

# SUPER-SCIENCE

## FICTION



APRIL  
1957

10

### PARIAH GIRL

by BOYD ELLANBY

### THE RIM OF ETERNITY

by KOLLER ERNST

### ONE WOMAN FOR VENUS

by WISTON MARKS

### INVULNERABLE

by HARLAN ELLISON

35c

## IMMORTAL

For the cover of this, the third issue of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION, we assigned Kelly Freas to do a painting illustrating life-after-death, immortality, the science of rejuvenation. And he came through with a breathless illustration of that split second we wanted.

The split second when a woman three-hundred and seventy-eight years old, wrinkled like a prune, gasping for breath and condemned to the Hole, was brought back to vibrant, proud youth.

On our cover you see Jane Doe of 3866 A. D. having undergone her fifth rejuvenation. They carried her in, laid her down on the light stage of the Rejuvenall and gave it the juice. They said she was dead, doomed to wither. But the bright men of the labs knew better.

So there she is, getting to her feet without help, standing there healthy and full of life, as her grey, matted hair changes to flaming red, as her brittle bones take on new life, as her body fills out and her head rises. She is no longer Jane Doe the old crone, she is now Jane Doe the desirable, beautiful woman, ready to live another two hundred years without aging.

The reason we assigned this subject to Kelly was that this issue contains a sprinkling of stories in that vein, stories and articles on immortality, life-after-death, the structure of TIME and SPACE.

We hope you will enjoy them as much as we did.

W. W. SCOTT

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W. W. Scott — Editor

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# ONE WOMAN FOR VENUS

by WINSTON MARKS

*illustrated by KELLY FREAS*

The governor of Venus must be celibate. Fuller had been conditioned by experts against all women. But things can happen in space that upset conditioning

THE Governors of the Territory of Venus got younger and younger each five-year term. Ruling the sand-blasted empire of bubble-huts and unbreathable air, the Earth Council discovered, was not a job for age. It did require dignity, poise, and self-control which one normally associates with experience, but, regrettably, experience brought gray hairs and a fragility of body and mind that cracked under the mental, moral and physical

buffeting that Earth's outpost gave its nominal rulers.

And so it was that at 26, Governor-Elect Raymond Fuller, fresh out of diplomatic school, found himself aboard the freighter *Sullivan II*, outward bound as an emergency replacement for 34-year-old Thomas Cottinghouse, the latest gubernatorial casualty to fail to complete his term. Cottinghouse had returned via the last passenger flight, eschewing the \$50,000 bonus for



finishing his fifth year of Tenure.

Fuller was wrestler-built, narrow-hipped, cold-blooded and confident. To fortify his high I. Q. and emotional stability, the "psychers" had rushed him through a special fortnight of mental and physical conditioning. So confident were they after the final tests, Fuller noted, that they didn't even demur when it was found that he must share the limited passenger accommodations with one Ramona Waverly, a female exile of considerable demoralizing potential.

Fuller, himself, gave her scarcely a thought until well after blast-off. The heavy acceleration had diminished to the essential-to-well-being *one gee* that pushed gently from the deck in perfect simulation of Earth's gravity, and his inner-ear mechanism and stomach responded quickly to normality. He arose from his couch in the cramped stateroom, pleased to find that his resiliency had overcome in minutes the blast-off effects that so often left passengers exhausted and nauseated for hours after depar-

ture. He was feeling fine.

Sliding his stateroom door-panel back he stepped into the low-ceilinged box of a ward-room upon which his quarters opened directly. A cloud of faintly perfumed tobacco smoke assailed him, and his stomach stirred uneasily.

He addressed the only other occupant, "I believe smoking is forbidden aboard." He was firm and authoritative, and there was no trace of response in his voice to the rather startling sight that met his eyes.

Ramona Waverly lounged supine on one of the two padded couches, a knee carelessly bent up throwing her single, translucent garment into a provocative dishabille. She was what? Nineteen? Twenty-nine? They had told Fuller, but it hadn't seemed important enough to remember, and certainly the smooth narrow lines of her face and neck gave no hint.

Her wide eyes, black as the tightly swept-back hair, moved leisurely over him. She dropped the offending knee and sat up drawing the filmy garment down to her ankles with an ex-

aggerated, prim gesture.

"So you don't even smoke!" The words and tone of voice told Fuller that she knew all about him, knew that he was a graduate cum laude of the school of iron will, clean living and let's-not-be-messing-around. The tone was a soft contralto to match her olive skin, and it was metropolitan and bored, inviting and contemptful, passionate and gelid, admiring and scornful. There was a trace of French accent.

FULLER examined her with academic interest. On Venus she would be only one more female constituent of his pioneer colony, cooking, minding and solacing one of the 80,000 hard-bitten males who had ventured into space to wrest a mineral fortune from the inhospitable planet. But at the moment she represented the product of the odd method of recruiting found necessary to provide the Venusian immigrants with wives.

Fuller seated himself opposite her, fanning a wisp of perfumed smoke away from his nostrils. "You were conditioned out of the nicotine habit. Why

did you smuggle cigarettes aboard? On Venus there is enough to corrupt the lungs."

She shrugged a bare shoulder. "It was a habit I cherished. Like all my—vices. No, it does not give me satisfaction now, but only the pleasure of a last defiance."

Typical, Fuller thought. "And which of your cherished vices got you exiled?"

"Ooooooh," she puckered her dark eyebrows, "hardly a vice. I fed my ol' 'usband bismuth for his ulcers."

"But bismuth is a common remedy for stomach trouble."

"Radio-active bismuth?" she replied with a grimace. "He died *tres* painfully and expensively."

Fuller remembered now, a self-made widow. And the vast fortune she had inherited before the insurance company gained an indictment had corrupted two judges and six juries. A conviction had been secured against her only after her money ran out.

"Why did you kill him?" Fuller asked curiously.

"He was a sadist. Would you like to see my scars?"

"Thanks, no. Why did you marry him in the first place?"

"He was handsome— —like you. And wealthy. Ah, *mon cherie*, so wealthy he was! But those lawyers! If they had gotten me a stay of execution of a single month more I would have been free. Such publicity! Such *grande responce* from my public!"

That was what had troubled the court, she explained. Too much sympathy from the public. The judge had offered her the choice of exile or execution, and when she had chosen Venus, they had packed her off on this freighter before her ardent worshippers among the tabloid readers completed their fund campaign to finance and demand yet another appeal.

She changed the subject abruptly. "What kept you to your stateroom for so long? I 'ave been perishing with loneliness."

A faint pique arose in Fuller, that she had recovered from blast-off even more quickly than he. Also, the roving look with which her eyes took possession of him made him wish vaguely that approved mascu-

line space-ship attire consisted of something more substantial than breech-clout and the sweatkerchief knotted loosely around his neck. No wonder the crew and even the officers were denied the wardroom for this particular trip. If Fuller had enjoyed a whit less faith in his rigorous moral conditioning, he should have been awash with misgivings.

As it was he arose with a slight grunt and moved to the stingy port to stare through his pale reflection into the black void just inches from his nose. The prickle of body hairs coming unstuck from his moist skin gave him the weird sensation that Ramona was still sweeping him with her gaze. Then the hard brilliance of the stars struck through to his consciousness, and the immense importance and dignity of his mission came back to him.

He was Raymond Thurston Fuller, youngest man ever to be appointed Governor of Venus. Calm. Incorruptible. A mountain of strength, physical and moral. Soon enough this poor girl would learn the rigors of her banishment to Venus. No

point in worrying over her obvious designs on his emotions. So she *had* snared herself a millionaire with her sinuous body and pouting lips! Fuller was no spoiled darling looking for diversion. He was secure behind the thickest armor that quiet political ambition plus psychological conditioning could give him. He was a rock, a cold, intellectual entity trained to deal with the personnel problems of a tempestuous colony. No mere woman could penetrate that armor.

He decided it, and the stars glittered back non-committally.

Turning, Fuller said, "Please remember, you are still under arrest. I have a full schedule of studying to complete before we arrive, so I'll have to request that you comport yourself with restraint or remain in your stateroom."

Ramona looked from his eyes to the door of her stateroom. The resolve in Fuller's eyes was unmistakable. She said subduedly, "*Oui!* With restraint. I would not like to be confined in that coffin. With restraint at all times, *mon cherie.*" And she sounded as if she meant it.

FULLER sat before a small reading desk and opened to page one of a thick, handwritten book bound in durable alloy—it was the log, the Venusian chronicle of the seven governors who had preceded him—the day-by-day account of their struggle to maintain some semblance of justice and order in the gale-torn empire where man had ventured and still clung only precariously to sanity and civilization.

As he read of the first landings at the north pole, of the bitter, physical hardships and tragedies that attended the anchoring of a few air-tight bubbles of living space, the technological struggle to unlock the water of crystallization from the substratum rocks and recover oxygen from the mineral oxides, Fuller fell deeper and deeper under the spell of admiration for these heroic men. Unlike several recent governors, Fuller's political ambitions were genuine and loyal to the planet of his assignment.

He visualized not a five-year servitude and a return to earth to enjoy the considerable mon-

etary reward awaiting him. Instead, he dreamed of empire, of solving the thousands of problems that remained before him, of building a great oasis, a stronghold against Venus' tempestuous nature. He dreamed of erecting cities in the great pits of the mineral excavations, of roofing the pits so that man could move miles without the suffocating wrappings of a space-suit.

To date, man had the choice of burrowing underground—and this was not fitting for the dignity of man—or else trusting his life to the cramped, insecure bubbles which too frequently, in spite of all efforts to anchor them, came unstuck before the sand-blasting hurricanes and went jouncing off like grotesque tumble weeds to mash their hapless occupants against the nearest cliff.

After three hours of steady reading, Fuller looked up to rest his eyes. As his mind returned from the howling Venusian hell described in the chronicle, the sight of Ramona sitting quietly reading at the other desk fell incongruously upon his vision.

That fragile, seductive wench on Venus? The wife of a grizzled, tobacco-chewing miner? What would she look like after a year—a year of smothering, silt-like dust driven by the hot devil-winds? How well would she adapt to her five-gallon per week ration of water, which must serve for drinking, cooking, bathing and cleaning?

The conjecture was idle. She would survive, for that is the first qualification of an exile, a tough survival instinct, a raging lust for life under any conditions. Had the testing board found her remiss here, she would not have been offered the option of exile. She would now be dead in the monoxide chamber of New York County.

His muse was broken by the thud of the dumb-waiter and the clink of silver against the magnesium trays. Lunchtime. Fuller raised the sliding wall panel and took out his own tray. On the way to his desk he thought better of his boorish behaviour, swerved and deposited the tray before his companion.

Ramona raised her eyes. "I

am curious, Raymond. What made you change your mind?"

*Raymond!* It served him right. Not even common courtesy was in order, apparently. But had his action been that apparent?

"In payment for being quiet so long, *Miss Waverly.*"

"*Mrs. Waverly,*" she reminded him. "And why not *Ramona?*"

He returned from the dumb-waiter with his own tray and placed it carefully at his desk. "Because I wish no familiarity from you, *Mrs. Waverly,*" he said evenly. "For the remainder of the trip it will be better if we don't converse unnecessarily."

A course of civil formality had been his final decision. Ignoring such a female entirely would probably irritate her into overt hostility, and that could prove distracting.

"Then favor me by addressing me only as *Madame,*" she said. She answered his puzzled glance more fully, "The name of *Waverly* is not one which fits me comfortably."

So, she had sensibilities—even a conscience, perhaps! I have poisoned my husband, but

please do not remind me of it.

Idly he speculated upon her remark about *Waverly* being a sadist. Then he pulled himself up short as his imagination considered what might have ensued had his answer been *yes* when *Ramona Waverly* asked if he would like to see her scars.

Conditioning. Semantic discipline. The *cortical-thalamic pause* was instinctive. His mind drew back from the consideration like a night-crawler diving for its hole, the result of psychosomatic integration, a self-knowledge of the physical beast that lay caged behind the rigid bars of his mental censorship. They ate in silence, then he returned to his reading and she to hers.

THE elapsed-time dial on the chronometer showed 126 hours when the first intimation of engine failure presented itself. It was "night" by the clock, and Fuller came awake on his couch to listen and feel the uneven pulsation that disturbed the fine-grained vibration of the nuclear drive. He had been sleeping lightly as usual, and now he was sharply

awake, for the cycles of pulsation were growing deeper. The gravity of thrust was betraying its artificial nature by its inconstancy.

Surge. Ease off. Surge-surge-surge! Ease way off!

Fuller's stomach registered its disgust. The pulsation was worse than a roller-coaster, for there was no predicting it visually.

He rolled off the couch to his feet and staggered into the wardroom, the deck bucking underfoot like a jerkily ascending elevator. He buzzed the captain on the wall communicator. No answer. He mopped at his face with the sweatkerchief, and suddenly the heavy humidity to which he had become accustomed, grew stifling.

Staring out through the port did no good. The stars looked back unconsolingly, for this hollow sliver of flotsam, this ridiculous intruder in their black domain was no concern of theirs.

Captain Thorn popped from the vertical transit tube that ran the length of the ship. His breech-clout and kerchief were soaked with perspiration,

but his features were placid enough. With barely a glance at Fuller he moved quickly to Ramona Waverly's door and shot the bolt locking her in. Then he seated his short, solid bulk on one of the chairs and regarded Fuller closely.

Before the Governor-elect could question this invasion of privacy and infraction of rules, ear-battering silence cupped glutinous fingers over the ship's hull, and the "gravity" vanished entirely.

Fuller's eyes seemed to jump in their sockets. Brain, heart, diaphragm and stomach, most of all stomach, rebelled at the kinesthetic outrage. The deck seemed to be dropping, dropping away beneath him. He was falling free like a ski-jumper. When the pressure left the soles of his feet, instinctively he reached "down" with his toes. The deck was still there, but the reflex action cast him upward. He raised his hands in time to fend off the low ceiling.

"Just relax," Thorn advised him quietly. "This is nothing serious."

"Then—then why are you in here?" Fuller demanded, push-

ing off from the overhead and gripping the bolted down desk-chair.

"I—well, I just checked in to observe how it would hit you. Free-fall strikes people differently, something like marijuana. Some get dreamy, some scared, violent, sick—some even get affectionate." He glanced at the locked door. "My orders to protect my passengers supersede the ward-room ban. How do you feel?"

"Sick. Nauseated." Fuller gasped for breath with a diaphragm that wanted to keep exhaling. The reduced weight of his viscera, of course.

"You're pale enough," Thorn observed half to himself. "Usually the heavily muscled ones react that way. Over-developed muscle-tissue spindles. They amplify the effect." He kicked himself away from the chair with expert ease and floated toward the tube exit. "You'll be all right, I guess. But don't unlock the girl's door, understand? They need me down below. Be just a short while, probably. I suggest you drift back to your stateroom and stay close to the lavatory. There's no room service here to clean up

any messes."

Wherewith the captain disappeared into the tube. Two clicks indicated that he had double-locked the exit. He apparently wanted no berserk passengers adrift during the emergency.

Emergency was right! Thorn's words had reassured Fuller that no serious danger existed, but the emergency clanger of screaming nerves in his knotted muscles was tearing him apart. The waves of nausea gradually diminished as he focussed his eyes grimly upon the chronometer that wanted to keep slipping down the bulkhead.

THE sensation of falling refused to go away. When he tried to ease his grip on the chair-back he drooped limply in mid-air, and panic seized him. Without the familiar pull of acceleration-gravity his very sense of posture left him. He had to stare down at his partly bent knees to reassure himself that they were "below" him.

Faint, metallic "clunks" transmitted through the ship's hull told him that somewhere men were active in the engine

room. Then a nearer, demanding sound attracted his attention. Ramona wanted out.

*Don't unlock the girl's door!*

The hammering of soft palms against the metal panel continued, and Fuller pictured himself locked in his own tiny cubicle, floating free, agitated, wondering what was wrong. On impulse he pushed off from the chair and drifted over to the door.

"It's quite all right, Mrs. Waverly—I mean, Madame. Just a temporary shut down," he called loudly.

Weird, high-pitched sounds came through the door. "Let—let me out, please." More of the light, gaspy sounds. The girl was hysterical. Probably claustrophobia from floating about, bumping into walls and ceiling with every little move like a ping-pong ball in a jug.

What possible harm could come from releasing her? She was likely to dash her brains out in there. It might be well to keep an eye on her, since she was, ultimately, his responsibility.

Fuller flipped the bolt. Instantly, the panel slid back and Ramona pulled herself through

with a gliding motion that bounced her from his startled body. She twisted in the air, touched off from the bulkhead and floated the twenty-foot length of the wardroom.

"I can fly! I can Fly!" she cried happily, catching herself on her hands, tucking her feet down and pushing off again. She was a fairy, a dancer, a bit of gossamer criss-crossing the space about Fuller, face lightly flushed, her sheer gown waving about her ankles at one moment, then billowing over her head like a collapsing parachute as she touched a wall to reverse her direction.

"I—I thought you were—crying in there," Fuller stammered.

*"Merci, non! It is lovely! Such freedom, like a bird. So often in my dreams—"*

"Yes, lovely!" Fuller breathed softly. His vertigo was gone now, the queasiness forgotten. What a thing it would be to capture that incredible woman and hold her in one's arms!

He waited for the restraining counter-thought to blast the reckless notion, but it did not come. She floated close to him,

her perfume an ineffable radiation that caused him to reach out and touch the rippling hem of her garment like a man in a dream.

**S**HE caught herself at the far wall and looked back at him, aware of his action. Her smile was light and inviting. "You could not catch me," she taunted, eyes wide and luminous.

The challenge thrummed in his ears like a plucked violin string. Involuntarily he tried to step towards her. His foot pawed empty space, for he had allowed himself to drift away from deck and bulkhead.

Again a shivering, muscular reaction ran through him. His hands clutched air, and he worked his legs helplessly. Slowly he was up-ending, but was it he who was moving? Or was it the room, the whole ship, space itself—slowly revolving about him?

A light, stinging slap to his cheek dispelled his growing dizziness, but it increased his rate of longitudinal rotation. Now Ramona was flitting about him on the rim of the spinning vortex of his crazy universe. Her laugh was provocative.

"My strong, brave Governor," she chuckled, "at las' he is going 'round with me." She somersaulted from a wall slowly, trying to match her rotation to Fuller's. As she neared him he reached for her, but his arms flailed clumsily. Ramona touched a palm to his chest and pushed. They separated, and suddenly he felt a wall at his back. The rotation ceased, but now it felt as though the room had stopped and *he* were spinning. He pushed off with his feet, aiming at one of the desk chairs to which to anchor himself. He missed and came up hard against the hull.

Before he could turn, a warm kiss brushed the nape of his neck. "Tag! You are it!" Ramona's voice at his ear caused his head to whirl, but she was gone. Waves of sensation spread down his spine and radiated out his limbs to his fingertips and toes. What was happening to his fine, synthetic restraint?

Even as the question flashed in his mind his legs doubled under him and he launched himself to the far corner where Ramona was momentarily hud-

dled striving to pat the billowing gown away from her head, down to her thighs and knees where it belonged. This time his direction was better, and he captured her before she freed herself.

"Non, non! It is not fair," she squealed. "You 'ave taken advantage—"

But already he had released his grip on the warm arm, the incredibly soft shoulder. *What was he doing?* The little vixen wanted this. She wanted to trap him in his emotions, to make a slave of the animal inside that was tearing his resolve to shreds.

Now her face was before him, tilted at a crazy angle, eyebrows arched, lips full and pouting. "Ver' well, fly away, but I will catch you at once."

Fuller's pulse throbbed in his temples as he fought for control. So easy it would be to reach out slowly and draw those lips to his—

To his amazement the thought seized command. His arms extended and closed about Ramona. Gently, like touching a cloud, he narrowed the circle,

and she floated to him, turning to parallel his stance.

"Ramona!"

"Raymond! The game—it is over so soon?" The black pupils were dilated as though she were drunk.

IT was insane to compromise his position with this woman! What kind of moral force could he provide on Venus if mere propinquity with a beautiful female could shatter all his own restraints? How could he hope to bottle up his virility for even five years if this wench could dissolve it in five days?

Forget it, his fevered brain told him. This is not Venus. You are a man, and no indoctrination can deny you this—this one last experience. Besides, there is no *rule*, no *law* about celibacy for Governors.

Of course not, his sub-consciousness echoed. No rule is needed with the conditioning you have. Your post is one of responsibility and self-sacrifice. 80,000 men exist on Venus, 80,000 men and fewer than a thousand women. No, there is no law, no rule, but tradition denies you even the right to en-

ter the lottery that will determine Ramona's husband. Perhaps some day there will be mates enough to go around, but not now. Not yet.

She's no child! She's a widow. And her new husband will never know—

Stop! Morality is the key to civilization, and your job is to build, not destroy. *She would know. And you would know.*

The cold logic of his indoctrination thrust icy fingers into his brain, but Ramona was a living flame in his arms. The icy fingers melted away as their bodies met, and passion surged through his great body. She was soft and firm in his arms, clinging to him and crying out with tears of relief.

"I want you," she sobbed. "I must have you! Don't let them put me on the lottery!" She hugged him with a strength born of desperation. "You will love me. I will make you love me, and I will love you. Oh, my Raymond, my Raymond!"

Yes, she wants you, a small cynical voice told Fuller. She want to be the Governor's Lady and escape the hardships—

The voice was lost, over-

whelmed by the pounding of the blood in his skull. The negative thoughts, inhibitions, both artificial and common-sensed, buzzed around in his head like a swarm of angry gnats—no, more like the fragments of a gyroscopic flywheel that has vibrated apart and lost all its stability; or the neat pattern of iron filings on paper held over a magnet, suddenly deprived of their polarity and scattered by a careless shake.

How could a man align his thoughts in a mad universe where there is no up or down? How could he orient his purposes when the only solid mass within reach was the half-naked woman in his arms? Or draw a rational breath with his lips crushed by a savage, wanton kiss? Or slow the tempo of his heart when it raced to match the wild beating in her breast?

**S**UDDENLY the very air took on a sub-sonic vibration, soft, then increasing in volume with a familiar frequency. Something touched his ankle, foot, knee, elbow. Something firm and unyielding—pressing more persistently. The

wall annunciator hissed then spoke.

"Now hear this: All hands and passengers, alert! Prepare for 22 minutes of double gravity. Thrust will rise to two gravities in ten seconds. Here is the count off: Ten, nine, eight, seven—"

With each tolling word the deck pressed harder at Fuller's side until at "five" the body in his arms was full-weight. The significance of the announcement ripped through his brain, and he staggered to his feet swinging Ramona into a two-arm carry. Through the state-room door to her quarters—to her couch.

"Three—two—one—zero."

They collapsed together. He struggled to escape against the thrust that had run his weight from zero up to 450 pounds in ten seconds, but Ramona's arms were locked about his neck. "Don' leave me, darling," she cried. "I'm frightened! It was so beautiful—to be free as the air. This is ugly. I feel gross, like an elephant. Don't let me feel that way, Raymond. Hold me! Hold me tight!"

