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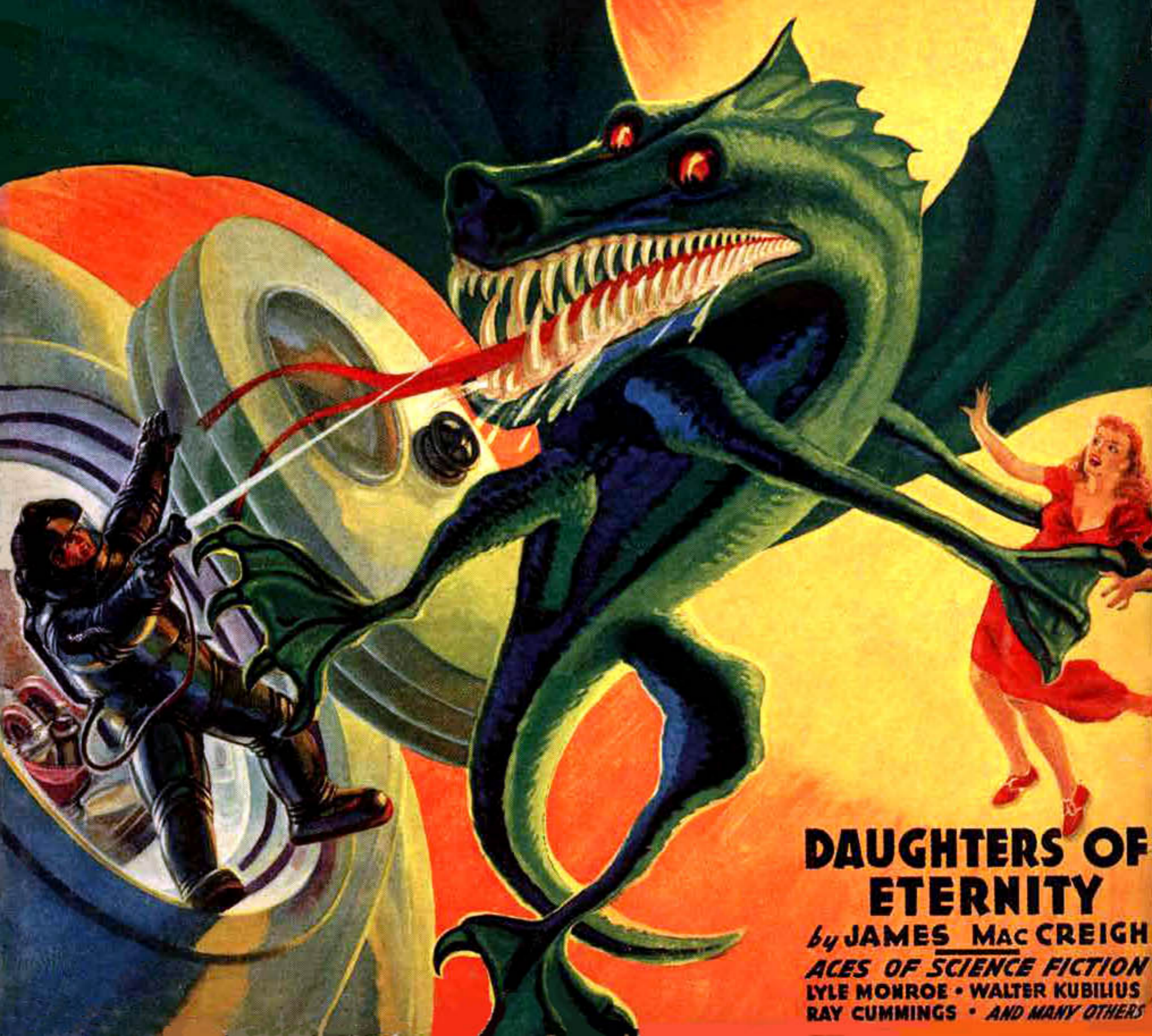
F

ASTONISHING

STORIES

MAR.

SLAVES OF THE UNKNOWN
A PROFESSOR JAMESON NOVELETTE
by **NEIL R. JONES**



DAUGHTERS OF ETERNITY

by **JAMES MAC CREIGH**
ACES OF SCIENCE FICTION
LYLE MOHROE • WALTER KUBILIUS
RAY CUMMINGS • AND MANY OTHERS

EASY WAY...

Tintz Hair

JET BLACK!

(ALSO 7 SHADES OF BLACK, BROWN, TITIAN AND BLONDE)

New Creme Shampoo instantly imparts lovely black color to hair that is

**STREAKED • DULL • GRAY
FADED • GRAYING • AGEING
BURNT • LIFELESS**

THIS remarkable new creme shampoo discovery, Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring, lathers and washes out dirt, grease and grime as it *instantly* gives hair a real smooth, Jet Black Tint that fairly glows with life and lustre. Don't put up with gray, faded, dull, burnt, streaked, off-color hair a minute longer. Tintz Creme Shampoo contains genuine Paraphenylene Diamine and is a real Instant Hair Coloring. The first application leaves your hair completely tinted; black, lovely, easy to manage. No waiting for results. Colors so smooth and even, experts find it difficult to detect. Won't hurt permanents. Now being specially introduced all over America by mail for only \$1.00.



LOOK YEARS YOUNGER—End your gray hair worries NOW. One application of Tintz completely tints gray, off-color hair so it will not be detected. Order today on our guarantee of "satisfaction or money back" offer.

**SEND NO MONEY FOR THIS AMAZING NEW HAIR COLORING
Mail Coupon on Guarantee Results Must Delight You or No Cost**

Tintz' chemists have at last perfected an amazing new hair coloring method. It is a creme shampoo containing genuine PARAPHENYLENE DIAMINE, the best hair coloring agent known to mankind! Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring *instantly* colors all gray, streaked, faded hair right in your own home to a natural-like, lasting color that matches and defies detection. Won't wash off or run off. Positively will not affect permanent waves. Leaves hair soft—easy to manage.

CHOICE OF 8 LOVELY SHADES

**JET BLACK—BLACK—DARK BROWN
MED. WARM BROWN—MED. DRAB BROWN
LIGHT BROWN—AUBURN (TITIAN)—BLONDE**

We want you to try Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring. We want you to take advantage of this special introductory offer and mail the coupon today. Send no money. On arrival of package, deposit only \$1 plus postage and tax with postman. **READ THE CAUTION**—Use Only as Directed on

Label—then shampoo-tint your own hair right in your own home. We are sure just one trial will convince anyone who wishes to dye their own hair that here at last is the hair coloring of their dreams! But if for any reason you wish to return the empty Tintz package, and you alone are the judge, do so in 7 days. We will immediately refund your \$1 and tax without question. This is today's big offer to anyone who wishes to **INSTANTLY** color hair! Don't delay but mail the coupon now—sure!

SHAMPOOING SPREADS COLOR EVENLY. It is impossible to do a blotchy job with Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring. If you can follow easy directions—results are guaranteed. Tintz contains PARAPHENYLENE DIAMINE—the best hair coloring agent known.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY SURE

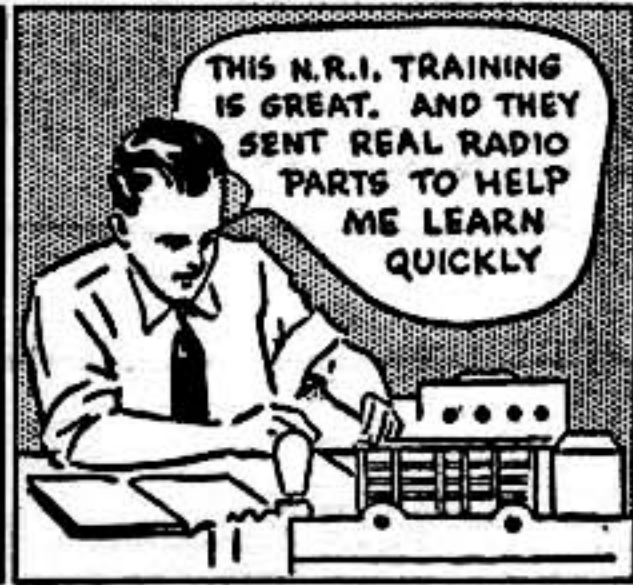
TINTZ CO., Dept. 978, 205 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.
Canadian Office: Dept. 978, 22 College Street, Toronto, Ont.
Send one full size tube Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring in shade checked below. On arrival I will deposit the special introductory offer price of \$1.00 plus 10% tax and postage charges with postman on guarantee I can return the empty tube for any reason within 7 days, and you will refund my \$1 and tax. (If money comes with order, Tintz pays the postage.) 3 for \$2.50 plus 10% Federal Excise Tax.
 Jet Black Dark Brown Med. Drab Brown Auburn (Titian)
 Black Med. Warm Brown Light Brown Blonde
Name
Print Plainly
Address.....
City.....State.....



YES- I'M CONVINCED THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD MONEY IN RADIO. I'M GOING TO START TRAINING FOR RADIO RIGHT NOW.

NO- NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.

BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW



THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS GREAT. AND THEY SENT REAL RADIO PARTS TO HELP ME LEARN QUICKLY



YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.

I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME

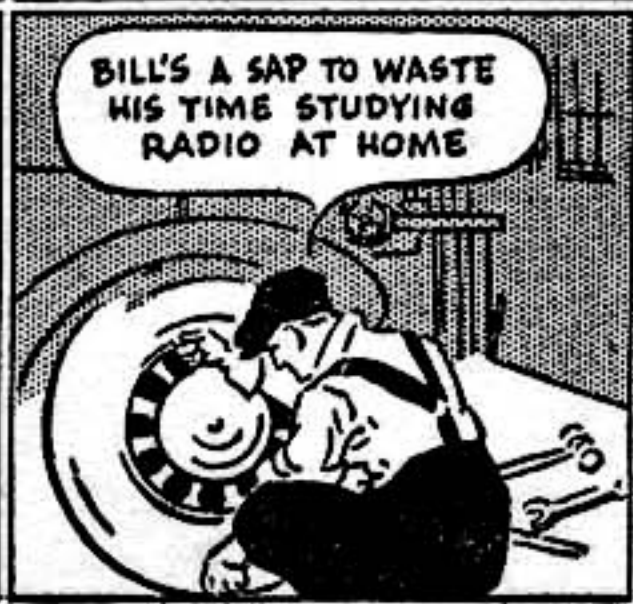
THANKS



OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU, YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM, UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute Established 25 Years

nection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. Many are getting special ratings in the Army and Navy; extra rank and pay.

Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valu-

able practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Find Out How I Train You for Good Pay in Radio

Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.

J. E. Smith, President Dept. 2BS9, National Radio Institute Washington, D. C.

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers the chance to make \$5, \$10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. There is an increasing demand for full time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators, too. Many make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. On top of record business, the Radio Industry is getting millions and millions of dollars in Defense Orders. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you for these opportunities.

Why Many Radio Technicians I Train Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Over 800 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are over 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good pay jobs in con-


EXTRA PAY IN ARMY, NAVY, TOO

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay.

THIS FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2BS9 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.
 Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....
 Address.....
 City..... State.....



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ASTONISHING STORIES

ALL STORIES NEW

VOL. 3

MARCH, 1942

NO. 3

NOVELETTES

- SLAVES OF THE UNKNOWN** by Neil R. Jones 10
Desperate, lost, the machine men of Zor took off on the most perilous mission they had ever faced—against a foe that could not die!
- TRACKS ACROSS THE DARKNESS** By Robert Arthur 25
A broken-down space pilot, a girl with the key to a planet's destiny . . . a day when the two must meet—or see their civilization perish!
- THE SHADOW PEOPLE** by Ray Cummings 86
Phantoms of the night or masters of tomorrow—who were the shadow people of Targh, who had sworn to make our world their kingdom?

SHORT STORIES

- THE MAN WHO KNEW ROGER STANLEY** . . by Joseph Gilbert 43
Somewhere, some place, your children's children may see him—the man who saved the world—at the price of becoming a space exile forever.
- PIED PIPER** by Lyle Monroe 54
Master of war and peace was he, the man who had exacted a dreadful penalty to prove the grim truth of his creed: "I serve the world—but I am slave to no nation in it!"
- DAUGHTERS OF ETERNITY** by James McCreigh 66
War lords of the Solar System, the fate of the ages in their hands—but they forgot one burning obstacle to the best laid plans in history—men, nations and galaxies may perish, but a dead man's thoughts may live forever!
- VOICE IN THE VOID** by Walter Kubiilius 77
A voice from the past . . . a city of the dead . . . a man who dared gamble the secrets of the infinite—against his own life!
- THE MESSAGE** by Richard Wilson 82
"This is my message. Keep away from your next assignment. No news story is worth the price—a death of madness in an uninhabited future!"

SPECIAL FEATURES

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Sidelights about authors and fans worldwide
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Digests and excerpts from fan mag contributors
- FAN MAGS** 64
What to look for and where to find it
- THE MAIL BAG** 75
Bouquets and brickbats—as we learn what readers think of us.

Cover by Wesso

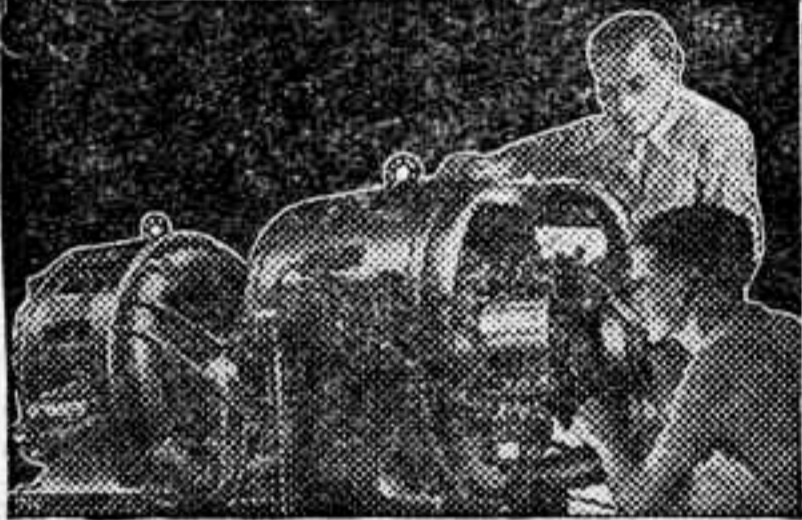
NEXT ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 1ST!



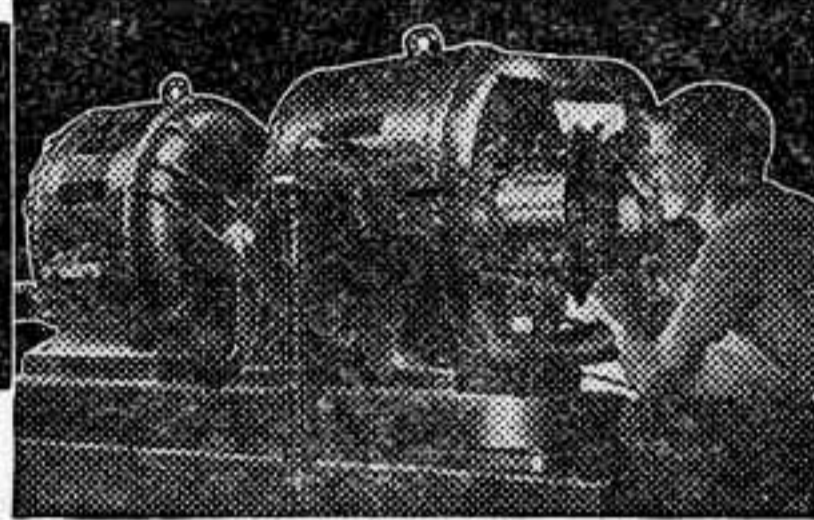
H. C. Lewis

QUICK EASY WAY ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS by Actual SHOP WORK **NOT BOOKS**

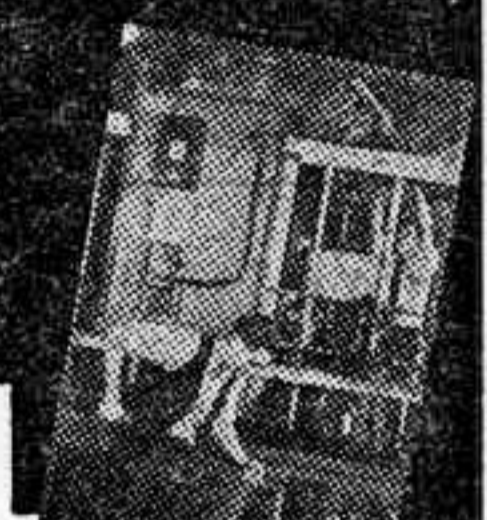
To
TRAIN
FOR



FIRST--You are told and shown how to do it.



THEN--You do the job yourself.



HOUSE WIRING
only one of the many
branches you
"Learn By Doing."

DOES YOUR PRESENT JOB QUALIFY UNDER THESE 4 IMPORTANT RULES?

Don't be fooled by a "mere job." Does your present job offer you a permanent job and a future in good times or bad times? If it doesn't . . . If it is just a "job" because conditions are good today . . . it may not be a job when conditions slacken up again.

You should take an inventory of your prospects now—

Ask yourself these 4 important questions—
No. 1.—Does the field I'm in today offer me a permanent job and a future regardless of good or bad times?—No. 2.—Is the field I'm in a permanent one?—No. 3.—Is it growing and will it continue to grow in the years ahead?—No. 4.—Is it a field that will always exist?

If it doesn't qualify under these 4 rules, now is the time to do something about it.

Electricity is a fast growing field. It qualifies under all these rules. It offers you your opportunity — if you will get ready for it.

Here at my school in Chicago, the world's Electrical Center, you can get 12 weeks' Shop Training in ELECTRICITY and an extra 4 weeks' Course in Radio. Here at Coyne you "Learn by Doing."

You will be trained on actual equipment and machinery and because of our method of training, you don't need previous experience or a lot of education. You do actual work on electrical machinery.

