of the Greater Jovian Fleet. He sat behind his massive desk and studied Joel with satisfaction.

"So our tipsy Earthling has regained his senses?" He motioned the sentries aside, waved Joel to a seat.

"In your drunkenness last night," he went on suavely, "you mentioned the phrase, 'Sentinel Cylinder'. What do you know about it?"

The eyes of the two men from different worlds met, challenged each other, and the gaze of neither Jovian nor Earthman flickered for a minute.

Then Joel spoke, with quiet finality. "Never heard of it," he said.

The sardonic smile did not leave the corners of Sci's mouth. "As you may have heard," he went on, "the Jovians are noted for their—er, persuasive methods of loosening unwilling tongues."

"You might try some of them," Joel told him tonelessly.

Sci's eyes narrowed a trifle. "There

are men," he admitted stonily, "who cannot be coerced by pain or force. Perhaps you are one of them. The man does not live, though, who will not listen to reason. It is important, though not vital, that the Jovian high command have more definite information of this thing you call the Sentinel Cylinder. Important, I say, but not vital. Earth is safely doomed!"

The beady, protruding eyes blazed and the high-pitched voice rose in a crackle of excitement as Sci went on, "You do not believe me? You think I boast? Then step to that porthole and tell me what you see!"

The throbbing Kinetogens of the Agfah had slackened and quieted as the two conversed, and Joel knew, as he strode across to the port, that the ship was coasting on its momentum.

Joel peered through the port—and his heart threatened to leap into his throat. Dead ahead were hundreds of long silvery objects, very sleek, very graceful in the sunlight that struck them. No mistaking those trim lines. They were heavy-duty fighting ships.

"What do you see?" Phox Sci demanded.

"I see space covered with a screen of warships," Joel replied. "A hundred or so—no, closer to five hundred of them."

"Look closer," said Sci. "What else do you see?"

"I see a vanguard of cruisers and scout ships," muttered Joel.

"Do you see the battleship squadrons?"
"Yes," Joel admitted.

"Do you see the troop transports, the mine layers?" pressed Sci.

"Yes." Joel's face was white now.

"You see more than that," said Phox Sci, as Joel turned away from the port. "You see the greatest space armada ever assembled. You see three hundred of the fastest, most destructive destroyer-cruisers ever built. You see the space fleet that will descend just before dawn on your planet to wipe her proud cities off the

map!" Sci's thin lips twisted in scorn.

"Your stupid Legion has been so busy playing games about the Asteroids it has forgotten to watch the fourth quadrant of space—the shortest route by far from Jupiter to Earth. While your Satellite Patrol has been sniffing like curious dogs at the Jovian mining craft, which have been annoying your miners near Earth, this fleet has been collecting here. Those ships near the planet actually did engage in ether-mining—to lull the suspicions of your espionage agents. When, by a clumsily feigned accident, the Agfah was disabled and towed to port so she could be inspected, your spies found her to be just what she assumed to be-a floating oreship. But these ships will mine the ether in a different manner."

"Why do you tell me all of this?" Joel demanded.

"Because anything you learn here will be of no avail to you until it is too late and because I wish to show you the futility of refusing to aid us by supplying information."

"What makes you think Earth won't fight back?" Joel asked. His gaze was cool.

"Earth will not be able to fight back," Sci asserted. "The destroyer divisions strike at dawn, laying every important military space port, arsenal and spaceship factory to waste. At three A.M., Earth time, a fleet of our mine layers begins mining the space above Tycho, bottling up your puny Satellite Patrol stationed there, so we can bomb it at our leisure." He nodded, expression impassive.

"That is but the first step. Before the Earth can recover, before the main body of your fleet can blast back to prevent it, one hundred thousand crack Jovian troops will have been landed at your capital, New Washington, from those troop ships that you just saw. One hundred thousand fighting men—one third as many as your entire Planet Guard—and that is just the

first contingent. When they have gained a foothold, other thousands will come, backed up by the Second Jovian Battle Fleet. In the meantime, these three hundred destroyers will be sweeping over the entire planet. Within a week, Earth will have surrendered—or she will be in ruins!"

"But," Joel Rogers interrupted quietly, "what of our fleet? It will exact a terrible revenge when it does return from the Asteroids. And how about Mars, Venus and Mercury? Do you think they would stand by and see the only other democratic planet in the System humbled?"