But the iron filings were in

place now. The gyroscope, solid and stable, spun in his brain with perfect alignment. Up was up, and down was down once more. The weakness of mind and muscle vanished, for now there was resistance, direction, purpose.

Gently he broke her frantic grasp and straightened to his feet like a man lifting an invisible load, but it was a good, honest burden, one which he could understand. Looking down at the crumpled body of Ramona Waverly a twinge of remorse shot through him.

He leaned over, drew her legs out straight and arranged her comfortably on her couch. Then he pulled her gown taut to her ankles. Instantly it plastered itself as if electrostatically to every slender, fragile line of her body and limbs, a virtually invisible sheath that enhanced the subtle voluptuousness of her lithe form.

The animal in him was caged once more, but it had scented the prey. It prowled in his heart and brain, and when he went to his own couch the image of Ramona was seared in his retina. He could not erase

the vision of the firm breasts unflattened by the acceleration, heaving over her sobs, and the look of reproach and terror in her eyes, the fear wrought mainly from the significance of his desertion.

Could an emotion born of propinquity, and desperation approach the meaning of love? The alarm circuits in his brain clanged raucously. The question was irrelevant and dangerous. Deliberately he forced himself to think objectively, to analyze the breakdown of his mechanistic protection. How could such elaborate psychological conditioning fail so miserably. Did this mean that any unusual stress could peel the armor from his naked emotions? If so, he was as vulnerable and unfit to administer as any bearded Venusian sandhog.

But no, this wasn't right. The one contingency they could not provide against on earth was a failure of gravity. All his conditioning was oriented, body, mind and senses, within the normal field-gravity of earth. Venus' gravity was essentially the same, so a repetition was highly unlikely.

This was important, for the governor could command the presence and personal service of any soul on Venus. And any woman would come flying to the relative comfort of the governor's quarters at the first summons.

**I**T was the subject of much soul-searching in the chronicles that Fuller had been studying, but not until now had he fully understood the aching emptiness of which these men had written—

"Abstinence is the lot of the majority," Cottinghouse had written, "and so the tradition has grown that the Governor shares it. And he must enforce the sanctity of Venusian marriages, for monogamy is the heart of our morality, even as the family is the stable unit of our culture. And he must prosecute all acts of adultery and prostitution, and he must hold himself as a public object of celibacy! What a fool I was to think I could fulfill this measure! And so I close this log and admit defeat a year before my term is ended.

"I leave with the tradition unbroken, but I am not proud.

My record speaks well only for the efficacy of my conditioning. The bitterness I cannot endure further is the fact that there is no possible conditioning against the loneliness, the heartaching desire for the sound of a woman's voice, the touch of her hand. I have reached the state of self-pity where I envy the other unmarried men the exhausting labor and incredible discomforts and hardships that sap their vitality. My body is still strong, my mind relatively clear, but my will to administer is gone. It is no longer within my ability to pronounce sentence for acts of immorality, and the women have discovered this—"

Fuller had read these words, and similar ones of earlier governors, with contempt. It had appeared a mere problem of sublimation. Now he wasn't so certain. He pondered deeply long after the 22 minutes extra-acceleration had passed and normal gravity had returned.

A tap at his door roused him from his reverie. It was Ramona. She looked up at him with tear-rimmed eyes, but she managed a smile. "The—the

breakfast trays are here, and Captain Thorn just left. He wanted to know who in 'ell unlock my door?"

Fuller nodded gravely. "It was my error. I—I'm terribly sorry, Ramona."

"No, no! Don' say that!" She pressed her face to his chest and cried quietly. "I know how you feel now, but please don' hate me. I realize that what I want is impossible—I saw it in your eyes when you left me. But please, there is so little time left for me. Let me pretend."

Fuller put his hands on her shoulders. "That would only make it harder in the end," he said. "You must understand my position, Ramona."

"I do understand. It was stupid of me to think you would consider marrying a murderess—"

"Don't speak of that again," he said sharply. "When you marry a Venusian your debt is paid. You will never hear the word, 'exile', on Venus."

"But that does not diminish the fact. I may never return to Earth. And when your term is completed you will be free to

go back. So you would be a fool to marry me. In five years there would be children, and in that time you would love me for I would make you love me dreadfully." Her cheek against his chest was slippery with tears.

He shook his head. "You have the right answer but the wrong reasons. I do not intend to return to Earth, ever. I am dedicated to the colony and to my post as long as I can administer. But tradition demands that the governor not enter the lottery, and no free Earth-woman will willingly endure—" He broke off. It was cruel to remind her of the hardships ahead.

Now her small, lovely face was tilted up, her eyes searching his. "Forgive me," she said, "but I think you will fail like the others. Without a wife, without a family you will put down no roots. Sharing the men's bitter loneliness will not make you a better administrator—it will drive you back to Earth."

Fuller thought of Cottinghouse's entry in the log. They were silent for a long moment, and suddenly he became aware

that his arms somehow had slipped around Ramona and were holding her to him. Could the answer be as simple as this? Suppose Ramona were right and he, too, lost the will to administer when the ache grew too great to bear?

*The ache!* For the moment it was gone. Ramona's quiescent body in his arms filled the emptiness. This was no wild passion born of bewilderment. It was a completeness, and almost mystic feeling of security and fulfillment that all his careful conditioning had failed to give him—indeed, had failed to protect him against hungering for.

"The tradition be damned!" he said so loudly that she winced. "The council is wrong—"

"No, Raymond. Not wrong, just helpless," Ramona said. "As you told me, there is no law against Governors being married."

"But their ridiculous tradition—"

"How can it be avoided?"

"I'll tell you how. If you arrive as my wife they can't demand a lottery drawing."

"I don't see how—"

"The Captain. He can marry us. I'll call him right now."

"But Raymond—you must be sure, very, very sure this is what you want. The men will be resentful, perhaps. There will be trouble over it—"

"Whose side are you on?" he asked with a crooked smile, moving to the annunciator and pressing the button. "Besides, they'll get over it when they discover we are *both* permanent residents."

**CAPTAIN** Thorn concluded his conversation with his important passenger and broke the connection. What a crazy trip! Unexplained secret orders to kill the jets for 22 minutes, simulating engine breakdown, a last minute gift of a prayerbook from that slab-headed Thom Hogan, the dispatcher—whatever in hell that meant—and now a request for him to become the first space-freighter

captain in all history to perform a marriage ceremony.

Whoa! Maybe it did figure, after all!

He fumbled in his locker for the little black prayerbook and flipped it open. A hundred-dollar bill dropped out with a note attached:

"Dear Captain: What you need is on page 122 of this particular prayerbook, and just in case any fantastic explanations occur to you for certain incidents on this voyage, the attached money is to buy you enough whiskey in port to forget it. Don't thank me. The book and the money come from higher up. *Much higher up.*"

Thorn looked on page 122, chuckled and slipped a bookmark between the pages at that place.

It was the marriage ceremony.

THE END

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# NUCLEAR NEWS

by STEVEN RORY

Atomic scientists are continuing the development of so-called "reversed" matter at a rapid pace. Following the recent creation of the antiproton, nuclear physicists have gone on to bring into existence the antineutron, latest type of "contraterrene" particle to be developed.

Anti particles are mirror-images of their normal counterparts. An electron is negatively charged; the antielectron carries a positive charge. Similarly, protons are positive particles; the antiproton, first manufactured last year, is negative.

A neutron—the third major particle that makes up the atom—is uncharged, but it does have a magnetic field. This is the point of departure for the antineutron; its magnetic field is reversed.

A research team working at the Bevatron at the University

of California developed the new particle by directing antiprotons at liquid hydrogen. A few—.003 percent—were converted to antineutrons. This was done by employing a distinctive property of the antiproton: when it passes near a normal proton without actually colliding with it, the antiproton may flip one of its components—a negative pi meson—to the proton, leaving both particles electrically neutral. The proton becomes a neutron; the antiproton, an antineutron.

The antineutrons thus produced were detected by aiming them against a lead glass target; as they collided with neutrons, they were annihilated, producing detectable bursts of energy. The research that led to the manufacture of the antineutron is yet another step in the quest that will ultimately lead to man's total mastery of the atom.

# THE RIM OF ETERNITY

by KOLLER ERNST

*illustrated by* ORBAN

Extraordinary speed compresses time. Approaching the speed of light might give one a peep into the fourth dimension—where the past, present and future meet

LUKE RISEN felt the X-33 quiver around him as the dial moved to Mach 20. He was hurtling through the ionosphere at a speed approaching 15,000 miles an hour. He wondered if this was how Elaine had felt the instant before that terrible impact. He closed his eyes an instant, then he shut out the old picture and spoke into the mike.

"Branning Field. Branning Field. Come in. Can you still read me?"

Doc Samuels' low, hoarse voice crackled in his ears.

"Branning Field. Read you okay, but you sound away in eternity, Colonel. How does our baby act?"

"Fine," Luke answered. "Pressured to five Gs on the climb to three-hundred-thousand. Felt like I was coming out at the ears for a while. But I'm here. Funny thing, though, I'm seeing gaps in space. Is this normal? Over."

Samuels' voice cracked through again. It sounded excited in a suppressed way. Peter Samuels, called Doc, was the senior mathematician-physicist. He never really got visibly excited. His voice just thickened a little. Luke grinned as he envisioned the gnome-like little grey-haired man hunched over sheafs of figures on his desk in the field office 300,000 feet below.



"Gaps. Do you mean black-outs?"

"No," said Luke. "Gaps. Like you see in a street of houses when you come to an empty lot. Gaps. No sky. No space. No nothing. Just darkness. Brief me on this."

There was a pause. Then Samuels' voice crackled out of the distance, sounding eerie and hollow...and worried.

"What's your speed?"

Luke looked, was surprised to see that the dial had jumped to Mach 25. He gave this information.

"How long have you been aloft?" Samuels asked.

Luke did not notice the increased huskiness of his voice. He looked at his watch.

"I was released from Mother Q," he said, "exactly two minutes, thirteen seconds ago."

Mother Q was the big launching ship which had carried him into the stratosphere for the test against gravity. The test was to indicate whether man had achieved alloys which would withstand the terrific friction as the rockets attempted to pass the 25,000 mile-an-hour earth escape velocity.

There was a gasp in his ear.

"Turn in, son," Samuels said, his voice crackling eerily out of space. "Something's happened to your co-ordination. You've been up nine minutes, eight seconds."

LUKE looked at his watch in surprise. Then he grinned. He was right. Old Doc Samuels, one of the world's great mathematicians though he was, was wrong. And, for once, with figures.

He spoke jauntily into the mike.

"My co-ordination is just peachy," he said. "Listen: My name is Luke Risen. I'm a colonel in the U. S. Air Force and senior chief test pilot for U. S. Pioneer Airways, Inc. I'm 34. I live at 34537 River Boulevard, Amherst, in a vine-thatched Cape Cod. I am a widower..."

He paused there. Something seemed to choke him. The hauntingness left him like air exploding from a rent balloon. His mouth became grim behind his jaw straps as a picture of Elaine suddenly filled one of the queer blank spots in space

as he hurtled toward it. Suddenly his world collapsed.

He heard only the high, terrible whine of the rocket-powered supersonic X-33. He fed more acid into the thrust chamber and the X-33 quivered, seemed to stand still in eternity like a stung horse, then it leaped forward, screaming.

He felt the pressure of it pull him against his straps. His head was hammered back into its protective cushion. The breath was squeezed from him. A greyness filled space before his eyes trained on the face of Elaine ahead of him in space. He began to feel the heat, saw Mach 30 on his dial and he resigned himself to eternity.

"Elaine," he whispered. "I don't want to fight any more alone. I want to join you."

"Luke," came Samuels' frantic voice. "Turn her in. You've got exactly ninety seconds of fuel left. Why didn't you keep in contact every sixty seconds as planned? You haven't answered my signal in three minutes."

Luke shook himself then. He forced his hand away from the acid control. His right hand had

been clutched there in a death grip, the knuckles white against the weather tan of the hand. He looked at his watch.

Not more than fifteen seconds had passed since he last talked to Samuels. He checked again to make certain, and he puzzled at that.

"Doc," he said into the mike. "One of us can't tell time."

But Samuels didn't laugh. His voice was thick.

"You've got seventy-six seconds left," he said. "Pull out."

Luke shrugged.

"Roger," he said.

Slowly he eased the X-33 over. Slowly, like a man coming out of the deep sea so as to avoid bends, or the boiling of his body fluids, he let her drift down from the terrible height. For the first time he looked down at the luminous ball some eight miles below which was the earth. He followed a beam in his helmet like a homing pigeon follows some kind of psychic radar to find its way home over vast, unfamiliar distances.

They met him in a red field jeep.

**H**HE felt stiff, a little unsteady as he shot back the cockpit bubble and felt the shock of warm, thick earth air. He grinned at the grey-haired gnome, with the thick, black cigar in his face.

"What's the matter?" he said as they drove back to the field offices. "You look like you saw a ghost."

Doc Samuels nodded rapidly, puffed even more rapidly on his cigar. Luke couldn't remember when he'd seen him so visibly excited.

"Don't joke, son" he said. "You don't know how near to being a ghost you were."

Luke stared at him and they rode the rest of the way across the field in silence.

In the office, over a cup of steaming coffee, Samuels finally sat back and said:

"Yah. Now what happened up there? The time, I mean."

Luke shrugged.

"The plane acts ready for the big test," he answered. "I believe I can boost her well past escape velocity next time. She heated a little, but appeared to be able to take a lot more thermal belting before..."

"The time," said Samuels. "What about the time? You were up thirteen minutes. Should have been only eight."

Luke grinned at him.

"I don't know what all this jabber is about time. It just goes to show you can't tell time down here any more. I wasn't up even eight. According to my watch, I was up there about five minutes."

Samuels looked at him queerly. He puffed great grey clouds.

"You're sure?" he said.

"I'm sure."

"What time do you have now?"

Luke looked at his watch.

"Fifteen hours. On the nose," Samuels grunted.

"Now," he said, "co-ordinate your time with the Greenwich clock there."

Luke looked. Then he stared at his watch. He shook it, finally listened to it. It was running, all right. But it was almost a quarter hour slower than the official field clock. He looked at the mathematician.

"What gives?" he said.

Samuels began to make a batch of figures. He tore them up as fast as he wrote them.

Finally, he sat back and spread his hands.

"Who knows?" he said, "Perhaps time compression. Maybe only a faulty wrist-watch. I suggest you have it checked and get a different one for the next test."

Luke nodded. Idly he took off the watch, swung it by its strap.

"By the way," he said, for Samuel's words had sounded like dismissal, and the little scientist was obviously fidgeting to get at his beloved figures. "What about those holes in space?" He did not say that he'd seen Elaine's face ahead of him, in one of those queer holes, as clearly as though she was next to him. He did not say that he had looked into her grey eyes and saw every little line on her forehead, and the laugh wrinkles around her lips.

Samuels squinted at him, puffed a moment, then said:

"The speed, son. The speed. It did something to your co-ordination. You must have passed out a number of times. That accounts for the lapses in keeping contact."

Luke turned away. At the door he paused.

"And the watch, Doc," he said. "Did that pass out because of the speed, too?"

Samuels stared at him. For a moment they looked into each others eyes, the one young, straight, tough like a young oak; the other old, bent, and wise beyond even his years.

Then Samuels shook his head.

"Sit down a moment, son," he said. When Luke had returned and sat, looking mystified, he continued. "There are many things that science cannot tell us. But mathematics can be on the verge of some of these discoveries. Like the fourth dimension, for example..."

"Fourth dimension? What's that nonsense got to do with..."

"Relax, relax. It's not nonsense. The way I look at it," said the old man gravely, "the fourth dimension is time. It is just possible to go so fast that time, virtually, stands still. You are acquainted with Einstein's theory of time and space, of course. Taking light to be the ultimate speed, the theory holds that the closer you go to

the speed of light, the more you, as a living thing, would slow down or flatten out. It is possible, traveling at a speed short of light, to live what you believe to be only minutes, yet, by earth standards, would be years. . . ."

"I understand the theory well enough," interrupted Luke. "But I don't see what it has to do with the tests. After all, the X-33 will go maybe up to Mach 35 or so. That's a drop in the bucket when compared with the speed of light."

"Yet, said Samuels," the principle is the same. Extraordinary speed compresses time. That is the fourth dimension. At these high speeds you may be able to see this dimension. It may be revealed as a solid which, at slow speeds, spreads out in space and does not appear to exist at all. It is like looking through a spatial picket fence."

Luke got up. He shook his head.

"You lost me, Pop", he said. "But, next time, I'll be watching for this picket fence."

**A**LL the way home he drove slowly through the

thick traffic, pondering the queer happenings of the afternoon. The X-33 was a beauty, he decided. It probably could leave the earth's gravity and dart into outer space. The alloys, apparently, could withstand the thermal pressures. A new molybdenum alloy had made that possible.

There had been no indication that the new metal, developed through Samuels' equations, had tired. He was quite confident that man was finally on the outer threshold of inter-stellar travel. And he was happy that he would have a hand in it. In fact, he felt a surging excitement that made him impatient to get on with the tests; impatient with the four-day lapses between the flights.

These were the only things he lived for these days. Ever since Elaine had been killed in that highway auto crash, he hadn't cared much about anything except speed. It was as though, subconsciously, he was forever running a race with death; running a race in an effort to join Elaine.

He did not consciously think

this. Consciously he told himself that science must advance.

"Somebody must be the guinea pig," he said, as he drove into his yard and parked. "And I can't think of a better one than Col. Luke C. Risen. What have I got to lose? An empty house?"

Four days later he went over figures with Samuels before making his next test in the X-33.

"I am not at all sure," the mathematician said, "that you will come out of speed like that alive. Or that the metals will stand the heat."

Luke had asked whether Samuels thought the X-33 could withstand speeds in excess of Mach 30.

He adjusted his new watch, smiling at the old man.

"I think you're wrong, Pop," he said. "I had that crate up at Mach thirty once, if I recall right, that last trip. And I'm here to start another. This time I will really give her a test."

Samuels shook his head. He stared at Brig. Gen. Williams, commandant of the field. Williams cleared his throat.

"You are not to take unnec-

essary risks, Colonel," he said. "This is scientific inquiry, remember. Not an air show."

Luke nodded.

"It'll be scientific, all right. I think I know my ship better than you men do. After all, I flew in it and I lived with it. If science is going to move on, it needs someone who will take a few chances. We can't stay at Mach thirty all our lives. Or can we?"

Williams grumbled. Samuels puffed rapidly.

"Promise me one thing, Colonel," he said. "At the first sign of pressure fatigue, or oxygen pinch, or...or these blank spots in space, you will ease down immediately. Remember, your body liquids can stand a little boiling, but if all these things happen, you will be a poor risk to return. There, also, is a risk of being unable to throttle back the X-33 at anything over Mach thirty. Bail out, then, son, and the hell with the ship."

Luke looked at him, fondly.

"Thanks, Pop," he said. "But this time I think I'll be in touch with you on time every sixty seconds."

**T**HE mother Q dropped him at 150,000 and he pointed the X-33's needle nose straight up until he hit 200,000 feet. There he levelled off. He felt the growing excitement in him, like a growing heat. Somehow he knew that soon he would see the space pockets. He thought of Samuel's fourth dimension and time theory. He smiled. What did it matter? All that mattered was the holes in space, where he might see Elaine again.

His hands worked automatically. He fed acids, and the X-33 screamed like a banshee in the thin air and its mach needle began to climb steadily.

"X-33. X-33," came Samuels' husky voice. "Sixty seconds."

Luke cut in.

"Check. Everything fine. At Mach twenty. Rising slowly. By the way, Pop, it's now fifteen hundred hours, four minutes, eighteen seconds."

"Check," said Samuels. "You are beginning to tell time better."

Luke chuckled as he switched off the mike and concentrated on looking for the

pockets in space. Each sixty seconds he checked in with the ground. Each sixty seconds the mach needle jumped.

After his third check he saw the first space hole. It was a black spot dead ahead. He glanced at the dial. Mach 34. He felt the vibration in the X-33 strongly now. Heat pressed in on him. He nosed up a bit and gravity pressure slammed him against the seat. But the grey spots did not appear before his eyes like the time before.

"X-33! X-33!" Samuels' voice sounded thick in his ear-phones. "You missed two checks. What happened?"

Luke puzzled briefly about that. His eyes hurt as he turned them to the dial clock. His time check revealed that he was still seconds away from his first check. But he did not answer. The rocket was now humming a high, strident tone. It was a new pitch, piercing, painful.

The Mach needle quivered just under 40.

"You must be wrong," he said. "Check your time down there."

Then he concentrated on the empty space patches which be-

gan to appear with considerable regularity before him. An instant later he thought he must be going mad. Or...

Was this death?

Was this the after life?

Had something happened that he was not even aware of?

**A**HEAD was land. There could be no question about it. It spread, rolling green and brown and autumnal russet, far to his left and right. In the distance were snow-capped mountain peaks.

He fought to keep his eyes open. His right, gloved hand froze on the stick as he battled a giddiness which had started in his stomach and now appeared bent on turning him inside out. The cabin was pressurized for 300,000 feet. But something was wrong. The pressures were building up terribly inside his body. He managed to strain a look at the altimeter. Its needle seemed frozen at that height. Yet, he knew he must be much higher. He felt as though he would burst into a million molecules at any second.

He began to feel the solar radiation, too. It seeped

through the tough molybdenum alloy shell. It tingled and danced on his skin like the live, frightful, burning energy that it was. Now it burned into his brain, and he felt as though the inside of his skull were boiling.

Frantically he leaned forward against the wheel, aware only that he must, somehow, come down, or at least level off. But he had no strength. It seemed like hours before he could move his head from its broad, padded rest to bring additional balance and weight to the task of moving the half-wheel forward.

Fantasy, he thought. It's all fantasy. I'm in the bunkhouse having a nightmare. It must be burning. I've got to get out.

The internal pressures eased a little as he fell suddenly forward. But the solar radiations increased and he had the feeling that he was being roasted on a spit, like a roasting duck.

He heard a crackling in his ears, became again aware of the mike strapped to his face and spoke into it.

"Trees," he said. "Broiling ducks. Land. Mountains. I'm in heaven having a roast."

He heard a strange chirping in the earphones. It sounded like the chattering of a monkey, rapid, unintelligible. He listened and, suddenly, his mind cleared and it sank through that it was Samuels talking; Samuels talking at a rate many times faster than normal. At first he could not separate the words. But, as he listened, patterns came through and he was able to piece sense into the queer chittering.

"Hypnotic...images," Samuels was saying. "Close...eyes...ten...seconds..."

He closed his eyes, but when he opened them the land was still there. A garden appeared magically at his right. Water rose from a crystal fountain in a dazzling, golden spray which hurt his eyes.

He saw the sun's rays coming out of the black space behind him, but they had no effect upon the fountain, nor upon the people who, he noticed then, were walking around it. He cried in horror as the X-33 hurtled straight for the garden and its people, rockets screaming hideously.