Here in my school you work on generators, motors, dynamos, you do house wiring, wind armatures and do actual work in many other branches of electricity and right now I'm including valuable instruction in Diesel, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at no extra cost. Our practical shop methods make it easier to learn—First the instructors tell you how a thing should be done—then they show you how it should be done—then you do the actual work yourself.

AN EXTRA
4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED

I'LL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

You can get this training first—then you can pay for it later in easy monthly payments, starting 60 days after your 12 weeks' training period is over—then you have 12 months to complete your payments. If you need part time work to help out with expenses while training in my shops, my employment department will help you get it. Then after graduation this department will give you valuable lifetime employment service.

Send the coupon today for all details. When I get it I'll send you my big free book containing dozens of pictures of students at work in

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
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my shops. I'll also tell you about my "Pay After Graduation" plan, how many earn while learning and how we help our students after graduation. Fill in, clip coupon, mail today for my big free book and all the facts.



"I sure was satisfied with Coyne... I got work right after I graduated and I feel that Coyne has brought me success in increasing my earnings."
J. Halyk, Canada

"... Coyne has first class instructors to teach you the simplest things to start with and they have the equipment to show you these things as you advance..."
Ben Rickman, S. Car.



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500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 22-76, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Please send me free your big catalog and full particulars of your present offer, also your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan, and also tell me about the Extra 4 Weeks' Radio Course.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....



Editor's Note: It is the intention of this department to publish news and information about fans and their activities, plus interesting sidelights about the professionals who write, edit or draw for the science fiction magazines. Viewpoints will be open to, and serve as the voice of, all readers and fans who care to make use of it. All items should be addressed to **ASTONISHING STORIES**, Fictioneers, Inc., 210 East 43 Street, New York City.

Ray Cummings Has a Family of Authors

RAY CUMMINGS is now rated as one of the grand old men of science fiction, and he has lived as bizarre a life as many of the characters he writes about.

Like all people of that superior genre known as "Scientifictionists", he displayed his advanced mental powers early in his career by completing a three-year course in physics at Princeton University in three months!

For five years he was a personal assistant to Thomas Alva Edison, and because of his close association with that American genius he is often sought out by biographers and other people interested in sidelights in the life of Edison.

Cummings has lived in Bermuda, Quebec and Florida. He has survived a hurricane and shipwreck. On the latter occasion he was adrift many days in an open boat with his wife and infant daughter.

Versatile, he tried his hand at oil-drilling, timber cruising and working on a Porto Rican orange plantation before seriously turning his hand to writing.

Bob Davis, one of the traditional

"greats" of the pulp publishing field, accepted and published Ray Cummings' first story, a short novel called "The Girl In The Golden Atom." The result was over-night fame for Ray Cummings as the creator of a new plot in fantasy—the atom dwindling theme. Years later Cummings was to pioneer another new theme—that of expanding *out* of the atom we live in into the super-cosmos. Bob Davis played him up as "A Verne returned and a Wells going forward."

Several of Ray's books have been popularly received, among them "Tarrano the Conqueror" and "The Man Who Mastered Time."

But aside from all these things, perhaps the most unusual thing about Ray Cummings is his literary family.

Elizabeth Starr, his fourteen-year-old daughter, bids fair to surpass her dad. At the tender age of thirteen, when most girls are concerned with nothing more important than discarding their dolls and growing up, she sold a short story to *Liberty Magazine!* So popular was this story that it received comment from opera star Kirsten Flagstad.

Subsequently the story and Elizabeth Starr were featured on the radio.

(Continued on page 8)

BILL, YOU SURE HAVE A SWELL BUILD! DID YOU TRAIN FOR A LONG TIME?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! THE ATLAS DYNAMIC TENSION SYSTEM MAKES MUSCLES GROW FAST!



Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!

Charles Atlas

an actual, untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."



J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion
Cup Winner
This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.

Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

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

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

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

ONLY 15 MINUTES A DAY

Do you want big, broad shoulders—a fine, powerful chest—biceps like steel—arms and legs rippling with muscular strength—a stomach ridged with bands of sinewy muscle—and a build you can be proud of? Then just give me the opportunity to prove that "Dynamic Tension" is what you need.

No "ifs," "ands," or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about "Dynamic Tension" and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

Send for FREE BOOK

Mail the coupon right now for full details and I'll send you my illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Tells all about my "Dynamic Tension" method. Shows actual photos of men I've made into Atlas Champions. It's a valuable book! And it's FREE. Send for your copy today. Mail the coupon to me personally. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83P, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



CHARLES ATLAS

Dept. 83P, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City..... State.....

(Continued from page 6)

Perhaps you have seen stories of Gabrielle Wilson in many of the pulps? Well, she is Ray Cummings' wife, and among her output have been numerous science-fiction, weird and horror yarns. A literary family with a vengeance!

With the Science-Fiction Clubs

DOTTED across the continent are numerous science-fiction clubs which are open to fans, editors, authors and artists alike. Often they are the hub of all activities in the district, and just as often a source of valuable contact both social and professional. Attendance to non-members is free of charge, without exception, and visitors are heartily welcomed.

Below we present a partial list of the science-fiction fan clubs, with a few points of salient interest concerning them.

The Queens Science-Fiction League. This club encompasses the entire New York area and has active members who commute from New Jersey. It is more than three years old now, and has had some bang-up meetings in its time. Among its members in the past have been such illustrious names as Farnsworth Wright, Frank R. Paul, Eando Binder, Hannes Bok, John Victor Peterson, Harry Walton, Malcolm Jameson, Thos. S. Gardner, Miss Mary Gnaedinger, and many others. There is usually a good program under the able directorship of William S. Sykora. Those interested in attending may write him, care of P. O. Box 84, Elmont, N. Y.

The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. This club has held well over one hundred meetings, and meets weekly in a famous Los Angeles cafeteria. Among its many members and regular visitors are Robert Heinlein, Charles D. Hornig, Jim Mooney, Jack Williamson, Morojo, Russ Hodgkins, Ray Bradbury, T. Bruce

Yerke, Forrest J. Ackerman and others. Most big-shots in the fantasy field have stopped over at the LASFS at some time in their careers, and the program is always interesting and varied. Write the club care of Box 6475, Metropolitan Station, Los Angeles, Calif., if you are interested in its activities.

The Philadelphia Science-Fiction Society. Years may come and years may go but the PSFS goes on forever. Led by top-notch fans, Robert A. Madle and John V. Baltadonis, this Philly club is internationally renowned for the yearly science-fiction conferences it holds. The Philly Conference is now a tradition in fandom, and many important turning points in science-fiction fandom have occurred because of decisions arrived at during the course of a Philly Conference. Members include such notables as Alexander M. Phillips, Milton A. Rothman, Jack Agnew, Charles Bert, and many others. Write Robert A. Madle at 333 E. Belgrade St., Philadelphia, Penna., if you would like to attend.

The Soloroid Club, of Westwood, N. J., is a new live-wire organization under the capable directorship of Roderick Gaetz. They meet the last Sunday of every month at the home of the director, 31 Bogert Place, Westwood, N. J. Manly Wade Wellman, famous science-fiction author, is present at all the meetings, and Joseph J. Milliard, another well known fictioneer, is an occasional attendant. If you possibly can attend, do so.

Minneapolis Fantasy Society is another comparatively new club which already ranks high. Clifford D. Simak, famous science-fiction author, is its director, and such well known authors and fans as Carl Jacobi, Oliver E. Saari, John L. Chapman, Morris S. Dollens, Douglas Blakeley are members. This club is very active. John L. Chapman, of 1521 Como Ave., S. E., Minneapolis, Minn., can probably tell you more about it.



IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$2,000 to \$10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now*.

Over 2000 Certified
Public Accountants among
LaSalle alumni

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I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address..... City.....

Position..... Age.....



SLAVES OF THE UNKNOWN



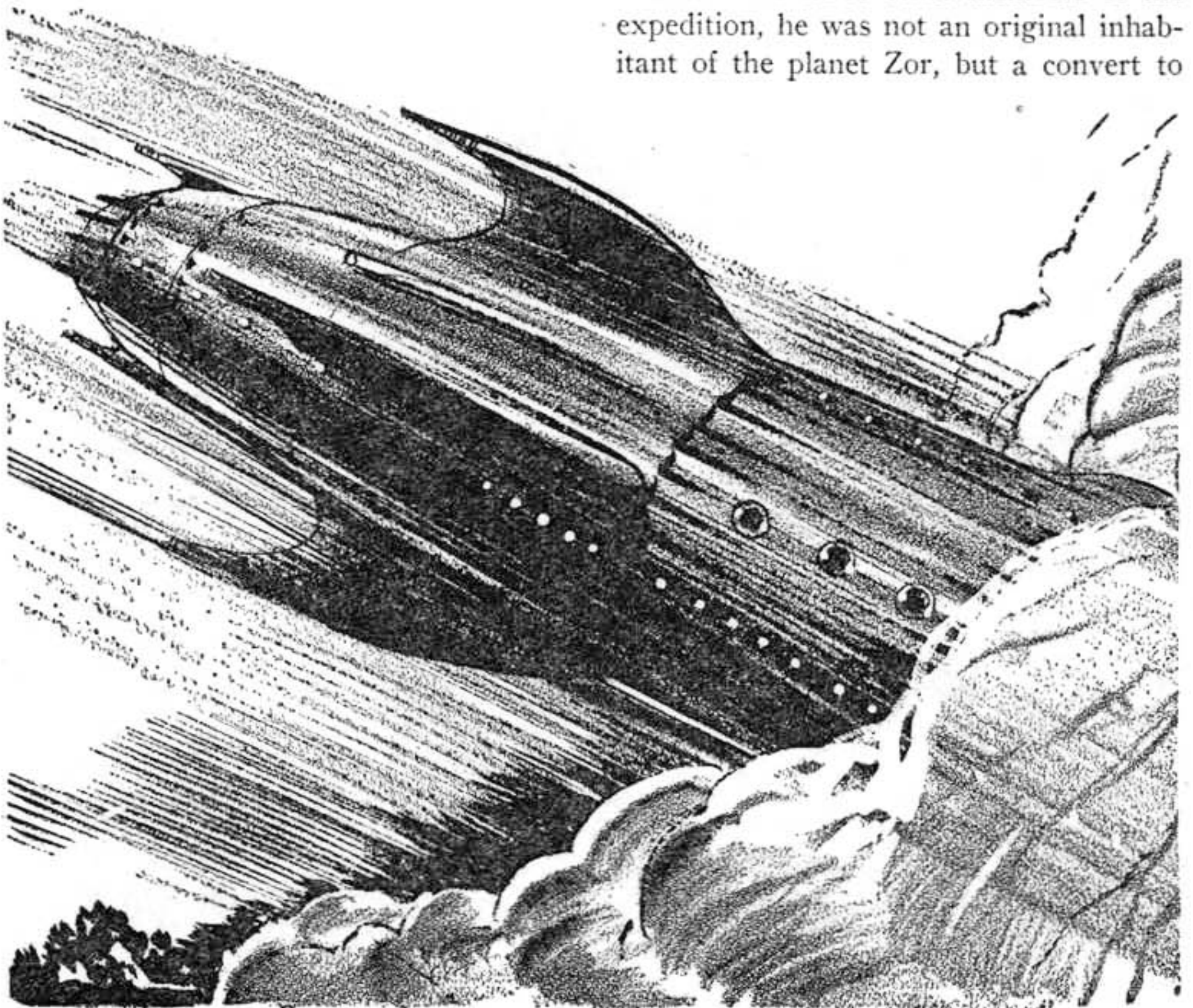
By
**Neil R.
Jones**

FOREWORD

PROFESSOR JAMESON, one time of the planet Earth, had become a machine man of Zor, an organic brain in the coned head of a machine which the brain directed. The rest of the machine comprised a metal cubed body, equipped with four metal legs and six metal tentacles. A circle of television eyes

stared from around the base of the coned head, while a single eye looked directly upward from the apex. He and his companions communicated by mental telepathy.

Nearly two score Zoromes manned the ship of the expedition which was under the joint command of Professor Jameson and 744U-21. The professor was better known to his metal companions as 21M-M392. Like three other members of the expedition, he was not an original inhabitant of the planet Zor, but a convert to



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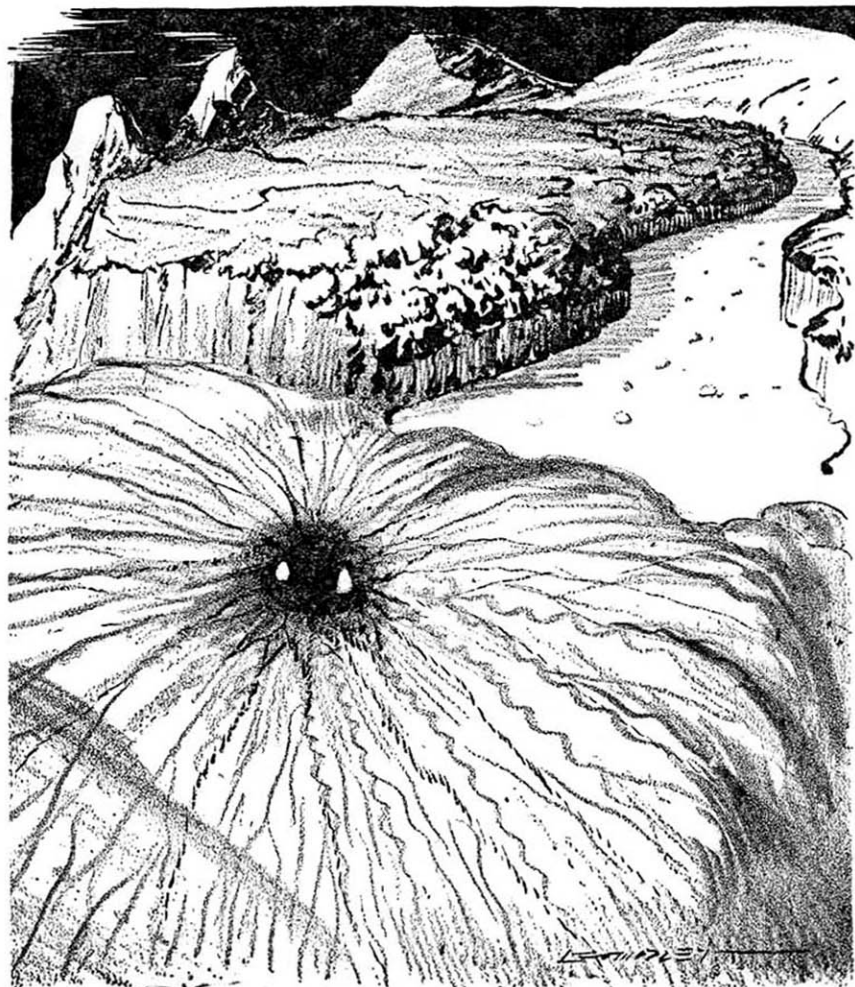
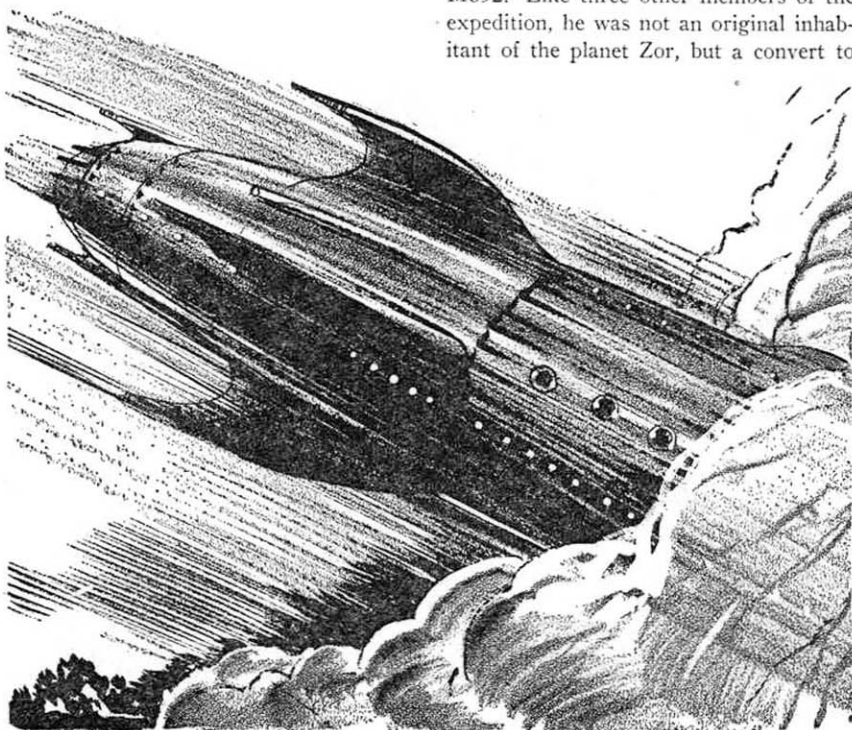
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Desperate, lost, the machine men of Zor took off on the most perilous mission they had ever faced—against a foe that could not die!

their metal ranks. Forty million years before the opening of this particularly strange adventure of the machine men of Zor, he had been a normal human being on the planet Earth. He had sought physical proof against the disintegration of his body after death, and his corpse had been hurled into the starry heavens in a rocket where the chill vacuum of the cosmos

preserved it for what might have been eternity had the wandering ship of the machine men not found the funeral rocket.

His brain was recalled to life in the shadow of a lonely, untenanted Earth, its dead surface lit feebly by a cooling sun. The Zoromes placed the professor's brain in one of the coned heads, and he set out upon an odyssey of unparalleled adven-



Desperate, lost, the machine men of Zor took off on the most perilous mission they had ever faced—against a foe that could not die!

their metal ranks. Forty million years before the opening of this particularly strange adventure of the machine men of Zor, he had been a normal human being on the planet Earth. He had sought physical proof against the disintegration of his body after death, and his corpse had been hurled into the starry heavens in a rocket where the chill vacuum of the cosmos

preserved it for what might have been eternity had the wandering ship of the machine men not found the funeral rocket.