Phox Sci's eyes now burned with the fierce light of the fanatic. "Democracy!" he snarled. "Democracy is about to be wiped from the face of the System! When we strike, our allies, Neptune, Uranus, Saturn and Pluto, strike. The moment word is flashed of the success of our attack, war fleets from all four worlds will swoop down to demolish Mars, Venus and Mercury. Democracy ends at dawn! As for the return of your fleet! Hah! The fools will bump right into the mine areas we have so cleverly planted in the course they must take. They will be devastated by the most destructive mine field ever laid! And you, Earthling," he said, glaring at Joel, "have a decision to makequickly." He paused, as if to emphasize the importance of what he was about to say.

Our spies have mapped every gun of your defenses, every one of your space ports, big or little. Only one thing has escaped us, a thing we have heard of only by rumor—the Sentinel Cylinder. We believe it to be a warship base, but we are not sure. You proved, by your drunken talk last night, that you know of its existence, probably its location. I have gone to great pains to show you the hopelessness of your position. You will tell me, now, where it is. In return I offer you, on the word of the Dictator, complete amnesty,

safe escort to any planet you choose, and —ten thousand dollars in platinum."

"If I refuse?" Joel said.

"You go out the airlock immediately with only two hours' oxygen supply in your air tank!"

Joel shifted uneasily in his seat. "That's a hard thing to ask a man, Captain," he said, "a hard decision to make. You'll give me a few minutes to think it over?"

"I give you exactly five minutes," the Jovian replied smoothly, sure of his man now.

"Mind if I walk around the deck a bit while I'm thinking?" Joel asked.

"You may," the Jovian replied. "At the first false move, of course, you will be shot in your tracks." He beckened the sentries, rapped out an order in their tongue.

IVE minutes . . . would it be enough? The two hulking red men alert at his heels, Joel strode up and down the short length of corridor that was the main deck. Finally he sauntered over to lean against the wall. With extreme nonchalance he proceeded to light a cigarette, all the while watching the two guards narrowly. To all outward appearance, he seemed to be lost in deep thought.

He leaned his weight against the wooden rail that jutted out from the wall and slouched a little. He let his left arm slide carelessly on the polished rail until he could feel the underside of it, Nothing there. Carelessly, drawing his hand back and forth, he edged slowly toward the captain's cabin, and three feet farther along he found it—a little metal projection that gave slightly when he pressed on it.

The two sentinels, watching him, must have thought him a very nervous man, for his hands as they gripped the rail seemed to twitch agitatedly, endlessly. The middle finger of his left hand gave a final nervous jerk. He straightened up, drew a long breath. "All right," he said to the guards, "I'm ready."

"You have decided to be sensible?" Phox Sci said with a smile of satisfaction as Joel re-entered the cabin.

Joel nodded bleakly.

"The Sentinel Cylinder is a hidden military space port?" Sci went on quickly. "You will lead us to it?"

Joel nodded again, slowly. "Yes," he said, "the Sentinel Cylinder is a hidden Legion base. The Meteors are quartered there. I'll lead you to it."

"Good!" Captain Sci could not conceal his elation. "You will go with me in my own destroyer when the time comes. Now I must ask you to return to your quarters."

As Joel Rogers, lieutenant in the Space Legion, stepped along between his guards, he held his head high. It didn't matter so much now that he had but a few hours left to live. He had played his part, played the game to the hilt with Captain Sci—and he had won.

WO hours before it would be dawn on Earth, they came for Joel, marching him to the airlock where Captain Phox Sci, dressed in a clumsy balloon-like suit, used for exposure in airless space, stood waiting.

"We go now," the Jovian said, and he handed Joel a space suit similar to his own. After Joel had donned the bulky suit, he turned his attention to what was happening outside the ship.

Through the thick glassite of an observation port he watched a cruiser approach, her sunward side gleaming like the head of a comet. Power blasts shot alternately from forward, rear, and lateral vents as the pilot eased the other spaceship closer to the *Agfah*. In a moment both ships were flashing along at equal velocity, side by side.

Captain Sci said, "Follow me," and

flung over the lever that operated the inner door of the air lock.

Once Sci, Joel and his two guards were inside the lock, the inner door was closed and the outer lock opened.

Joel saw that magnetic-grapple lines had already been fastened to the destroyer and it was along them, hand over hand, that the captain led the way, Joel and the two guards following.