He fought to pull out, but the weakness had soaked into

him now and he was unable to move even a finger. The rocket howled at Mach 40, a speed which left the earth, itself traveling at 19,000 miles an hour, rapidly behind. He tried to cry a warning, but he knew this was useless, futile, like yelling into a hurricane. Then the X-33 ripped through the garden, through its people, through the land, and he saw that the people were not in the least discomfited. He felt no shock, no split second or final consciousness before death which, surely, must come with such impact.

Yet, he thought wildly, this must be death. But then, would I be conscious? Would I, for example, be able to reason like this if, indeed, I were dead?

THE thoughts curved in on him and confused him. He ceased to think about it. A strange happiness came then. He decided that he was dead. He could not explain how he knew. But he did not care. He wanted it that way. Soon he would see Elaine. He would join her in that space pocket where he had seen her before. He had given his all for

science, and surely science, through this great speed and heighth test today, must have taken a giant step toward space travel.

He did not stop to think how, being dead, he could be having these fleeting mind impressions. He let it go for what it was, and he felt very relaxed and at peace.

As the X-33 continued to scream through the strange land, a woman raised her hand and, suddenly, he saw Elaine.

He drove through her and he was not surprised when, instead of seeing her vanish, that she was suddenly sitting beside him in the X-33's cockpit where there was barely room for himself. But he did not ponder these things. He closed his eyes and sighed. Even the terrible burning in his brain seemed gone.

"Elaine, darling," he said. "Home at last. Oh, I missed you so."

Elaine put a hand on his cheek. It felt very cool.

"You must go back, dear," she said. "You can't stay here now. You have work to do before you join us."

Luke looked at her. Her face was pale and sweet. Her grey eyes had a look of infinite patience and peace.

"Go down there?" he said.

Elaine nodded.

"I don't want to go down there," blurted Luke. "I'm tired of being alone. I want to be with you. I'm happy here. Happier than I've been in months."

He touched the mike at his mouth, wondering if his conversation was being picked up in the field wagon below; wondering if Samuels was thinking he'd gone stark, raving crazy.

But, he thought, Samuels couldn't hope to understand. I'm home. I found Elaine and I'll stay with her now in eternity. And, if I'm not really dead now, I'll fly the X-33 until...

But the radio merely made static, crackling noises.

Strange, he thought, how clearly he could see Elaine. Even the wedding band, yellow gold she wanted. It glinted on the ring finger of her left hand. She had been buried with it. Elaine, however, answered him as though his thoughts had been spoken words.

"But you are not what you on earth call dead, darling," she said. "And you must go back. You have no choice. It won't be for long." He felt the cool of her hand on his burning cheek again. "It will be only a matter of minutes and we will be together again. Infinity minutes, not earth minutes. It will be a short time, Luke. Just remember, you are on earth to fulfill a mission. You have a duty. Here, in eternity, there is no death. Here I will be waiting."

"I'm dreaming," Luke said. "This is fantasy. My mind melted."

"No," Elaine answered softly. "You pierced the time dimension. God will move it back now, for man was not intended to see into his future. I pleaded for you, for I knew what was in your mind. That is why you had a glimpse of us. Now, darling, you must go back."

"No! No! No!" Luke cried.

**B**UT, suddenly, he again became aware of the instrument panel before him; aware of the banshee whine of the X-33's rockets and the naus-

eating pressures as the radio crackled into words; aware of the solar radiations as the unfiltered rays of the sun saturated the ship. He was lying forward, across the wheel, the nose of the X-33 screaming earthward.

"Luke! Luke! For heaven's sake, answer. What happened? Are you all right? Are you there?"

Luke stared at the dial. It showed him traveling now at Mach 16. The pressures were passing, even the solar heat was no longer a raw, insistent, crawling burn. He felt weak and giddy. But he managed a grin at the absurdity of the last question. If he wasn't there, certainly there would be no use asking that one. He flicked on the switch.

"X-33 to Branning Field," he said. He shivered suddenly at the closeness of whatever had happened to me. Suddenly, as the full use of his lungs returned, the last of the awful heat broke, and the terrible vibration left the ship, he was very glad that he was alive. "I passed out, I guess," he continued into the mike. "For a while

I thought I was in eternity with Elaine."

"What?" cried Samuels hoarsely.

"In your heavenly time dimension, Doc," Luke said. "You know, through that spatial picket fence of yours. I'm all right now. I'm coming right in with a report on this baby. She's a honey."

He cut out and grinned as he pictured the grey old gnome,

chuckling over his words, yet puzzling and worrying about them.

Then, as he pressed forward and started into a full, screaming power dive toward Branning Field, a bit of gleaming metal caught his eye as it rolled over in his lap.

It was Elaine's yellow-gold wedding band.

## THE END

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A new type of particle accelerator or "atom smasher" that will allow important advances to be made in nuclear research will be installed in Canada early in 1958. To be known as the Tandem Accelerator, the 10-million volt machine will make it possible to study in continuous detail the nuclear energy level of heavy elements which they know only in patches today. Until this novel atom-smasher was designed, it was possible to study

only certain of the light atomic nuclei; now the heavy elements will come in for careful scrutiny as well.

The 35-ton accelerator will be shielded with thick concrete walls and built against the side of a mountain for added protection during experiments. The atomic particles will be accelerated down an L-shaped track 150 feet long, while scientists in a separate building will be able to study their behavior.

# PARIAH GIRL

by BOYD ELLANBY

*Illustrated by KELLY FREAS*

The native girl Bradford had picked out on the planet seemed to have a criminal record. — But what exactly was her crime? Bradford had to find out the hard way

**L**T. Charles Bradford stood at the window, watching the suns go down on Hozhan's chief city. He had been waiting more than an hour now for Napersec to process his request, and he could see that Schwartz and Osborne were both getting impatient. Behind him he could hear the evenly clicking relays of Napersec, —Native-Personnel-Selector-Computer, —and he glanced at his watch, ready to give up for the day, when the rhythm of the machine suddenly changed, and his request card dropped into the return chute.

Over the name he had written

so carefully, *Jina Xasast: 17-5-3009*, lay the smudged red stamp: NOT APPROVED: CRIMINAL RECORD.

"So you picked a lemon," said Schwartz.

"That machine must be crazy!" said Charles. "Jina's no more a criminal than I am. She's the nicest girl I've ever met, and with those big, brown eyes, and that cute little skirt thing she wears, and the way she enjoys talking about languages,—I don't believe it! She couldn't commit a crime if she tried."

Lt. Isadore Schwartz shrugged and spread his hands.



"I guess it's hard to tell, with aliens."

Captain Stanley D'Arcy Osborne laughed and raised a sandy eyebrow. "With girls, you mean. Look, Bradford, we've wasted enough time. You know as well as I do that Napersec has all the dope on these people, and if it says your girl's no good, you'd better forget her and pick another."

Through all six feet of his gangling frame Charles could feel the slow rise of stubbornness, the same stubbornness that had kept him plugging away at the Hozhan language when most of his Company had given up the struggle.

"But I *like* Jina!" he said.

Captain Osborne looked at his watch. "If you don't hurry, we'll be late for tonight's Frater. With at least twenty thousand girls on this planet just waiting to be wifed, why be so particular. Anyway, why be in such a hurry to settle down, when the contract lasts for three long years? Why don't you look over the field first and play it cautious, like me, at least till we find out whether these girls are really as human

as Napersec claims they are?"

"Didn't you hear me, Osborne? I said I liked Jina!"

IN the month since the UP occupying force had landed on Hozhan, the experts had assembled the basic facts of the planetary culture and the psychological patterns of the inhabitants. Only a week ago the data had yielded the preliminary assay: *Population Humanoid, Class A*. Two days ago United Planets had authorized the first Frater and had issued the expected directive: *Wifing permitted, subject to Napersec*.

Frowning at the card, Charles tried to imagine why Napersec had turned down the girl he had chosen. Of all the hundreds at the first Frater, she had appealed to him most, and had impressed him at once as "different." She was the only one who seemed to have any curiosity about the solar planets, the only one who tried to help him with the Hozhan language, and the only one who seemed more interested in conversation than in sampling the novelty of hotdogs and ice cream.

"You're holding us up, Bradford," said Osborne. "The girls will be getting anxious." Taking out his comb, he began to smooth his curly, red hair.

"Do you have to wear that fancy SD'AO monogram on everything?" said Schwarz.

"Why not? I can't lose things when I have SD'AO on my comb, my ties, my socks, my notebook, —There's an idea, Bradford, I'll lend you my notebook, full of girls' names. Pick any girl on the list, they're all beautiful, all well-upholstered. I'll even let you have Rasha, there're plenty of others."

"I've already picked my girl. Jina."

Schwartz goggled at the well-filled pages. "You sure haven't let the grass grow under your feet, Osborne. Only forty-eight hours since UP gives us the green light, and look at your backlog! Stanley D'Arcy Osborne, Earth's gift to the Hozhan women. —they sure do go for your red hair and baby blue eyes."

Osborne smiled, and patted his tie. "Did you hear what Rasha told me last night? Said

the girls had about decided I was the handsomest of all the Earth soldiers, handsome enough to be a daromm,—whatever that may be."

"She must have been kidding you," said Charles. "A *daromm* is one of the local animals, ugly as sin. But tell me, what shall I do about Jina? What do you suppose they call a crime, here on Hozhan?"

"Same as with anybody," said Schwartz impatiently. "Theft, mayhem, arson, murder,—"

"Not Jina!"

"Then why don't you ask Napersec for a breakdown?"

Quickly Charles coded "Specific details" and fed his card back to the machine. Within five minutes it returned with the stamp: "Data not in circuits ask Supervisor."

"Well, you tried," said Schwartz. "Better give up."

"Give up? Hell no!"

WITH the problem of Jina on his mind, Charles had almost lost interest in the nuances of Hozhan phonetics, and the next morning's linguistics class seemed endless. Even when he was free to leave, get-

ting to the Supervisor's office was not easy. Outside the walls of the Old City, new buildings were going up. Trying to hurry through the maze of construction, he had to step over and around naked children playing in the dust, and detour to avoid the domestic animals that wandered unmolested in the cobblestoned paths. Once he found his way barred by a *gol*, a long-haired, spotted creature rather like a friendly goat; he gave it a pat on the rump and shoved it out of his way, but when he met a *daromm* a short distance farther on, he circled it widely, for he was wary of the latent force in its huge body, and he disliked its ugly eyes and pig-like grunt.

The road ended finally in an archway beyond which he could see the maze of alleys and thatched roofs of the Old City.

An armed guard stood in the middle of the archway.

"Your pass, Lieutenant?"

"What pass? I just want to see the Colonel... Say, aren't you Sismanidis, from Tulsa? You took me for a big pot at poker, the night before we landed here."

The guard relaxed. "I thought I'd seen you before. You tried to fill an inside straight. Sorry, Lieutenant, but this area is out of bounds now."

"What's going on? UP doesn't need any guards on Hozhan. I never saw a more friendly or peaceable bunch of natives."

"I know that's the way they seem, but when Captain Osborne didn't check in last night, the Commandant ordered guards posted at all entrances to the Old City."

Charles stared. "You mean Stanley D'Arcy Osborne got himself lost in there?"

"That's where they found his comb, at least. They way I figure it, he was probably chasing some girl, and he'll show up all right in a couple of days, but until he does... You've got urgent business?"

"I've got to see the Supervisor, Colonel Begg. Yes, it's urgent."

"In that case, I'm turning my head, and if anyone slips through, I didn't see him."

**C**OLONEL Begg looked annoyed as he motioned

Charles to a chair. "A native personnel problem, Lieutenant? Surely you know that Napersec takes care of all such matters? If you will just fill out a card and feed it to the machine—"

He looked even more annoyed as Charles recounted his story. "Please note the word was 'crime', not misdemeanor. If the girl has a criminal record, I can only recommend that you forget her. We can't have our men consorting with criminals."

"She's not!" shouted Charles. "I'm sorry, sir, but she's so shy, and gentle, and intelligent. You should have heard the cute way she corrected me the other night when I mispronounced the word for 'house.' 'Ze tone is wrong, Charles,' she said. 'Do not say *nap*, zat means a kind of illness. For *house*, use ze fourth tone, *nnap*.' I'll never believe that Jina—"

"I know," said Colonel Begg. "A pretty girl plays up to you, and you take her for an angel."

"But what crime did she commit? What seems wrong to a Hozhan might not seem wrong to us at all. What did she do?"

"I haven't the least idea. Criminal records go to Psychia-

try, not to me. I strongly advise you to drop the whole matter. If you insist on having specific details, I can refer you to Psychiatry, but I warn you, they won't appreciate your wasting their time any more than I do."

Charles hesitated only an instant. Then all his ancestral New England stubbornness asserted itself.

"Thank you, Colonel Begg."

**S**ITTING in the deep leather chair half an hour later, Charles felt that Dr. Kranz's sharp eyes had looked him over, tabulated him, and filed him for future reference in less than sixty seconds.

"The other night I met a girl," Charles began. As he repeated his story, Dr. Kranz began to frown, and on hearing "criminal record," he shook his head emphatically.

"We can find out, my boy, if you insist, but it won't make any difference."

"I still want to know what she did."

"Don't you understand, my boy? It does not matter what sort of criminal act she may

have committed. By Hozhan standards she is a criminal, and that is what counts. A criminal is, by definition, one who transgresses the laws of his society. In German, we call him a *Verbrecher*, one who breaks through regulations."

"I understand," said Charles impatiently. "Linguistics is my field."

"Then you should find the Hozhan language fascinating. I'm sorry about this girl, but I can't help you."

"But suppose she only broke some law we wouldn't approve of, or would even think ridiculous?"

"Possible, but not likely. The Hozhani culture is too similar to that of Earth. Remember, the analyzers rated the people Humanoid, Class A."

"Maybe they made a mistake."

Kranz smiled. "Impossible. Oh, I suppose a few minor aberrations may reveal themselves in time, but nothing that would change the basic classification, otherwise we would never have allowed wifing. Since they are human, obviously they will share our basic con-

cepts of right and wrong, and if they condemn an action as a crime, you may be certain that that same act would be called a crime on earth, at least by some group of human beings, some time, some place."

Charles jumped to his feet and walked restlessly about the room, unpleasantly aware of Kranz's watching eyes. "But why can't you at least give me the particulars? Doesn't a man have a right to know?"

Sighing, Kranz turned to his master file and coded into the keyboard, "Jina Xasast: 17-5-3009." After a minute's wait a microcard appeared in the view-box: INFRACTION OF RITUAL OBSERVANCE.

"But what did she *do*?" Charles shouted. "I've never been given such a runaround in my life! Here we've got a thousand experts trotting around collecting information, and they shove it into a mastermind of a machine, and then when you ask for one simple detail, all you get is a generality!"

"Are you always so excitable?" said Kranz.

Charles sank into the chair and tried to speak more quietly.

"Is it so terrible to break a rule? That's probably all Jina did. Haven't you ever fractured a ritual yourself? If you're going to hand a criminal record on every man that forgets to salute an officer or picks up the wrong fork at a dinner party, we'd all be outcasts."

Dr. Kranz stood up and walked to the door.

"We are not so stupid as you seem to think, young man. This says *ritual*. What would you think of a Moslem who walked into the courtyard of the Great Mosque at Mecca, and spat on the Black Stone? You know very well that his fellow Moslems would kill him on the spot, and justifiably. If you are so unwise as to persist in your interest in this girl, the only thing you can do is to make a personal appeal to the Commandant himself. If you want to risk his reaction, that is your affair. Good day!"

**A**S Charles stood in line in front of Frater-Hall that evening, moving slowly towards the door, Schwartz shook his hand admiringly. "Man, what a nerve! You mean to say you

wound up with the Commandant himself?"

"It was easy," said Charles. "The Commandant evidently prides himself on two things, his paternal interest in his men, and the infallibility of his snap judgments. I'd hardly finished explaining when he began to mumble, 'Never saw the machine yet that couldn't foul things up, never saw the psychiatrist yet that couldn't make a mountain out of a molehill. Of course I can't go counter to regulations and give you this girl until we've cleared up this criminal record business, but I can give you a temporary permit.' Then he reaches for my card, stamps it APPROVAL PENDING, signs it, and hands it over."

"But you still don't know what she did?" said Schwartz. "Maybe she just wore the wrong shade of face powder one day, but maybe it was mayhem or bigamy. Maybe you shouldn't take the chance."

They had reached the doorway now. "There's Rasha," said Schwartz. "If Osborne hasn't turned up yet, maybe I can make some time with her."

Alone, Charles searched the hall until he found Jina, sitting in a corner by herself. She glanced up shyly, and smiled as Charles presented his stamped card, but when she saw the various stamps, her long-lashed brown eyes became remote.

"Why is your card stamped red, Charles? Ozzer men have green stamps."

Was there ever a more entrancing accent? Charles wondered. Her English vocabulary was still small, but her pronunciation of the words she did know was excellent, and the only sound she couldn't make was the *th*.

"Don't worry about the card, Jina," he said, pulling her to her feet. "Come on, let's join the others there with Schwartz."

She held back, ducking her head. "Zey not want me."

"Of course they want you!" He led her across the room, to the corner where Schwartz was laughing with a group of girls and soldiers. Rasha in particular looked gay and happy, until she saw Jina. Then her face so-

bered, and she stepped back.

"Now don't be like that, Rasha," said Schwartz. "You're just as pretty as Jina, no need to be catty."

"Zey do not want me," Jina murmured. "I am bad."

"Well, they'll have to take you, because you're with Bradford and Bradford comes with me. Come on, Rasha, smile for the man. That's better. Look, Bradford, see if you can understand what Rasha's been talking about, I get only a few words of it."

The girl spoke softly, but so clearly that Charles had little trouble in understanding her. "She's inviting us all to come to her house tomorrow night, in the Old City. Some special banquet. Says her parents want to meet us, and it will be a big honor in their lives if we'll come."

Schwartz looked worried. "Wait a minute! Do you realize we'll have to eat native food?"

"Please?" said Rasha, touching his arm.

"All right, all right. Sure we'll go, Rasha. I'll try anything once."

**A**T the archway leading into the Old City a guard was still on duty the following night, and he waved them through when Charles presented their passes. With Jina clinging timidly to his arm, he followed Rasha and Schwartz through the gate of a shabby courtyard and up a flight of stone steps to a barred wooden door; Rasha called out softly, the door was unbarred and they walked through a hall into a room filled with color. Silver candelabra lighted the walls, rose-colored carpets covered the floor, and the low divans were heaped with cushions.

From the crowd of Hozhani in the room Rasha's father came forward; with white head erect he spoke courteously to each one until he came to Jina. Then his face changed, he nodded, and turned away.

Charles felt chilled and worried as he took his place on a divan; a cup of amber liquid was placed in his hand, and he sipped it doubtfully,—then gratefully. It was a dry wine with a faint aroma of apricots. His cup was refilled almost immediately, and as he continued

to drink, the party began to take on life.

Leaning back against the cushions, with Jina at his side, he discovered that he was speaking her language more fluently than he had ever dreamed possible. The hum of voices was music, and the world was a delight. Jina seemed more desirable than ever, and the possibility of her being a criminal was ridiculously remote.

Suddenly it seemed imperative to clear the matter up, and what better way to find out the truth, than to ask Jina herself?

The words were very clear in his mind, and he was surprised at how difficult it was to make her understand his simple question. At last he resorted to using English.

She understood him almost at once, and blushed. She evaded his eyes as she answered.

"Yes. Zat is so. I did."

"But what did you do, Jina?"

"It is too bad. You will not like me."

"I'll always like you, but I don't understand you. Tell me again, what was it you did?"

Her faint voice, her inadequate English, and his meager knowledge of Hozhan combined to thwart him. He learned no more than he had known before.

"Were you ashamed of what you did, yourself? Did you think it was bad?"

She nodded her head, looking frightened.

"Never mind," he said, patting her knee. "It's all in the past now, and whatever it was, I'm sure you won't do it again."

The wine came around again, but he seemed barely to have tasted it when suddenly his cup was empty and Rasha's father was speaking to them. People were getting up now, and in a pleasant haze Charles tucked Jina's hand under his arm and followed the others into the dining room.

Baskets of fruit and bowls of nuts ornamented the table, which was set with green pottery decorated with scenes of scarlet birds in flight. The guests stood with folded hands as the servants hurried in with steaming platters. The tantalizing aromas of strange spices drifted through the air as the

men set their platters on the table.

Rasha's father stood, closed his eyes, folded his hands, and intoned an invocation; then, at his signal, the guests sat down.

Even Schwartz should enjoy this banquet, Charles thought as he looked at each dish. He tried to memorize the name of each, and to relate its name to its chief ingredient. Here was *dali*, a giant mushroom, broiled and smelling something like roast peanuts. Here was a cereal very like rice, whose name he did not hear. Here were skewered squares of *gol*, the little goat-like animal that ran in the streets; and boiled *nub*, a shell-fish.

A servant stood at the head of the table, carrying a silver platter bearing a roast of *daromm*, the pig-like creature with ugly eyes.

"To honor the men from Earth!" said Rasha's father, and signalled the servant to begin his round. When he reached Jina, she blushed, and shook her head. Immediately all talk stopped. In utter silence, everyone looked at Jina until, at

a nod from Rasha's father, the servant moved on, and people began talking again.

"Aren't you hungry, Jina?" asked Charlies. "Don't you like the *daromm*?"

"Yes, I do not like."

RASHA'S father, he noticed, was still watching Jina sternly—as though she had committed a crime! In that moment, Charles felt a glorious sense of enlightenment.

"Is that what you did before?" he whispered. "At a banquet like this one, with ceremonial food and ritual? And you wouldn't eat some of the dishes?"

There were tears on her cheeks as she nodded.

Charles laughed. "Hey, Schwartz, guess what! I've found out what the 'criminal record' amounts to. Jina won't eat meat! She's a vegetarian. Just wait till I tell this to Kranz!"

"Kranz will just say this proves his point," said Schwartz. "In Hozhan society a vegetarian is a rebel, rebels are bad, therefore Jina is bad."

Timidly, Jina touched Charles' arm. "I am not vegetarian. I eat *gol* and *nub*. Just not—not this dish." She nodded towards the slice of roast *daromm* on his plate.

"Well, that's nothing to be ashamed of, and it's certainly no crime," said Charles, picking up his knife. "It smells delicious, but I will admit *daromm's* an ugly brute when you see him in the streets."

"Not *daromm*, Charles, *zat* is for every day. For *zis* kind of ceremony we must have *ddaromm*."

He should have used the fourth tone, he noted, rather than the third, but he was not really listening to her gentle correction, for he felt uneasy. Disturbed by the general hostility to Jina, he tried to speak lightly.

"Well, I won't worry about pronunciation when I have such a treat in front of me. I always did like the skin of a roast, when it's smooth and crisp and glazed just—"

He dropped his knife and pushed himself away from the table.

"What is ze matter, Charles?"

Choking, gulping down the rush of fluid in his throat, he stared round the table at the silent, shocked Hozhani. Their eyes condemned him.

What kind of monsters *were* these creatures who were supposed to be human? Wait! What had Kranz said? "...at least like some human group, sometime, somewhere..."

But Jina had refused to conform!

Kicking back his chair, he grabbed her hand and jerked her to her feet.