His brain was recalled to life in the shadow of a lonely, untenanted Earth, its dead surface lit feebly by a cooling sun. The Zoromes placed the professor's brain in one of the coned heads, and he set out upon an odyssey of unparalleled adven-



tures with the machine men, on their way back through the galaxy of suns and worlds to Zor, in a far corner of the Universe.

Since reaching Zor, this new expedition had embarked upon a roundabout direction, which Professor Jameson expected would ultimately lead him back in the direction of his own world and the nearby system of Sirius, where the strangely evolutionized descendants of humanity had fled millions of years ago when Earth had become chill and the sun had grown subdued. As the present narrative opens, however, we find them upon the third world of a system comprised of five planets.

* * *

ORANGE sunlight streamed down upon the hull of the spaceship, moored upon a plain of waving, yellow grasses. The sun was not far above the horizon, and was slowly sinking. Fantastic animals and birds uttered strange cries and noises, but showed little curiosity in regards to the machine men.

Professor Jameson and 744U-21 stood and watched machine men flying in from different directions on their metal wings. They were about to leave this third world of the orange sun. There were two outer planets in opposition at their present orbital phases, and it had been the agreed design of the machine men to explore these nearer worlds before proceeding to those closer the sun.

"I have a strange curiosity, developed since we came to this third world, to see what the second planet is like," said the professor. "Now that we are about to leave here for the fourth and fifth planets, this curiosity seems to have grown stronger."

"A coincidence," 744U-21 observed, "for I feel the same way, but it is more logical to visit the outer worlds first."

The professor was inclined to agree with him. It was strange that they should

both become so unreasonably obsessed with the same idea.

6W-438 and 8L-404 approached.

"I think we are making a mistake going to those outer worlds before we have explored the worlds closest the sun," said 6W-438.

"What makes you think that?" 744U-21 asked.

"I don't know. But 8L-404 thinks the same, and so do others with whom I have talked."

"21MM392 and I have just discussed having had the same premonition of something unusual about that second world. There must be a peculiar influence about this third planet to move us all to the same idea. If there is, then it is the only item of particular interest we have found here. It seems to me that for a planet lacking in interest, as this one is, we have stayed much longer than is our usual custom. If this world exerts such influence contrary to orderly thought, then we have two good reasons for quitting it and heading for the outer worlds."

Such was 744U-21's logic, yet the professor wondered about this strange influence. What was it? Did this world exert a chemical or magnetic deterrent to the designs of the Zoromes? Would it disappear when the spaceship left the third world?

When Professor Jameson and 20R-654, regular pilot of the spaceship, stepped aboard, they found 744U-21 in an uncommunicative mood. The machine man appeared deeply lost in thought, and he failed to catch their initial remarks.

"It is surprising, 20R-654, how so many of us, including yourself, should show such a lively interest in this second world, for no logical reason at all," said the professor.

744U-21's mental processes appeared to be so guarded, however, as to appear non-existent. Professor Jameson radiated a strong call to arouse 744U-21 from his

deep introspection. The machine man gave no response.

"Something is wrong with him!" exclaimed 20R-654. "We must call some of the others—6W-438—284D-167—948D-21! He appears to be in a coma!"

The machine men responded, and hasty examination was made.

"This does not happen to us unless our metal heads have suffered a blow of some kind!" said 948D-21. "Such an accident could not have happened to 744U-21 here. At least, the head shows no signs of it."

The machine men examined 744U-21's metal head thoughtfully. Recalling 744U-21's suspicions regarding this third world, Professor Jameson immediately gave orders to 20R-654 to abandon it and head for the outer planets.

The third world fell away from them, a huge, curving globe that grew smaller, a slowly rotating ball. Professor Jameson was engrossed with their departure when 41C-98 caught his attention in alarm.

"The sun is growing larger!"

"What?"

"We are not headed for the outer planets! The ship is proceeding sunward!"

The professor and several others hurried to the control room. 20R-654 had been given specific orders to start for the outer worlds. It was unlike him to make mistakes. They found the control room locked. This, too, was unusual.

"20R-654! You are going in the wrong direction!"

There was no answer.

"We are headed sunward!"

"Do not fear," came 20R-654's eventual reply. "Have I ever driven this ship into a star? We shall curve about the sun and reach the second world."

In 20R-654's reply, Professor Jameson caught a strange, irresponsible note—as though he were only repeating a form given him.

"But you were told to go to the worlds

beyond the orbit of the one we just left, not to the inner planets."

There was no answer to this. In fact, the searching minds of the machine men could gather no trace of mental activity beyond the metal door.

"Unlock the door, 20R-654, and let us inside! This is 21MM392!"

This time, the pilot's mental radiations were felt, but were strained and made with apparent effort at concentration. "I cannot move to do it. I can only do what I am allowed to do and what I am urged to do. My limbs and my mechanism seem shut off, and my mental impulses are diverted. The only direction I can move this ship is in the direction of the second world. Orders incessantly bombard my brain, and whatever I would do contrary to them, of my own free will, I cannot do."

The machine men registered mental alarm. Here lay a dangerous affinity to the condition of 744U-21. A grim and purposeful enemy held two of them in its power.

"We shall break down the door!" cried the professor.

He curved a fore tentacle so as to bring his built-in heat ray into play. Then he discovered with surprise that it did not work. His fellow Zoromes were in similar difficulties. They stood paralyzed, unable to move. All received a strong suggestion to leave the running of the spaceship to 20R-654 and not try to interfere.

"There is something aboard this ship!" exclaimed 29G-75 desperately. "Not back on that planet we left! It dominates us!"

"Is it hypnotic?" demanded 5ZQ35.

"It is not willful," came 20R-654's analysis of his own situation. "It is more like my controls were being operated by something else while I stood helplessly watching."

"Search the ship," said the professor, "and see if there is anybody or anything aboard which could cause this."

FREE of the idea of breaking down the control room door, the machine men found they were allowed to move about, yet they were conscious of a lurking force ready to retard any effort considered harmful to its designs. The ship, and every cubic inch of space inside it, was carefully searched. Nothing was found.

"These things are intradimensional!" 92ZQ153 suggested.

"Remote control," offered 41C-98. "They are governing our actions from the third world."

"Or perhaps from the second—where we are going."

"There is one thing certain," said Professor Jameson. "We can only wait and see what our arrival on the second planet will bring forth. There is an unseen vigilance with a power over us which we seem unable to break. Let us see whether we are being directed for good or for evil." He waved a tentacle in the direction they were taking. "Ahead lies unknown adventure—what kind we do not know—and probably strange experiences, too. It is what we seek for, though generally on our own initiative. This time we are being driven."

They approached ever closer the flaming star upon whose axis the planets swung. No more attempts were made to hinder 20R-654's course in the direction of the second world, and the deterrent influences of the unseen vigilance remained dormant. Yet, in small, suggestive ways, its heavy, invisible hand revealed that it remained poised, ready to clamp down upon any activity contrary to its own purpose.

The revival of 744U-21 afforded them no further intelligence, either. The machine man told of having suddenly lost his senses as he stood waiting for the ship to leave the third world. He likened it to nothing he had ever experienced since becoming a machine man. He had lost

consciousness before this through blows on the head, but this had been neither violent nor abrupt.

"It was more like an experience I remember as a flesh-and-blood Zorome, previous to my brain transposition. It was like being given a drug and feeling one's senses sliding away beneath its effect."

20R-654 rounded the sun, and from that time on the first and second worlds grew in size from bright, glittering points of light to glowing discs against the star-sprinkled firmament.

The second world loomed large and green as they sped to intercept it rotating on its orbit. From afar, they were agreed that it supported life, not only through spectroscopic analysis but because of its position from the sun and its semi-visible blanket of atmosphere, which softened the star-glow next to the planet's curvature.

Approaching closer, their telescopic observation revealed much vegetation, while land predominated over the areas of water, mainly comprised of land-locked seas. The diameter of the planet the professor estimated to be little more than four thousand miles, yet the density promised to be great enough to almost equal that of his own earth.

20R-654 reported suggestions received that he cruise a few miles above the planet instead of landing at once. This gave the machine men a chance to examine the topography and also search for life forms with the telescopes.

"Look at that bare, gray mountain." 744U-21 called the professor's attention to a glittering formation. "It glistens in the sun as though it had been rained upon."

"There is some kind of life near that mountain which has enough intelligence to clear the land. All the forest round about, except for here and there a long strip, has been cleared."

They traveled on, noticing that fre-

quently there were swampy morasses located near the vicinity of the irregular clearings. Definite steps were suddenly laid out by the unknown intelligence. They were told to head for one of the peculiar gray mountains and power blast it as the spaceship swooped low.

"Those mountains must be fortresses of some kind," 6W-438 suggested. "The intelligence which directs us wants us to make war upon its inmates."

"Shall we refuse?"

"What can we expect to happen to us if we do refuse?"

As if in answer, every machine man became assailed with an uncomfortable feeling of internal, mechanical stress. Their limbs commenced jerking oddly, and they felt helpless. The thought was strongly implanted upon their minds that disobedience meant destruction. The attention of the machine men became focused all at once upon 28A-155 who was acting in an alarming manner. He staggered—and from his brain emanated an agonizing chaos of incoherent thought. The other machine men were powerless to move. Suddenly, as it had come, their helplessness passed, and they became once more mechanically relaxed. 28A-155, however, fell flat upon one side of his cubed body and lay still. From his brain there emanated no thought waves of any kind, either legible or chaotic.

The rest of the machine men moved slowly about him in dread anticipation. They groped for a mental spark, such as the unconsciousness which 744U-21 had known, but they found nothing. It was 119M-5 who put into expression the grim truth which by this time they had all guessed.

"Dead! Something has been done to his brain!"

Once again, the helpless feeling of being unable to combat something they could not find nor see assailed them. Their inability to function properly was still upon

them when the ship rocked to the recoil of a powerful blast. 20R-654 was firing from the control room which, under orders, he had once more locked. Suddenly, with this realization, their self control reasserted itself, and they were allowed to look upon the damage 20R-654 had done.

The spaceship was wheeling upward from one of the gray mountains which 20R-654 had bombarded. As for the "fortress"—it had become horribly alive and in motion, twisting, shuddering and stretching out of shape like a great mound of jelly.

"It is alive!" the professor radiated in amazement. "The whole mountain is alive! It is a gigantic life form—the largest by far we have ever looked upon!"

"But what can it be?"

"A mass of life! It has eaten a broad path through that forest down there!"

"But can it be intelligent?"

"There is no telling! Probably not!"

"We have evidently been brought here to destroy these things," 744U-21 told them. "Now we know our imposed mission."

They were aware of a prevalent satisfaction arising from the governing force which had so ruthlessly destroyed the life of 28A-155 as a severe lesson in discipline. 22R-654 continued to blast at the vast mountain of jelly which lashed out madly, with pedicles thrusting upward in a mad frenzy only to fall back and once more become a part of the central mass. The machine men all at once received the impression that the nucleus of the loathsome monster was to be destroyed. Other machine men took up the bombardment, and soon the vast mound of hideous animation was reduced to lifelessness.

THAT there were thousands of these things to be destroyed, the unseen intelligence made plain to them, and they were not allowed to linger long in the vicinity of this, their first kill.

Another mountain was found and destroyed, and another after that. Fully a score of the repulsive bulks were destroyed before the machine men were ordered back to the scene of their first slaughter. They were directed to land, hunt out the darker-colored nucleus, and, if it were not already destroyed by the blasts from above, to destroy it.

Fifteen machine men set out on foot to perform the task under the leadership of the professor. Still a good distance from the center of the organic debris they had made of the giant organism, the machine men commenced to find and pick up small pieces of what had comprised the living mountain. It was a semi-transparent, viscous material, like gelatin but much tougher, for a scarcely visible network of translucent fibers interworked through it and were strongly suggestive of a nerve system. As the machine men reached the central shattered mass, they found that these fibers increased in size the closer to the center they came. It was by this means that the machine men discovered the nucleus, a hard, dark mass nearly a foot in diameter. The professor destroyed it with the heat ray built into his fore tentacle.

They made stops with the spaceship at all points where they had previously destroyed one of the monsters. In this way, they accounted for all the nuclei which bombardment from the spaceship had missed. Through their own experience and the prompted suggestions of the master control, the Zoromes learned that the things they were destroying originated in minute form and kept eating and growing. They were little more than giant amoebas, but they never subdivided according to the natural law. As far as the machine men could discover, there was no reproduction, and this puzzled them, for where had these giant forms originated in the first place? The nuclei, it appeared, never died. There must always

have been the same number from the beginning. It was evident that the mammoth amoebas were a danger or hindrance to the unseen intelligence, and that the latter had no way of destroying them. This puzzled the machine men.

They grew and grew, rolling slowly along, absorbing everything organic in their path, swallowing the forests and wild life indiscriminately, until they either reached a stage where they were too large to move, or else the food supply ran out. Then, the entire mass, with the exception of the nucleus, stood still and died. A rotting decomposition set in, a stinking morass resulted. These were the swamps the machine men had seen from on high, and into this muck and mire the nucleus sank out of sight to remain dormant for a long time, while lush vegetation sprang up as the swamp dried out. Finally, the nucleus emerged from its dormant state to recommence the cycle once more. The machine men discovered that the giant amoebas possessed no intelligence.

PROFESSOR JAMESON found that his theory regarding the blanket mental attunement of the secret intelligence to the machine men worked out pretty much as he had figured it would. Their mental contact became more or less synchronized to the Zorome mental structure. There were times when it completely missed the professor's mental contact. At the peril of risking the same fate which had overtaken 28A-155, Professor Jameson decided to test the power of the unseen intelligence.

"We shall leave the ship for a time and wander over a part of this strange world, the next time we go out looking for nuclei to destroy," the professor told 454ZQ2.

Professor Jameson and five companions found this easy to do, hiding among the shattered remains of an amoebic colossus. The spaceship left without them, and they waited for a time before coming out into

the open in order to explore the planet.

"We had best start out across the hills," said the professor, "for if we are missed, it is probable that 20R-654 will be forced to return to all the landing points we made and search for us."

"I am not entirely free of the strange influence, though it does not seem so strong," 6W-438 announced. "There now appears to be a lack of directing power. A confusion and disorder seems to have been created, as if this alien intelligence was at a loss to understand and cope with an entirely new situation."

"I feel something like that," 5ZQ35 told them. "It must be getting away from the spaceship which does it."

Before dawn came, they found themselves entering a country of more rugged ground than that which they had left behind them. They walked over rocky terrain dotted here and there with shrubbery. The rock was brittle and snapped easily beneath the weight of the machine men. Several times, they suffered falls. 6W-438 bent a leg, and the professor's cubed body was so badly dented on one corner as to completely nullify operation of his tentacles.

As the dim starlight yielded to the first gray tints of dawn, Professor Jameson became confirmed in the fact that they were not going to lose the alien intelligence. He felt its subtle, groping power, as if it were undecided what to do. They all felt it more or less. It was 33F-65 on whom it asserted itself most consciously. More than this, it grew stronger and more assertive as dawn blossomed into sunrise. The alien intelligence then became commanding, ordering them to return to the spaceship.

The land rose on a gentle slope, and they came to the edge of a rugged declivity. Beyond and below, as they approached the edge, they saw more fertile land than that over which they had come through the night. At the edge, they made a sur-

prising and quite shocking discovery.

"One of the giant things!" 454ZQ2 exclaimed, waving a tentacle below.

It was true. A huge, gray, gelatinous mass moved slowly, inch by inch, its summit less than fifty feet below the rim of the overhanging cliff. Behind it lay a broad, devastated swath meandering backward into the distance. The creature was little more than half grown and possessed a diameter of something less than two hundred feet.

The machine men stood close together in one spot looking down upon the giant amoeba. They were unaware that the cliff shelved outward at this point, or at least they had forgotten the brittle character of the rock, for they were caught helpless as it broke way beneath them with a growing rumble. Six machine men and several large rock fragments were sent hurtling into the gray mass below.

The professor fell feet first into the mountainous organism, which shuddered from the impacts of the falling bodies. He sank to his neck and helplessly watched his companions struggling with their tentacles to regain the surface of the loathsome creature and slide down the outside. But they were not to escape so easily. From a smooth surface rose a giant pedicle. It reared menacingly above the six machine men, then flattened and descended upon them. The professor felt the resistance beneath his metal feet give way as he slid further into the living mass. Through the translucence, he could dimly see a corner of metal body and tentacle projected towards him. It was 92ZQ153.

Their thoughts flashed back and forth as they discussed their situation. The professor's tentacles were unmanageable; he could not use his heat ray. They might have to stay there until the thing died, or the spaceship came and destroyed it. In this latter possibility there lay danger to them.

"Look!" exclaimed 5ZQ35. "The thing

is casting out the rocks within it!"

It was true. Finding them strictly inedible, the colossus was gently pushing the rocks to the surface once more.

"We may be next," said 6W-438. "This thing does not eat metal."

The machine men knew this to be true and waited patiently. But darkness came, and the light died out of the translucence above them, and still they remained prisoners. In fact, it was the professor's belief that they were gradually being worked closer to the center of the vast bulk.

With the coming of daylight once more, this fact became substantiated. They were deeper inside the thing. There was no hope of being cast out. They gave this up. It was their agreed opinion that the giant amoeba instinctively sensed the presence of their organic brains.

THERE came a time when dawn no longer appeared. At first their general opinion leaned to the fact that they had now descended beyond the reach of daylight. But a subtle sensing of a change in gravity and the gradual appearance of partly digested tree trunks pulled out by the roots revealed that the great creature had rolled along, and they were now on the bottomside. Daylight later reappeared weakly, and from that time on they never penetrated deeper into the mass.

They came to realize, not long after their fall from the cliff, that the intelligence which had dictated to them so ruthlessly had disappeared. There was no sign of it by any of them. Whether it lay dormant or had gone for good, they did not know.

They possessed only a confused record of the time which passed after their fall off the cliff. As to their future, they knew that their release would depend largely upon two eventualities. The machine men would come and destroy the great amoeba which had swallowed them, or eventually

the unthinking creature would find itself so large as to be unable to continue its slow rolling in any direction it chose, or it would run out of food. In either of the latter cases, it would die.