As they slowly pulled themselves along the lines toward the waiting ship, Joel marveled at the scene about him. Space, it seemed, for an area of tens of cubic miles, was filled with twinkling ships' lights, and every ship that he saw was a grim-looking destroyer, with row upon row of tubes for the self-accelerating rocket torpedoes.

But the ship to which they were transferring was different from the others. It, too, was a super-arsenal, but, if Joel knew anything about ships, it was one of the fastest ever to leave a planet.

When they were in the other ship, Captain Sci wasted no time in leading them to the control turret. With Sci at the controls, the ship increased its acceleration and seemed to leave the rest of the fleet behind. As Joel watched from a side port, he saw the huge swarm of destroyer-cruisers swing into smooth, coordinated movement below, maneuvering, climbing, rising up to form into a solid phalanx of spitting power vents and scintillating mirrors—a cloud of doom.

Sci circled high above until the armada, three hundred strong, was in alignment beneath him, then dipped his ship down and shot ahead to take up the spearhead of the formation. Joel, sitting tautly in the seat behind the wily Jovian, wondered grimly if his months of careful plans and strategems would work out to the split-second he had timed them, if his message had gone through . . .

On through the starry void the dreadnoughts of doom swept, straight toward sleeping Earth. As minute followed minute, and the ships clipped off fifty thousand miles, a hundred thousand miles, Joel Rogers prayed with the fervency of a condemned man for the countless lives of his fellow countrymen. Time after time, he looked backward and upward, searching, probing the depths of space.

Then he saw the thing for which he was desperately seeking, and his gasp of relief and exultation brought a sharp look of inquiry from Phox Sci.

"Something troubles you?" the Jovian asked caustically.

"Nothing troubles me now," Joel replied. He paused a minute, then leaned forward, speaking slowly, distinctly. "Sci, I told you I'd lead you to the Meteors. I'll do better than that—I'll bring them to you. Before you meet them, though, there are a couple of things you might like to know." His face was grim now.

"First, I think you've bitten off a bigger chunk than you can chew when you try to swallow democracy at one gulp. Second, never underestimate your opponent. You Jovians started planning this attack five years ago. Earth started plans to thwart it ten years ago."

In reply to Sci's quick, incredulous glance, Joel went on, "Yes, we knew you had a bee in your bonnet for ruling the entire Solar System, but we didn't see it that way. Then, years ago, the Legion quietly began its search, seeking the most strategic spot to build a super-space port, the most powerful in the System. So quietly and carefully did we work that when this monster hornet's nest was completed, the spies of other planets had been able to discover no more about it than the fact that it probably did exist and it was known as the 'Sentinel Cylinder'." He shook his head.

"Our next step was to criss-cross space from Mars to Earth with a system of detection stations. These had automatic thermoscopes, or delicate thermo-couples, for locating ships by their intrinsic heat, and radio-sounding devices for measuring distances. The stations immediately flashed full information to Earth—direct to Legion Headquarters—whenever any ship came in range of the delicate instruments." Joel's smiles became grimmer now.

"You thought your ships were massing, unnoticed. Not so. We knew the craft were there, and we guessed that their intent was not peaceful. What the ships were up to we did not know, nor when they would strike, nor how. That was why it was important that one of your shipswe selected the Agfah because you were on it—be forced to visit a Terrestrial port. so that our skilled mechanics could attach a short-wave transmitter to its hull. That was why it was so important that I be put aboard the Agfah when it left Earth -so I could tap out my information for the Sentinel Cylinder to pick up, after I had learned what I could of your plans."

S CAPTAIN SCI listened, his face showed first contempt, then alarm, then black fury, and he half-arose from his seat. But Joel Rogers went on unhurriedly. "Three hours before this fleet of yours started for Earth, the Meteors had left the Cylinder, accelerating fast and true, and much swifter than your ships can speed, straight toward you. The Meteors are here now, Captain Sci!"

"You talk insanities," snarled Sci. "I see no Meteors."

"One seldom sees a trap until it is too late," Joel said. "You have led your men and ships into one of the most disastrous traps in the history of space warfare! Do you know, Captain, we Earthmen have concocted a compound that can be made into a paint that will not reflect light, any light, even that of the sun? And did you know that the term 'Sentinel Cylinder' is not a name chosen merely to mystify? The Cylinder is actually that, a real cyl-

inder of beryllium steel, covered with a coat of our non-reflecting compound and used as a destroyer base by our Legion. The Cylinder is not ahead of you, Captain, on Earth, as you were deluded into thinking. It is behind you, in space itself. But the Meteors aren't behind you any more. They've caught up with you! Look up there!"