"Come on, Jina, we're getting out of here! You too, Schwartz! Leave your girl and run!"

Schwartz gaped. "Have you gone crazy, Bradford? You look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"I have! Remember they said Osborne was handsome enough to be a *daromm*?"

"*D d a r o m m*," said Jina, weeping now as he pulled her towards the door. "You get ze tone wrong again. For zis ritual, we use only *d d a r o m m*."

"What are you talking about?" said Schwartz. "You can see them roaming the streets any day in the week."

"Not this one," shouted Charles from the door. "This one has the monogram SD'AO tattooed on its chest!"

THE END

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# LOOK TO THE STARS

by SCOTT NEVETS

A mystery of long standing concerning comets appears to have been solved by scientists Harold C. Urey and Bertram Donn of the University of Chicago. Urey and Donn studied the problem of comet eruptions: in their path across the sky, comets are occasionally seen to erupt and throw out a mass of luminous material.

Urey and Donn suggest that these eruptions are caused by chemical explosions of free radicals in the comets. According to a theory developed by Fred Whipple of Harvard, comets are composed mainly of an icy conglomerate of solid methane, ammonia, and water. Donn and Urey conjecture that some of the ice is made of solidified free radicals such as CH, NH, and OH. These materials in a free state exist only at the lowest temperature, and become

explosively reactive when the temperature rises much above absolute zero.

A lost asteroid has been re-located after fifty years of obscurity, thanks to combined work with the telescope and the electronic computer. Heidelberg Observatory in Germany first discovered the asteroid, Athalia, in 1903, and it was not photographed again until 1943, when an asteroid survey by Indiana University caught it on one of the 2000 photos they took.

Dr. Paul Herget of the Cincinnati Observatory checked the plates recently and settled for all time the problem of the elusive Athalia's orbit. It took him just one minute, with the aid of a superfast IBM computer, to solve the problem.

# BRINK OF MADNESS

by ARTHUR SELLINGS

NOVELETTE

*illustrated by* ORBAN

On the surface, Sam Bishop never had it so good. Peace, independence, prosperity were his. But the whole set-up seemed phony to him. He had to find out the real truth

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE FIRST thing he saw when he opened his eyes was a white oval of a face hovering over him. Two yellow eyes were watching him. Red lips parted in a warm smile.

"Are you all right?" The voice was quiet, concerned.

"Yes," he said weakly. "Yes, I think so. Where—" He struggled to rise. But the hand laid upon his shoulder was surprisingly strong. Or was it only that he was surprisingly weak?

"Don't exert yourself," she said. Her hand moved beneath where he was lying, and he felt

himself being raised gently to a sitting position.

He looked about him. He was in an impossibly tiny room. A shaded bulb shone in a low ceiling. No light came from outside. A small curtain on one white wall was the only sign of a window.

"Where am I?" he asked, and as he spoke became aware of the vibration, the slight sway. "Oh—an ambulance?"

The woman nodded.

"But what happened? How did I get here?"

"You were in a car smash. But don't worry. You're all right now."



"Car smash?" He stared at her. "But I don't remember any smash."

"You were unconscious for a long time. You lost your memory."

"I did? But I still can't remember." Panic fluttered in his voice. "I don't even know who I am."

"I'm sure you do." The woman's voice was smilingly persuasive. "Try."

He tried—and something seemed to click suddenly in his brain. "I do know," he said wonderingly. "I'm Sam Bishop, aren't I?"

"That's right. You see."

"But who are you? That isn't a nurse's uniform."

"No, it's not a nurse's uniform."

"Then—" He closed his eyes, seeking a name to link with the image of her face. A name fluttered down like a leaf from the branches of his mind.

"You're...Lena?"

She clapped her hands delightedly. "There you are, you do remember. What else about me?"

He frowned, then his eyes widened. "Aren't you my

wife? Aren't we married?"

She took his hands in hers. "Sam darling" she whispered.

He trembled and drew his hands away.

"Why what's the matter, Sam?"

"It's all so queer" he said haltingly. "I remember that my name's Sam Bishop. I remember that you're Lena, that you're my wife. But they seem just like names in my head. Just facts like—well, like—" His words trailed off. "I don't seem to know any other facts," he finished hopelessly.

"Yes you do," she said quickly. "But you've been in a coma so long. That's why everything appears so strange to you. But be patient. As you get stronger so will your memory."

"No," he protested, feeling suddenly trapped in this white box of unreality. He struggled against the blankets that swathed him. "I can't wait that long. Let me out."

"What is it, Sam?" Her voice was anxious, her hand cool upon his brow.

"I...I don't know", he moaned. "Let me see the world outside. Let me be sure it's

there. I want to know."

"Certainly", she smiled, and stretched a hand to the curtain. She took a look out before she drew it back. "There."

Trees flashed by, green and lush against a blue sky.

"Thank you," he said, sinking back. "I just had to have something to get hold of, something real."

"Of course, Sam. I understand."

"Trees, blue skies," he said, sighing. "It seems such a long time since I saw them."

"It *is* a long time."

"*How* long?"

"Days, weeks—don't think about it. We'll have all the time in the world now."

"But where are you taking me?" he said, stirring.

"Home."

"Home?" he echoed. Again, as he asked himself a question, the answer came fluttering to hand. Was this the experience of everyone suffering a lost memory—this piecemeal process? So that you couldn't remember a thing until you asked the specific question, then down it came?

"Yes, home, Sam."

"Fifteen Cambridge Road," he said.

"Good—you didn't ask that time. You knew."

**B**UT HE wasn't listening.

Ask myself another fact, he thought. *Where did I crash?* No answer this time, though. He tried again, fearfully. He cried aloud. "Where did I crash? What happened? Why can't I remember?"

"Because of the shock. Don't try to remember."

"But how bad was I?"

"Very bad. Multiple fractures—skull, ribs, pelvis. And dozens of stitches." She drew back his shirt. A delicate tracery ran under his right breast, diagonally across his stomach. He looked at it as impersonally as if it were a map.

"M-mm, neat needlework," he commented. "Ah well, as long as I'm still in one piece—"

She bit her lip.

He saw it. "Why, what's the matter? I am, aren't I?" And then he realized. He thought it had been the tightness of the blankets about him—that and his weak condition. But it

wasn't. He reached out a trembling hand.

"You'll have to be brave, Sam."

His hand reached what it was feeling for. Beneath his thighs the swathing blankets were empty. His hand froze—then suddenly he laughed.

She looked at him, alarmed.

"Funny, isn't it?" he said.

"For a second then I was scared that I was paralyzed. There's no difference, but somehow being rid of them doesn't seem half as bad."

She laid a hand on his. "You're brave," she said.

"Am I?" He didn't withdraw his hand this time, but squeezed hers gently. "No I'm not, I—"

He had not noticed that the vibration had stopped. Now there was a click, and sunlight flooded in as the doors were opened. A tubby, kindly-faced man in uniform climbed in.

"Well, this is it, Mr. Bishop. The end of the line." Bishop realized now that he was in a kind of wheelchair. He was wheeled to the ground down a ramp.

"All O.K., Mrs. Bishop?"

the ambulance man said, handing over the chair to her charge. He touched his cap to the man in it. "Best of luck, Mr. Bishop."

"Thank you," he murmured.

**T**HE AMBULANCE drove away, leaving Bishop staring at his surroundings, the row of neat houses, the tidy lawns.

"We're home, Sam," said his wife, her eyes shining. It still seemed strange to him to think of her as his wife, to hear somebody call her Mrs. Bishop. It was like a dream. No, it was the reverse of a dream. In a dream you found yourself in surroundings that you told yourself you ought to know but which you couldn't quite place. But this street, this white-painted house up whose paved path he was being wheeled—he *knew* these. Yet he couldn't remember ever having been here before. Not actually walking up this path—or entering this door at which they were now halted.

"No," he said, twisting back in the chair. "I'm frightened."

She bent over him. He felt

cool lips kiss his brow, caught a delicate hint of perfume. "You've no need to be frightened, darling. I'm here."

"But... I don't know what's in there."

She had the key in the lock now. She turned. "You'll remember. You can prove it. What color's the hall done in?"

He closed his eyes to think. He opened them. "Blue and white?"

"Right first time," she said happily, throwing the door wide. As he was wheeled in on soundless tires, he said on a sudden impulse, "But what color was it before?"

She stopped short for a moment. Then she laughed. "Why, it's always been blue and white." She turned away and stooped. "Look at all the welcome home cards."

But he was wondering why he had thought for a moment of a home different from this. Of a hall painted not blue and white, but... But—

The fragment of memory withered and died. But why, in that moment, had it seemed more real than any of these other facts that he had pulled

down from the dark recesses of his mind?

He looked up, to meet the gaze of a pair of golden eyes, looking at him compassionate, patiently—and he felt suddenly ashamed. He ought to be grateful, yet here he was, fighting the truth—that he was home. Was it any wonder if, after what he had been through, his mind played him tricks, making him confuse reality and illusion? But *this* was real.

"Lena," he said softly. "Bear with me."

Her lips trembled. "Of course, Sam."

"I'm—I'm glad to be home. Really I am."

And then he was holding out his arms, and she was cradled in them, her face buried in his chest, sobbing, sobbing.

**T**HROUGH the rest of that day Sam Bishop learned more about himself. As, question by question, he filled in the blankets in his past, he began to feel like a living dossier—a dossier, it's subject and its compiler rolled into one—

Q: How old am I?

A: Thirty four

Q: Where was I born?

A: Right here in this town.

Q: Here?

A: Greenville

Q: Have I any relations here?

A: No, you were an only child. Both your parents are dead.

Q: How long have I been married?

A: Six and a half years.

Q: How old is Lena?

A: Twenty seven.

Q: How did I meet her?

A: She was the girl next door

Q: What was my job?

A: Office manager, Greenville Novelty Co.

—And so on and so on, while Lena stood quietly by, evidently realizing what was going on in his mind, getting tea, then supper, keeping him supplied with an occasional drink.

When she wheeled him to bed he said, "Well, it's a good thing we were living in a bungalow anyway." Then, impatiently, "Couldn't they had supplied a runabout? So that you wouldn't have to push me everywhere like this?"

"I don't mind," she said.

"But I do."

"Of course, dear," she said soothingly as she helped him into bed. "Your new legs will be here soon. They're being custom-built, you know."

SLEEP was a long time coming. He tossed and turned as his restless mind kept up the dossier-filling process. *Who? What? When?*

Q: Why has nobody been down from the office?

But that wasn't a question that memory could answer. "Why has nobody been down from the office to see me?" he asked Lena.

"They wanted to," she answered sleepily. "But I thought it best to wait awhile, till you were settled in."

"I'm all right," he said stirring. "How about wheeling me out to the works in the morning? That is, if it's not too—" How far was it? Less than a mile. "How about it?"

"Why, certainly, Sam."

"Thank you," he said, feeling contented now. Just as when he had felt trapped in the ambulance, it eased his anxiety to be able to see things for himself,

and not have to rely entirely upon this absurd memory.

He smiled into the darkness. "At least there's one thing I don't have to remember. I'm finding it out all over again."

"What's that, Sam?"

"Why I married you. Goodnight, Lena."

A happy sigh came from the other bed. "Thank you, Sam dear. Goodnight."

## CHAPTER II

THE sun next morning shone from a blue sky. People waved to them as they passed. Who is everybody? he asked himself. That one was—Mrs. Matthews. This one? Betty Burke. This kid in a jazz-striped shirt who biked past and called out, "Hiya, Sam!"—that was Jimmy Young from down the street.

Who else do I know? he thought, but no answer came. Their names, like every other item of knowledge, seemed to have to wait for the triggering of a specific question. Not who or what do I know—but who or what is *this*? When would the process end? he wondered. Would it ever end? Only when,

fact upon single fact, it had all been recovered?

But the first grimness of that thought faded. He found himself almost enjoying the process of re-discovery as they came into the center of the town. One by one the buildings fell into place. There was the Town Hall, the Greenville Bank, the barbershop, Schmidt's the delicatessen, the drug store.

It was only a small town. They were soon across it and out among grass and trees. The works came into view, a single white concrete building.

Almost before they were inside a burly man came rushing to greet them. "How are you, Sam?" he asked beaming.

Sam's memory, prompted, told him that this was Mr. Finney, his boss. "Fine, thanks, Mr. Finney. I hope you don't mind my—"

Finney waved amply. "Mind, Sam? I'm glad to see you. We're all glad to see you, Come on in."

He took over the wheelchair himself and wheeled Sam into the main office proudly.

A small crowd of people

gathered round, slapping Sam gently on the back, hurling congratulations at him.

"Hey, give the man air!" Finney boomed.

Faced with piecing together a dozen faces and names all at once, Sam was glad of the respite. He smiled wanly. "Just thought I'd come down and see how you're getting on without me." He didn't have the faintest idea what exactly they were supposed to be getting on with—he hadn't got around to that—but it seemed the right sort of thing to say.

That started a chorus of jokes and lamentations, before Finney waved them all away good-humoredly and wheeled Sam into his own office.

"Well, how has it been, Sam? Tough?"

"Well, I didn't know much about it." Was *that* an understatement!

Finney nodded sympathetically. "And you don't want to, eh?"

"That's right. I'm only interested in looking forward now. I can't wait to get back to work."

"Back, Sam?" Finney looked

shocked. "What are you thinking of?"

"Why not?" Sam said cheerfully. "The wounds are healed—and I get my new legs soon. It'll probably take me a couple of weeks to get used to them, but then—"

"But, Sam, you don't have to worry any more. You're independent now, with the compensation from the crash."

"I am? How do you—" He broke off as he intercepted a quick glance between Finney and Lena. Lena said quickly, "I told Mr. Finney, Sam, when he asked me if there was anything he could do. He's been very kind."

"I'm grateful," Sam muttered. He looked at Finney squarely. "But I don't want to live the rest of my life on a pension. When can I start back?"

Finney toyed with a beefy lower lip and looked awkward. "We-ell, Sam, it's not quite so easy as that. You see, young King took over your job, and he got married on the strength of it. After all—well, nobody thought you'd want to come back."

"Nobody seems to have wanted me to," Sam retorted angrily.

"Oh, don't get me wrong, Sam. But—" he spread his hands— "in the circumstances—"

Sam couldn't trust himself to say anything more. It was plainly no use arguing, anyway. He gestured to Lena to wheel him out.

He brooded, not speaking, all the way back. He was beginning to feel trapped again. As they came into the main street he found himself beginning to dislike the place. Was that how he had felt before the accident, or was it only the effect of his interview with Finney? Whatever it was, he felt the town closing in on him. It was too smug—like Finney and his complacent assumption that he wouldn't want his job back. It was too small, too *neat*.

He searched in his mind for a picture of what the place had looked like five, ten years ago, but didn't get any different picture from the present scene. That was odd. Surely there must have been *some* changes. Or was it so odd? Did a person

notice things like that? A person like himself, that was. And he shivered at the thought—suddenly conscious that he had a lot more blanks to fill in yet before he could start assessing just what kind of person he was at all.

Lena broke gently in upon his thoughts. "Can I help?"

He jerked back from a limbo of speculation. "Why?"

"You looked worried. If there's anything—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake leave me alone!"

She didn't answer. And when, moments after, he looked up into her face, she turned it away from him.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I'll try to be patient."

### CHAPTER III

HE did try—*hard*. Tried to endure the inactivity of a life bounded by four walls and a garden—and by his own fragmentary knowledge. But his mind raced, because there wasn't enough for it to get hold of. Plaguing his memory with questions, he gradually built up a picture of his life and sur-

roundings. But there seemed so much lacking. What it was he didn't know, but everything seemed so circumscribed—and he didn't know how to start extending it.

There was the television of course, and he watched it till his eyeballs ached. But it seemed all jokes and music. And the jokes seemed flat, the music monotonous. He'd lie awake at nights, his thoughts chasing themselves round and round, never seeming able to break out.

And then his legs arrived, and everything changed. He was too absorbed in practising with them to worry about anything else, too tired at the end of the day to stay awake for long. It was tough going; he lost count of the number of times he fell. The first couple of times Lena rushed to help him up, but he waved her away. And after that he practised in the bedroom behind a locked door.

The days lengthened into weeks. Weeks of bruises and soreness, and of times when he thought it was a hopeless dream that he would ever be able to

walk again. At those times he'd behave badly towards Lena, not being able to help himself. But Lena took it all.

But those black times became less frequent as he persevered and progressed. Until the day came when he unlocked the bedroom door for the last time and made his way nonchalantly to the living room.

"Lena," he called out.

She came in from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron, and stood stock-still at sight of him. He stood there casually in the middle of the room, one hand in his trouser pocket. Then he pirouetted a full circle with the confidence of a dancer performing a well-rehearsed step. He *had* rehearsed it—a hundred times.

He looked up at her. Her eyes were shining. She came running to him. He held out a hand. "This dance, madame?"

"Oh, *Sam*," she breathed, going into his arms. He held her close, turning with infinite care, *dancing*.

"Do be careful," Lena said, but laughing. "Oh, it's so good, *Sam*."

He stopped dancing and

looked into her eyes. "Everything's going to be different now, you'll see."

She snuggled against him dreamily. "You mean it's going to be the same as it used to be, darling."

#### CHAPTER IV

THE next weeks were deliriously happy. If this was how things used to be, he told himself, things used to be good. The barriers between him and Lena were down. Being no longer dependent upon her, his resentment of that fact was swept away.

So, too, was the sense of shame at being resentful of her kindness. And now he could see her clear—as clear, that is, as a man could who was falling in love with his wife all over again, yet with all the freshness of a first time.

He took her out proudly, brushing aside her protestations as he bought her new clothes, making the rounds of Greenville's eating places. Drinking with her, laughing with her. Laughing *at* her, too, but gently, when she warned him not to over-tire himself.

Even when the physical strain did tell on him he could laugh—because he was no longer worrying about himself. Discovering Lena—not as a nurse and devoted companion, but as a wholly delightful person—was much more rewarding than the process of re-discovering himself.

But that task was still waiting. He knew it, knew that these weeks of happiness were only the honeymoon; that some time he had to prepare to lay the foundations for a wider, more permanent happiness. It took an effort, but he made it.

It was then that the awakening came. He spent two days—that was enough for a town Greenville's size—trying to get a job. *Trying*; that was all that came of it. Everyone was very kind, very helpful—but everything was full up.

His optimism, his new-found confidence, kept him going until the very last hope was finished. Even then he wasn't going to give in. One route back to normalcy—and one that might be of help in finding or making a job for himself—was a car. The old one had been

junked, Lena had told him. Accordingly, he went into Greenville's only garage.

He'd already tried there for a job, and the affable attitude of Smith, the owner, as Sam walked stiffly in, was tinged with a certain wariness.

"It's all right," Sam told him cheerfully. "I'm not after a job again. I want to buy a car.

"A car?" Smith looked startled.

"Well, why not? Why shouldn't I want a car?"

"No reason at all, Mr. Bishop. That is... just hold on a minute, will you?"

He came back from the rear after a couple of minutes, looking apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bishop, I just remembered. A driving license can't be issued to—I mean, your disability rules you out. The same goes for my license to sell. I—"

"What are you trying to say?" Sam grabbed the garage owner by the lapels. "There's nothing wrong with me."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bishop, really I am. But it's the law."

Sam searched his mind. "I've never heard of that law," he

said. He released the other's jacket disgustedly. "Who do I see about it?"

"Well—the mayor, if you like, but it won't be any use, because—"

But Sam was already marching out.

The garage owner was right. It wasn't any use seeing the mayor. That individual was heart-broken that the law was like that, but it *was* the law and there was nothing he could do about it, he explained.

**S**AM got home in a towering rage. He barked at Lena, cursed himself for doing that, then, trying to explain, wound up with hurling at her a crescendo, of indictment against Greenville, the narrowness of its ways, the stupidity of its inhabitants.

"I'm getting sick of the whole set-up," he finished moodily.

"Set-up, Sam? What set-up?"

"The way things are," he said. "What did you think I meant?"

"Why, nothing, Sam."

He glared at her. "I'm sick of the way they treat you when you ask for a job. I'd rather

they kicked me in the teeth than be nice. Nice but negative—that ought to be this town's motto. And I'm sick of it. I'm getting restless."

"Sam dear," she said. "Don't fret. You don't have to worry about a job, do you? We've got enough. Isn't this what you always dreamed of? Independence?"

"Did I?" He searched his mind. "Maybe I did. But I wanted to earn it, not—" his voice was bitter—"not have it handed me on a plate in exchange for a pair of legs."

"Oh, Sam, you mustn't speak like that. You can be happy. *We* can be happy. We have been, haven't we?"

"Of course," he admitted. "But, Lena, don't you see—there has to be more than that?"

"But there can be." She took him by the arm. "We can do all kinds of things. How about learning to play a musical instrument, or gardening? You know you always wanted to—" Her voice withered away before the contempt in his look.

"*Hobbies!*" he said, making it sound like a dirty word.

She got up abruptly. "Have a drink, darling. You're tired."

He sighed. "All right. Maybe I am."

She mixed it, and after it he felt slightly better.

"I'm sorry I blew my top," he said, then smiled ruefully. "I always seem to be apologizing, don't I?"

"Don't worry about it, dear. Let me get you another drink."

After the fourth in quick succession he looked at her cagily. "Are you trying to get me drunk or something?"

She smiled. "Why not?"

"You've got me there," he said wryly, holding out his glass.

## CHAPTER V

HE woke up in pitch darkness, one stump hurting badly. His head was making a contest of it. He groaned and hoisted himself on an elbow. Then he saw that the other bed was empty. He frowned and called out. There was no answer.

He switched on the light and strapped his legs on. He looked all over the house. Lena wasn't

there. Disturbed, he went out of the house in search of her.

The night was dark. He was about to call out, but restrained himself. No sense in disturbing the neighbors if—as was likely, he tried to convince himself—she had merely gone for a walk. Perhaps she hadn't been able to sleep.

The night air cooled and soothed his aching head. The pain in his stump had ebbed now, too. Obeying a sudden impulse, he set out down the street.

Before long he found himself at the town center. At this hour it was deserted, the low buildings shrouded in complete darkness. Except one—the Town Hall. A chink of light came from a ground floor window. He was about to turn homeward, in case Lena should get back and start worrying about *his* absence, when a quirk of curiosity made him cross the street.

He bend his eye to the chink of light—and froze there. Then he turned away, dazed and unbelieving, and shook his head to clear it before he looked again. But it *was* true. Here, in the main hall, was gathered

what looked like the entire adult population of Greenville!

There was Finney—yes, and Gray and Smith and—*Lena*. She was in the center of them, her slim figure all but hidden by those gathered about her. She was talking quickly, urgently. By the look of it, anyway, for he could hear nothing. He craned his head and laid his ear to the glass.

He could hear only muffled scraps of what was being said. Somebody said, "I still say it was unwise to call a general meeting." Another voice said, "That isn't the point—" Another, "It's all right, he's completely out. I made sure of that." And that voice, he realized with a shudder of disquiet, was Lena's! What's more, they were talking about *him*. He listened with mounting fear.