If the machine men destroyed the organism, their release would be both dangerous and rapid, and one or more of them might easily be released from life. If the creature died a natural death, their freedom would come with the gradual dissolution of the shapeless beast.

The machine men, however, reckoned without taking into account unexpected developments. It was 5ZQ35 who first noticed and pointed out an increase in the amount of light reaching them. The light faded once more, and 6W-438 hazarded the belief that the sun had been shining directly down upon their side of the monster. Night fell. During the night, 33F-65 made an exciting discovery.

"A leg of mine is free! It is sticking up from the surface! I am being pushed upward!"

"Make no motions with either your legs or tentacles!" the professor warned him. "This great dumb organism is giving up on digesting us, and we are being cast out! If you move, you may excite the thing to once more enfold and retain you!"

As 33F-65 reported more and more of his body being slowly pushed free, 454ZQ2 finally announced that a tentacle of his had reached the surface, followed by the tip of his head, so that the apex eye contemplated the starry night above a dark and obscure horizon. Then his lower eyes worked up far enough for him to look upon the dark, glistening surface of the unthinking giant which had eaten them and was now giving it up as a bad job.

Suddenly, 33F-65's cubed body worked free with a slight jump, and he went sliding to freedom down the side of the great creature and into a clump of bushes bordering the path of the feeding monster.

Walking clear, he waited for the others. 454ZQ2 was next, and the others followed at intervals. Dawn came as 6W-438, the last Zorome to be ejected, slid down the slippery outside of the feeding giant.

IN THE distance, they saw the looming escarpment from which they had plunged into their late, living prison. An aimless, meandering track behind the huge organism suggested a great deal of ground covered since their accident. For two days and nights, the machine men headed back in the direction of the shattered organism, where they had left the ship. They were now ready to be picked up again. 744U-21 had understood about their plans of coming back to the spot again, and had returned at intervals to look for them. The six machine men were picked up on their way back.

They found that although they had been free of the malignant influence since their fall into the gigantic amoeba, those aboard were still its slaves.

"Have there been any more fatalities?" the professor asked.

"No," 744U-21 replied, "but we found how 28A-155 died. A great number of his brain cells were destroyed. Something penetrated his brain, but it must have been a ray of some kind, for nothing was found in his brain."

Fifty-three rotations of the second world had passed since the professor's expedition had left the spaceship.

The six wanderers had not been aboard the ship for more than a half day before the same old feeling of mechanical subjection and disturbing influence commenced to creep over them once more. The professor had expected it, but had not known how soon it would come.

In the supply room for spare parts, 284D-167 and 7H-88 removed the professor's coned head and placed it upon another body, equipped with metal legs and tentacles, after which they immediate-

ly set to dismantling the old body. The professor waited until they had replaced one of his new tentacles with the one from the old body which contained his built-in heat ray.

With a new body, most of the consciousness of an invisible presence was removed. He was mentally aware of its proximity, but there was that freedom from restriction to his mechanical parts, as though he had left it with the old body. A spark of inspiration, born out of the discovery and closely allied to thoughts of his since his escape from the giant amoeba, leaped into being. He had left it in the old body! That was it! Or nearly so. But there was his head. That was still the same and accounted for the mental proximity.

He fought down a burning desire to acquaint the rest of the machine men with his theory. It was a dangerous thought for the alien intelligence to grasp. Just how dangerous he did not know—but he was going to find out.

Somewhat covertly and casually, he suggested to 454ZQ2 that they go to the laboratory where he wished to consult the Triped on a bit of scientific research. 454ZQ2 sensed by the professor's mysterious wave of a tentacle that something portentous loomed out of the professor's casual suggestion, but he placed all conjecture beyond the ordinary trend of his thoughts.

In the laboratory, Professor Jameson handed him a bit of peculiar mineral, a rather dense ore, which had been picked up near the remains of an amoebic giant on one of the machine men's search for nuclei.

"Tell me all you can about that," the professor instructed him. "Concentrate upon it, and pay no attention to what I am doing."

Although the Triped realized he was to draw any mind-listening vigilance away from the professor's subsequent actions,

he could not help but take furtive notice that 21MM392 was arranging powerful magnifying glasses to bear upon him.

"It is a soft metal," 454ZQ2 observed, "but it is not as heavy as gold or lead."

"Would you consider it a true metal, then?" the professor asked, bringing a large glass to focus on the Triped's cubed body, and slowly moving it about in a systematic coverage of the side towards him.

"Yes, I believe it to be a true metal."

"Malleable?"

"Perhaps. An alloy might serve to better purpose, however."

"You mean for strength," Professor Jameson suggested, "or possibly durability."

"Either—or both," 454ZQ2, somewhat aware of an absurdity in his reply, answered.

"Would it be useful to us in any way, do you think?" The professor stopped the glass and examined a tiny flaw in 454ZQ2's metal body. It was a pinhole—less than a pinhole, he found, by taking away the glass, although the flaw loomed large enough through the strong lens. He became so interested in the fact that the flaw belied its description by being perfectly round and of interminable depth that he failed to catch 454ZQ2's mental inanity to the effect that the new mineral might be used in making parts for the spaceship.

Professor Jameson swung onward to other parts of the Triped's metal body and discovered more of the "flaws." There were many to be found in the neighborhood of the joints, where tentacles and legs emerged from the metal cube. As he inspected them, something filled one of the round openings, and a capsule-like container floated out of the hole, directly towards the professor. In awe, he followed it with the glass, vaguely aware of a nonsensical monologue from 454ZQ2 desperately inventing new aspects of the metal. The professor saw the capsule approach

his own body, and he wondered at its motive power. As he watched, he saw a hole appear in his body where there had been only a smooth metal wall. The capsule entered and slowly disappeared from his view, leaving him staring through the lens at the new, empty opening.

TO BOLSTER and maintain 454ZQ2's harangue, he put another question. "Do you believe we can find the metal here on this world in sufficient quantity?"

454ZQ2 was off again, anxiously seizing this morsel of suggestion to expand and enlarge on his dissertation which threatened to fag. Both he and the professor were grateful that no inner uneasiness or suspicion manifested itself from the invisible masters. But the professor knew that if he accomplished what he hoped to do, the situation would soon prove alarmingly different. He swung the lens back to the Triped's metal body and rotated his attention from one tiny cavity to another. His patience yielded a reward. He saw another small capsule float out of what he now realized were numerous tiny tunnels. Removing his eye from the lens for a quick look, he saw a silver mote of dust gleam indistinctly as it moved toward him. Professor Jameson realized that his new metal body was rapidly becoming reinfected with the mysterious power over his metal parts.

He then completed his intended design. Seizing a transparent cup, he quickly netted the flashing mote and turned the cup upside down upon a nearby slab of stone. The mote became confused, but eventually headed for the stone base into which it commenced to slowly burrow. A quick application of the professor's heat ray beneath the stone caused the capsule to back out rapidly and start tunnelling into the transparent cup. Again the professor's heat ray turned it back. The professor

became aware of a flutter of confused mental excitement from somewhere. It reflected both anger and desperation.

The little capsule, scarcely larger than a mote of dust, went from side to side, seeking escape from the heat ray, while heat accumulated inside the inverted cup. The professor saw the metal capsule come to rest, and he sensed something of what was to happen. He lifted the cup and allowed the heat to escape, ready to imprison the capsule in case it started to move.

The capsule moved, but did not change its position. A section of it swung outward, and several tiny creatures hurried out of it, relieved to be free of the heated conveyance. The professor was not surprised. He had been expecting it. In fact, he had forced this issue with his heat ray. He examined them through the glass with intense interest, for he knew that these tiny mites were the real invisible power governing the machine men. It was a ludicrous idea on the face of it, yet at the same time he knew these things to be deadly.

"454ZQ2, turn your attention here, now. Take a magnifying lens and see what I see."

The Triped quickly responded, and gave a mental gasp of surprise as he saw the round, little bodies on their pairs of short legs, and watched their long arms adjust something to their heads. Little tubes waved and directed upward, coming to a stop in the direction of the two machine men.

"They are looking at us, likewise, to see what we are up to," the professor explained. "But they are not magnifying us. No, they are reducing us. It is like viewing us from the wrong end of a telescope."

"Those—those things have been ordering us around?" 454ZQ2 asked incredulously.

"And killed 28A-155," added Professor Jameson significantly.

"But how do they control us?"

"They offer mental suggestion, and if we do not respond, they have burrowed inside us and are ready to interrupt the functioning of our body or limbs at any point they desire. They not only cut off our impulses when they wish to, but they also create such motion of our parts as they themselves choose to. They operated from the point of interruption."

"What shall we do?" 454ZQ2 asked.

"First of all, call all the others and let them know that we have found our mysterious enemies at last."

THE professor suited his own suggestion to action. Machine men crowded the laboratory as Professor Jameson called them and proclaimed that the unknown menace was no longer unknown. The tiny intelligence was also gathering, alarmed to find that they had been discovered. They were also angry, deciding to put down any revolt their giant slaves of metal might contemplate. This became clear to the machine men as warnings reached them thick and fast between unregistered communications among the mites.

The Zoromes took turns with the magnifying lens in looking at the intelligent diminutives which infested their bodies, using their aircraft, or whatever it was, to burrow through metal or other hard substances. More of the little capsules came alongside the first, and the mites stepped out.

The machine men were given an ultimatum, and they were amazed at the conceited recklessness of the small creatures they were unable to see without the glasses, although their little ships were barely visible as silver spots of dust. The professor could have burnt the entire tiny gathering out of existence with his heat ray, yet he knew that countless others lay inside the bodies and heads of the machine men, ready to strike. The slap of a

tentacle might, if delivered exact, have crushed them all.

"Beware of such dangerous thoughts," came the timely warning of the mites. "You could only destroy a few of us, while we hold it in our power to kill every one of you. Our vessels operate inside all your bodies—and in those metal heads, as you well know, ready to strike and penetrate into your brains, as we have already done with one of you."

"And almost did in the case of another," Professor Jameson radiated sharply, recalling the insensibility of 744U-21.

"In that case, we drugged his brain. One of our aero cars burrowed right up next to his brain, and the drug was administered directly—at a time when he was too strongly influencing a project running counter to our designs."

"What is your design in destroying the amoebic monstrosities?"

"This world is ours and always was ours until the undividing amoebas drove us to the third world. Our having developed a high scientific civilization was our salvation as well as our downfall. We possessed communities here on this world which for the most part were located in trees or high, rocky retreats. We were fortunate in having conquered space sufficiently to be able to leave this world and live on the third planet, which we had already visited and colonized to a small extent, for scientific purposes. We found the third world uncomfortable, however, and lacking in many enjoyable features of our own world here.

"We were unfortunate because one of our own scientists inadvertently created the danger we are now having you fight. He found out how to stop amoebic forms from dividing and make them grow instead. He created a solution which caused this, and several thousand amoebas, with their deathless nuclei, had been created and scattered for experiment before the

danger was realized. They grew and wiped out a great many of our cities, absorbing us as they absorb everything organic. They were too terrifyingly large, these great, dumb organisms, for us to cope with them, and we were forced to flee across space to the third world where we have lived for nearly a hundred of its revolutions, until finally you came as an answer to our troubles."

"And you want us to destroy all of these monsters before we leave this system?" Professor Jameson asked.

"We indeed expect, and know that you will eventually destroy every last one of these things, although there are dormant nuclei which will not awaken to life and reveal their location for several years. But as for your moving on and leaving this system, that you cannot do, for you are too handy as our metal slaves, and we hold over you the power of life."

Every machine man contemplated this as the deadly little creatures reentered their aero cars and set off in the direction of various machine men to take up positions with their numerous brethren, already firmly entrenched.

"Remember," the ultimatum was impressed upon them in their moment of thoughtfulness. "We hold over you the power of life and death—like this!"

33F-65 crumbled into a heap, legs thrashing and tentacles flailing, the horrible brain agony upon him as one, or possibly more, of the little aero cars plunged viciously about in his brain.

"Now—go and destroy more of the great, fleshy monsters, or more of you will die! You might be interested in knowing that although we wish to retain as many of you as possible, we can get along with a quarter of your number."

THE desire to cope with the fiendish devils burned at white heat, but the machine men knew themselves to be at a dangerous disadvantage. Flurried,

chaotic thoughts of vengeance, of reprisal, of turning somehow upon their tiny captors, engulfed them, even while they were aware that the masterful mites realized their thoughts. But they knew that all they could do was to obey, at least until they knew of something else they might do. 744U-21 expressed an opinion that after the last amoebic monster was destroyed, they, too, would be killed by their captors.

Professor Jameson, too, had thoughts of his own, but they were guarded. Although the mites were inside his new body, he knew them to be there in lesser numbers than in his old one. But his coned metal head—that was different.

Danger of the worst kind was lurking there.

The spaceship of the Zoromes once more went in search of the great amoebas which continually roamed the second world in search of organic substance to

keep them alive and growing. Professor Jameson walked past the control room and looked inside. 20R-654 sat in his customary position at the controls. The professor continued to the fore of the craft where he watched with others for signs of a monster. They were heading into a new territory virtually untouched as yet. They first saw the irregular and winding, tell-tale track through forest and brush; then upon the horizon loomed the inevitable gray bulk.

As the ship sped toward it, Professor Jameson entered the control room and walked to the side of 20R-654. A suspicion of his intentions manifested itself to his consciousness, and he felt weak efforts at paralyzing all movement. One leg, in fact, did drag. One of the capsules had penetrated his body at least that far and had taken mechanical command. They were almost above the giant amoeba and ready to open fire when the professor radi-

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ated startling instructions to 20R-654.

"Drive the ship straight down into the amoeba! Not too rapidly but at sufficient speed to plunge it entirely beneath the surface! Quick! Act quickly! We shall be free of these little parasites!"

20R-654 made a valiant effort to obey the instructions, but the vigilance was too closely attuned and ready. His efforts were aborted. Instead, his tentacles lashed out at the professor and curled around him, while others clutched at the controls to steer the ship away from the monster below. The professor became vaguely aware of a messenger of death burrowing towards his brain, and of another probably heading in the direction of 20R-654's. He knew his plan to be their one chance, if it worked, and he hurled the pilot out of his position and seized the controls himself. Straight for the gigantic gray hill he drove the ship, while he fought off the mechanical efforts of 20R-654 to stop him, or at least divert the ship into a crash on bare ground, a crash which would annihilate every man aboard.

But straight and unerring, Professor Jameson drove the spaceship toward the center of the swiftly expanding view of gray bulk, issuing last moment advice to his comrades.

"Hold tightly to something! When we come to a stop, crawl out and let yourselves be bathed in the digestive juices of amoeba! Let it soak into all the crevices where these masters of ours lurk! Give your heads particular attention first, for that is where the greatest danger exists! Let—"

The professor's consciousness departed from him in a bright flash. He had accomplished his purpose, however. The spaceship lay deeply imbedded in the giant organism which they had been sent out to kill. Although the tremendous impact had been quite a shock to the creature, it had no other damaging effects upon it, so immensely large was the feeding giant. Groping pedicles reached inside the ship inquiringly as staggering machine men opened up the ship at every possible avenue.

In the parting instructions of 21MM392, they realized their possibilities of salvation. The pedicles excitedly caressed the metal heads of the Zoromes, surging over and surrounding the bodies, instinctively aware of the organic brain inside. Soon the interior of the ship filled up with the viscous, slimy material, and the machine men were aware of a sudden relaxation and absence of the invisible presence which had for so long enslaved them. In the solid wall of living, amoebic material surrounding them, they recognized their salvation.

This was the situation into which the confused consciousness of Professor Jameson returned. In reply to the bewildered wonder which stuttered for understanding in his own brain, there came to him from 20R-654, whose body lights reached the professor dimly through several feet of the closely packed mass, an explanatory statement.

"That was a hard blow your head gave my body when the ship dove into this thing."





TRACKS ACROSS THE DARKNESS

By Robert Arthur

THE Pan-Planetary rocket *Mercury*, taking off for Mars, drifted upward from her land dock. From the concrete outside the Administration Building, Johnny Day and Ann Carter watched her go.

Day, whose breadth of shoulder made his five-ten height seem less than it was, watched with set jaw. The girl beside him, slim, with space-dark hair, understood and was silent.

A broken-down space pilot, a girl with the key to a planet's destiny . . . a day when the two must meet —or see their civilization perish!

For the *Mercury* was the newest addition to the Pan-Plan fleet, and Johnny Day, as senior captain, should have had command of her. Instead, he had to stand and watch her depart, forbidden to leave

the ground farther than his feet could take him; a busted spacehound without a ticket or a job.

For he had tried to land his former command, the *Distant Star*—lost by blast explosion on her first trip out after he was relieved—single-handed, without the usual aid of the land dock crews, the great magnetic cranes and hydraulic bumpers. The landing men were on strike, and having made a record round-trip flight, he wanted to see the company get the benefit of it. So he had tried to set her down by delicate manipulation of the landing jets.

He would have succeeded, but someone in the crew, sympathetic to the strikers, had pulled a fuse switch at the last second, cutting out a bank of leveller jets, so that the *Distant Star* had dropped the last fifty feet and narrowly missed toppling. The whole stern had been buckled, and four passengers suffered severe sprains.

Disregarding Johnny Day's wrathful report on the sabotage, the Space Board had called in his ticket, and Pan-Plan's general board of management, which had the power to override both old J. A. Carter, the president, and Lowman Thornton, his operations manager, who had both sided with Day, had fired him.

The *Mercury*, visible now only because of her blast, hovered for an instant at the fifty-mile mark, making ready for the switch to her space jets. Behind Johnny Day and Ann, old J. A. Carter himself, and Thornton, his o.m., were watching also, and the plump face which J. A. turned toward the night-spangled sky was lined by strain.

"If she doesn't get through," they heard him say, his voice tight, "we're sunk. Four ships gone in a year and a half! It's a wonder there's a passenger aboard tonight."