With a cry of consternation, Captain Sci whirled around, stared upward and back. There, swooping from the interstellar gloom and looking like phantoms of space because of their non-reflective coating, was a tight V-shaped wedge of monster destroyers, plunging down and forward with swift ferocity at the rear of the Jovian phalanx!

Cursing furiously, Sci jammed the controls of his ship over, barked a series of orders into the microphone in front of him. As the Jovian armada started to swing about, to reform in battle allignment, Sci flung a contemptuous taunt at Joel Rogers.

"A paltry hundred ships!" he sneered. "We will blast them from the ether!"

"Will you?" Joe asked quietly.

Then a strange thing happened, happened so swiftly, so disastrously, the Jovian leader could only stare in openmouthed wonder at what he saw.

The Space Legion ships were still more than five miles away. The Jovians were only half through their reversing maneuver when, in the next instant, a mighty simultaneous jet of furious flame burst from a hundred torpedo tubes. Even before the light of that concerted blast had died from Joel's eyes, the front rank of the closely-packed Jovian ships disintegrated in a blinding blaze.

In one terrific explosion, one hundred Jovian destroyers were torn into shattered wreckage, sent spinning and flying through space in twisted fragments. Again that sheet of flame swept out from the Legion ships, and the Jovian phalanx,

shaken like a cyclone-struck wheat field, began to melt away, dissolve into nothingness.

On and on came the Legion squadron in never faltering line, hurling its barrage of death before it. Now half of the proud Jovian armada had been destroyed—two thirds of it. Panic-stricken, a few of the Tovian pilots turned to flee, but the long arm of death, reaching out from the Meteors, caught them, hurled them into incandescent oblivion.

With a cry of despair Captain Sci watched this cataclysm of destruction taking place so swiftly, and he suddenly cried out in bewilderment, "What is it?"

"I'd say it was our new invincible torpedoes," Joel Rogers answered him quietly.

"But even torpedoes require great skill in aiming, and every one that has been fired has made a direct hit!" the Jovian shrieked. He was now nearly insane.

"Our torpedoes require no aiming," Joel said with a grim smile. "You see, they are light-attracted. The glare of enemy power vents sets off photo-electric cells; relays guide the torpedo relentlessly to the source of the light." He regarded the frantic Jovian. "And you thought Earth was going to be a pushover," he said musingly.

"You!" Sci screamed. "You are responsible for this!"

He clawed at the service automatic strapped to his waist.

Joel Rogers arose from his seat, stood erect. "It is an honor," he said quietly, "to die for one's planet." He stood at attention, saluted. But it was not the red man he saluted-it was the tri-colored insignia of Earth on a destroyer-cruiser.

Joel Rogers was still standing at attention when the torpedo struck.



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(Continued from page 89)

department in one piece. Layout problems and such.

Dear Editor:

The Feb. '42 issue bears out the thought that SSS is on a slow upward trend, for it does show some improvement over the preceding number. And this improvement was brought on, not so much by stories (which remained at about last issue's level) as by the illustrations and departments, and the more polished and cohesive presentation of the magazine as a whole.

But . . . on to the review.

"Cross of Mercrux" is not one of Walton's best, nor as excellent a yarn as "Lost Legion" (which was a controversial yarn, judging from the readers' letters), but it is good enough to take first place. Its potentialities probably could have been further developed, however, if the story had been somewhat longer, to build up to a better climax and less abrupt ending. Nevertheless, it is an interesting and unusual yarn.

Second place is taken by Brackett's "Child of the Green Light," while "The Hunted Ones" and "Atrakin and the Man" tie for third. For a minute there, when I started the No. 2 tale, I thot I was reading another "Into the Darkness" yarn! And let's have more from Kubilius . . . and Harry.

Better cover this time, though it could be still more so. I still would like to see the "Super" dropped from the title and a better rocket design made.

Strange thing about Bok, his work is never "just fair"—it's either very good or very bad. His superb illustrations for "Cross of Mercrux" are an example of the former while the one for "Spaceship of Korl" is a specimen of the latter. Giunta has also done an excellent job and should be used more often.

The letter section, as with the other departments, shows a great deal of improvement. The only fault I can find (not that I eagerly search for one) is that it is spread throughout the mag instead of being concentrated in one portion.

As a Science Fictioneer, I'm extremely glad to see the renewed and growing activity of this organization, for I believe that such societies should play a more important role than aimlessly urging people to join and letting it go at that.