"He's getting suspicious." That was Lena again. "Restless, too. If once he finds out that—" The rest was lost in a momentary rise in the background noise.

"We've got to keep him here, that's certain," was the next he heard, spoken by a voice he didn't recognize.

"We'll have to make other plans." After that the voices became quieter—so that he couldn't make out a word.

He backed away from the window, trembling, feeling trapped again. He slumped against the wall, trying desperately to reason it out. There was a conspiracy against him, that much was plain. These people weren't neighbors, they were—*keepers*. The word swam before him. For what did that make Lena? Not his devoted wife but only the head keeper? No, it couldn't be, he told himself. But it could. He was mad, this was some kind of mental colony. But not a whole town devoted to that purpose, hundreds of people set solely to watch over one man! That was ridiculous. Anyway, he wasn't mad. Was he? It wasn't memory that answered him, but his own mind striving to convince him that he wasn't. Then—

The only possible answer came. This was—a *prison*. Not keepers, but jailers.

But why? What had he done? And again—why all these people interested in *him*? And why didn't he know? His dismembered memory—had that

been part of the punishment for the crime, so that he didn't even remember committing it? Because in some way even the memory of it was a crime? He shuddered at another thought—his *legs*... was that part of the punishment, too? A grim and horrible substitute for a ball and chain?

He panicked at the thought, fearful of his own ignorance, of people who could nurse under a bland, even a loving, exterior, such dark purposes. He hobbled away, hugging the wall.

HE rounded the corner—and sobbed with relief. A car was standing at the kerb. He toppled into it. The noise as he started the engine seemed horribly loud. But he drove his foot down hard and recklessly on the accelerator. The engine responded, and he was away. He only knew that he had to get away from this place.

As soon as he hit open country he slackened speed and looked back. He thought he could hear other cars being started up. He could certainly see lights.

He drove on, the darkness lightening slightly in front of

him. But there was no lightening of the dark confusion in his mind. He kept repeating "Lena," over and over to himself, still incredulous that she could have been mixed up in all this.

He turned again, and this time saw headlamps sweeping the sky behind him. His metal leg became a straight rod of determination, holding the accelerator tight against the floor.

It was that that proved calamitous. He saw the bend coming and was ready. But his leg wasn't. It locked. He reached down frantically and knocked it up, but by then it was too late. The road skidded crazily away from under him and he realized that there was an embankment here, that the car had left it and was falling through space. And in that moment he realized far more. In a blinding flash it all came back. He was falling, falling. He screamed—

## CHAPTER VI

**H**E sprawled there, aware that he was not dead. And then he fought to stop himself screaming, fought to stop himself from going mad.

For he knew now who he was. His name was Sam, certainly—but *Powis*, not Bishop. He knew it—knew, too, that he had never seen Greenville in his life before that day that he had been wheeled out of the ambulance. It faded away to the substance of a dream beside the reality. He hadn't been an office manager—but a space pilot. That was the reality that threatened his sanity now.

For he remembered it all. The first flight to another star. One man—Sam Powis—against all that immensity, sent out to seek new sources of uranium for an Earth that had squandered in wars its own store and that of the other planets of Sol.

And how it had all gone wrong, the calculations all astray, so that he had wandered for years in the frightful blacknesses of space...his reason crumbling...and then—the last hope, swinging near to light and life again. The last nightmarish descent in a broken ship, and...

And now he couldn't stop the screams as it all flooded back. The sense of helplessness, the knowledge that he would never

make it, the crazy turning of the globe beneath him....

He stopped screaming abruptly as two facts impinged on his consciousness simultaneously. He *had* made it—and it had been Earth. With instruments and senses alike wild, he hadn't known—or had time to care, any more than a drowning man debates the nature of the driftwood he clutches at. It had been Earth! But he had landed among enemies, smiling enemies who for their own dark reasons had tried to keep his landing secret—secret even from himself. The urgency of danger checked him on the brink of madness. He had to—

But it was too late. Hands were already lifting him from the car. He writhed, whimpering.

"It's all right," voices told him. "You're safe now."

"Leave me alone," he cried. "I know the truth. You're enemies—"

"We are friends," the voices said, as the hands bore him up the hillside. The hands lowered him to the ground and released him. He struggled to get to his feet, then stopped. One metal

glowered up defiantly. "You'll never get away with this. When the Space Department finds out they'll—"

The men standing round him looked from one to another. One of them was the man who called himself Finney. It was he who said softly, "You remember, then?"

"Yes, I remember—Mr. Finney. I remember that too."

The men conferred in whispers, then Finney said, "We only tried to help. You see, when we pulled you out of the wreckage of your ship you were in a bad way. I don't mean only physically. Diagnosis of your mental condition told us that you would be insane when you recovered consciousness. The shock of the crash, coming on top of your years of wandering, would have proved too much. So we sealed off your past and made a new identity for you, a new environment with a new past."

Sam looked up at them bewilderedly. "But *why*? I didn't go mad."

"We miscalculated on more than one point," Finney admit-

ted. "We underestimated your mental resilience. Although I still think that if you had known the truth at the start it would have been too much for you. Besides, there is still one fact that you do not know. Now that you know the rest you must know this, too." He hesitated, then said, watching Sam closely. "That you are not on Earth as you believed. This is another system altogether."

"*What!*" Sam looked from one to another of the faces above him. Then he laughed wildly. "You stand there, telling me that this isn't Earth—telling me in English! Look—"

"**B**ELIEVE me," said Finney in a tone that commanded acceptance. "We are made the same as you. We learned English especially for your sake."

"But Greenville and everything—"

"That was made for your sake, too. You see, we have apparatus to probe minds to their last thought. With our knowledge of mental techniques we could have done one of two

things. We could theoretically have blocked your past from you entirely, then indoctrinated you with our language, our customs—given you, in fact, a Lanjon personality. Lanjon is the name of our world.

"But such a total substitution would have been risky, and distasteful to our ethical sense. So—we took the other course. Those things that we could copy we left in your mind. The rest we blocked. We made a new background for you. It had to be one small town. After all—" he shrugged apologetically— "we couldn't change the entire planet. We built Greenville, we adapted everything to look like the picture of Earth that we took from your mind. We moved factories there to give the inhabitants a reason for being there. A reason, that is, in case you should ever start wondering.

"For the same reason we supplied you with a past as self-contained, as it were, as possible. In your mind we found one dream—of peace independence, happiness. We tried to make it for you. But we underestimated

your restlessness. In my role of boss I couldn't give you a job back that you'd never had, for the simple reason that the goods being made at the Greenville Novelty Company would have been really novelties to you. For another thing, it naturally had links with the outside world, the world that you had to be prevented from wondering about—for your own sake. That was why we had to rustle up a law quickly to prevent your having a car. Otherwise we did all we could. We—"

A thought had suddenly struck Sam. "Don't tell me you even put on those television shows just for me?"

Finney nodded.

Sam grimaced. No wonder the music had seemed monotonous! They must have made it all up out of scraps that they had dug out of his memory. Which accounted for the jokes being stale too. But the effort involved! Hundreds of people learning English, schooling themselves to act like Earth people—and all for his single benefit. It was unbelievable. Yet he believed it. It fitted. He

remembered now the little things that had been missing—newspapers, road signs—all such links with a world outside that an ordinary small town would have.

"But why?" he asked Finney. "Why did you go to all that trouble for one man—a stranger at that?"

Finney looked embarrassed. "No man is a stranger," he said at length. "And is it so strange? We saw in your mind, too, memories of your people doing enormous acts of kindness sometimes for one person in distress."

That was right, Sam thought. But what else had they seen? Had they seen the hatred, the suspicion, the destructiveness?

"I am truly sorry," Finney went on, "that we bungled our task. But you understand that it was not easy, that it was a new endeavor for us. We thought that we could make you happy. But when Lena saw that—"

"Lena?" Sam said, rousing. "Where is she?"

"I'm here," a voice said. A slim figure stepped forward

from behind one of the drawn-up cars.

**S**AM turned away, cursing himself for having mentioned her name. For the hopelessness of it had dawned upon him. For now that he realized the true size of what she had done for him, he realized something else. That she hadn't done it for *him*. She had done it for a stranger—a crippled stranger at the gate. Just as the rest of this humane people had done what they thought had been right, and gone to incredible lengths in the process. She had given herself to him—but only in a charade.

Nobody spoke. He bowed his head and sat there for a long time unmoving. He heard cars start up and move away. When he at last looked up there was nobody there but Lena.

"Go away," he said. "Go back and help take the scenery down." It hurt having to say it, but there was nothing else to say now.

"But—I want to be with you."

"It's all over now. You can stop acting."

"I'm not acting, Sam. I—I wasn't acting before."

And, staring up at her wonderingly, he knew suddenly that she meant it. He tried to scramble to his feet. She reached down and helped him up.

"When am I going to stop being dependent on you?" he said softly. Then he drooped. "Oh, it's no use. I'm still lost. More than ever. I haven't even got Greenville now—"

She only smiled gently. "Do you need it now?" Taking his weight, she guided him upwards a few steps, then round a spur of rock. He followed her gaze—and took in his breath.

For down below, in a valley, was a great city. At least, city was the nearest word he had for it. Pinnacles and towers, tall and breathlessly graceful, soared up from the mists of dawn, shining like crystal in the light of the rising sun. Bands of pulsing color arced over it, globes of light hovered in the air. It was more than a group of buildings. There was purpose there—he felt it, even if he couldn't start to divine it.

Standing there, he knew now

why these people had done what they had for him. They must have read in him the inhibitions, the fears—must have understood that his mind, waking to a wonderland like this, would have feared the power that could have built it.

But he knew them now. How could he fear people who could set this aside for—Greenville?

He turned back from the vision. "I want to go back," he said to Lena. "To Greenville."

"Yes," he told her, then chuckled at her look of dismay. "I've got to make a start in this world somewhere, haven't I? What better way than helping to take down the scenery myself?"

THE END

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Maurice Rosenfield (Signature of business manager). Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of September, 1956. (My commission expires March 30, 1958)

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Cert. filed in N. Y. & Bronx County  
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# GALACTIC THRILL KIDS

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

*illustrated by* EMMETT

Yancey was in space at the mercy of thrill-hungry kids who had stolen a ship. But outer space is no place for kids, who are brave only when they have the advantage

THE bar was a dark, dimly-lit place, with buzzing neon signs droning unpleasantly somewhere in the back. Art Yancey glanced uncertainly at the dingy saloon for a moment, then stepped inside, still walking with the rolling gait he had acquired in five years in space.

"Double Scotch," he said hoarsely.

The bartender, a tall, balding man with a curved ski-jump nose, looked down at him. "Got an ID card, sonny?"

"What?"

"You heard me," the barkeep said. "No ID, no drink."

Yancey looked around help-

lessly. "I'm just off my ship," he said. "I'm a spacer—starship Valiant. I don't *have* an identification card yet."

"Sorry, friend. I don't care if you're the emperor of Mars. I can get my license yanked for serving you, and—"

Yancey scowled. "How old do you think I am?" he demanded.

"Beats me," the bartender said, shrugging. "Sixteen, seventeen, maybe?"

"I'm *twenty-three*," Yancey said hotly. "Spacers have to be small to keep the mass ratio down. I can't help it if I look like a kid."



"I can't help it either," the barkeep said sympathetically. "But I can't serve you. The local police are getting very fussy about underage drinkers, y'know. Why don't you toddle down to City Hall and get yourself a card, if you're that thirsty?"

"Get yourself a diaper too while you're at it," said a drawling voice from further down the bar.

"Care to back that up?" Yancey snapped. "Come on, buddy—"

"Easy, friend," said the bartender. "Go away, will you? I don't want any trouble in here."

Yancey turned reluctantly and walked away, choking his anger. He passed through the photoelectric doorbeam, out the open door, and into the cool night air. He stood outside the bar for a moment, rocking lightly back and forth on his toes, wanting desperately to hit someone or something.

Red tape. That was it. Here he was, a spacer just off his ship, and because he didn't have the right sort of identification card he couldn't get

served in a bar. Oh, of course they were only protecting the youth of the nation, or something along that line—*damn!*

He looked down the busy street, searching for another bar whose proprietor might be more easily swayed. He spotted one about halfway down the block, on the other side of the street.

Then he felt a knee in the small of his back, and heard the sound of giggling behind him. He whirled—straight into a pair of brass knuckles. His head exploded in a burst of multicolored light.

He slid to the ground, bewildered. The last thing he heard was the sound of giggling.

**T**IME passed. Yancey had no idea how much; he lay quietly, eyes half-closed, listening to the throbbing in his split upper lip. From somewhere above him in the darkness came the sound of voices—high-pitched, youthful voices, with undertones of hardness and cruelty that chilled his blood.

"You think he's all right?" someone said.

"Yeah, sure," replied another, in a deeper, more confident voice. "A little roughin' up never hurts."

"He looks pretty banged up," said the first voice. "We really gave it to him."

"It was fun, wasn't it?" the second said. "Okay, then, shut up. We got our kicks—and he got his."

Raucous laughter at that. Yancey lay still, feeling the bruises all over his body, wondering who his captors were.

A third voice spoke. "We ought to be at the spaceport soon. You got the keys, Whitey?"

The first voice said, "Sure thing."

Jangling of keys. The third voice said, "I'd love to see the look on old man Harmsworth's face when he finds out we've borrowed his private flivver for the weekend."

Laughter again. Cautiously, Yancey opened one eyelid a fraction of an inch. He was in the back of an auto, speeding along a main arterial highway. There were three men—no,

three boys, he corrected—in the front seat. One of them—a blond, tousle-headed boy, probably the one known as Whitey—started to turn his head, and Yancey hastily let his eye droop closed again.

"What'samatter, Whitey?"

"Thought I heard the dope movin' around back there," Whitey said. "Wouldn't want him to slug us from behind."

"Don't worry," said the deep voice. "He's out for a while. We really gave it to him."

*And you're real proud of it too,* Yancey thought bitterly. *Damned thrill-seeking little rats!*

He knew what had happened now. He'd been spotted by a gang of JD's—juvenile delinquents—the tough kids who hang around a spaceport town and make it a deadly place between midnight and dawn.

They preyed on spacers, who were lonely, rootless men, the kind who would never be missed by a family or a woman. Spacers on leave and strangers in town were ideal quarry.

Yancey cursed silently. He'd heard stories—spacemen kidnapped and spirited off to Tim-

buktu or Zanzibar or even Ganymede—beaten, stranded.

Why? Just for the hell of it. Just to have something to do, to fill empty, useless young lives. Just for the kicks.

They'd fingered him in the bar. He had been talking too loud, probably, and they closed in and nailed him. A little roughing-up in the street, then a quick ride—where?—and the fun would begin. With jetcars common things and small private spaceships by no means rare, these kids could easily strand him wherever they pleased.

In Alaska, maybe. Or Antarctica. Or in Copernicus Crater, on the moon. It didn't matter at all to them. They just wanted their fun.

**“WE'RE HERE,”** the boy named Whitey announced. “Wake up the creep and we'll get movin'.”

Yancey felt a hand smack his face twice, hard, and he opened his eyes. “Cut out the rough stuff,” he growled. “I'm awake.”

“Welcome back from dreamland, spaceman,” said the boy

who had hit him. He was tall, with cropped hair, sharp cheekbones, and—Yancey stared unbelievably—a neat row of chevrons incised into the taut skin of his cheeks.

Yancey allowed himself to be dragged out of the car. He was at the spaceport. For a wild moment he hoped he might spot someone he knew and get himself rescued, but the thought died immediately. They were at the far end of the spaceport, where the private vehicles were kept. Millionaire's Row. No one down here would recognize a jetman from an ordinary commercial cargo-hauler.

The boy with the deep voice approached him. In the light of the main control tower, Yancey saw his face. It was a baby's face, with plump, rosy cheeks and a mass of tangled light-brown hair. *The killer kind*, he told himself.

“Keep your mouth buttoned while we're in the port,” Baby-face said. He drew a jewel-studded pushbutton knife from a pocket and let his hand slide lovingly along it. “Just keep your mouth shut, hear?”

Yancey nodded.

They led him silently through the forest of small craft to one ship that stood by itself in a corner of the field. "Up we go," said Whitey, shoving Yancey onto the catwalk that led to the entry hatch.

Without arguing, Yancey climbed up, and the three boys followed him in. They headed for acceleration cradles and started strapping themselves in. The babyfaced boy left his arms free, and trained a home-made zapgun on Yancey.

"Go on, spaceman. Over there and get the autopilot going. And the first funny stuff you pull gets you a soft burn in the gut."

Yancey nodded somberly. He didn't intend to fool around. These kids meant what they said.

He moved toward the control panel and noted it had already been set in a precalculated orbit. He didn't know enough about astrogation to figure out exactly where they were heading, but he guessed it was somewhere in the asteroid belt.

*Christ, he thought. I hope they don't give me a spacesuit when they pitch me out. I'd rather pop quickly than starve on some nameless little ball of rock.*

"Go on," Babyface urged. "Push down on the blastoff key and let's get moving."

"What about clearance?" Yancey asked. "You can't just blast off whenever you want."

"Shove clearance," Babyface said. "By the time they notice we've hit jets, we'll be back of the moon. Blast off, spaceman."

Yancey stared at him stonily. "What about me? There'll be acceleration."

They giggled again, all three of them—the devilishly innocent high-pitched boy's giggle that Yancey had heard outside the bar. "It ought to be fun to watch you," said the boy with the scars on his cheeks.

Yancey started to say something, then choked it back. The zapgun in Babyface's hand wiggled menacingly. "Come on, spaceman. If we have to kill you now it spoils all our kicks."

"I'd hate to disappoint you,"

Yancey said acidly. He glared at them, feeling like a fly having its wings pulled off, and reached for the blastoff key.

A moment later, the ship roared upward. The acceleration bashed him to the floor of the control cabin, and he lay there, spreadeagled flat against the desk, watching the blood trickle from his nose and run along the floor. They were still giggling gleefully when he passed out.

**H**E came to some time later, with the ship in flight and the artificial gravity on. He pushed himself to a sitting position and looked around. His three tormentors were having a card game up front.

"Hey, look," Babyface said. "Sleeping beauty's up."

"Yeah," said the boy with scars on his cheeks. He threw down his cards and strode through the open bulkhead to where Yancey was sitting. "Stand up," he ordered.

"Why?"

"Because I said so, little boy."

Obligingly, Yancey got to his feet. He was stiff and sore

all over, and his face felt like it had been through a wringer, but he stood up, wobbling unsteadily. He looked up from his five-six height at the tall boy in front of him.

"Well?"

"How'd you like to take us on a tour of the universe, spaceman?"

"What do you mean?" Yancey demanded.

"I mean that we've only got this one orbit, from Earth to Ceres and back. Instead of us dumping you on Ceres, we want you to give us a little joyride around the sky. What say?"

Yancey shrugged. "I can't do it. I don't know how."

He saw the tall boy stiffen. "Don't hand me that. You're a spaceman, aren't you?"

"I'm a jetman," Yancey said. "I don't know any more about piloting a spaceship than you do. You kidnapped the wrong boy."

A fist thudded into Yancey's stomach. "That's for lyin'," the tall boy said. "We don't like liars."

"I'm telling the truth," Yancey insisted. "I don't know how

the damned ship is run."

The boy named Whitey came through the door. "He makin' you trouble, Slat?"

Slat nodded. "Won't give us the ride. We rough him up a little?"

"Might as well," Whitey said. He jabbed out at Yancey's midsection and the spaceman batted away the fist defensively. For a moment there was a crackling silence in the cabin.

"Next time you do that," Whitey said, "I'm going to cut your hand off." He aimed another punch at Yancey. This time the spaceman let it land. It knocked the wind out of him, but he remained standing.

"You're real brave, aren't you?" he asked. "Fighting fearlessly against underwhelming one-to-three odds. I'd love to take you boys on one at a time, instead of as a gang."

That one hit a weak spot. Yancey saw the tall one named Slat go pale, and the row of scars on his cheeks stood out redly. He retaliated the only way he knew how—with a punch.

Yancey stood it for a min-

ute or so, and then lashed back. His first punch caught Slat just below the throat, and the tall boy staggered back, cursing. Yancey started for him with murder in his eyes, but Whitey tripped him up. Babyface appeared from the other cabin and stood over Yancey's prostrate form.

"You're a tough one, aren't you?"

Yancey made no reply.

"You think you're a real powerhouse, spaceman?"

Again Yancey said nothing.

"We'll see how tough you are when we dump you on Ceres in a couple of hours," Babyface said. He picked Yancey up and hit him. Yancey rolled with the punch and absorbed the pain as well as he could. He had the formula, now. *Don't react.* Keep a poker face, don't let them know they're hurting you. They want to see you suffer—and if you don't suffer, it spoils their fun.

He let them beat him into unconsciousness without so much as a whimper.

**Y**ANCEY dreamed of Ceres, and it was a nightmare. It

was interrupted, suddenly, as he felt himself picked off the floor and slammed roughly against the wall of the ship. That could mean only one thing: sudden deceleration had taken place.

The alarm bell sounded, and he felt hands shaking him. "Wake up, spaceman! There's trouble!"

Yancey looked up into Slat's hard eyes. The tall boy was worried. "Come on, spaceman. Up!"

Yancey groped to his feet and let the boy lead him to the control panel. A moment's glance told him what was wrong.

"We're not going to get to Ceres," he said simply. "We've stopped—or *been* stopped."

"*Stopped?*"

"Someone's caught us in a traction beam," Yancey said. "It's holding us right where we are."

"The cops?" Slat suggested immediately. Yancey saw a muscle start to flicker beneath the boy's scarred cheek.

"Could be," Yancey said. "Except the Terran cops don't *have* traction beams. The only

people who do are the Vegans, and as far as I know *they're* not after you."

Slat stared at him for a moment, then ran inside and explained the whole thing hurriedly to his two companions. The three of them came back together, fortified in each other's company.

"You kidding us?" Babyface asked.

Yancey shrugged. "You asked me a question. I gave you an answer. I say some Vegan's slapped us in a traction beam. It's the only way we could be stuck like this. You don't want to believe me? *Don't.*"

They huddled into a worried-looking little group. Yancey rejoiced inwardly at their dismay.

"You know how to get us out of this thing, spaceman?"

Yancey shook his head. "There's no way out of a Vegan traction beam. We just sit here until we find out what goes."

"Where's this Vega?" Whitney demanded suspiciously. "Out near Pluto, maybe?"

"Don't be silly," Babyface

said. "It's a star somewhere."

"I ain't so sure of that," Whitey replied. "What kinda people is these Vegans?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Yancey said. "They're rough customers. I spent a year there."

"We can take care of 'em," Slat said confidently. He glanced out the port. "Look—there's their ship!"

Yancey followed his gaze and saw that there was indeed a Vegan ship up there, typical bubble-form. And coming down on a grappling line was a spacesuit-clad Vegan, crossing the gulf of space between the ships like a spider traversing its web to reach a wasp snared near the outer edge.

"Let's hide," Babyface said. "Then we can ambush him when he gets here."

"Good idea," Whitey said. "Let's stow in the storage locker here. I'll count to three and we'll all jump him."