"She'll get through." Lowman Thornton, the o.m., was a tall man, erect and

powerful. He spoke with confidence. "Coincidence can only stretch so far."

"Coincidence!" J. A. Carter spat the word out around the butt of his unlit cigar. "It's already stretched *too* far, if you ask me!"

"I know," Lowman Thornton acknowledged. "If it weren't that in every case the normal blast spot was there—"

"Yes," Ann's father agreed, and his voice was suddenly very tired. "I suppose I'm crazy. It's just that there's been an awful lot of rockets lost the last ten years, and all of them good ships. Not old tramp freighters, the kind you'd expect to blow."

Johnny Day and Ann, watching still, saw the *Mercury* now only as a flaring spark against the far-flung banner of the universe. Then she was gone, only her blast path stretching behind her to indicate her passage.

The long streamer of orange red left by her blast was visible even through the diffusing screen of Earth's atmosphere. Out in airless space it would be glowing a vivid orange, a trail of heatless fire.

After an hour it would fade a bit, but for a week it would linger there, visible for a great distance in all directions. Finally, with the slow dissipation of the infinitesimal atomic fragments of blaster fuel which, glowing in death with curious heatless radiance caused the phenomenon, the track would die out.

Only government patrol boats, battle rockets, smugglers, and, formerly, space pirate vessels did not leave these wakes across infinity. Placing a premium upon secrecy of movement rather than upon economy of operation, they used the Talleyman baffles that dissipated the blast into invisibility, though lessening fuel efficiency by forty percent in doing so.

BEHIND Johnny and Ann, the two executives stirred at last, started toward the Administration Building. Then old J. A. stopped.

"Johnny," he demanded, "you still going?"

Day nodded, lips tight.

"You still stick by your crazy theory that there's something we've missed?"

"I don't say there is," Johnny Day shrugged. "I say there may be. In any case, the *Distant Star* was my ship, and I want to see for myself."

"You're going out to look at the blast spot?" the o.m. asked, surprise in his voice.

"Blasting off in half an hour," Johnny's tone was wooden. "In the *Stormy Petrel*."

"Johnny has a wild-eyed theory," J. A. grunted, "that somewhere behind these disappearing rockets is something more than accident. When he's having a worse nightmare than usual, he thinks the Marchists have a hand in it."

"The Marchists!" Surprise showed again on Lowman Thornton's face. "But they're nothing any more—a small coalition of independent Martian states, always fighting each other. There was a time, fifteen to twenty years ago, when—but since the war, they've been stripped of all their power. And besides, they're closely watched. If they were up to anything, we'd know about it."

"I'm not trying to make an argument out of it." Johnny Day shrugged again. "But I do know there are still thousands of Marchist sympathizers on Earth, working for the party from within. Some of them are in high government and industrial positions, too. It's no secret any more; there's a vigorous underground Marchist movement. But that's beside the point. I haven't even got a full-sized hunch to go on. I just want to go out and look at the spot where the *Distant Star* died."

The big man looked thoughtful, nodding.

"Just the same," he murmured, "it certainly would be interesting if you found anything. . . . Well, luck, Day."

"Johnny—" J. A. paused for an instant longer—"if the Space Board has given you limited permission, why not take my new experimental job, the *Nova*? If you're bound to go, she's faster than anything else built, by half, and she's equipped—"

Day shook his head.

"Thanks. I'll stick to the *Petrel*, though."

"Well—then good luck. Good night, Ann." The tired and aging man followed his operations manager across the concrete.

When they were gone, Ann Carter faced the spaceman.

"Johnny," she said, her eyes troubled, "you know it's a crazy thing to do—to go out hunting the *Star* in that old ruin of an ex-racer."

"I'm sorry you think it's crazy." His voice was tight. "Crazy or not, I'm going to do it. If I don't find anything, I'll know my ship died an honest death. And if I do find anything—well, I'll be very interested in running down the parties responsible, quite apart from getting my papers and my job back."

"Your papers?" Ann exclaimed. "But I thought—"

"I told your father the Space Board had given me limited permission." Day's lips twisted. "That was a lie. I slipped a blank into my pocket when I was up before them, and forged the signatures. The port master thinks it's genuine. That's one reason I can't take the *Nova*. When it's found out, the company might be implicated."

"Oh, Johnny!" the girl said unhappily. "And they're so strict about— But anyway," she suggested, "you could take my zipper sportster, *Doodlebug*. It's small, but it's fast. And besides, it has a radio that'll reach back. You know the *Petrel* hasn't got a transmitter worthy of the name, and—"

But he was already shaking his head.

"At least, let me lend you the radio then! If you did find anything and wanted to call for help—"

"I won't call for help," Johnny Day assured her grimly. "I never have yet, and when I break down and do, the whole universe will know it."

"Oh, don't you see, Johnny?" Ann pleaded. "That's the whole trouble now—that you won't let anybody help you. I know that since your father died when you were a boy, laughed at for his space drive theories, you had a hard time of it, struggling up without help."

"But now you've proved yourself. You can let your pride relax. You don't have to run the whole works single-handed. The board wouldn't have taken the stand it did on your landing crash if it hadn't thought it was just more grandstanding, more show-off stuff."

"Maybe." Johnny Day's voice was toneless. "But I've got along so far all right doing it my way, and I guess I will in the future too."

"I guess you will," Ann agreed, her voice hardly a whisper. "But if you don't need any help, you don't need me. Because I want to be a wife to the man I marry—a helpmate. And you won't even let me lend you a radio. So please forgive me for doing this now, just as you're getting ready to blast off."

"It's not just because you're down. You know that—but because you don't need me; you don't need anybody. If you ever change, Johnny, why, it'll be different. But until then I—I—"

Her voice caught. She pressed something into his palm, whirled, was running toward the Administration Building.

He started to follow, then stopped. The thing in his hand was a thin circlet of gold-platinum, made from the spark chamber of his first rocket, the *High Hope*, which he had built from junk when he was only seventeen. That was just after his father died, derided for his revolution-

ary space drive theories that still had never been adequately tested. He had entered the *High Hope* in the seventh Around-Mars race, and had crashed on landing. But the fourth money he'd won had paved the way to bigger things, to—

Johnny Day looked about him, at the deserted field, and his lips twisted. To this. But he had shown them before. And he'd show them again.

Bitterly he put the ring Ann had given back to him into his pocket, and strode across the field to the rickety old land dock where dangerous speedsters and derelicts like the *Stormy Petrel*, apt as not to explode on the take-off, were launched.

HE GOT the *Petrel* off successfully, with a rush that flattened him into the oil-suspended pilot's seat, though the sceptical land dock crew, having locked the dock on him, scattered far and wide. Out in emptiness, he swung westward, on a course roughly parallel to and opposite in direction to the sun's course through space. He began to back-track to cut the blast path of the missing *Distant Star*.

Pan-Plan's chart men had given him the necessary data on the path's position. Blast tracks, of course, being practically substanceless, hung approximately where they were made in space, while the planetary system rushed away from them. This, paradoxically, due to the angles involved, made the "far" end of the *Distant Star's* abruptly ended path closer than the take-off end. His course was laid to cut the trail of the vanished rocket at about the spot it had been thirty hours earlier, just six hours before it disappeared.

It took the *Petrel* thirty-six hours of top-speed travel, with Day awake every second to nurse the ancient blast mechanism, to cut the trail. At the end of the thirty-sixth hour he found it glowing dimly above him. He used his nose vents,

flipped over, and let his blast reverse his momentum. He overran, and crept back, to take up another course parallel to the outward track of the *Distant Star*. This he followed at a great enough distance to see it clearly—it became fuzzy, close up—and two hours later was able to pick up the blast spot, a great ball of dimly glowing orange light. The blast path led up to it, and no further.

Johnny Day brought his ancient racer to a see-saw halt and studied the enormous ball of pale radiance. He had seen those ominous blast balls before. And they had always marked the end of a speeding rocket.

The usual cause for a fuel blast on a new rocket, with well designed explosion chambers, was either sabotage, not unknown in the bitter commercial rivalry of a few years before, or a meteorite that crashed through the triple allasteel plates into the fuel tanks.

But for four meteorites to plough into four Pan-Plan ships just exactly right to hit the fuel tanks, in less than eighteen months. . . .

After circling the blast ball for half an hour, studying it from all sides, Johnny Day backed off and stared at it with wide-eyed calculation.

"Small," he muttered to himself at last. "And not very bright, either. I think a little backtracking is called for."

He flipped the *Petrel* over and began to

move back along the path, forcing weary, red-rimmed eyes to alertness as he scanned each foot of the lingering wake of light.

At last he muttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and reversed his ship to a stop.

Where he had halted, the blast path was appreciably thicker and brighter than throughout the rest of its course. And the upper limit of the path showed an outward bulge, a dim finger angling off from the main line of the wake.

Could someone have cut into the freighter's wake at this point, and not too carefully have spliced a second blast path with the first?

Day backed off and squinted some more. Undeniably, it was some kind of junction point.

He had no explanation to offer himself yet as to just why two blast paths should have been spliced together here, and he was too tired to flag his brain into squeezing one out just now. But he had seen what he had come to see, and he could relax now and get some sleep. The fading of the blast path from now on would be of no consequence.

He set his motors and his course so that his blast exactly counteracted the tug of the sun and the rest of the solar system, trying to drag him away from there, and fell instantly asleep, his head pillowed on the hard crystal of his control panel.



BUT sleeping was a mistake. Because he awoke, an indefinite time later, with a hazy remembrance of a dream in which a clanging gong had meant danger—and found the gong had been the incautious slam of a metal boot against steel.

A space-suited intruder was stepping through a rectangular cut in his plating into the control cabin.

Johnny Day came awake with a rush, and was on his feet in the same instant. The uninvited caller was already straightening within the cabin, and a second was coming through behind him. There was a rack of old weapons—blaster guns and para pistols—beside the controls. But they were too far away. The leader of the two was already reaching toward his waist belt, and Johnny Day leaped.

Under the normal half-grav the rocket carried, he cleared the full fifteen feet and landed on the man like a sack of cement. The other was carried back against the plating and his breath slammed out of him—an unpleasant occurrence in a space suit. He crumpled to the deck, gasping agonizedly, as Johnny turned on his companion.

One step put him at the other's side, and his hand clamped on a wrist, twisted. A small para pistol fell to the deck. Johnny swung the wrist up behind its owner's back and thrust the fellow forward, hurling him shatteringly into the steel wall. He was starting forward to follow up the jolting smash when from the darkness beyond the hole in his plating a bluish beam fanned out briefly.

Day's legs buckled under him. His upraised arm fell numbly to his side. He sagged downward to the deck, and not a muscle below his shoulders would obey his will.

Even as he sprawled on the allasteel, he knew a low-strength para ray had gotten him. At low power it was harmless, for it merely set up an interference in

his nerves that blocked the passage of all commands from the brain to the voluntarily controlled muscles. All involuntary reactions, such as breathing and heart beat, continued. But for another ten minutes, until the shocked nerves recovered, he would be just a head attached to a helpless hundred and eighty pounds of inert body.

Then, as he lay there, and the two he had manhandled got shakily to their feet again, the third invader stepped into the cabin. Day knew already that they had cut through from the outside, and sealed the outer cut with perma-plastic to hold the air in before making the second cut.

The third suited man straightened, putting away the para gun, and began to unfasten his faceplate. He was big—bigger than Johnny Day even—and a sudden suspicion flashed through the helpless spaceman.

Then the plate came open, and with expressionless features Löwman Thornton was staring down at him.

JOHNNY DAY'S lips twisted. "Well," he said sardonically. "Fancy meeting you here! It's a small universe, isn't it?"

"Isn't it?" Thornton agreed calmly. "But ever since you blasted off, Carter has been mumbling about Marchists. He even mentioned your ideas to the government—which pooh-pooed them, of course. Still, I don't like to have such ideas drifting around. So—" The big man's teeth showed in a momentary grin—"I persuaded him I ought to come out in the *Nova* to give you a bit of help."

He jerked his head impatiently toward his two companions.

"Wrap him up!" he directed. "Take him off, and we'll blast her. Move lively!"

The two, working awkwardly, slid an emergency space bag over Johnny Day, of the kind used for invalids and wounded space travellers who could not don stand-

ard suits. Bolting on the headpiece, they carried him into the lock, while Thornton busied himself fastening a small object to the control panel.

Then he followed them in, closed the lock door, and swung open the outer portal. The slender length of the *Nova*, held alongside by magnetic clamps, was a dozen feet away. An extensible bridge pushed out to them from its open lock; the two huskies carried Johnny Day across, and a moment later he was freed from the space bag in the *Nova's* control cabin.

They sat him down in an observation chair, and Thornton slapped a few turns of flexsteel tape about his ankles, then fastened his wrists behind him. The flexsteel clung closely, and where it overlapped adhered in a magnetic grip so strong it made the handcuffs of another day seem like bonds of tissue. Nothing could free him except a special demagnetizer unit that Thornton carried.

Then, with the inwardly raging spacehound secure, and Thornton standing by, the taller of his two assistants took the *Nova's* controls and they went away from there.

"If you want to say good-bye to that junk heap you were piloting," Thornton said amiably, lighting a cigarette and then sliding open an observation panel, "better hurry."

Johnny Day looked. In the distance, only the blast of the *Petrel* was visible. As he watched, that expanded into a flaring ball of yellow radiance that died away to orange. Then it hung there, like so many blasts spots he had seen, a period marking the end for another space boat.

"If anybody else is fool enough to follow you," Thornton observed, "that's all they'll find. They'll figure your motors let go."

"You didn't do that to the *Distant Star*, though," Johnny Day told him. "Nor to any of the other Pan-Plan boats that vanished. Nor any of the other rock-

ets that have disappeared, these last ten years."

"No." Lowman Thornton blew a pair of smoke rings. "That's true. We wanted them unharmed. And we didn't want them to send any messages. But it was easy enough. I don't mind telling you how we handled it. Nugent electric sleep inducers, set to go off at a predetermined time."

"Nugent sleep machines!" Day exclaimed. Of course! The sleep machines, setting up in the brains of all individuals within range typical sleep patterns, induced instantaneous and involuntary unconsciousness. Pilots, crew, passengers alike had dozed off at the same instant. The automatic pilots then had taken over, but after fifteen minutes run without human attention, had shut off blast. The rockets had then drifted under momentum, helplessly. . . .

"Our own ships, of course," Lowman Thornton told him, "were following, using baffles and leaving no trail. When they saw the blast go dead, they knew the ship was ready. They'd just pull alongside, cut their way in, shielded against the Nugents, and take over. Then a prize crew would install baffles on the captured rocket and navigate it to our home base—while the mother ship cut back and turned into the blast path the other boat left.

"Once in the blast path, it de-baffled, and spliced a new trail onto the old, ran it out a few hours, then threw out a blaster-fuel bomb and cut the baffles in again. The bomb left a blast-spot at the end of the fake path, and that was that. Very simple, and very neat."

"Neat enough," Day agreed levelly, "seeing that it worked for ten years without causing suspicion. And where are the ships now—and the crews and passengers?"

"Safe," Thornton told him. "Tucked away in a most unlikely spot. The rock-

ets have all been refitted into fighting ships, for use when The Day comes. The crew and passengers are, as you might say, working for their keep. They. . . . Yes?"

The man at the controls was nodding toward a section of the panel Johnny Day could not see. Thornton stared at it; then his brows lifted. He picked up the telephonic receiver on the communicator, and with a one-sided grin at Day, spoke into it.

"Hello!" he said. "*Nova* calling *Doodlebug!* Ann? Lowman speaking. Yes, we just picked you up. Suppose you came out looking for Day? Yes, so did I. Thought he might need help. He did, too. I have him aboard. . . . No, not hurt badly, but he needs attention. I'd like to get him back to Earth. . . . Back-flash in an expansion chamber. . . . Yes, he did dig up something. Important, too. I want to look into it. . . . You'll pull up and let us tranship him? Fine! Contact in about an hour, I think. So long until then."

He hung up, and met Johnny Day's scowling regard.

"Company," he remarked. "As you may have gathered, Ann's coming up in her zipper ship. A reckless thing for her to do. When we have the New Order established, women will stay where they belong—on the ground."

Then he turned his back on the spaceman and began giving orders to his navigator.

FOR most of the next hour, Lowman Thornton sat and smoked reflectively, ignoring Johnny Day completely. Finally, though, he broke his silence.

"Meeting Ann out here," he remarked, "is a break that I'm trying to decide how best to take advantage of. I think on the whole I'd better take her prisoner. We can use the ship, and if Carter thinks she's

been lost, it may be shock enough to get him to step down and let me take over his job, which would make it much easier for me to work for the party.

"However, in case you're harboring any dark thoughts against us, be assured she'll be well treated. And in two or three years, after we've made our coup good, she will be set free again. You too, if you're good."

He paused, scanning Day's face.

"Day," he said then, his tone sharpening, "you've always had a reputation for being a lone wolf. It's occurred to me that if you could only curb your individualistic nature, and cooperate a bit, you might easily rise to great heights."

"What kind of heights?" Johnny Day demanded.

"Heights in the party!" Thornton told him. "You're probably the most brilliant space pilot living. If that brilliance were harnessed into teamwork with the rest of us—"

An abrupt deceleration in their speed checked his speech. Thornton glanced up at the instruments, then rose.

"We can talk about it more later," he said. "Anyway—think it over."

Leaving only the navigator there, he went out. The navigator was slowing the *Nova* fast, and presently he brought her to a halt, maneuvered her delicately for a moment, and Johnny felt a little quiver run through her plates as they made magnetic contact with Ann's tiny *Doodlebug*.

His lips closed tightly, and his muscles tensed. Thornton had failed to switch off the communicator. It was just barely possible that maybe—

Johnny Day leaned forward, tensed leg and thigh muscles, and though bound, stood upright.

"I'd like to watch, if there's no objection," he remarked, and the navigator nodded, touched a button that opened the observation panels.

Johnny turned, almost fell, hopped

backwards, and brought up with a jar against the steel panel close beside the communicator.

He shifted position an inch or two and leaned back, steadying himself with the fingers of his bound hands.