The Central Queens and Jamaica area seems curiously devoid of active s-f fans, but . . . anyone in this section willing to form a Science Fictioneer branch please contact me. Somebody must buy those big stacks of stf mags I see on the newsstands!

Sincerely.

Bill Stoy, Jamaica, N. Y. A Dixie fan looks at our pages:

Dear Mr. Norton,

I notice with much pleasure the fact that you intend to use Bok and Finlay on the interiors. I am over-enthusiastic over both of these superlative artists, but doubt very much if friend Virgil can be obtained. However, if you can manage to snare him, congratulations are due! I might mention that a good man to have on hand is one Dolgov, who has a style slightly similar to Bok's. And I notice that you said you were going to continue Morey. Well, Leo is a strange person; he can be good, and can be equally bad. But the main thing is that he can turn out artwork in a requested amount of time. An excellent young artist who hasn't been given much of a trial as yet is Damon Knight. He has one advantage to add to his excellent depictions: he lives in New York and can be reached in a hurry.

I also notice that Wesso is going to be used on the covers. Well, our young hero drawls in his best Western fashion, if he can sorta hide those glaring colors of his, he's acceptable. Of course, his bright colors attract the eyes of the ordinary newsstand-hound, so—May I suggest using Hannes Bok and John Forte on the covers? Both have proven their worth and I think that both can be persuaded to do the covers.

So much for the artwork; now to the fiction. Thought-variant stories, like "Into the Darkness," "Daughter of Darkness," draw popular acclaim as well as response from the actifan. However, too many of such a type will soon find the mag in a rut.

Action? A certain amount, but please, oh please, don't descend to the depths to present the childish bazzleziggling of some books I could mention. The kid buyers of that type of mag will soon tire of them and turn back to their Westerns and detectives.

Well (that word pops up everywhere) at least you're giving the new and struggling authors a chance. 'Cause you bought "The Man Who Knew Roger Stanley" by Joseph Gilbert, who's not only my boon companion, but also my conpanion-at-pounding-tripe-writers-for-nothing. Joe's been writing almost a year more than I have and is four years older, but I smile tactfully and continue writing. Someday . . . someday soon, so says my agent.

I'm a student in the School of Journalism at University of South Carolina. That part's not so strange, but if and when I graduate, I'll start free-lancing. After establishing myself, I intend to come to New York and start working in the pulps. Just in case I fail in that spot, I'm specializing in sports-reporting and stuff. Mostly the stuff, though. But—why should Norton want to know about Jenkins?!

In conclusion, may I plead feebly for a longer readers' section, with a two-way column?

I don't know whether I'm quoting anybody on this, but I'm sure that someone has said it before: Mid-semester exams are hell! unquote.

As ever. Thine. Harry Jenkins, Jr. Columbia, S. C.

From the West Coast comes word of a possible set-back in the plans of the Pacificon. Memo to this office signed by Walter J. Dougherty, Paul Freehofer, and Forrest J. Ackerman, reads as follows:

Dear Fellow Fans:

Six weeks ago we had planned an issue of Pacificonews which would start arrangements to select the date of the Pacificon and which would contain the first of a series of articles on the various attractions in the Los Angeles area. But the coming of war has changed the entire situation, and plans formerly made must be altered to

meet the crisis.

After waiting a short period for clarification of the local situation, the Convention Committee met to consider what should be done. Our first decision was that the Convention belonged to the fans and that they must be the ones who will decide on the final fate of the Pacificon. This would necessitate a vote, best carried out under the supervision of the Convention Committee. Second, we decided that this vote should be delayed as long as possible, in order that the trend of events might become more evident and that the first wave of war hysteria might die down.

Therefore, we regretfully announce that the Convention Committee will cease action until March 15, at which time a ballot will be sent out to all members giving them their choice of several possible alternatives. This date will give us time to make all necessary arrangements even if it is decided to hold the Convention here early in the summer, and will still give the fans a chance to discuss the matter by correspondence and

in the fan magazines.

In order to give a basis for discussion and to indicate the possible choices, we now outline the situation and alternatives as we see them. Certain facts are clear: Los Angeles may be subject to bombing attacks and will at least be bothered by blackouts from time to time. All fans, including Convention officials, will be subject to more stringent draft regulations, and consequently may be taken away from their duties. Defense work will take more of the time of us all. Even more important, transportation will become more expensive and perhaps by next summer may be impossible. Gatherings in this city may be forbidden, even as they





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already have been in Washington, D. C. Moreover, all cities on either coast are subject to the same dangers and the same restrictions. Of all of these points, the most important is probably the transportation problem.