"What about the spaceman? I don't trust him," said Slat.

"Stash him away with us. If he makes a noise, we'll let him have it."

THEY opened the big locker with the view-niche in its door and bustled in, just as the sound of the Vegan's feet striking the skin of the ship echoed through the cabin. Babyface kicked Yancey roughly to the floor and they drew the door closed.

There was the sound of the Vegan forcing the airlock hatch, the rough clang of metal against metal, and then he came aboard.

"Jeez," Slat whispered, as he stared through the niche in the door. "He's coming in."

"What's it look like?" Whitey asked, his voice muffled and indistinct.

"I don't know," said Slat. "It's big and wearing a spacesuit, and it's got lots of arms and legs."

"We'll jump it when I count three," Whitey said.

"Why don't you wait till it's got its back turned?" Babyface asked.

"Yeah," said Slat. "It's looking right this way. Let's wait till it turns around. God, it's ugly!"

"I've never seen an extra—extra—an alien being before,"

Whitey said. "Except in the newsreels. I remember a pic I saw about a thing from Sirius that had a hundred mouths and—"

"Shut up!" Babyface ordered. "Don't make it any worse."

"It's turning around," Slat reported. "It's looking the other way. We ought to get out after it while it isn't ready for us."

"Okay," Whitey said. "One."

Yancey glanced up. The three juvenile delinquents were poised near the door, getting ready to charge out. Bright beads of sweat were dripping down Babyface's chubby features, and the scars stood out brilliantly against Slat's pale cheeks. Whitey, in the far corner, was clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Two," Whitey said, his voice wavering a little. "He still have his back turned?"

"Yeah," said Slat. "He's just standin' there."

There was a long pause. Then: "Two and a half."

"You guys all ready?" Babyface asked.

"Three," Whitey said.

Yancey watched, grinning. None of them moved. They stood there, glancing at one another, frozen.

"What's the matter, tough guys?" Yancey asked. "I heard him count three."

Slat turned away from the viewing niche. "It's big," he said quietly.

"Yeah," Whitey agreed. "Maybe we ought to wait. Maybe it'll go away."

"Maybe it won't," Yancey said raspingly. "I heard him count three," he repeated.

He looked from one to another to another. They were jelly-faced, quivering with sickly fear.

"You aren't going out there at all," Yancey said. "You're scared green." He stood up and walked over to Babyface. He yanked the zapgun from his trembling fingers, picked the young hoodlum up, and belted him, hard. It felt good to get some of his own back. The trio seemed paralyzed with fear of the extraterrestrial beyond the door.

He shoved Babyface con-

temptuously into Whitey and turned away. "Don't go away," he said. He opened the locker door, stepped out, and closed it again, clicking the lock shut as he did so.

He turned to face the Vegan, holding the zapgun forward. The Vegan, still engaged in some observation of its own, whirled in surprise, and Yancey crackled out three crisp words in a harsh, clicking alien language.

The Vegan responded with a flood of words, gesticulating wildly with its seven thick tentacles. Yancey stepped closer to the bulky, eight-foot-tall alien, and gestured with Babyface's zapgun. He repeated his three words.

The alien waved its tentacles morosely in semi-circles for a few moments. Yancey could see its hideous face behind the bubble-helmet working furiously. Finally it turned and made its way back through the hatch into the airlock. Minutes later, Yancey felt a jolt as the traction beam broke and the Vegan spaceship departed rapidly for points unknown.

HE turned back to the locker and opened the door. The three young toughs were huddled in the back. Yancey trained the gun on them.

"I've got this thing now, and I won't hesitate to use it. I want you to drop off your knives and other weapons at your feet, one at a time. Whitey, you first."

He watched anxiously, wondering whether the boy would gamble and hurl the switchblade at him anyway, but all the fight seemed to be out of him. Gloomily, he unloaded his hardware and stepped back.

"You next," Yancey ordered, pointing to Slat. It was Babyface's turn after that.

"Now back up," he said. He forced the three of them up against the far wall and scooped up the little arsenal lying on the floor. "We're heading back to Earth," he said. "This'll make news when your gang finds out why you three got sent to the Big House to get your psyches reorientated. When they find out that you were scared witless by a cheap Vegan punk!"

"What's that?" Whitey asked wonderingly.

"Yeah," Slat said. "Jeez, what did you do to that thing? Why'd he run away? What about the ship? Weren't there any more up there?"

"No," Yancey said, as he reached for a length of rope and started to strap the three of them up for safe keeping. "There was just one of them—him. And he had the same weakness you guys did."

"Huh?"

Yancey finished the job and looked up. "He was just a kid. Full-grown Vegans run ten or eleven feet high. He'd stolen a spaceship, and he was out for a thrill. Thought he'd kidnap some Earthmen and see how they were made inside, I guess. But when I took him by surprise and started to wave the gun around, he froze up in a hurry. That sort scares easy when they don't have the upper hand."

He saw three red faces, and grinned sardonically. "Hits

close to home, doesn't it? You nasty little toughs are all the same. You fold when the chips are down. I told him to clear out or I'd blast his goddam head off—and he cleared out."

Yancey slammed the locker door and clicked it shut. He turned away to set up the orbit that would take them back to Earth, and paused halfway to rub some of his bruises. They had really given him a going-over. He hoped the Psych Bureau turned them inside-out.

*Damned thrill kids*, he thought, as he took the *Ceres* tape out of the autopilot and inserted the *Earth* one. *Yellow inside, that's what.*

He thought of the three ex-toughs cowering miserably inside the locker, and of the young Vegan hotfooting it toward some softer solar system, and smiled pleasantly to himself at the realization that he hadn't had the faintest idea how to fire Babyface's zapgun.

THE END

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# TIME AND SPACE

## ARTICLE

by ALLEN R. EVANS

Space-time discoveries may prove immortality is a fact

**E**INSTEIN'S proof that there is a fourth dimension; that the fourth dimension is time, and that time and space are identical, gives us a scientific explanation for an experience a few years prior to the Einstein discovery. Relating the discovery to the experience is the nearest scientific proof of immortality that has yet come to us.

Immortality has been the subject of an endless and indeterminate debate ever since man began to construct philosophic reasoning. Perhaps even the cave man yearned for some kind of an after-life. Those who are deeply religious believe in immortality as a result

of their faith. The non-religious hope for immortality, perhaps more or less a matter of wishful thinking. But can we KNOW? Can we know, as we know the multiplication table? Recent discoveries point towards such a possibility.

Let no one scoff at the suggestion. Had your grandfather been told that before many years he could sit beside his fireplace and both see and hear events taking place thousands of miles distant, would he have believed such a wild assertion? These amazing discoveries need only to be further sensitized or extended to give us yet other astounding revelations.

There is a verse in Ecclesiastes which at one time seemed to be a medley of contradictions:

"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been;"

Did Solomon have some tremendous prophetic insight far on to our own time when we are just beginning to know a little on the fringe of the great time-space development? Is some dear relative that you thought had passed from your sight forever, still working in the garden, reading in the den, sleeping in the old bedroom? Solomon tells us, "That which hath been is now," and discoveries in the realm of time-space are confirming his prophecy. Our next great achievement is to gain a perception of "That which hath been," events, friends, relatives, and thus realize that they still exist in that part of time we call "now."

Our ancestors could not possibly have imagined seeing and hearing people thousands of miles distant. It is not nearly so difficult for us to think of inventions so sensitive that

they will pick up events not only distant in space, but distant in time. Space is no longer a barrier to sight and sound and why should time stop us?

Let us keep remembering that time and space are one. We have wonderfully overcome the barrier of space and it is only logical to believe that we shall also become the masters of time. One should be no more difficult than the other. What a tremendous experience to see and hear again our dear departed! Then indeed will come to pass that the last enemy to be overcome will have been mastered.

IT is not easy to put into words an explanation of the new space-time discoveries. The symbols of geometry, algebra and trigonometry are not sufficient for the great mathematicians and they have had to invent great numbers of new symbols, quite without meaning to the layman. For the same reason we need new words in our vocabulary to give meaning to the modern time-space developments.

The great English physicist,

J. W. Dunne, experienced many premonitions, awake and asleep, which in a great many instances came to pass. So realistic were these premonitions that Dunne came to the inevitable conclusion that he caught glimpses of the future only because "the future exists now." His experiences convinced him that what we now call the past and the future live here and now in what we have heretofore regarded only as the present. It is a tremendous thought and one which requires a good deal of contemplation.

The most outstanding experience in this time-space realm came to Miss Jourdain and Miss Moberly, two educated English women in France for a brief holiday. One day they journeyed out to Varsailles. For a time they roamed about the park; but they had a strong wish to see the Little Trianon. They inquired the way and as they drew near they saw several men working, apparently gardeners. The men had a peculiar dress appearing as if they were historical characters costumed for a theatrical play. A young man hurried

past and he also was dressed in the fashion of a day long past.

In a kind of little summer house, supported by pillars, they saw a man sitting. He had a sneering expression and his face was pock-marked. Further on a woman sat at a table sketching. She wore a lace covering around her neck and an unusually large hat. Other casual visitors which the English women noticed all gave the impression of characters dressed for an historical play. As the women rambled about the gardens they crossed a small bridge beside a waterfall.

On returning to Paris the two women discussed the day's sightseeing. Each had the peculiar feeling that the people around the Little Trianon had not been quite real. In one of the art galleries they saw a painting of Marie Antoinette. At once they knew this was the likeness of the lady they saw sketching.

WHEN they returned to England, they were still puzzled by their inexplicable experience. Miss Jourdain returned to France determined

to do some research. Again she walked in the grounds of the Little Trianon. But there was no thick woods. She could not find the summer house nor the little bridge beside the waterfall. She discovered that the sinister, pock-marked young man exactly fitted the description of the Comte de Vaudreuil the false advisor of Marie Antoinette.

Authorities in Paris declared there had never been a summer house where the women saw it; nor any little bridge or waterfall. With tremendous determination the research was carried on. A map was found at last showing the course of the stream which had long ago been filled in. Later a document was found with an estimate of the cost of the summer house on the spot where the English women "saw" it. Furthermore, Miss Jourdain discovered in a thick growth of shrubs, a piece of stone column similar to the columns of the summer house which had disappeared.

All of these discoveries and identifications could hardly be

in the nature of coincidences. They were too many and they were too exact for chance to play any part. What is the explanation? Did they walk through a non-existent landscape? Or did they possess some rare sensitive perception giving them the ability to see what was really there, although invisible to others? The English ladies produced a book relating the details of their unusual experience. This book, *AN ADVENTURE*, together with documents, maps and other related material is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

The preface which J. W. Dunne wrote for the book is probably as clear an explanation as it is possible to give at this time:

"Einstein produced evidence that what one man on one planet would regard quite correctly as past TIME, another man on another planet, might regard, equally correctly, as present SPACE. Hence, if Einstein is right, the contents of time are just as real as the contents of space. Marie Antoinette—body and brain—is sitting in the Trianon garden

now."

What does all this mean to us? Does it answer the question we ask ourselves about our departed dear ones? Where are they and can we see them again? Keep remembering that time and space are identical. Then does it not follow that our departed friends live in

TIME just as they once lived in SPACE? Are we thus on the verge of the greatest discovery of all history? Then instead of our vague longing, our hope and wishful thinking, we can KNOW that immortality is not only a religious tenet, but a scientific fact.

THE END



An inch-square "honeycomb" device for computing machines developed by General Electric will store nearly a million bits of information in its tiny area. The heart of the tube is a thin sheet of glass in which small holes have been etched and then filled with metal. The tube is used this way: information is written onto one side of the honeycomb by a scanning electron-beam. A "reading gun" picks up the information from the opposite side.

The early lab models can store information only for sev-

eral minutes, but it is expected that that period will be extended greatly in later research. Since the holes in the honeycomb are spaced *five hundred* to the inch, each square inch has 250,000 individual storage cells—and each cell is capable of holding several bits of information. The storage tube will be vital in solving the engineer's dream of "smaller computers with bigger memories"—and also will find uses in television cameras and "scan converters," in which radar information is collected and then displayed on an ordinary television screen.

# INVULNERABLE

NOVELETTE

by HARLAN ELLISON

*illustrated by EMSH*

Ever wish you were indestructible? Then read about Eric Limmler, a man who was both invulnerable and immortal. Nothing could injure him—and he led a wretched life

**T**HIS year my name is Eric Limmler.

To look at me, you'd say I'm thirty-seven years old. As far as you'd be able to tell—you'd be correct.

I'm unmarried, with pitch-black hair and eyes that match. My face is quite round, with ears that protrude just a bit too much from the sides of my head. My nose is broken in two places—that happened by accident, but by my own hand, naturally. My teeth are white and even, in excellent shape except for a cavity in my right lower wisdom tooth. It won't get any worse; it's been that

rotten for two hundred and sixty years.

I have acid indigestion occasionally, and there isn't a neutralizer on the market that can help me. I'm resigned to it—my eating habits are lousy.

I am five feet, eleven inches tall, dress conservatively and never wear a hat. I cut my own hair, and tried raising a moustache several times. It was too much trouble, each time, so I shaved it off. I'm immortal.

**“L**OCATING you was a relatively simple matter, Mr. Limmler,” he intoned slowly, as though he were solving a mystery.



Forstner *seemed* pleasant enough. Big Business was written across his imported English tweed, his imported English briar, and his—I imagined—imported English moustache. I wondered who *his* boss was.

"That's nice," I replied, dropping the last of the dinner dishes into the sink. I changed the subject not very subtly, "How long did it take you to grow a moustache that rich?"

He looked confused, then fingered the growth with pride. It was almost copper-colored, matching his hair and eyebrows, and hung slightly handlebar-like. "Seven months," he beamed. "Nice, eh?"

"Um, nice," I said, biting off a hangnail. "Tried one of those myself when I was younger." I shrugged. "Didn't work out, though. Made me look shaggy. You know how it is."

He nodded, sat back and contemplated my abortive efforts to raise lip-fungus, then jerked back to alertness with a start. "Er... what I was saying, Mr. Limmler, is that we found you through your encounter last Tuesday."

I felt myself frowning, trying to figure exactly *what* encounter it was he was referring to. Then I half-smiled, and turned back to the sink full of dishes. He cleared his throat and seemed to be ill-at-ease. "Go on," I said, having nothing better to say for the moment. He was going to regale me with the story anyhow—why should I deprive him of as small a joy as that?

"Our Miss Lindy was there when the truck hit you. She said she was standing at an odd angle to the alley, and she was certain not even the driver could have been aware how badly you were hit. She said the truck caught you across the hips with its front fender. She swears you were hit, lifted, and thrown out of the driver's line of vision. She said you were tossed at least twenty feet by the impact."

His voice had deepened; he seemed impressed by the telling, more than the act itself.

"You then picked yourself up, informed the trucker he'd missed you and you'd merely stumbled. Then you walked away, carefully brushing off

sidewalk debris as you went.

"Our Miss Lindy followed you here." He joggled his pipe-stem at my humble apartment. "She reported what she'd seen, and on her word we did some checking."

He stopped abruptly, and without turning I could swear I heard him licking his lips. "You're indestructible," he said slowly.

"Oh?" I said in a surprised tone. I wanted to see what else he'd dug up. I'd have to try and erase it if I had the time.

His face tightened in annoyance: "Yes, *oh!* Don't be coy, man! It took a devil of lot to convince all the hard-boiled executives at Consolidated Enterprises we *had* to convince, that a man like you actually exists. But we did it, and we did it the only way possible: with proof!" He was hepped-up, but he wasn't actually telling me anything new. "We *know* you're incapable of being hurt, Limmler. We have the proof. It *wasn't* proof, out of context, but when we matched it with what our Miss Lindy saw, we had a startling picture. You've covered your tracks

beautifully, but we have millions at our disposal, and we checked you back as far as we could!"

I knew that couldn't have been far. Eric Limmler had only been conceived twenty-four years before. Anything further back would have been Erwin Franken, William S. Dignin, Joseph Melzenner, Charles Gregory Hodgman, Avelino Canales and before that it's a bit too difficult, getting them in order of appearance, so why should I bother?

FORSTNER was still talking. "You fell from a tenth-story hotel window in 1968. Damage: none. You were bitten by a rabid dog in 1954. Damage: none. There was even a fire at New York University in which spectators swore you were trapped! You were listed as dead, then appeared the next day. Damage: none!"

His eyes were glowing. I turned off the water, pulled the towel to me and wiped my hands. I stacked the few plates to drain themselves dry, and turned to him.

"All right, Mr. Forstner,

let's assume for the moment I am what you say—an indestructible man. So what? What does that mean to you and to Coenco?"

He jiggled his hands in front of his face, as though aligning the words properly before speaking them.

"Consolidated Enterprises Company is about to complete a tremendously important project. We've been in preparation for ten years, and work is now reaching complet..."

He didn't finish the word. His left hand had been waving that damned briar in front of my face, and I hadn't even been watching the right one.

Before I realized what he was doing, his right hand dipped like a seagull inside his imported tweed jacket and then I was staring into the thick, square shape of a .45—with a silencer.

The recoil threw his arm back against him and the explosion was so poppingly tiny, it seemed terribly funny. Almost as funny as the bullet that hit the Barrier and ricocheted into the steel cabinet next to Forstner's head.

The slug tinkled against the metal, dented it beautifully, and dropped out of sight to the floor. Forstner had gone fishbelly white.

"You were saying," I smiled.

He had trouble getting started. Then he *did* lick his lips: "W-we want y-you to join this top-secret project." He lifted the pipe to his mouth nervously; obviously he could think of nothing better to do.

Even so, he was waiting with a sort of smug secrecy for me to ask him what project. I decided, just for added kicks, to take the wind out of his ram-jets.

"If you mean the moonship, Forstner, I'm not available."

I thought sure he'd bite through the pipe stem.

**R**ATHER than have them dismantle the apartment house to get me out, and inconveniencing hell out of Mrs. Pollack, the landlady, I went semi-quietly.

They'd bugged me for a month after Forstner's Barrier testing. There was a tap on my phone, a squad of studiously inconspicuous plainclothesmen

following me day in and day out—who I tagged almost immediately. They wore hats, no matter how warm the weather. Even the one who *didn't* wear his hat was obvious.

Then too, there were spotters in the apartment across the court, watching my lowered blinds with binocs, and, all in all, it was most annoying.

So I lifted the phone one evening and said into the dial tone: "Come on, Forstner. We'll play footsies for a while. Pick me up at nine tomorrow morning."

In the car, in the train, and finally in the plane winging West, I was silent. Much to my surprise, Forstner hadn't made an appearance, but his Miss Lindy had.

Rather pleasant, his Miss Ann Lindy. A rich, honey blonde with long legs and a peculiar taste in perfume. She looked like a goddess, and smelled like cooking kale.

"Sorry we had to be so unpleasant about getting you to come out to Bakestone with us, Mr. Limmeler," she said, turning in the deeply-padded seat. A bleak mile of New Mexico

badland was flowing East underneath the jet as she turned. I missed it, watching her movement. That was a woman, that was.

"It was six of one or half-a-dozen of the other, wasn't it, Miss Lindy?" I said. She smiled apologetically. "Besides," I added, "I wanted to see exactly how far your boys have gotten. My curiosity sometimes gets the better of me. I've been waiting for this thing for a good long time now." I looked past her, out the window, muttering, "You can't possibly know *how* long." She didn't catch it; I didn't want her to catch it.

"They need you, Mr. Limmeler. They really do. It's a big thing they're planning. A big thing and a wonderful thing." She clenched her small hands in front of her, "I wish to God I were a man at times like this! It's a step..."

I wasn't really listening. She was sold, that was obvious. Well, all right. But I'd heard them say the same things about the dirigible, airplanes, the exploration of Brazil, the atomic bomb and the Surkin Piles.

What Ann Lindy was saying wasn't new.

Yet, oddly enough, for the first time it was somehow more real, more immediate.

Her eyes gleamed, her color heightened, she seemed caught up in the grandeur of her own words. She was star-struck if ever anyone was. On her it looked real fine; real fine.

"Do you like to neck, Miss Lindy," I asked suddenly.

"—with the others, for—" she stopped, looked at me as though I'd bitten her, then stammered a bit. "W-What did you s-say?"

"Do you like to make love?" I repeated it more bluntly.

**S**HE turned a frigid glare on me. "I was talking about the moon shot," she reminded me.

"I know," I said, "but somehow the subject pales when I notice who's discussing it." I grinned at her wolfishly. "Besides, I wanted to make sure there was femininity inside that pretty skull, as well as moondust!"

She laughed then, lightly, as though she hadn't quite forgiv-

en my transgression, but was trying. It was a pleasant thing—a thing I hadn't heard in a long while.

"You've a nice way with words, Mr. Limmeler. How is it that no girl has hooked you?" She was leading me, actually pumping me I suppose, and I didn't mind one little bit. She hadn't forgotten for a moment she was liaison personnel, but it wasn't going to interfere with her woman's inquisitiveness.

"Roaming never allows a man to pick up ties that hold." The loneliness had been creeping up on me, before I'd even been aware of it. I'd relaxed in Ann Lindy's company. Now it seemed to engulf me. The whistling passage of the jet across New Mexico became a deadly thing.

"I'm a rolling stone, Miss Lindy, and I have every expectation of going to my grave that way." I stumbled over the word *grave* and saw her puzzled expression.

I turned a wan smile on her, but she didn't respond. She was looking at me with the most *peculiar* expression.

I wondered how much Forst-

ner and his superiors had told her, and how much she had guessed. "Why do you look at me like that?" I asked.

It didn't take her off-guard as I'd hoped it would. I don't know *why* I wanted to see her off-guard, with her defenses down. Perhaps it's just that I want to strike back once in a while. But Ann Lindy's composure remained intact.

She altered the expression; now it was wistfulness. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "You seem so strange, so distant, actually. You're unhappy aren't you, Mr. Limmler?"

She'd never know. I might have told her how long I'd been unhappy, but it would have lost meaning, then. A time that long, sad that long, is more alien than touching. I'd been alone with it so long, there was no use advertising. I'd long since stopped feeling sorry for myself.

It was just at times like this, when I wanted the nearness of someone else more than anything, that I felt encased in the frost of my own isolation.

Hell on Earth? Buried alive? Those things happen, and you

don't even know they exist.

"Unhappy? Everyone's unhappy, Miss Lindy. Some more than others, that's all. It makes the times when you're not unhappy seem more enjoyable."

"Yes," she said, unsmiling, "I'd heard that. It makes sense, I guess." She stopped, looked at me with concentration for a second, biting her lip. Then she said, "What are you, Mr. Limmler?"

I'd known that one was coming up. It eventually does. I tried to pass it out of the conversation.

"This Mr. Limmler, Miss Lindy business is getting rather ponderous, don't you think? Try Eric."

She let a grin flicker a moment's life, then whipsawed me again: "I asked you a question . . . Eric."

**I** had to answer. I felt closer to Ann Lindy than I'd felt to anyone in many years. Simply because she was interested, simply because she was treating me as a human being. That can mean a lot sometimes. Particularly when loneliness has

compounded itself as much as it had in me.