Through the observation port, he saw Thornton and the shorter man cross on the extensible bridge into the open port of the *Doodlebug*. Scarcely a minute later they returned, bringing Ann, helpless in a space bag, as they had carried Day.

But Johnny Day, seemingly intent on the scene, was concentrating instead on the button which one middle finger would just reach. It was the key of the emergency sender—a good, old-fashioned dot-dash sender, still the only reliable form of communication when heaviside storms swirled over Earth, or sun spot cycles built up to a climax and filled space with electrical dirt.

The first touch on the button switched the communicator from telephonic to telegraphic, and all Pan-Plan ships, unless tuned otherwise, sent on a tight frequency to Home Port.

"J. A." Johnny tapped out, sweat standing out on his forehead with the effort of keeping his finger strained to reach the button. "J. A.—Day—Day—Have vital info. Ships hijacked Marchists. Unknown base. Preparing overthrow Earth government. Have battle fleet. Thornton a Marchist agent—"

Then the door flung open, and Thornton came through, helping carry Ann.

"Neils," he ordered as he entered, "you'll navigate the prize back to home base. Pick a man for crew and start at once. I'll handle the *Nova*, and follow you in with the prisoners. Put on baffles and use them."

"Yes, sir." The navigator saluted and hurried out. The second man, having lent a hand in getting Ann out of the space bag, and in removing Thornton's own suit, went out with the equipment.

Thornton, giving Johnny Day, who now leaned against the wall several feet from the communicator, only a glance, lifted Ann into a chair. She was groggy and almost unconscious, apparently from a light touch of para ray.

"What—" she began, shaking her head in an effort to clear it, "what—?"

Then she saw Johnny Day, saw the flexsteel about his ankles, and her eyes went wide.

"You're a prisoner, Ann," Thornton told her quietly. "So is Day. I'll save explanations and questions and tell you now that I'm a Marchist agent; that we've been hijacking Pan-Plan and other ships for our own purposes, and that we have them now in readiness for the blow we will soon strike which will give us control of the general governments both of Mars and Earth.

"You are going to be our prisoner until after it is struck. Behave yourself, and you'll be well treated. Misbehave—and suffer the consequences. I think that covers the ground quite fully."

Ann took the news in silence, paling, but not losing her composure.

"At least," she said after a moment, "that explains a lot. But poor Dad! He'll—"

And then old J. A.'s voice itself filled the control room.

"Day!" it roared. "Day! Dammit! Keep sending! Where are you? What about the Marchists? What about Thornton? Dammit, finish your message!"

THORNTON whirled about. With the communicator still on, Johnny must have touched the speaker control button, so that J. A.'s voice was coming in bell-clear through the speaker as he tried to reach back on the Pan-Plan private beam.

A para gun snapped into Thornton's hand, and for the first time his composure seemed to desert him.

"What did you send?" he grated. "And how? What—Never mind. I can see for myself."

J. A.'s voice still roared out at them.

"Day!" it raged. "Day! Answer me! Finish your message! Where are you sending from? Did Ann reach you?"

Thornton touched a control, and the record tape turned back for him. He read off the message Johnny had sent, swiftly, showing his teeth. Then his face tightened with decision.

"Day!" The para gun came up. "Come here! Tell J. A. the communicator is giving you trouble, and you'll call back in fifteen minutes. Or else—"

He advanced the para gun control setting to full. A full para jolt crippled all the voluntarily controlled nerve ganglions in the body. That meant unimpaired health, but helpless invalidism of the most terrible sort, with all limbs hanging limp and flacid, slowly atrophying.

"Why not?" Day shrugged and hopped forward.

Thornton caught him and held him upright. He spun the communicator controls, setting up an induction howl, then cleared the phone. Johnny spoke into it.

"Okay, J. A." he said crisply. "Day calling. Having trouble with the radio. Hold on fifteen minutes. Will call you back and—"

Thornton dimmed the speech out in an audio howl and snapped the set off. Then he dragged the spaceman over and dumped him into a seat.

"Well, Day," he said sardonically, "you've certainly put me on a spot, haven't you? I can't go back to Earth now, after you've tipped off Carter, and that puts a monkey-wrench in a lot of gears. But—"

The steely blue eyes probed Day's, and a silky thread of menace crept into Thornton's voice "—but maybe we can turn your stunt to advantage. A good Marchist is never hidebound in his think-

ing. Flexibility is a great virtue in battle. Let's see if we can't be constructively flexible."

"Johnny!" Ann broke in sharply. "Don't listen! He's going to try to get you to do something. To help him! Don't listen, Johnny!"

"If you interrupt again, Ann," Thornton snapped, "I'll have to give you a touch of para ray to quiet you."

"Shut up, Ann," Johnny Day added, in a tone that brought scarlet to the girl's cheeks. "I'm interested to know what he has to say."

"Good!" Lowman Thornton said. "A few minutes ago I was telling you you could rise to great heights in the party, and the New Order, afterward. We need your ability at the head of our space force. That would mean, eventually, commander of the Space Navy. If you will cooperate with us, I can promise you that post."

"Johnny!" Ann's tone was imploring. "Don't listen! He won't keep any promises he makes. He—"

"For heaven's sake!" Johnny Day exploded irritably. "How can I think when you're talking so much? Please, Ann, be quiet!"

She subsided into startled silence, staring at him as if she had never seen him before. A sly little smile played around Johnny Day's lips.

"And how," he asked, "can you promise me that unless—it couldn't be you that's head of the Marchist movement, could it? You who plans to be Grand Exalted Thingamagummy once the Marchists are in power?"

"That," Thornton stated flatly, "is beside the point. Let it rest that I can promise it."

"You *are* top dog," Johnny said, nodding with satisfaction. "It would take a man with your kind of managing genius to whip together such an organization in hardly ten years. Well, at least I'm deal-

ing with the head man. Go on, I'm curious to hear what your new plan is."

"All right." Thornton shrugged. "I am head of the party. And you are a man I could work with to accomplish great things—if you were willing. You've always wanted to build and test the space drive your father was working on when he died. When we're in power, that'll be done. You can direct the work.

"There's no limit to what you can do if you throw in with us. If you don't—well, I won't even kill you. Just give you a permanent paralysis and let you rot away, not even able to commit suicide. But you don't have to agree because of any threats. Look at it the other way. What does the world as it stands offer you?"

"Nothing! It's taken everything you had and kicked you out. Even if you could get back now to Earth you'd be arrested and clapped into jail for illegally operating a rocket."

He made a gesture with his hands. Johnny Day shot a tight-lipped, bitter glance of inquiry at Ann.

"Yes, it's true," she said. "The port master discovered you'd forged the permit. The Space Board wants to teach you a lesson. But Johnny! They just don't understand! They wouldn't—"

"I think they would!" Johnny Day bit out. "A three-year sentence, probably, just because I wouldn't be one of their

namby-pamby 'good boy' pilots." There were spots of red in his cheeks, and his eyes were angry. "Go ahead, Thornton. Make your proposition. I'm interested."

THE tall man sat down, lit a cigarette, and in incisive sentences told Day what he wanted. Now that his message had gotten through to J. A. Carter, a search would surely be made for the Marchist headquarters, and more intensive effort made to ferret out sympathizers. Even if the Marchist base was not found the party's work would be handicapped and set back.

"But," Thornton explained, watching the spaceman's face, "if we can lure them into a hasty expedition to crush us, and ambush them, we can strike at once. The fleet crippled, we could descend at once on Mars, seize the government, and pick up our men there. All the ships we've hijacked have been made over into fighting rockets, and they make up a force formidable enough for us to crush anything that might be left on Earth. The fighting would be over in a week—and the party would be in power!"

His eyes glowed. His words were animated. Johnny scowled back, however, in perplexity.

"I don't see," he objected, "where I come into—"

"What you would do," Lowman Thornton told him, "is—in five minutes,

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radio Carter. Tell him you're aboard the *Nova*—and I'm a prisoner!"

"You're a prisoner?"

"Tell him you've stumbled on a Marxist plot to attack Earth and seize the government; that I'm the leader of it; that you're forcing me to show you how to reach our secret base; that the base must be attacked at once before we can make our attack. Tell him he must impress the general government with the seriousness of the affair, and have a battle fleet of at least two-thirds the available rockets sent out to destroy the base. You'll lead the way—will meet them on Juno."

"But why Juno?" Johnny Day demanded. "I could do the rest but—"

"Because," Thornton told him, "Juno is our base. Not on it. *In* it. The only thing *on* Juno is a small mine house belonging to the Asteroid Mining Company. Through that shaft we've hollowed out half that four-hundred-mile ball of rock. Our entire battle fleet is inside, together with thousands of our soldiers and workmen, as well as prisoners, just awaiting—The Day!

"And that isn't all. The whole southern hemisphere of the asteroid is covered with concealed weapons which can bring down any space fleet in existence, if it can be decoyed close enough. Whole hills will roll back to let the rockets out, and let the guns fire—at the right time.

"And your job is to lure the fleet there. You'll do it by telling them that the base is actually on Ceres, which is ten million miles further out. But that you want to rendezvous with them on Juno, in the south polar depression, to give them full data and information on our strength as well as to leave the *Nova* behind and tranship to a fighting boat."

"Then," Johnny Day suggested calmly, "they'll follow me down, and your guns will bag them like ducks settling on a pond."

"Exactly!" There was exultation in

Thornton's eyes. "Wipe them out in one stroke. Then The Day of the party will have come!"

The spaceman sat silent. Ann Carter, watching fearfully, saw his lips twitch, as they did when he was coming to a decision.

"Johnny!" she whispered, horror-stricken. "You can't! It doesn't matter what they do to us. But you can't let them murder your friends, rule Earth—despotic, cruel, enslaving millions who—"

"Speak for yourself, Ann," Johnny told her rudely. "You made it plain enough to me a couple of days ago how you felt about me. As for me, I haven't any ambition to be a para-cripple for fifty years or so. And when you come right down to it, what did Earth ever do for me? Drove my father to his death, broke me—and now wants to make a criminal out of me!"

Depths of bitterness were in his voice.

"So I say, let them look out for themselves. I want to do a lot of things before I die and, as Thornton says, one of them is to vindicate Dad. I'm not keen on killing a lot of other guys, especially—but when it's my skin or theirs, I guess I can bring myself to it."

He looked at Thornton, lips tight, and nodded.

"Okay," he agreed. "It's a deal. Help me over to the phone."

THORNTON released his hands and helped him to the communicator. He switched on the televisor and stood back.

"J. A. will want to see you," he said. "Make it convincing. And remember—I have the para gun here."

"Why should I try a double-cross?" Day demanded. "What have I got to lose by throwing in with you? . . . Hello, J. A.—Day speaking. Listen. . . ."

He gave the story steadily, just as Thornton had outlined it. He made J. A.

believe it, made him see the seriousness of it and got his promise to come out at once with a battle squadron.

"We'll rendezvous on Juno," Johnny finished crisply. "I'll have more dope for you then. Thornton and I had a scrap, and he's groggy still. Getting into Juno is tricky and I'll lead the way through the Belt. I'm further away than you are, but the *Nova* is faster, and if you leave at about twelve hours tonight, I should be a couple of hundred miles ahead of you.

"So watch my blast trail carefully. I'll lead you through gaps big enough to ensure safe clearance for the squadron, and we'll rendezvous at twenty-four hours on the 17th. That's eight days to reach there, pushing at top grav all the way."

"All right, boy," Carter's voice came back, quietly grim. "We'll be there. But—did Ann find you? She set out to follow your blast path and—"

Thornton shook his head. Johnny Day repeated the gesture, and saw the lips of the figure his telepanel reproduced tighten.

"Must have missed me. Maybe she turned back. She's sure to be all right, though."

"Yes, of course," J. A. Carter said quickly. "Signing off, Johnny. Will renew contact and let you know when we blast off."

The screen went dark, and Thornton came forward.

"Good," he said. "Naturally you realize I can't trust you fully yet. But so far I'm well pleased."

"Oh, Johnny," Ann Carter asked in a whisper, "how could you?"

"Darned easy," Johnny Day answered, shrugging. "Now that I've gotten wise to myself. I've taken a shoving around so far, but from now on I do the shoving." And he gazed at her with half-closed, speculative eyes. "Maybe," he suggested, with a one-sided grin, "you'll just have to

learn to like me this way. It may take a little time. But you'll get used to it—eventually."

THE days dragged by. In the sameness of space, only hunger and fatigue marked the hours. The *Nova* raced on at an outward angle that took it past Mars with good clearance, on toward the asteroid belt.

Lowman Thornton, Johnny Day and Ann Carter had the officer section of the ship to themselves. There was a crew of only seven, and of them the two prisoners saw nothing, except when a mess boy brought meals.

Johnny and Ann each had a cabin, to which Thornton kept them confined except for the time they spent in the control room, where their movements were restricted to tiny, mincing steps by loops of flexsteel about their ankles.

Anxiously the girl awaited some sign from Johnny Day that his acquiescence to Thornton's plans was only a pretense. But as day after day passed and he became harder, more cynical, as though some element long dormant in his character were coming to the surface with a rush, she knew her hope was vain.

He and Thornton spent much time over the charts. And each day at noon Johnny had a brief talk with J. A. Carter, in which the televisor showed him at the *Nova's* controls.

J. A. was in the flagship of the battle squadron—led by Commander Horatio Benson—which was hurtling toward their rendezvous—the rendezvous with treachery to which Johnny Day was leading it. As each day went by, and he reported no message of news about Ann, Carter's aging features became more and more haggard. But Johnny Day gazed at the reproduced likeness on the telepanel and showed no concern for his former employer's unnecessary worry.

Most of the time, Johnny was at the

controls, in fact. The only professional navigator aboard, Neils, had gone in Ann's *Doodlebug*. Thornton could handle a rocket tolerably, but to get out all the speed built into the *Nova* required a professional.

Thornton checked the course frequently, and found it true. He relaxed—a little, not too much—and with success so close to his grasp, he grew visibly more animated.

At the end of six days, they were far beyond Mars, and coming close to the asteroid belt. Here their course joined that of the battle wagons speeding out from Earth, although they were almost half a day ahead of the fighting rockets from Earth.

Now Thornton was busy on the radio, communicating on a hairline beam with the tiny planetoid that was only a spot of brightness ahead of them.

On the basis of data transmitted from the Marchist base on Juno, Johnny Day altered course and plunged into the tremendous belt of loose rock that dirtied the heavens here. Their blast trail, broad and plain, stretched behind them to act as a guiding ribbon to the following fleet; the course was chosen so that the time difference would not affect the safety factor.

"We'd better begin to kill speed," Day suggested to Thornton as they straightened on the new course. "We're too far ahead of them, and getting further."

The tall man nodded. Johnny began to slacken off their pace, running the blasts intermittently but not shutting them off altogether, for the blast path was necessary to the guidance of those following.

"All right, *Hercules*," he addressed the flagship. "We're in the Belt. Be sure to watch my path closely. I'm letting you close up some."

"Understood," came back to him, and he shut off.

FOR the following twenty-four hours of frequent course changes he remained at his post continuously, but nothing of incident occurred. At the next communication period, however, for the first time, the following squadron began to question his directions.

"Why land on Juno?" Admiral Benson, on the *Hercules*, wanted to know. "Why not push on? You can tranship in space, and send *Nova* back."

Thornton's face darkened at the message, but Johnny answered coolly.

"There's an outpost there that must be silenced," he retorted. "I've forced Thornton to order it silent until after we've landed. Then I'll deal with it. But if it sees a whole fleet going by, it's bound to report us."

"Then shouldn't we be right behind you," the admiral demanded, "in case you encounter trouble? Or let us pull up and put aboard some Marines, in case there's a fight."

For a moment Ann, listening, felt a faint breath of hope. If they only would pull up—

But Day negated the idea brusquely.

"Need no help!" he retorted. "Will slow down to let you pull up to within ten minutes of me. Imperative that we rendezvous as agreed, however. Follow me down. Landing at twenty-three hours, thirty minutes."

Thornton nodded as he concluded.

"All right," he agreed. "Naturally enough they don't want to land and expend extra fuel without reason. But they will. I'll have to revise the orders a bit, though."

Tightening his beam down to a hairline, he relayed orders to the waiting, secret garrison in tiny Juno.

"Coming down at twenty-three thirty," he reported. "Battle fleet will be on our heels. Will make crash landing. The instant we're below the fire line, open up with everything. The fleet will be killing

grav for landing, and you'll catch them unprepared. The first salvo should get half of them at least.

"But wait until we're out of the line of fire! Don't bring us down too! That's all. Acknowledge."

Then he shut off, lest even the tight beam stray, somehow, back to listening ears in the fleet behind.

After that they waited. The spot of light that was Juno grew slowly. The tension became almost unbearable. Even Thornton showed it, smoking jerkily and being unable to sit still.

Johnny Day, however, stared at the instrument panel and seemed to have no nerves. He was leading five thousand men and Earth's finest rockets to their doom, and doing it without a quiver.

Thornton watched him intently for a time, but seemed satisfied. He turned to Ann, bound her into the chair with the crash belts, then went back to smoking.

At twenty-three hours, the fleet was on their heels, two score of slim shapes that showed up in the rear scanner panels, trailing faint filaments of radiance behind them. Johnny Day still handled the controls with hawk-like, nerveless intensity, and Juno was a distant, bowl-like surface far beneath them, illuminated brightly.

They were dropping for a landing in the exact center of the great depression in the south polar area, where a single small building and crude landing dock now showed up—the ostensible superstructure of the Asteroid Mining Company's diggings, beneath which lay the whole vast fighting force the Marchist party had assembled.

Thornton flung away his cigarette as Johnny killed speed rapidly. In the scanner plates the fleet was still close at their heels, and from the way they came on in unbroken formation, it was evident they were quite unsuspecting.

"They're too close to save themselves now!" the Marchist said. "They're inside range. If we weren't so close, they'd be under fire now. Drop us for the ore-loading dock there. Fast as you can, and never mind the ship. Prepare for a crash landing."

He strapped himself into a crash-chair directly behind Day, leaving his right arm free, the para gun in his hand.