Therefore there are certain alternatives. First is to cancel the Convention entirely. If this is done, all money in the Convention treasury will be divided and returned to the members. This would be the best choice if it is agreed that all fan activities should be curtailed during the war. Second, the Convention can be postponed for the duration, in which case all membership fees will simply be frozen and the Convention Committee will cease action until after the war. This would permit local conferences, yet would insure a stable and well-financed Convention once the trouble is over. Third is to transfer the Convention in toto to some city in the interior of the country. This would not solve the transportation problem and might cause some dissension among rival candidates, yet could be handled by a vote of the fans. The local group would be glad to cooperate with any group so selected. Fourth and last, we can continue in the hope that a Convention in Los Angeles will be possible. We would be more than happy to do this, our only fear being that fans might not care or would be unable to come to Los Angeles under the circumstances. You are still more than welcome if you can possibly come.

Please consider the matter very carefully and be prepared to vote. Although the final choice must be made by the members of the Convention Society, we would like to have the opinions of every one of you.

Sincerely yours, The Convention Committee

### NOTES FROM A FELLOW EDITOR

History and science fiction-how often do their paths meet and cross! Donald A. Wollheim sends us some extremely interesting and pertinent notes on this

Science fiction (Mr. Wollheim writes) is a form of literature which has the curious and unique faculty of altering with the passage of time. A work of seriously imaginative fantasy can, with the passage of years, become either a clever prediction of what was to happen in what is now the present or else become simply a ridiculous farce removed from any possibilities of reason. Surveying the past of science-fiction becomes thus a constant

contrast between amazement at correct guesses and guffaws at nonsensical ideas.

Tules Verne achieved his real fame when so many of his inventive fantasies succeeded in materializing. His realistic narrations of submarines, airplanes and other inventions of the Twentieth Century still carry the force of conviction to us who know these things as everyday actualities. Thus, we are led to find tolerance for those of his notions which have vet to materialize, such as the spaceship and exploration into the interior of the Earth.

Similarly, we praise H. G. Wells for his predictions of the role of aircraft and tank in warfare. His "Land Ironclads" can compare in some ways with accounts of the great clashes of tanks in the present war. His "War in the Air" carries weight with the lesson he was first to state. that aircraft can destroy but cannot conquer—a lesson the Germans had to learn for themselves over London. Sometimes it would be well for leaders to glance more carefully at the predictions of imaginative writers on future history. It might be rewarded.

It might have rewarded the United States Navy had it paid more attention to a little incident that occurred in the customs house at Honolulu, Hawaii, in December, 1933. Several cases of books were confiscated there from a shipment of Japanese publications. The books were copies of an imaginative story entitled "Future War Between America and Japan." Its author was a Japanese writer of adventure thrillers named Kyosuke Fukunaga, a former naval officer.

The book described a war in 1936 in which the Japanese make a surprise attack on Hawaii and, after a terrific battle, defeat the American Pacific fleet off Oahu. The customs officers who described the book said that it contained many accurate pictures and descriptions of the American ships, including the number of guns and

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We were told by Secretary Knox that the attack on Pearl Harbor was accompanied by intensive sabotage work by disloyal Japs. The report in 1933 of the customs office says that many copies of Fukunaga's work and others like it had gotten into Honolulu stores and were bought by the younger element of the Japanese population. It would not be surprising if this future-fictional work did not actually play a part in preparing the minds of its readers for the treason they committed when history created the real-

This type of story predicting future history is not unfamiliar to us. America has done its share of predicting future wars. Every reader of science-fiction can recall at least one and probably more stories in any magazine dealing with war between the United States and Japan. Future wars are an always popular subject and speculating on them is a popular pastime of writers. When writers put their minds to it they can usually succeed in getting at least one facet of the future right, even if the whole structure is still in darkness.

In 1908 an anonymous writer calling himself Parabellum wrote a book entitled "Banzai!" (Baker & Taylor) which made a stir. It was a prediction of a clash between the U.S. and Japan and is one of the earliest of that type ever to appear.

The attack began with a surprise assault on the Philippines and a Japaneseinspired Filipino revolution (note the attempt actually made to get the Filipinos to revolt in 1941). Here we have the element of surprise attack and fifth column intrigue which seems always to figure in these works.