"I suppose they'll tell you eventually—if they haven't already," I said, partly to myself. It took a great deal of inner pressure to make me spew the story. I'd learned that secrecy, camouflage and ordinariness were my only defenses. Those and the Barrier, of course.

I decided to tell her. I'd be gone soon, anyway.

"Call me a superman, if you like," I said. I was grinning and she took the word as I'd hoped she would. I admit I was playing for sympathy. *Poor Superman!*

"Somewhere around the middle of May, in the year 1683, I found myself born to perfectly normal parents in Stockholm, Sweden. Their name—oh, by the way, I'll save you the mental math; that was exactly three hundred years ago—their name was Enquist. They died when I was seventeen. I'd been seventeen for thirty-three years and they both died thinking I was hopelessly retarded."

Her face had altered subtly

as I'd spoken. Even as I watched, Ann Lindy's attitude changed. How do they react when they know a man three hundred years old sits next to them? Thank God she didn't get the How-Did-He-Get-That-Way - And - How - Can - I - Get-S o m e-Of-The-S a m e expression most of them featured. Hers was something else. It was simplicity. It was horror and an overwhelming pity. I was committed to continue.

"It wasn't so bad, really. Along with this never-aging business, I had the Barrier." She looked at me quizzically through the pity. "Try to hit me," I said. She hesitated. "Go on!" I snapped.

She raised her hand tentatively, made a movement toward me, stopped. "Hit!" I barked.

She brought her doubled fist around in an arc at my face. The fist got two inches away from the skin—and rebounded.

It couldn't possibly have hurt her, yet Ann Lindy shrank back, clutching her hand. Her eyes were wide and unbelieving. "You really *are!*" she gasped. The only thing I could

do was keep grinning foolishly, hoping she'd find it easier to let her pity continue than to spring some other reaction. There are times when pity is greatly to be desired.

"I've had that since I was born, as far as I know. It's strengthened gradually. When I was fifteen, my original fifteen, I had a cavity in my tooth," I said, poking a finger into my mouth and feeling the jagged hole in the enamel. "I've had that same cavity ever since. It never bothers me, and it's never gotten worse. I'll probably still have it when I die. I still have my first set of teeth. Not my baby teeth, you understand, but that first strong set of adolescent teeth."

She was shaking her head in disbelief, in wonder.

I had to keep talking. I knew I was almost babbling, but I couldn't stop and let her begin thinking too much about it. These moments were too hard to come by.

"Fairly simple explanation, actually," I continued. If I hit her with enough of this, fast enough, strangeness might compound on strangeness and

dull its effects on her. "I guess the bacteria can't get through. At first, when the Barrier wasn't as strong, they slipped in. Later, they couldn't."

Her eyes narrowed a bit, and she jiggled her finger in silent thought for a moment. "Then what about the molecules of air? How come *they* get through if the bacteria can't?" She was a sharp girl. I was wishing I had an answer to that question. It had bothered me for almost three hundred years.

"And," she said thoughtfully, "if the air molecules can get through, if we poisoned the air with gas, why wouldn't you die?"

"Don't know," I shrugged. "Perhaps it's the molecular composition, perhaps it's the size. Whatever it is, only pure air gets through—as does odor and light. Don't ask me to figure it—I only live here." She smiled again, and the pity had fled before her inquiries. We were starting to get better acquainted.

"In other words, you don't know what *this* Barrier is?" she asked.

"Look," I said, "you have a watch there." I pointed to the white-gold wristwatch circling above her left hand. "Do you know how it keeps time?"

"Well...it...there's a balance staff, and a mainspring...and when the..." she ground to a slow stop.

"You see. It's the same thing with me. I'm here—inside the Barrier—but I don't know why. And your boys could work me over for the *next* three hundred years, and I wouldn't be able to tell them anything more than I can right now. They'd use me for a gun-*iea* pig till they couldn't stomach the sight of me—and they wouldn't get anywhere, because they'd be going under the conviction that I was holding back, hindering them.

"I live with this thing every day of my life, but I'm in the dark about it. But," I added with a helpless chuckle, "they'll never believe me. They've been conditioned to look for a secret, and they won't ever be able to believe that the secret is that there *is* no secret!" She didn't answer.

THE plate above the control room door blinked PLEASE FASTEN SAFETY BELTS and NO SMOKING PLEASE.

The jet banked, and over the wingtip I saw long, low metal buildings, arranged in a hollow rectangle. Railroad track snaked in every direction: toward fuel dumps, from rows of boxcars to a derrick-like structure, away from piles of steel girdering, and out onto the bleak desert.

As I watched, and followed its progress, an engine and three tank-cars pulled away from the loading docks near the derrick and chugged away from the settlement.

I followed the twin black threads of track with my eyes.

Then I saw it rising in front of the faraway mountains. It was encased in sunlight, shining in the midday glare, looking for all the world as though it actually wanted to leap away. There were a few major differences in construction, from what I'd imagined. I wouldn't know if they were for better or worse till I was closer to the ship.

"Pretty, isn't it?" I said, not looking at Ann Lindy.

"Pretty is hardly the word, Mr. Limmler," she replied. There was a touch of amusement in her voice, and she'd slipped back into using the formal address. It was always like that; few people ever called me by my first name for very long.

"When you've seen as much as I have—wars, corruption of fine inventions, the sicknesses of three hundred years, men at each other's throats—something as fine as this seems too big for eulogy. Pretty is all I can muster, I'm afraid." She didn't answer.

The jet sank lower, riding the air currents, and the ship disappeared behind the hills. I turned back to Ann. She was staring at me fixedly. "How did you know about the ship?" she asked. "It was top-top classified. Only seven people in Washington knew about it."

I extended my hands in a deprecating movement. "I keep posted," I said. "Just so I can keep abreast of developments such as this one. I've known

this was coming for some time, Ann. Not precisely when, but soon I was sure."

She kept staring. The words were out of her mouth before she seemed to realize she had thought them. "You're a remarkable person, Eric Limmler."

I wanted to answer her. Wanted to tell her what I thought of her, too. I wanted, right then, to tell Ann Lindy why no girl had ever hooked me. Lord knows I've wanted them to do just that! I found myself tied with silence. I couldn't answer her, tell her how much I valued her admiration—her companionship.

The Barrier not only protects—it prohibits.

**F**ORSTNER was waiting. He was surrounded by top brass. The place was acrawl with guards; guards on the guards; and guards to guard the guard's guards. The same old story. It wasn't as noble an endeavour as they would have had me believe.

It was an arms race, an attempt for superiority of space before someone else got there.

The introductions went in a blur, thank goodness, and then they ushered me off to one of the long, low buildings.

"Testing center," Forstner explained as we hurried. I looked for Ann Lindy, and saw her in the rear ranks of our caravan, talking in heated tones with a mousey-looking three-star. She seemed to be defending something. I hoped it was me.

We passed the guards with snappy saluting and snapped orders from both sides.

They brought me into a white room, the walls of which were studded with machines. I was able to identify most of them, but there were a few I was certain had been rigged specially for me. I saw a stress machine and a portable flame-thrower with tank, and a weird-looking arrangement that looked like a nightmare revamping of an automobile chassis dynamometer. They weren't losing any bets, these boys.

"Strip down, please, Mr. Limmier," one of the medical men said. He was a short fellow with thick, horn-rimmed

glasses and cowlicks. He had a first lieutenant's patch on his white smock, and I began wondering just how close the collaboration between Coenco and the government was.

In the moment it took my hesitation to wear off, another medic stepped over to the short man. *Moral support*, I thought, and then caught sight of the fire-suit he was wearing. I don't know why, but it made me chuckle. Seemed funny as hell at the time.

They all looked at me strangely silent for a minute, then the medic repeated his order—a bit more sternly. The fire-suiter moved a step closer.

"Why should I bother, Doctor?" I replied. "Whatever it is you're planning on throwing at me, it won't get as far as the clothes, anyhow." I motioned him to get on with whatever it was he was planning. For a second he seemed as though he wanted to argue, but a sharp word from Forstner held him back.

He shrugged and looked at me in mute appeal. I really think he didn't know what to

do. Forstner, looking hag- and V.I.P.-ridden, stepped out and told him to get on with it.

THE medic indicated a small room off the main testing center, and I stepped through the door. It was an asbestosteel-lined cubicle. The fire-suited assistant stepped in after me, bolting the door behind him. Did they think I was going to try and escape?

One whole wall of the cubicle was fireproof glass, and the crowd gathered in front of it, peering in, some with their noses against the glass. I felt like a cookie in a bakery shop window.

The assistant strapped on the tanks he had brought in, and wound the fire-tube in his gloved hands. I saw him glance nervously at the huge window. I looked over and caught Ann Lindy's worried expression. I winked at her.

The assistant looked back at me, said nervously, "They told me you'd be okay—otherwise I'd never try anything like this. Sorry," he said, slipping the fire hood over his face.

"It's okay. I understand," I answered.

He stepped back against the bolted door and turned it loose. The plume blossomed and flowed around me. I felt the heat, but distantly. It wasn't uncomfortable in the least. There was a red, flickering haze around me, and the flames leaped up, sharply pointed and roaring—from my body to the floor, back at the medic, beating at the walls and the window and the ceiling. The spectators drew back hurriedly as the holocaust beat at them. In a few moments the room was clogged with charring black smoke. The hiss of the eruptions ceased and the assistant rushed across through the smoke to me.

He stopped cold and stared. "My God in Heaven," I heard him whisper, through the fire hood.

THEY unlocked the door and we slipped through quickly, so the smoke wouldn't get into the main room. The asbestosteel walls had been charred and razed. I was untouched.

They were all staring at me in amazement. "It's true!" I heard a deep voice say. I turned and identified the speaker as the mousey three-star Ann had been arguing with. I wondered if this won the point for her.

Is there any sense in carrying this further, Gentlemen?" I suggested. I'd had the same routine, in less advanced form, from Himmler and Napoleon. One or two others as well, but they're less clear in my mind.

They began nodding to one another and I thought the experimentation was concluded. But Forstner said, "Everything else we've set up is substantially tested by this first experiment, now that we can see what we have. All except the radiation and cosmic ray tests."

The little, cowlicked medic agreed, and they strapped me into the box, in another glass-windowed room. I could have objected and gotten out if I'd wanted—the straps tightened two inches away from my body—but what was the use. If it pleased them, why not? I was

going to be out of this in a few hours anyhow.

They rolled a machine out of its wall-niche and aimed it at me. It rose on a pedestal, with a horizontal bar-arm at the top that swung on gimbals. They swung the bar-arm, which tapered from a thick back to a pointed snout, and pointed it directly at my throat. Then the medic adjusted a horde of knobs to various calibrations, checking each one twice. He rubbed a finger alongside his nose, cast me a worried glance and said, "You won't feel anything. At first." He added the last with a tremulous tone.

He took a portable control box from a drawer, secured the jacks to the machine, and unrolled the cord as he made for the door. He went out, double-bolted the door after slipping the cord through a seal-plug in the frame. A few silent minutes passed, then the machine came to life suddenly.

Under a plastic dome atop the instrument, a red light began to glow. Brighter and brighter, as a radiation coun-

ier somewhere behind me clicked madly.

I couldn't feel a thing; he was right. But I was certain I was being slammed by all the might of radiation and cosmic power they'd been able to summon.

It seemed only a few minutes, then the light died away. I could only estimate the half hour before the door opened: my watch had ceased to function.

The short, bespectacled medic came in first, then Forstner, then Ann Lindy, pale and frightened-looking. The rest followed them.

They didn't utter a sound.

They just stood loose-jointed and stared at me, in terror and fascination.

**T**HE ship stretched up and up. I'd known it was here for several years, of course. My information trickled in late, but eventually. Hell, it *had* to be here; the signs were unmistakable. Stock market rises, steel and supplies going out West and not seen again. Key personnel taking extended trips. It had to be, and it

most certainly was.

But I'd conceived of nothing like this!

They had altered the traditional image of the needle-nosed rocket; they had added a sleek bubble enclosure that formed the nose. It was transparent—at least now.

Forstner saw me looking up at the clear compartment, the late afternoon's sinking sun glinting off it in flickering bursts. "New construction material," he said. "They tell me it can withstand heat and cold and stress like nothing ever hauled out of a blast furnace." He pointed up the side of the ship at the protruding longitudinal ribs of identical material. "Same stuff," he added. "We've got banks of recording and transvision equipment back there. Recording away full blast all the time. Stuff opaques itself when it has to, seals itself if it gets punctured—flows at times, don't ask me how—and insulates like crazy. Real fine stuff."

I nodded, still looking at the ship. He sounded like a kid with a six-week-chew of bubble gum. "Developed for us by

the boys over at GE-Sylvania. Real fine," he muttered again, shaking his head for added emphasis.

The thing was breathtaking. It was long, and almost sleek, and the tail fins jutted with imposing authority. The ship looked competent, damned competent. It would make it.

I'd have given an arm to ride it to the moon.

"You may have been wondering why we didn't assemble it in space, using Artellite III for a base..." he began.

I raised a hand to stop his jabbering. "Because it was knocked to flinders in space two months ago by *kamikaze* rockets from a Ruskie base near the North Pole." I threw *that* particular little piece of top-secret data at him without taking my eyes from the ship.

He drew a rasp of breath, and I wondered to myself why I was preverse like that sometimes. *Authority*, I said to myself, and I knew I'd figured the answer to my question in one word.

"How did you—" he began.

"Same place I learned about the ship," I said. "Got little

birds working out of Capistrano in a spy-net for me. Tell me everything. Can't beat 'em—they can't be caught." He fumed and blustered for a moment, clutching pipe and moustache alternately.

"That's an unpleasant thing to do to such a fine bit of shrubbery," I chided him. For a moment I thought he'd become apoplectic. Forstner was so perfectly suited to this project—ulcers and all, I supposed—I began to wonder whether he'd been prefabricated for the job.

He continued to snort, but hustled me toward the ship. "Want to show you through the little baby," he resumed, as though I hadn't calmly mentioned the most deeply-hidden secret in the Tri-Continent's files.

He led me to a guard-post, where a blond sergeant tossed a snappy salute against his service helmet and stepped aside. Inside the guard-shack, which was backed against a steel stanchion, we entered an elevator car, and started up to the plug-port on the ship's side.

We went into the ship, and

I was prepared to be impressed. I wanted to go. More than they could ever know.

But I didn't think I would. Not for them—and not for me.

THE briefing-room after ship inspection was cool and pleasant. They gave me a tall drink and watched fascinated as the hand holding it passed through the Barrier and I drank. I caught their confused looks, and shrugged my shoulders.

"I suppose it's controlled mentally. One of those survival factors nature takes care to include. The only thing *I've* been able to reason out logically is that subconsciously what I want to get through—gets through. That's why I can drink this excellent highball," I said, drinking the excellent highball.

The three men they'd already screened, trained and tested to take out the ship—from the thousands who had been initially selected—sat and watched me.

Marshall du Jardin, Ben Ruskin and Loren Louis Rabnick sat watching me closely.

They were almost the composite picture of level-headed, handsome American youth. Ruskin was a square-featured Negro, watching me with arms crossed and a perceptive gleam in his brown eyes. Rabnick and du Jardin were both blonds, and seemed hooked together by some invisible circuit. When I raised the glass, their eyes swivelled up. When I coughed, I could almost see their ears prick.

But they were good boys—it was easy to tell. It was a pity they were going into the cold Out There. Perhaps they wouldn't come back.

As though he'd sensed what I'd been thinking, Forstner came across the briefing-room and perched on the edge of the table, fingering his pipe, pursing his lips. He no longer seemed the bumptious official fronting for the Combined Services. He was all ice and steel and he wanted to get down to the problem.

"See those three?" he asked, pointing to the All-American Triplets.

"They were given the spot of notoriety," I answered. "I

wasn't supposed to miss them—I didn't."

Forsiner gritted his teeth audibly. "Those three are going to make the moon shot, Limmler. They need you. You're invulnerable—nothing can get to you. If the trip goes all right, you're an added safety factor, you won't have anything to do. But if it doesn't," he paused, licking his lower lip, "God forbid—then you'll get back, somehow, and will tell us what went wrong.

"There'll be emergency equipment on you at all times, to get you down, should you be turned into space. You'll be able to make it back into atmosphere.

"There's no one else for this job, Limmler." He wasn't wasting a word; he was hitting me with every emotional dirk he'd prepared. "We've had bad breaks on the other five attempts—as you probably already know; you seem to know everything else—and we don't want to see these men go the way the others went. We'd planned on flying it blind again, this time, trusting to luck and our mechanics, but

then we hit you. The ship is a good one, it'll make it if anything can, but we need you to—"

I banged the glass down on the table, stood up quickly. "No!" I said, much too loudly.

They stared. I knew I'd be gone from their sight soon, lost to them, no matter how hard they searched for me.

But I couldn't stand the way they were looking at me. It had happened before, almost like this before, but this time it seemed intolerable.

Getting lost might not be the solution. I've had three hundred years practice at it, and I do it well. Disraeli once said to me, "You'll never be lost. We'll find you! We *must* find you!" He'd had half of Europe looking for me—and I'd melted away. I always did. I was certain I could do it again if I had to. But did I want to do it?

I had to tell them why. They were staring at me with a strange disgust and hatred in their eyes. Most of all, Ann Lindy was leaning against the outer door, her eyes blank and

without message. That hurt; hurt real bad.

"I don't want to go. Why should I? I'm not trained, I'm only a safety valve. If the ship makes it, I go into a curio box for you to stare at. If it doesn't, then I have hell getting back, so you can send me out again!"

*Years of being hated, I thought bitterly. Years of being The Man Who Can't Die. With specialists poking and prying and trying to get through the Barrier. With feature writers clogging my doorway and mailbox and hair wanting to write my touching story for Look At Life.*

"I've spent a long time alone, and I like it. I don't see any reason to risk my life—a good long one, not a stinking three score and ten like yours—on a scatterbrained stunt like getting to the moon. Stick it, fellows. Stick it hard! I want no section of it!"

*God, God, God! I cried to myself, it isn't true. I want to go, but I can't, don't you see? Don't you understand, I can't! First you'd use me, then you'd hate me. You'd start another war over me, trying to crack*

*the Barrier, wanting to turn out soldiers like me. An invincible army. And what if there are others like myself? What debt do I owe them? What legacy would I leave them if I were to make this shot?*

"So, no thank you, Gentlemen, but you can take your suicide mission and stick it, lock, stock, and rocketship. So long!"

I got up and moved toward the door.

They didn't try to stop me. I don't think they wanted to come near me—a new kind of leper. They knew there was enough charged wire and enough guards and enough tracers around the installation to make sure I wouldn't get away.

They were wrong, of course.

I made for the door. Ann Lindy's face grew large in my vision. Her eyes were no longer cold and blank. They were starting to tear. I heard a voice at my elbow as I passed the All-American Triplets. It was Rabnick.

"Invulnerable, huh? What good is he? What damned

good is a man to anyone else, or to himself, if he can't do some good? No guts, no spirit! Invulnerable, immortal. Three hundred years of life and worthless. He's invulnerable!" They jabbed him in the ribs and he fell silent, but I saw the hate that smoldered in all their eyes. The hate and disgust.

Then a strange thing happened. I've heard men swear and curse and damn me for many years. In many languages, in many dialects, they have reviled me, and wished me to the Pit.

You can get a good many people mad at you in three hundred years.

But no matter how vile their curses were, no matter how deeply felt, they didn't strike me with one fraction the impact of the phrase Ann Lindy mumbled as I passed her. In its simplicity it summed up... everything.

"You stink," she said, so low I could hardly hear it. So low and so earnest, I stopped three steps away from the door and freedom.

It defeated all reason!

I turned back to Forstner.

The pipe was still clenched unlit, under that magnificent moustache. "I'll go," I said.

No one smiled, no one cheered. If they'd gained a victory, it certainly wasn't evident.

THE *Big Proud Baby* blasted through the overhanging clouds, and tail-braked in toward Bakestone.

The shot had been uneventful. We'd landed, planted the flag—just a bit ridiculously, we all thought—and blasted off again according to the schedule. There had been no mishaps: no melodramatic meteor punctures, no collisions with comets, black planets, saucers, or cosmic ray clouds. It was a milk run.

The *Big Proud Baby* settled back on her tail with a roar and a blast that muted itself slowly, till the rumbling died away, and we bumped, rocked, and settled.

Back. Back and down and finished. Now the ordeal began for me. It was worth it. It was worth it.

We heard the "clear for disembark" from the decontam

crews, and felt the odd little bump of the portable elevator as it was clamped to the ship.

The minutes went blurrily, and we stepped off the elevator, into the screams and cheers of the entire installation staff. Rabnick and Ruskin and du Jardin were gathered into enfolding arms, their backs pounded, their faces smiled into. I got my share, but it was an odd, distant thing. As though I'd been an unpleasant chaperone that had gone along with the sweet boys.

We started walking to the staff cars that waited. I was right behind the All-American Triplets.

du Jardin was saying: "Wait until you see the readings from the potentiometers. When we got out to..."

And he pitched over onto his face. Several top-brass almost walked on him, so suddenly did he drop. I heard Ann Lindy scream.

Then Rabnick and Ruskin howled something and fell over, too. All three of them.

The medic took ten seconds to get through the crowd. By

that time they were dead. Stone dead. Cold dead. Inexplicably dead. And the eyes turned to me.

I stood tall. I wasn't dead. And I felt guilty about it!

THE autopsy revealed nothing. The single fact available was that they were dead. I wasn't, and that was another fact.

We were back in the briefing-room. They'd asked me, they'd begged me, they'd threatened me, though they knew it was useless. Still I could tell them nothing. The men had seemed perfectly normal during the entire trip, had shown no ill effects. There was nothing to account for it.

Forstner was saying, "We'll come to a solution, Limmler! You'll see! Those boys aren't dead for nothing, and we won't spare any effort to find out what killed them. And what kept you alive when they died!" He added the last with a steel barb of tone that I knew all too well. Almost an accusation.

I stood up and looked at him steadily. I wanted him to get

what I was going to say next. It would be the last time I'd ever see him.

"I can either stay or go. If I stay, you'll spend eight billion trying to crack the Barrier and re-build it to your own specifications. Because now you know there is no Space for you without it. There's something out there that cuts down any man without a Barrier.

"And the only man with a Barrier is myself. That's why you're certain I know how it works—and I'm just keeping it to myself.

"If I go, you'll break your necks trying to find me. While you spend your money trying to locate me, you'll never be able to figure out the Barrier and construct it yourself. Because you'll always think along one channel: Limmler's Barrier—How did *it* work? Your creative energies will be driven into that one channel alone.

"It'll be smarter if I go. Because after perhaps fifty years, when you've resigned yourselves that you'll never find me—then you'll be able to

go ahead in another direction. Besides, if I go, I won't have to watch your faces change with hate over the years. You'll hate me, and never know I'm as helpless as you."

I looked at him steadily for a moment more, then turned and retraced steps I'd made six months before. Ann Lindy wasn't at the door this time.

I stopped at the door, three steps from a freedom I should have grasped six months before. "You can experiment all you want, Forstner," I said, and my tones were ones he hadn't heard before. "But not with me. I'm through. Good-bye."