"Give orders to rig for crash," he directed, "and then strap yourself in. I trust you—but make one false move, and you get the para beam—full jolt."

"I don't think you'll betray me, since it's too late for the fleet to get away now

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anyway, but I take no chances. After we've landed, and the battle is won, your status will be one of full membership in the party. With—" he jerked his head toward Ann—"full privileges of any kind you desire."

"Check," Johnny Day answered, almost absently. He gave the crash order into the televo and buckled himself into the pilot's crash webbing, designed to permit him to remain at his controls under anything short of complete catastrophe.

Now they were all secured. Thornton was, temporarily, as much a prisoner as either of them. But he still held the para gun, and no move Johnny Day could have made could be quick enough to escape it. And if Johnny had intended to make any move to save the fleet behind, the moment for it was past—too long past.

Knowing that, cold fingers of horror touched Ann.

"Johnny," she said, the first words she had spoken to him for two days, "how could you? Oh, how could you?"

Day flashed a grin at her—one of his old grins.

"It's been hard," he said, punching a series of blast control keys, "but a guy can do a lot when he has to."

He swung the control switch in front of him in a great arc. And the *Nova* went mad.

HE HAD fired full stern and full side blasts simultaneously. That much Ann and Thornton had time to realize. On Earth, or even the moon, they would have dived into the ground at terrific velocity, with enough force to atomise every particle of the ship. On such a tiny body as four-hundred-mile Juno, their violent side blast skidded them across the sky just far enough so that, though they came to within a thousand yards of the ragged edge of the polar

depression, the *Nova* screamed away from the minor planet at a tangent.

She made a great flat arc, and by the time the predetermined series of blasts had finished firing, had reversed herself and was going back toward Earth, thousands of miles from her former course. But long before then every soul aboard was unconscious.

The instant she had begun to move, her acceleration was in the order of nine gravities, and the tremendous inertia almost stopped the circulation of blood. Ann struggled for consciousness, and being young, maintained it for a space of seconds. In that time she saw Thornton bring up the para gun—and find he could not aim it.

The acceleration was so violent he could not lift his hand against it. The muscles of his neck corded, and his eyes popped with effort, but the gun would not rise far enough to bear. Johnny Day grinned faintly at Ann; then she saw Thornton's arm relax, and blackness took her in a sickening swoop.

She came out of it some moments later, as the blasts diminished, to find both Johnny and Thornton drooping in their crash webbings, unconscious. The para gun lay on the deck.

Then, simultaneously, they too recovered consciousness.

Johnny Day ripped at the belting, and was out of it before Thornton could free himself enough to reach the gun. His feet were bound, but he made a dive, a tremendous leaping tackle, and caught the Marchist leader around the knees. They crashed to the steel together.

"Ann!" Johnny yelled. "Get the gun! Take the controls! Head us back for Juno! I'll handle—"

His voice choked off as Thornton got an arm about his throat. Ann got out of the crash belts and went down on her hands and knees to snatch up the little para pistol as both men rolled toward it.

But she could not use it; she did not know how. She pulled herself up and skirted the struggling two to reach the controls.

Johnny Day, handicapped as he was by his bound feet, managed to keep Lowman Thornton on the floor, but Thornton, unhampered, was fighting savagely. He put a scissoring pressure around Day's waist, and squeezed with deadly pressure. Johnny, one arm around the big man's neck, was delivering sledgehammer blows to the face, but Thornton had the advantage. He got fingers into Day's hair and began to bang the spaceman's head on the steel deck.

"Stay . . . at . . . controls!" Johnny sobbed to Ann. "I'll . . . handle . . . him."

He abandoned the struggle suddenly, turned, and twisted free from the scissors in one mighty effort. Unable to get to his feet, he rolled onto his back instead, gathered his knees into his belly, and lashed out with both feet as Thornton started to rise.

His feet caught the big man's shoulder, and whirled him backwards. Thornton began to fall. Ann, having reached the controls, jammed down a firing lever for an instant to full, then released it. The kick of the ship, reaching to the burst, staggered her, and sent Johnny sprawling. But Thornton, already falling, was slammed down to the deck with bone-shaking force. He gasped as the breath was jarred from him, and went limp.

Then Johnny was beside him, fumbling in his pocket. A moment later the flex-steel was off his ankles and Ann's—and binding the unconscious Marchist. Then Johnny Day took over the controls, and swung them back at full grav for Juno.

THE spot of light sprang at them, enlarging, and Ann gasped with astonishment. By now the battle fleet should be annihilated—but the tiny

planet was encircled by a network of faintly glowing lines, that represented blast paths—the tangled tracery of fire that meant a battle in the sky.

"Johnny!" she exclaimed. "They're fighting! They weren't wiped out!"

"Not likely!" Johnny Day grinned, as Juno sprang upward toward them. "Not your father, and Goldbraid Benson. They probably dropped a thousand tons of semi-atomics on Juno the instant we changed course."

The scene took on more coherence. Battle rockets were spinning in space over Juno, dodging the blue streaks of torpedo shells, and spouting bursts of flame on the asteroid's surface told of the impact of semi-atomic bombs that could uproot a thousand cubic yards of rock at a time.

From below, yellow sheets of fire licked upward, and the blue pathways that marked the torpedo shells rose by the score. A ship and a torpedo met. The ship's blast fuel tanks went, and there was a ball of flame in the sky.

But the incessant glare of the semi-atomics made Juno's surface far lighter than the rays of the distant sun did, and the ground fire was weakening fast. The shattering impact was almost enough to shake such a small body of rock as Juno apart, and within minutes the ground firing had dropped off to sporadic pot-shooting.

Then, in a desperate attempt to escape, a score of converted liners leaped upward from the underground docks. They lanced up, fanning outward, and the waiting cruisers of the fleet, which had been remaining aloof from the bombing, sprang into action.

The battle lasted thirty seconds, perhaps, not more. Then the last crumpled hulk was settling back to the powdered rocks, and the firing had ceased. The sky was a lacework of tangled blast paths, strangely terrible and beautiful. The battle fleet, three-fourths still intact, assumed

formation above the shattered stronghold of the Marchists and waited for the oncoming *Nova*.

"*Hercules*," Johnny said into the communicator. "*Nova* calling. This is Day. Congratulations! We're bringing Thornton in as a prisoner. Hope the prisoners underground escaped injury."

"*Nova*," came back the answer. "*Hercules* acknowledges. Have radio communication with remnant of garrison. Underground damage slight. Fleet landing. Will rendezvous as agreed."

"Understood," Day answered. "Tell J. A. his daughter is aboard *Nova*."

The fleet began to move down for a landing, and the *Nova* followed them in.

"Johnny," Ann told him, "I'm sorry. I—I did think you had turned traitor. You were—were rather convincing."

"Meant to be," Johnny Day answered. "If you hadn't thought I meant it, Thornton wouldn't either. And I had to make him think I saw things the way he wanted me to. There was no other way of getting a message out."

"But there wasn't anyway—"

"Yes, there was," Johnny told her soberly. "One way—provided I could get to handle the controls. By using our blast path."

"I don't understand."

"Your father and the admiral," Johnny explained, "were warned not once, but twice, to follow our blast path, and to watch it carefully. And I meant that. When I began to kill speed as we entered the Belt, I shut off blast according to a definite pattern. So that our blast path became a kind of broken line—

broken into dots and dashes. Three short ones, three long ones, then three short ones again."

"Morse code!" Ann gasped. "SOS! The old distress signal!"

"Uh-huh! And eventually they caught on. Your dad and Admiral Benson realized that meant I was in trouble—and probably wasn't actually in charge of the *Nova*. They could deduce from that that everything I told them was probably false too and they'd better come loaded for bear and prepared for anything.

"So, when we got to Juno, they were ready. When we broke course, they knew it was time to act, and they started dropping bombs before the Juno guns could open up."

Ann was silent, digesting this, staring down at the battered face of the asteroid as they settled. From the corner of his eye, Johnny watched her.

He asked casually, "Remember our last conversation. Before I blasted off from Earth?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Well, it just occurred to me," the spaceman said elaborately, "that I made a promise—when I asked anybody for help, the whole universe would know about it. So, since in about four years the Alpha Centaurians will know, if they have glasses good enough, and in maybe another hundred million years it'll get around to the rest of the universe, I thought that maybe, without waiting *quite* that long, you'd try this on again. Just to see if it still fits."

He held out the ring, grinning. And, smiling back, she took it.





The Man Who Knew Roger Stanley

“YES,” said the man with the bitter blue eyes. “Yes, I knew Roger Stanley.”

He sat there and said that with the soft green of the Howard-Brazier fluorescents stirring restless, hidden ghosts in the hell-pits that had been magnificent eyes, and casting out in starkest relief the incongruity of sensitive, tortured lips above a jaw that belonged to a fighter. But no one laughed. You didn't laugh at a man like this; not even if you were one of three students on a vacation from the Interspatial Institution, and were a little drunk and reckless, and spoiling for a fight. So they were silent, waiting, unconscious of the raucous clatter in the spacemen's den about them.

“I knew him,” said the man with the blue eyes. “I ate with him, suffered with him, cursed with him, slept with him,

By
Joseph Gilbert

Somewhere, some place, your children's children may see him—the man who saved the world—at the price of becoming a space exile forever!

fought with him, and knew him as well as anyone ever could or will. You remember Other World Enterprises? It's dead now, of course, and the men back of it are rotting out their filthy souls in hell. It was they who built the domes on Venus, picked up volunteers to colonize them, and then, to arouse the flagging interest of the public to the point of buying more stock in Other World, appointed Roger Stanley to lead the expedition. Roger Stanley! Even then he was famous as the author of *Dawn Shadows*, and as the leader of the movement for justice for the then brutally-treated "watchers" of Mars. He was a young idealist then, only twenty-five, eager, immature, but there was that about him that drew men to him, the strange sincerity that belongs to all truly great men.

"Well, you know what Other World was up to. The colony on Venus was insured for a tremendous sum. If it failed, Other World stood ready to collect thrice what it could ever hope to obtain from the colonists out of the slow culture of the medicinal plants of Venus. What could a sensitive youth like Stanley do against the primal instincts and brutality and raw, cruel force of those men who made up the colony? A little hardship, and they'd bolt on him; they'd mutiny, walk out cursing, and laughing a little, perhaps, at the ineffectuality of this fluttering, helpless fool of an artist. It was a good plan. Fool-proof.

"They must have chuckled heartily to themselves, these fat vultures, as they stood on the send-off committee's platform and smiled at the happy, confused young boy waving back at them as the spaceship door swung shut with a hiss and a clang. They must have slapped each other on the back, and shaken hands as that tiny defiant tail of fire vanished into the sky. They couldn't guess what was to follow, you see"

His voice trailed off. The athletic

Larry Miller, dressed in a sleeveless tunic that showed off his really admirable muscles as planned, started to say something funny, met the impact of those strange eyes, forgot what he'd intended to say, and was silent. The low, quiet voice began again.

"They didn't see Roger Stanley the third night. He was in his room in the dome on Venus, drunk. He had never before taken a drink.

"He didn't make any noise, just paced up and down the floor and drank Martian wine—pints of it. Up and down all night long he paced. At dawn he came out. Save for the unsteady way he walked and the color in his usually pale face, he didn't show a drop of all he had drunk. The men stood and stared at this man who had been Roger Stanley, and was not quite Roger Stanley now, as he strode, quiet and determined, saying nothing, down into the repair room. He picked up a welding torch and, ignoring the astonished men in the room, went up to the entrance of the dome. There were tremendous double doors leading to the metal gates and two guards loafing at the gates. He ordered them off, and they laughed at him. He drew a blaster and repeated the order. They didn't laugh at that. They would have once, but not at this Roger Stanley; he told them that he'd kill both of them if they didn't leave, and he meant it. He barred the door behind them, and started to work inside. They heard the torch for about an hour. Then he slipped out through the doors, pushing them shut behind him, and went to the room wherein stood the air-conditioning mechanism, and the technician who took charge of it. The technician left when faced with a blaster, and Roger Stanley stood alone in that room too.

"Then there came the crowd, shrieking mad things with the coward-courage that is of the mob. They had discovered that Stanley had sealed the entrance to the

dome, and they were determined to kill him. 'Come out, come out!' bellowed one of the powerful men who had assumed the role of leader. 'Come out and die! You fool, don't you know we can open the entrance with another torch in an hour. Come out, you yellow-livered scum, 'fore we come in after you!'

"THE roar of the mob shook the dome. Then another voice rose above it—a powerful voice, the voice of a man who has become something more than a man. The voice of doom will sound like that.

" 'Listen to me!' it said.

"The roar of the mob shuddered away, and silence rushed triumphantly in. 'By the time you smash this door, or contrive to open the entrance,' said the voice, 'you shall all be dead. Unless you agree to go back to work, we shall all die together. And die quickly.'

" 'A bluff!' howled the leader. 'A bluff! We're comin' in to get you, Stanley, and when we—'

" 'Listen!' cried the voice. 'Listen for the ventilators!'

"There was a moment's silence. 'They've stopped!' screamed someone. 'God have mercy on our souls, they've stopped!'

" 'We have perhaps ten minutes to live,' said the voice, very calmly. 'Now will you agree to go back to work?'

"They held out five minutes. Then somebody got down on the floor and started making strangling noises, and they gave up. They agreed, these men, and they kept their word. They were hard, but they were honest.

"Stanley organized those men who were loyal, and things changed. If you worked, you ate. If you refused to work, then starve and be damned to you.

"They worked. There were some little rebellions, naturally, but the rebels were punished, so that stopped. No, not tor-

ture. Simply a strong dose of castor oil, and a long rope to unknot in front of your friends and a strip of adhesive tape across your mouth. No torture could have the effect of being laughed at by your friends. And the culture thrived. But from that day on, Roger Stanley was never again sober. No one ever smelled liquor on him; they smelled mint. He chewed it constantly. It was said in the dome that when you saw a moving cloud of mint approaching you, followed by a dimly perceived man, you knew that Roger Stanley was coming."

"That's true enough," said slim, spectacled Milton Williams, the serious, competent youth who was writing his thesis on Roger Stanley. "It's a not very well known fact about Stanley that he incessantly chewed mint. He had it imported all the way from Earth, too."

The blue-eyed man smiled, and the smile softened the lines in his hard face, and faded them so that they almost vanished. Then the smile was gone, and the old agony was stark in his eyes again.

"It was perhaps a month later when he learned of Other World's plan to destroy the dome with everyone in it. Stanley had backfired on them, so they were taking this way. Some of the technicians found one of the workers setting dynamite to shatter the dome. They didn't call Stanley just then. They wanted information. They got it. Their methods weren't very nice, but they were effective. When they had got all they could out of the soboteur, they shot the worker through an airlock into Venus' atmosphere. And once a man without a space suit hits Venus' atmosphere, you don't worry about him any more.

"They went to Stanley and told him everything. He sat there, looking down at the table top, silent. It was over a minute before he said in a harsh voice, 'You say he had an accomplice?'

" 'Yeah,' said one of the technicians,

'but we don't know who. He wouldn't tell us.'

"Stanley, with his eyes on the table, said, 'Assemble all of the men in the recreation room in twenty minutes.'

"The order went out over the dome communication system. Men asked questions, received no satisfactory answers, and, puzzled, gathered in the large auditorium where Stanley stood waiting on the stage. He waited until he knew they were all there, then told them of what he had learned from the technicians. 'The man had an accomplice.' He drew his blaster. 'That accomplice is going to die now!'

"A man in the crowd swiftly drew his blaster in what he thought was self-defense. Stanley's blaster went *Blamp*, and the man didn't have a head any more.

"'That's all,' said Stanley calmly. 'You can go back to work now.' And he strode off the stage.

"This all got back to Other World eventually, but they could hardly squawk about it. So they sat tight and simmered, and the years hurtled by.

"**T**HEN came the Mars-Earth war of 2022. Mars, you'll remember, had nearly a thousand tremendous ships, heavy as hell, and almost unmaneuverable. Earth had only 700 battleships and all were several tons lighter than the Martian monsters. But they came out to fight and die, and die they did. It was slaughter!

"Stanley sat with his jaws tight and listened to the announcer on a televisor ship having hysterics. Then he got up, went to the communications room and put in a call for Other World. When he got the bilious, bloated President Hoag, he told him that he was planning to take the light cruiser ships in the dome and attack the Martian armada. Hoag called him mad, and some other names besides.

"Funny, isn't it, how men can remem-

ber personal grudges when their world is at stake? Stanley sat there listening to old Hoag rave, and getting madder and madder all the time, though it didn't show except in the tight way his jaw was clenched. Finally Stanley told the financier exactly what he thought of him. It was ten minutes before Stanley finished and snapped off the televisor. He snapped instructions to the communication room technician.

"'Get every man to the cruisers,' he said. 'Two men to a ship. Snap it up.'

"'Pardon me, sir,' said the man, 'but what can light ships like ours do against an armada?'

"Stanley smiled. 'There was another armada at once, Jack. They called it the Spanish armada.' He went out, with the technician staring after him.

"It's history what happened next. The lumbering ships of the Martian armada had absolutely no chance against the small cruisers which were built for speed. The tiny ships sailed over, around, under the enemy, without the Martians ever being able to get a line on 'em so as to be able to shoot them out of space. While they were harassed by the little cruisers, the large Earth fleet had its opportunity. And did they take it! This time the slaughter was on the other side, and when it was over, there were only 317 Martian ships left to surrender. The war was over.

"People back on earth went crazy. Stanley was a hero as there'd never been a hero before. Tales of what he'd done at the colony came back too, and Stanley became the most celebrated man on Earth."

"He still is," said Williams. "He always will be. Roger Stanley has never been debunked by any modern historian, simply because there's nothing to debunk. He was that kind of man."

Again the man smiled. It changed his face amazingly.

"Stanley sat by the televisor and lis-

tened to the reports come in. They wanted him to make a speech over the televisions. He refused—flatly. And that night he got drunk—roaring, blind drunk. He smashed bottles, laughed and cried and cheered and sobbed in his locked room.