"Banzai!", however, is not primarily a naval war story. It soon carries its action

to land. For the Japanese who have infiltrated the Pacific Coast suddenly seize railroads and cities in California and Northern Pacific areas and hold the coast long enough to land troops. (Remember that the Panama Canal was not completed until 1914 and did not have to be accounted for by Parabellum). The rest of the book deals with the land warfare. The Japanese were finally defeated in the passes of the Rocky Mountains. Incidentally, during the greater part of this war, Britain is described as a non-belligerent ally of Japan!

Another work of this period is rather less historical and more given to scientific fantasy. That is "The Vanishing Fleets" by Roy Norton (Appleton, 1908). In this the United States fights a curiously pacifistic war against Japan and Britain (it must be remembered that these two nations were allied in 1908) with the Kaiser's Germany playing an odd role on the American side. The U. S. surrenders the Philippines without a fight but succeeds in causing the disappearance and capture of all enemy fleets by use of a secret invention known as the radioplane.

To come closer to the present, many of the writers have combined the "Yellow Peril" with the "Red Peril." In that case we usually have a fight between America and an all-Asiatic coalition in which the Jap navy plays a big part. An example of that type of work is John S. Martin's "General Manpower" (Simon & Schuster, 1938). The theme of this deals with an organization to establish a monopoly on labor power by contracting the millions of unemployed into a trained reserve that can do anything from running a factory to fighting a war. General Manpower takes on the job of getting the Japs out of the Philippines which they had seized in 1950 and erasing the Red-Yellow peril from U.S. shores. There are some carefully mapped campaigns in the islands





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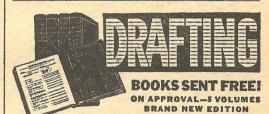
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including Borneo and a final decisive battle fought at San Francisco in which the fate of the world rests.

An older and more detailed work is Floyd Gibbons' "The Red Napoleon" (Cape & Smith, 1929). Primarily this is a story of an invasion from the Atlantic. Red revolution has overthrown Japan and China. A yellow despot named Karakhan overthrows Stalin and seizes control of the Soviets who now include all Asia. He leads an invincible army in 1932 against Europe and smashes it, conquering everything including England. He then attacks America.

The Japanese revolt at Hawaii (there it is again) but the outcome is of little importance. The U.S. Fleet had already left Pearl Harbor because the main fight was elsewhere. The Panama Canal is blown up, Seattle bombed and the Pacific Northwest invaded. The combined Eurasian fleet, including the Japanese, fight the U.S. Fleet in the Caribbean and are defeated to win the war for America.

W. B. Shearer in a novel of intrigue entitled "Pacifico" (Watt, 1926) deals with secret maneuvers between the U.S. and the Island Empire which do not result in war. However the Japanese try to capture the Philippines by means of fifth column troops and insurrection (yes, again!) but are thwarted by the sudden arrival of an American air fleet. Incidentally, the leader of the Japanese naval forces in the book is named Yamamoto, the same name as the Admiral who was to direct the actual attack on Hawaii!

Professional fiction writers can be excused when their predictions go wild but when we are presented with a book the publishers describe as written by an expert on world affairs and written after the war had actually broken out, we should expect accuracy. Longmans, Green & Co. published a book entitled "The Shape of the War to Come" early in 1940 which

#### NOTES FROM A FELLOW EDITOR

they publicized as probably an accurate forecast. Its first big blunder came when the Germans did not invade England late that year. From then on it goes more and more astray. By May 1943 the Japanese come into direct conflict with the U.S. I quote the actual passage and let the reader judge for himself!

"The United States was now engaged in a war with Japan for control of the Pacific. The English Fleet, in 1943, was at last able to release all American fighting vessels from the Atlantic; these were sent to the Pacific, and a great American armada sailed upon Japan. The little island of Japan was now minus its fleet which fled before this gigantic American naval apparition. Its cities, therefore, were literally bombed off the map. The Tapanese had never committed as atrocious a bombing of any one single Chinese city as we then committed upon that unfortunate nation."

The question of air power versus sea power was brought out in a book concerning a war between Japan and the British Empire in which there is described a battle for Singapore which appears to be developing in this war. The book was "The Naviators" by E. F. Spanner, dated 1926. In this the development of a large naval air arm is the deciding issue and saves the day for Britain.