As I walked out the door, into the New Mexico midnight, I remembered those two words Ann Lindy had spoken that had stopped me. They never would again.

Let them hate me; let them pity me; let them search a million million years for me! Never!

Invulnerable? Sure I am. From the outside.

THE END

# BRIGHT FLOWERS OF MARS

by CURTIS W. CASEWITT

All his life he'd been an explorer, and now he was to be the first man to explore Mars. His whole heart and mind were set on the landing. He would soon be there!

MARS glowed like a copper penny on his magniscreen when something seared the back of his neck and struck his spine. He blacked out, but the next instant, he was awake again, his ears filled with the deafening blast of the meteorites. He didn't panic. He was an explorer, and the unforeseen was his business.

He turned his head and saw the holes behind him. *A big one*, he thought. *Like a fist*, and two pin-sized one. The projectiles had pierced the meteor bumper, roared through the hull, the glass wool, the inner skin, shooting out on the starboard side of the ship.

He was alone in the control cabin, alone in space. He felt no fear, only indignation. Air tore out of his nose and mouth, as if from balloons. His lungs were afire. The pain was hell.

He'd been trained for emergencies, and he knew that the pressurized capsule would keep him alive until he'd plugged the holes. He pushed the button for the capsule. Nothing happened. His contour chair didn't straighten; the overhead cylinder didn't budge. Were the motors out? He tried to see the control panel, but his vision blurred. He could merely make out the green alarm gas streaking toward the holes. The self-

sealer hadn't worked. *Too much force, those mets*, he thought.

The air was hissing out of the ship. He knew that pressure would drop rapidly. He'd have thirty seconds to patch the gaps, one minute at the most.

He had a special gun for this job, like a stapler, shooting suction pads. The gun hung overhead, inside the capsule, its barrel sticking out of the metal. If the capsule had come down as it was supposed to, he could've pushed the gun's trigger from the inside. Now he'd have to get up and jerk it out of the cylinder. He tried to rise. He couldn't. He seemed pinned to the contour chair. His legs wouldn't respond. His breath came in short, tortured gasps.

He had another ten seconds. His hands gripped the armrests and he heaved himself to his feet. But he couldn't stand, and his knees buckled. He crashed to the cabin floor. His spine was agony, and he suddenly knew that he was paralyzed from the waist down.. The gun was at a maddening distance above him.

"Powers," said the radio,. "What's wrong? We heard the detonation."

"Still in one piece," Powers said. He was astonished that he could speak. *Next time better watch your voice*, he thought. *Make it firmer. None of their business what you're going through.*

He lay on his stomach now, air aperture. The pumps were pushing the oxygen-helium pushing the oxygen-helium mixture out of the other compartments into the control cabin. This new supply would give him another minute—or two? If he could suck up enough air, he might pull himself up toward the sealing gun.

He took a deep breath at the air-feed and grabbed the contour chair. But he had no strength at all now. He dropped back.

HE was trained in space medicine and he knew what was in store for him. Death by explosive decompression. Shortly, the ship's compartments would be drained of air. His lungs would then cease functioning. The last

oxygen would leave his arteries, his tissues. Helium was better than nitrogen, of course. Helium delayed and diminished the boiling of blood.

"How are you, Powers?"

"Ready for the kettle."

"What did you say?"

He didn't answer. For an instant, his lips wouldn't work. Hammers pounded into his ears. He saw his red hair, his red beard grotesquely reflected from the chromium. His taut lean face appeared fat, distorted. Sweat was rolling down his cheeks in torrents.

"What's the matter, Powers? Answer us! Are you hurt?"

"Deeply," he said. "My pride—"

Ah, yes, he thought. His pride. It was shot to the devil. No photos of him on Mars. His mouth gulped at the air-feed. Shifting his shoulders, he allowed himself another glimpse at the screen. It bobbed like unhinged blackboard, with Mars the size of a tangerine. Presently, the picture was gone. A grey river swirled in front of his eyes. His lids stung. *If I could only get up*, he thought.

"Powers! Where are you?"

"On my way," he mumbled. "To Mars!"

To Mars! To Mars! He'd dreamed of it since the sixties, after the unmanned rockets had circled the moon. He'd been a kid then, tiptoeing about his parents' farm yard in his pajamas. He'd often stood outside at midnight, his feet bare, his eyes glued to the sky. Their farm was high up in the Rocky Mountains, and the altitude, the thin atmosphere made the stars shine sharply. He'd gotten to know the Milky Way, the North Star, and the planets. By the time he was ten, he'd learned everything about the planets, how hot it was on Mercury, how cold on the moon, and about Jupiter's storm and about Mars'—

"Listen," rasped the radio voice. "Can you hear us?"

He tried to answer. But just then, his lungs were being ripped from his chest. *Last air gone*, he thought. *Compartments all empty. Pumps useless*. He shoved his mouth against the grill of the air-feed, wriggling like a carp in a net. *This is it, Powers, your time is up!*

He was furious at destiny.

Of course he'd explored all of his own planet: the Amazons, the Andes, the last unknown spots of Africa and Australia. He'd hacked his way through the jungles of Cambodia, and climbed Nanga Parbat. He should be satisfied, really. His bearded portrait hung in class rooms; his picture was on walls of the best clubs. David Powers, with a new species of edelweiss from Austria's Grossglockner mountain. David Powers, with Monarch butterfly in Brazil. With coral snake in Panama. In ionosphere, testing a rocket. In Exosphere. *But damn it all*, his mind cried. *I'm not ready for death. There's still Mars!*

The operator kept babbling into his ear-phones. But he couldn't hear now. He rocked through a painful darkness, all throbs and stabs, with blisters under his skin, with foam in his heart. He was dying.

"Powers! Powers!"

NOW he seemed to be alive again, breathing freely. He had the sealing gun his hand. He didn't know how it got there. His elbows were propped on the floor, and he could feel

the bulge of his biceps.

He was filled with wonder at his recovery. He fired his weapon at the starboard-side of the hull. The patch flapped noisily over the holes, liquid rubber splashing across the rim, hardening. He shifted the gun toward the port-side, and squeezed the trigger. Sealed, too. Sweet odor. The green alarm gas petered out. There seemed to be plenty of air. He took deep, delighted breaths. He was safe.

*Oh God*, he thought. *Thank you. Thank you!* So, after all, the journey hadn't been in vain. The months in the ship, the decade of preparations. For ten years, he'd led the life of a monk, studying astro-gation, rocketry, geophysics; he'd dug deeper into his own field: botany. He remembered the tests for the trip: superhuman endurance, claustrophobia, irritability, acceleration, confinement. He'd flown every winged craft until they trusted him with the supersonic F-456's and the rocket.

"Come in, Powers."

"I'm in." He felt numb as though he was just emerging from a knockout. He no long-

er lay on the floor. He was sitting in the contour chair. He couldn't make out the figures on his instruments. He bent close to the panel, but the numbers and the needles danced crazily in front of his pupils.

"Your ship hasn't moved, Powers!"

"Moving," he said. "Speed of sound. Mars orbit straight ahead!"

He was puzzled that he could see the planet distinctly: a large orange with green-blue patches and a network of geometrical lines. The texture was orange-like, too, all gleaming pores. "The surface is spread with butter," he said.

"What was that?"

"Most enjoyable." He leaned forward. Black arrows shot across his retinas. Then his sight cleared again. "There's the *Elysium*," he cried. "*Eden*. *Cydonia*. *Nerigos*."

Exhilaration tugged at him. *Now*, he thought. The most wonderful part. The landing. Years of preparation for this, too. He circled the planet three times, then shifted into automatic. He knew that the radar altimeter would feed informa-

tion to the electronic computer, thus controlling the motors.

It went smoothly. Soon, the planet tilted in front of his screen. He yanked out the hand-telescope. Oh, how magnificent it all was! How he could see every mile! A lifetime's expectation was melting in his eyes: two polar caps, then *Hellas*, *Tempe*, *Arcadia*. Now the straight lines, the angles of blue-green. Not canals, just as he had anticipated. But fauna.

"Powers," said the voice in his head-phones. "How are you?"

He didn't answer. He was crying.

"We're sure now. It was a meteor shower. But you must have plugged the holes."

He put down the head-pieces. He was self-sufficient. He didn't have share to joys of exploration. Not yet. Three thousand miles an hour, two, one, five hundred, down, down, rockets blazing, fins descending first.

HE made it like a feather. He pushed the air-lock button and stepped out. The agony in his spine, in his lungs

were gone. He'd never felt better in his life. The new gravity billowed him down the ladder.

"Powers," said the operator.

He couldn't understand how the radio pursued him. He'd left the head-phones in his ship.

"The gun worked? You plugged them, didn't you?"

"Plugged what?"

"The holes."

"There are no holes on Mars," Powers said. "Mars is all flowers."

They stretched in a long, blue line, like corn flowers. He kneeled down to touch the short, blue stems, the tiny, perfectly rounded petals, to smell the soft, discreet scent. The latin name of these beauties flashed through his brain, and for an instant he wanted to tease the operator, speaking in latin. But the beauty of the scene overwhelmed him, and Powers could no longer speak.

Far away, beneath the pink-colored, fleazy clouds he could see the hills rise, the color of apricots. Tongues of light now played on those hills, now on the mossy mounds to the East, now on the unending lines of

flowers in front of him. He found himself running recklessly beside the field. Oh, yes, he must take moving pictures and collect samples. He had a speakphone in the ship, to dictate his report. And he must fetch his testing equipment, too.

He stopped, his knees weak from the exertion. *Rest a little*, he told himself. The cool Martian wind touched his face. There was dew on the blue petals, and he let the pearls run down his fingers.

Through the field, he noticed the needle-shaped nose of his ship. He listened to its angry contractions. *Cooling*, he thought. He began to shiver, too. He wanted to rise, and for the first time, he was pinned down again. Why the pressure in his ear drums? The vice pinching his temples? And this awful pain in his chest? *Of course*, he decided. *Lungs acting up once more. Should've taken the oxy suit.*

He began to writhe among the flowers, wondering how he could have rushed out of the airlock without protection. This was mad, mad. Once more he was dying.

The ear-phones sputtered on the cabin floor. Strange that he heard the voice at this distance. "We're dispatching the next ship."

"There is no need to," Powers said. "I'm on Mars." Couldn't they be patient? He'd at destination, wasn't he?

recover in a moment. He was "We'll send the ship."

"Oh, hell," he said, his lungs wracked by a last torture, "Send a fleet!"

"One ship."

It arrived nine months later

to find his rocket floating about the vacuum of space, its engines punctured, its cabin at zero gravity. Powers was stretched out in the contour chair, his spine split open by a meteorite. His head rested in the direction of the magniscreen. The explorer's eyes were shut tight in a smile; his mouth curved upwards, and his blistered hands were open, the sensitive palms down, as if he were still caressing the Martian flowers.

THE END

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# HOMETOWN

by RICHARD WILSON

Home is where the heart is. There is nothing, nothing in the whole wide universe that can take the place of your own hometown on your own home planet, the earth

**K**IT stood entranced in front of the old house. "Oh, Thad," she said to her husband, "it's just like the one I was born in. The porch, the dormer windows—everything."

Thad, who had known Kit practically all her life, was aware that her old home was not at all like this one. But he didn't say that to her.

"Sure, Kit," he said. "Very much so. Now Let's start back." Then, without thinking, he said something he could have kicked himself for: "It's getting dark."

It *was* getting dark, of course, but only in here. And that would make it harder to get her to leave.

"Oh, it *is*!" she said. "Isn't it wonderful? The street lights are going on. How softly they glow. And look—there's a light on in *my* house, too."

"Come on, now," Thad said irritably. "My feet hurt."

"I'm sorry, darling. We have been tramping all over town, haven't we? We'll just sit in the park awhile and rest. I do love the dusk so."

They sat down on the wooden bench. He leaned back resignedly. She was perched on the front slat, turning her head this way and that, exclaiming over a tree or a bush, or over the red brick firehouse across the street, or the steeple on the church at the end of town.

Then she saw the chalk marks on the path.

"Oh, look!" she said delightedly. "Potsy. One-two-three-four-five. What fun that used to be!...I wonder where the children are?"

"Now Kit," her husband said, "you know there aren't any children."

She turned to glare at him in a quick change of mood. "Why do you always have to spoil everything? Isn't it enough to know it without being reminded of it? Can't I have a little fantasy if I want to?"

"It's just that I don't want you to have another—I don't want you to be ill, that's all."

"Go ahead and say it!" she cried. "Another nervous breakdown. You're afraid I'll go crazy is what you mean. You're sorry you ever picked such a neurotic woman, aren't you?"

Thad tried to soothe her. "You're not neurotic, Kit. You're just homesick. It happens to everyone here, me included. I just don't think you should let yourself be carried away by all this—"

She jumped to her feet. "Carried away! I haven't *begin* to be carried away." She took something out of her bag and tossed it into the first potsy square. "I'll show you some carrying away." She skipped through the boxes. He saw what she had thrown down. An expensive compact he had given her.

Another couple walked along the path toward them. They smiled indulgently at the woman playing a child's game. Thad looked away in embarrassment. He waited till the couple had passed, then got up and grabbed his wife's arm.

"Kit!" he said roughly. "I'm not going to let you act this way." He shook her. "Snap out of it. We're going now."

She shook his hand off. "You go," she said. "Go on back to that cold, sterile world, you big brave pioneer. I'm staying."

"You can't. Be reasonable, Kit."

"There's a hotel down by the church. I saw it. I'll stay there until my time is up. How long is it—six more months? Maybe they have special monthly

rates." She started to walk away.

"Kit, it's not real. You know that. The hotel is just a false front, like a movie house and the supermarket and everything else in here."

"Don't say that!" She stopped and turned to him. Her eyes got unnaturally large. "Don't take it away from me again! Not when I've just found it. Don't take it away! Don't!"

She sobbed, then laughed wildly, then sobbed again and went limp. He caught her and lowered her gently to the grass—the artificial grass under the artificial tree, under fake stars in a fake sky.

Someone had seen and an ambulance came clanging, its headlights two reddish gleams. He had to admire the people

who ran the place—it was an old-fashioned Earth-style ambulance, authentic right down to the license plate.

Two men jumped out with a stretcher and lifted Kit into it. "Anything serious, Mac?" one of them asked.

"No," Thad said. "Just three and a half years of being a Moon colonist, that's all. Seeing all this was too much for her." He climbed into the back with the stretcher.

As the gates swung open the perpetual light of the Moon caverns banished the artificial dusk. As his wife was transferred to a conventional ambulance Thad looked back at the sign over the gate:

HOMETOWN, EARTH

Admission \$5

The End



# SCIENCE SHORTS

by EDGAR P. STRAUS

The conquest of space may require a healthy assist from the plastics industry. According to Egmont Arens, former president of the Society of Industrial Engineers, it appears inevitable that plastic—and not metal—will form the outer shell of tomorrow's spaceships. No known metal or alloy exists that can meet the heat-resistance specifications that will be set for space needs, and, at present, the plastics researchers seem considerably closer to a workable material than the metallurgists.

Machine-made music is the latest product of the cybernetic age. The Datatron, a super-fast computer used by the Burroughs Corporation, can turn out melodies at the rate of a thousand an hour, using arithmetic note selection.

The Datatron is fed a form-

ula which substitutes numbers for notes and equations for tempo; the machine then spews forth melodies on an electric typewriter.

The mathematicians working with the computer, Douglas Bolitho and Dr. Martin Klein, say that once the Datatron is inspired by the formula, it will proceed to write more than ten billion tunes without further human intervention.

The computer's prime inspiration is a random number introduced from the keyboard. The signals start a chain reaction by which Datatron generates thousands of other numbers, each representing one of the eight diatonic notes of the scale. The machine then automatically picks a series of numbers at random, testing each for melodic acceptability and rejecting those that would produce sour harmonies.

# THE MAIL BAG

Dear Editor:

Here's one gal who was fortunate enough to stumble upon Vol. 1, Number 1 of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION and simply must write to say that the contents certainly lived up to the title SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION, especially "Catch 'Em All Alive" by Robert Silverberg (who incidently rates tops with yours truly. Never saw such varied themes by one mere man, and I have enjoyed all of his work that I've been lucky enough to find.)

Milton Lesser's "Chance of a Lifetime" was next, followed by "Once Within a Time," "Psycho at Midpoint" and finally "Who Am I?"

All features rated well, and I hope that future issues will maintain the high standard set by Number 1. That is a big order, man! Think you can do it?

You also have the top men in the illio department.

There's only one complaint,

and that is that you are bi-monthly. But I hope you can remedy that in the near future.

I do hope you will include some letters to the editor in future issues. I live about four miles from town and I have met only one other fan in all the years I've been addicted to science fiction. He's a cab driver and I never did find out his name, but we've sure had some grand talks while he made money from me on his meter. I would surely like to meet some fans in the Vancouver, B. C., Canada, area.

Mrs. Dorothy Jeffery,  
Vancouver, B.C.



Dear Editor:

I just finished your new magazine and enjoyed it very, very much. It seems to have the quality that you can't hardly find no more. *Well-written* space opera! You can find well-written stories almost

everywhere, but no adventure. You can find space opera in plenty of places but it looks to be written by a 6-year old. But finally your magazine has just what it takes. A true 35¢ worth.

Although your stories are excellent I could make some suggestions on the departments and personality of your mag.

First off, you could do without more than half of those science departments. There are entirely too many. Why don't you make about a 5-page science article in one section without having articles all over the mag. In place of that space you ought to have a letter section. A small one, of course, don't overdo it but a letter column at any rate.

If you don't like letter columns, why not a Personals Column? Let the readers take part in some part of the magazine. That will promote more readers, I'm sure. And why not have maybe a biography of an author or artist on the inside cover and your editorial inside the mag and much longer? Why not try a few of these suggestions?

Oh yes, I hope as time goes along you won't keep Freas on the cover all the time. Freas is one of my favorite artists but you need some variety on the cover. Ziff-Davis features Valigursky on every one of their stf mags and every issue. It gets monotonous. So how about Emsch or Virgil Finlay on the cover? For that matter, how about Finlay anywhere in the mag? He's a great artist. In my opinion, you've got the best artists in the stf field now, but Finlay would really give you top rating from the art standpoint.

I loved Freas' cover! It was positively beautiful. What I liked most was the rusted metal spacesuit. I don't think that spacesuits will be made out of that colorful, glorious plastic wonder substance that everybody draws. Of course they will as time goes by, but I feel that at the beginning metal suits will be what they wear. I know hardly anybody will agree with me on this, though. Apparently Freas does.

My favorites in your mag were "Catch 'Em All Alive," "Psycho at Midpoint" and

"Chance of a Lifetime." Your others were equally good. In other words all your stories are tops.

So put a little personality in your magazine and you'll really have it made. Wish you best of luck.

Billy Meyers,  
Chattanooga, Tennessee



Dear Editor:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the appearance of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION. As with fanzines, new magazines are usually noted for poorly selected, mediocre stories. However, this is indeed *not* the case with your mag. The stories were all far above average.

I shall now proceed to utterly bore you and your readers, with my useless comments and ratings on the featured fiction. Shall we commence?

Hmmm... I guess first place rightfully belongs to "Once Upon A Time" by Russ Winterbotham. Time travel yarns are my favorite type of stf—the majority of the aforemen-

tioned type, however, are long and dull. That can not be said for Russ' novelette, though. The idea is quite novel, and the story is written in a most entertaining manner. Winterbotham has a sort of "snap and pep" to his writing—if you know what I mean. I would be proud to be the author of "Once Upon A Time"; I hope Mr. Winterbotham is. More in this vein, *please!*

Very much enjoyed by this reader was "Who *Am* I?" by Henry Slesar.

Well, if you're gonna insist on rating the shorts, I'd award first place to "Psycho At Mid-Point", Harlan Ellison. The actual plot is not particularly original—men return from outer space and all—almost all—go mad—but nevertheless the story is food for thought. And that is why it got first place.

If I was Judith Merrill or Ted Dikty, I'd consider "Psycho At Mid-Point" for inclusion in one of their "Year's Best" anthologies.

The science shorts... I must say this: I am not especially wild about these. One or two—that's okay. The space could

be put to better use with a fan column or some sort of interesting stf article. Or maybe book reviews.

Martin Fleischman,  
Bronx, New York



Dear Editor;

I have bought SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION—I like it. The stories are good and I like to read this type of fictional plot. The articles were good—short and brief. I hope that you do not decide to publish full length novels since I prefer the stories to be of such length that I can read them in little more than a half hour or so. The typography is excellent. Some of the magazines out now seems to have a type setting that is almost blurry.

All in all an excellent issue!  
William S. Hampton,  
Norfolk, Virginia



Dear Editor:

Thanks for a new, lively magazine. This is the way it looks to me... I found it to

be a commendable first issue; in the parlance of the theatrical critic the stories were adequate—that is, they were well-written, entertaining, and served their purpose.

I liked the stories in the following order— Probably the best was Slesar's "Who Am I". Ellison's "Psycho At Mid-Point" rated second.

I have always enjoyed time travel yarns and liked Once Within A Time. It held a flavor somehow reminiscent of the older, freer days of fond memory; the science fiction stories of some twenty years ago. The outcome of Lesser's Chance Ot A Lifetime was transparent from the first few paragraphs. Catch 'Em All Alive was the lightweight of the issue. Silverberg has done and will do better. If he doesn't exhaust himself in the next year with his tremendous output he will go places as a writer.

I like the short science articles and the way you alternated them with the stories. Keep this feature but try and have a couple of the articles on topics of scientifictional interest. A couple of features like

this, calculatedly aimed at the s-f fan would prove of great appeal.

I have nothing against fantasy but I would prefer that you stick to science fiction, and especially SUPER science fiction, unless you get a fantasy so exceptional that it would be a shame not to print it. I think we can do without a letter column or book reviews. Most of today's letter columns are as dull as a sick dog's eye, so unlike the good old days of PLANET, STARTLING and THRILLING WONDER. Book reviews are amply covered in several other magazines, and I can't see the need for one more. Nor can I see reviewing fanzines. It's been done to death.

You did a good job of not giving away too much story in the blurbs and illustrations. Several of the magazines have a bad habit of doing this. I like to read everything else in a magazine first before I read the stories and with some mags I have to get a firm grip on the back of my neck and guide my eyes away from the blurbs to

avoid spoiling the effect of the story.

Allan Howard,  
Newark, New Jersey



Dear Editor:

When I picked up the first issue of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION, I cursed the glutted newsstands with all their new sf magazines, because most of them are really tripe.

But I took a chance, and to show I'm pleased by what I read, you'll find a postal money order enclosed for a year's subscription. The stories all have a strong tone of realism—and they all *move*! I particularly want to congratulate you on publishing Slesar's "Who Am I?" and Ellison's "Psycho At Mid-Point", both of which are in the great tradition of fast-action s-f, and both held my interest. I didn't much care for the Winterbotham or Lesser stories, but that was only because I liked the two I already mentioned and Silverberg's yarn more.

Edward T. Heisman, Jr.  
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