A privately published book entitled "America Betrayed" carried a warning against Japanese plots and charged the U. S. with being unprepared for a Pacific fight. The author is Albert D. Nelson, date 1940. In this work the Japs infiltrate the Pacific Coast. Striking suddenly and with great force, they capture almost all of the West, invade New England, bombard New York and raise general havoc. The nation is saved in the nick of time by the heroic action of an individual bearing a name suspiciously like that of the author.



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However, there is one book which is worth giving very considerable attention to—as a matter of fact, it is receiving much attention from the national press now. That is "The Great Pacific War" by Hector C. Bywater. This book, published in 1932 by Houghton & Mifflin, is described as "The History of the American-Japanese Campaign of 1931-33". The work is that of a naval expert and is carefully thought out and detailed. Actions are described by a man who knows his business.

Probably the best way to give an idea of the course of the conflict would be to list leading chapter sub-heads and thus summarize the work. We shall proceed:—

"Causes that led to the war-Japan's endeavors to control China-China takes a step towards unification-Japanese Government decides on war with the United States as a solution for domestic difficulties-Dangerous weakness of U.S. Asiatic Squadron—Tapanese steamer blows up in Panama Canal, suspending communication between Atlantic and Pacific-U. S. Asiatic Squadron attacked by superior Japanese fleet-Majority of the American ships destroyed—Japanese prepare to invade the Philippines—Japanese transports attacked by American aircraft and submarines on reaching Philippines-Landings effected despite heavy casualties-Surrender of Manila—Philippines entirely conquered by the Japanese-Absence of news from Guam causes concern in the U. S.—First attack on Guam repulsed with heavy loss—Second Japanese attack proves more formidable—Surrender of the island—Economic position of the United States superior to that of Japan-Friction between Japan and Russia-Mines laid by Japanese off Hawaii and San Diego-Tapanese submarine attacks on U. S. Pacific Coast-Air raids in California-

"U. S. Government finds popular demand for energetic measures too strong to resist—New ships ordered—The scout-

ing fleet to proceed to Pacific via Cape Horn - Submarine fight in Magellan Straits-U. S. determines to assume the offensive—Expedition to the Bonins— Arrangements for junction of squadrons dislocated-Expedition retreats but is brought to action by Japanese-Both sides suffer heavily—Shake-up in U.S. command—Plans for a new expedition— Failure of "stop-the-war" agitation— Japan's troubles in China-American squadron sent to Samoa—Tapanese squadron with transports enters neighboring zone—Tapanese squadron destroyed at Battle of Rotumah—Japanese raid Dutch harbor-Armed Japanese merchant vessels make their appearance in the Atlantic-Insurrection in Hawaii quelled with the help of tanks—American expedition from Samoa effects a landing at Truk-American forces occupy islands of Jaluit and Ponape—Grave discontent in Japan — Japanese expect a fleet action—Feint against Guam distracts Japanese attention while Angaur is occupied—Americans make a false attack on Yap-Japanese main fleet leaves Manila for Yap-Japanese discover they have been outwitted and must fight—The Battle of Yap— Superior strength of American forces results in victory after desperate fighting-Hopeless position confronting Japanese Government — Chinese armies overrun Manchuria—Sakhalin surrenders to Russia-Guam becomes American again-American armies effect landings in Luzon-Defeat of Japanese Army of Occupation and fall of Manila-Bloodless air raid on Tokyo followed by an armistice-Terms of peace."

The war lasted approximately two years. This reviewer does not intend to prophesy anything concerning the course of the actual Pacific War. But in one respect, all of these books, save the first. will prove to be astonishingly accurate. The United States will defeat Japan.



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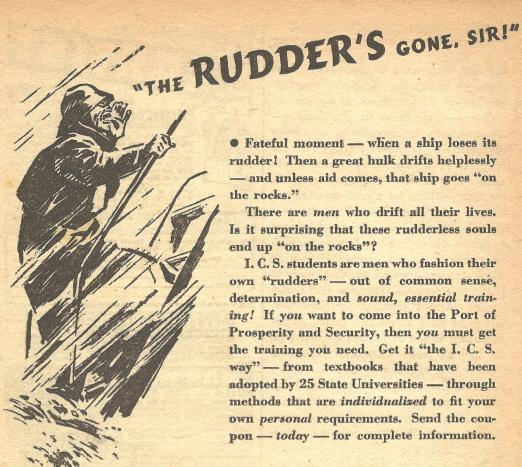
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