“Every man in the dome was waiting outside his room when he came out the next morning. He had told them that he was going back to bring Other World to trial. The men started a cheer when he appeared in the door of his room, but it died when they saw his face. He stood in the doorway, talking to himself in a low voice and gazing into space as though they were not there.

“‘I’m going back to Earth,’ he said, ‘but it won’t be the same Earth. I had a girl. I promised her I’d be back, and she promised she’d wait—for eternity if need be. And she will. She’ll wait and wait and wait and pray a little and wait and wait and grow old and die unmarried and unmourned—still waiting. For, you see, I’m not going to keep my promise.’

“The men in the dome dropped their eyes to the floor, tried to think of something to say, could not, and were silent.

“‘Three years have passed since I first came here,’ said Stanley. ‘Three years—and liquor does something to a man’s guts and outsides, too, when he drinks it steady for that long. She sees me, visualizes me as I was when first I left Earth, not as I am now. The idealist, true, but

not on the outside anymore. On the inside. That won’t do, you know; it won’t do. She’d keep her promise, because she’s like that, but she wouldn’t be happy. Shattered illusions are hell. Let her keep hers!

“‘I meant to write a book, too. It would have been a damn good book. I’ll never write it now.’ He paused, staring into space, his hands on his belt, speaking softly to himself. ‘What happened to my life? It’s gone, faded like an ephemeral bubble in the heat of the evening sun. I never wanted to do the things I’ve done here. I’m not that kind of person. But they’re done, and my job is almost finished. So I’m going back to Earth.’ He looked at them as if seeing them for the first time. ‘I’m a hero!’ He laughed shortly, bitterly. There was silence. Then he looked directly at them. ‘Good-by,’ he said, and was gone.

“**H**E WENT back in a small, two-man cruiser. There were a million people waiting at the field when he returned. Televisors, dignitaries, banners, speeches, a banquet. How those millions cheered when the little rocket settled! The cheer rose to a bellow as a man stepped out of the rocket. Then the cheer died and a puzzled murmur arose as no one followed him. This man wasn’t Stanley!

“The man stepped forward and raised



his hands for silence. He said, 'Roger Stanley was lost in space.' Just that. 'Roger Stanley was lost in space.' Nothing more. Then, as one, a million people bowed their heads, a myriad of heads were uncovered in silence.

"This was their tribute to a man who had made history.

"The trial made history, too. Other World threw everything they had into it, but the evidence was there, and popular opinion was against them, as it had never been against anything before. They all got life on the Earth Space Penal Station, every man of them. And the man who had brought them to justice, the man who had returned alone in the cruiser, vanished. No man ever saw him again, and knew him for what he was."

"Until now, eh?" said Larry Miller.

Williams leaned over the table, staring intently at the man with the bitter blue eyes.

"You were with him when he died in space? You were with him?"

"Yes," said the man. "I was with him. But—you see, he died in space only as the man the people knew. Not a physical death."

They stared at him, unspeaking. What can you say when a man tells you that Roger Stanley is not dead?

The man gazed back at them with weary amusement. "He's a bum—a space bum, a fugitive from memories, from smashed dreams, shattered illusions. Doing work only a space bum would do. Cleaning holds, scrubbing decks, polishing metal. 'What do you want done, mister?' he says. 'I'll do it. It won't cost you anything but meals and board and enough drink to put myself in a coma. Anything. I'll do it. I'm a space bum. . . .'"

"Why?" whispered Williams. "Merciful God, why? The most beloved, worshipped man in the ten worlds. He has

only to identify himself, and everything he could ever wish or desire would be his. The ten worlds at his feet. Why shouldn't—?"

"Suppose," said the man in a tired voice, "Napoleon were to return to the people of France who worship him. Would they worship the man himself after they saw this short, ridiculous little fellow with a silly cocked hat and a bulging belly? Suppose Washington were to return. Would America worship a man with wooden false teeth, a terrible temper, a love for liquor, and a vocabulary that would blow the tubes out of every television from here to Mars? Not very romantic, no. Heroes don't look like heroes, save in people's minds. That's why they become heroes after they're dead, because there's no annoying original refusing to check with the mental conceptions of the multitudes. If Roger Stanley never comes back, he'll live in mankind's memory. If he does—how will this drink-soaked, disillusioned man compare with the upstanding, heroic young idealist most people visualize?"

"Roger Stanley will never come back. After all, of what importance are a few more years when you're loved by a billion people, when your memory is cherished and treasured, when you can see yourself already a legend?"

Milton Williams leaned over the table, again staring intently into the stranger's face.

"Tell me," he whispered, "suppose I—or any of us—ran into Roger Stanley. How would we know him? What was his outstanding characteristic?"

The other looked puzzled for a moment. "His outstanding characteristic, you say? Oh—blue eyes."

He stood up, slowly shaking his head as the other seemed about to ask more questions, and strode out of the den, out of their lives, into the dark of the waiting night.



HERE'S a department for all of you, whether this issue of *Astonishing* is the first you have read, whether the magazine is your first introduction to science-fiction itself, or whether you are an enthusiast in the field.

It is a department for those of you who like science fiction, like to look in just a bit upon its many sidelights, contribute an item of your own now and then, perhaps, but prefer to take a generally passive role in it all. If anything in here stirs you to writing a letter, or reading a book you haven't seen before, well, that's all to the good. But it isn't the purpose of this department to get you to join any organization, write any letters, or purchase anything.

YOU'VE read stories about interplanetary travel; you've seen spaceships and space scenes on the covers of this magazine and others in the field. Perhaps you've speculated upon the possibility of space-flight; perhaps you've wondered whether anything solid has been done in the line of finding out if we can get away from the earth at all.

There have been books written on the subject. But let's quote from an article on the subject by a fan writer who calls himself "Ye Olde Booke Collector":

"Strictly speaking, these works are not classifiable as fantasy—at least not to the science-fiction fan—but no one can doubt as yet that their general theme tends still to be fantastic. I refer to two books on

astronautics by two persons known to science-fiction: *The Conquest of Space*, by David Lasser (Penguin Press, 1931) and *Rockets Through Space* by P. E. Cleator (Simon & Schuster, 1936). Fans will remember Lasser for his editorship of *Wonder Stories* from June, 1929, to October, 1933, and they will remember P. E. Cleator for his articles on rocketry in the first British science-fiction magazine, *Scoops*. Both these persons became interested in rocketry and the science of space-flight—whose technical title is *astronautics*—through their connections with science-fiction.

"*The Conquest of Space* is not a technical work. It is a fairly easy and casual survey of the background of rocket flight, the knowledge of the subject at the time, and the aspects of actual space travel. Part of the book describes an imaginary voyage into space, detailing the factors that would be likely to arise. The book is light, and will carry extensive information on the subject to a newcomer, but it will not convey any solid facts to the person probing for more factual figures.

"*Rockets Through Space*, subtitled 'The Dawn of Interplanetary Travel', is a more up-to-date volume and contains more information, statistics. It also contains diagrams of actual rocket models, designs, and experiments. Plates show Pendray and the ARS rocket which made a record of 700 miles an hour; scenes from Jules Verne, from the UFA film, from various rocket mail and rocket experimenters'

flights. Rather than dealing with imaginary flights through space itself, the greater part of the book recounts the actual experiments made on the subject of rocketry, detailing the work of the German Society and its 'Maraks', the American Society's trials, and the various mail-rockets, both winged and otherwise." (From the "Science Fiction Fan" April, 1940).

THE province of science-fiction is by no means limited by speculations about the future. Many are the fine tales in this genre whose subjects have been riddles of the past, of the beginnings of life on this planet, of what civilizations and forms of life dominated the earth before the advent of our recorded history.

One of the finest writers specializing in this corner of science-fiction was the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who has been acclaimed by many outstanding contemporaries as the successor to Edgar Allen Poe in American literature. After his death in 1937, Lovecraft's home in Providence, Rhode Island, became a sort of shrine for his myriad of admirers. Here are a few excerpts from an article by John B. Michel, giving impressions of the man from viewing his surroundings:

"The city exuded an atmosphere so tangible that I felt it almost immediately after we had left the train. From all sides about us, low hills rose slantingly to the horizons. We stood in a sort of cup-shaped hollow and the town climbed about us in row on row of ancient, red-brick structures, with only the suggestion of a modern building or two in the business district.

"It is a place of no special rush and hurry. Except for the roaring railroad terminal it might very well have been just another country town lost somewhere in the hills. Civilization does not seem to have changed its soul. It is a town of

tradition. We walked along 'college' streets, and 'pine' streets and 'market' streets, all lined with tall and stately trees. On our journey up the slope toward the great college in whose vicinity stands the Lovecraft home, we met hardly another soul. On a sleepy Sunday, Providence is very still, very majestic and clean and white.

"The house was a perfect frame for the life of the man who once lived in it. Shut off from direct view of the sloping street by a bend in a long, brick-walled alley, it hid from the large, imposing library building beside it, the waving branches of trees surrounding it like upthrust arms warding off the threat of absorption into a busy, moving world. We stood before it at last and gazed down the hill through the quiet, still air.

"To the eye, the house, the town, the trees and the sky was a frozen world of wax, and faded, imprisoned color. Steeples and gables of forgotten years filled the whole, circling horizon.

"Lovecraft's aunt met us at the door. We walked up a flight of narrow stairs together. She took our hats, ushered us down a short corridor and into a large room.

"Suddenly I realized why Lovecraft had withered outside it.

"It was an artist's studio, minus the huge, slanting windows, but very reminiscent of the conventional, a low-ceilinged, broad and long sort of room with its walls and floor bathed in sunlight that poured in a flood of rich gold through quaintly curtained windows and half-hidden embrasures.

"It was of another set of years, a dust collector of the traditions, tastes and substance of a particularly nostalgic section of the past when Poe wandered about the back streets and hilly back alleys of this place.

"A lot of oddly assorted moods and atmospheres seemed to have caught on its

gingerbread character as it plowed through decades.

"Plants and growing tendrils filled whole corners. Lovecraft's desk, set against the northwest window, was untouched. His pencils, pens, blotting paper, instruments of writing, and many scraps of note paper lay as though the author had left but for an instant. . . .

"We talked for many minutes. Mrs. Gamwell told us of her nephew's last days, his dry humor and his indifference as death approached. . . . We saw a new phase of Lovecraft through her words, an eager, boyish side, impulsive, even rash. Through her weaving it was easy to imagine him sitting, wrapped in an old bathrobe, on the spiderish chair before his desk, writing—a Voltaire *sans* smarting sarcasm and biting rhetoric." (*From the "Science Fiction Fan", November, 1939*).

Lovecraft did not write many tales which could properly be called science-fiction, but those few he did produce are unforgettable; their sweep is truly cosmic and in them an entire cosmology can be found. These, along with other masterpieces of fantastic fiction, can be found in the omnibus *The Outsider and Others* issued by Arkham House, 1939.

WHAT might fantasy magazines, books, etc., be like in the future? Donald A. Wollheim paints a picture of how the microfilm process may revolutionize the entire panorama of publishing:

"A page of book or manuscript is simply photographed on a roll of 16 mm. film. Page by page a book can be recorded on microfilm. This film, when complete, can be run off page by page on a simple, cheap reading machine which enlarges the film to full size—or any size convenient to the reader—and can be read at leisure.

"By the method of microfilm, only one master copy is made of the original work. It may be a copy of an already-published

book or magazine, or a new manuscript filmed from typed or hand-drawn sheets.

"But what of the future? With mass education and well-being, public publishing offices could be set up in every town and district. Those who wish to get something of theirs published take their manuscripts to that office, pay a fee, and receive in a short time a copy of their work in microfilm. The publishing office sends a master negative to the state or national publishing center for filing. Lists and critical analyses of every published work are issued periodically from this central office—perhaps weekly, perhaps daily. Persons wishing copies put in a request at their local office; in a day or so they receive, via the central office, their copy in microfilm." (*From "The Phantagraph", June, 1940*).

YOU may have heard of such terms as "entropy." It's a process based upon the second law of thermodynamics and operates through the gradual dissipation of heat and energy throughout the universe to a common level of low temperature heat. The popular conception of the end of this entropy process has often been the basis for science-fiction tales.

However, here's an excerpt from a fan article wherein the writer speaks of a newer, dynamic concept of the universe:

"Just how does this dynamic concept operate? Does it discard as obsolete all theories, concepts, etc., up to its time? Obviously not; the table of scientific discovery cannot at will, be cleared in one fell swoop while the leaders of the new concept say to each other: 'It is to be assumed we know nothing except this, our fundamental axiom—that the cosmos and all in it is constantly in a state of flux, the new arising as the old relapses and wanes away, the new arising out of the old itself.' No, this clearly cannot be done.

"Nor can the dynamic concept discard

laws of matter, energy, motion, light, heat, etc., from which the laws of thermodynamics rise. It examines carefully. But if a principle is correct today; if, for example, the entropy principle seems to be working now, the dynamic concept does not assume that it will be grinding away, unchanged, to the end of time. Nor does it assume that it was in effect when time began.

"Dynamism always considers the question of interference, because of the one factor which former theoreticians seem to have overlooked is the matter of life.

"For life is the interference factor in our universe, and, perhaps in any universe. Without life, then indeed might all things move in accord to immemorial principles, from everlasting to everlasting.

"But life, as exemplified by homo sapiens in our universe at the present time, can queer this whole game. Man has already modified a number of 'immutable' laws, and he hasn't really started yet. Just take that venerable law of gravitational attraction: an object is attracted to Terra at a definite rate of acceleration. We've already tacked amendments onto it. It now reads 'unless modified by parachutes, gliders, airplanes, balloons, etc., an object will fall to the earth at aforementioned rate of acceleration.' And science-fiction readers can further amend, in theory, by adding 'gravital counteragents.'

"When man gets through with all his silly wars and such and gets major problems of living safely on earth settled, he won't be just a clever animal any more: he'll be a first-class interference factor with unlimited fire-power. The writer recalls a science-fiction story about a living galaxy, wherein it was discovered that all the galaxies are fleeing from ours. Ours is infected; it's poison; it's full of life. Well, if the galaxies *are* conscious and capable of motility, they'd better start running now!" (From "Fan-Atic", September, 1941).

Which, you must admit is very controversial, but stimulating to the grey cells nonetheless. *Fantasy Circle* is wide open to any additions or rebuttals any reader would like to make.

ONE OF the most famous science-fiction tales ever written is "The Blind Spot" by Homer Eon Flint and Austin Hall. Both of these writers produced a number of classics of imaginative literature on their own. Here's an excerpt from the write-up of an interview Forrest J. Ackerman had with Hall, back in 1932:

"Hall did not call himself a mystic, but was of the opinion that man was on the verge of making a tremendous discovery, in comparison with which the metaphysical would fade into insignificance. A mysterious universe was about to be revealed to our wondering senses. He was interested then in the possibility of fourth dimension stories, and intended to write a series of them.

"He claimed to have started writing by mistake. His first story the editor of the old *All Story* branded 'the damndest lie ever concocted'—and forthwith published it. Hall did practically all of his writing between ten at night at three in the morning. . . .

"One day, after Hall and Flint had lunched together, Hall, then about forty, held his finger up before one of his eyes and asked: 'Couldn't a story be written about that blind spot in the eye?' Not much was said about it until four days later; then, again at lunch, Hall outlined the classic to his collaborator. The first eighteen chapters were written as conceived by Hall. When 'Hobart Fenton' took up the tale, it was Flint writing chapter nineteen to twenty-four. Hall resumed at 'The Man from Space' and carried through to the conclusion."

Austin Hall wrote the famous sequel to "The Blind Spot" after Flint's death.

Oddly enough, the very last thing Flint said to Hall, at their last meeting was: "I'll see you in the blind spot." Flint was killed in an auto accident shortly after they parted on that occasion. (*From "Specula", January, 1941*).

WE'RE a strange lot, we followers of science-fiction—those of us who cannot wait for the next issue of our favorite pulps, even though we don't get around to joining up with the "fan" crowd. What makes us this way? How do we differ from other people? Ray Garfield has a few words to say about that:

"Science-fictionists look to the future; they envision a future world. In a sense they consider themselves 'futurian' in outlook because of that. Contrast a science-fictionist's outlook on the world with that of the average man and you will grasp what is meant. A science-fictionist looks at a thing and tries to visualise it as it may be in years to come. He looks at a modern city and transforms it into a future metropolis. He looks at an airplane and thinks of ocean-spanning rockets; he looks at the moon and the stars and thinks of space-flight. Physics and chemistry remind him of atomic power, and he shrugs his shoulders at the marvel of radio for thought of the television sets of the future. He thinks of the world not as a collection of nations, but as a planet of one race—the human. The present is to him already the past; the future is the thing.

He has what may be termed a dynamic conception of the future. (*From "Science-Fiction Fan", June, 1940*).

PROPHECIES are usually interesting reading. True, few books of prophecy which you can obtain are such as to merit the term "scientific", but there are a few exceptions. One of these is John Langdon-Davies' *Short History of the Future* (Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1936).

Ye Olde Booke Collector has this to say about the volume:

"Mr. Langdon-Davies' approach to the question of the future is somewhat different from that taken by other social theorists. He prefers a coldly scientific and unemotional approach. He refuses to be swayed by his own desires for the future, or the Utopians' ideals in which he would prefer to believe. Carefully he examines the facts of present day life, laying particular stress on the scientific development of the various nations, on their actual political histories, and on their economic status. Basing his observations on these—and he speaks not as an armchair theoretician, but as a practicing scientist who has traveled extensively both as a tourist and as a reporter—he then ventures a series of twenty-four prophecies of the future. These prophetic remarks are what constitute his short history of the future.

"While events have shown some of his details incorrect, thus far his general prophecies have been adequate— He stated, for example, in 1935 that there would be no war in western Europe until 1940. . . . Nowhere does he state that he himself desires or advocates what he predicts; he predicts these things, often with regret, only because as he sees it, the cold facts of observation make any other conclusions implausible. . . .

"*A Short History of the Future* is a grim book, but an exceedingly interesting one; it should be required reading for staff authors who venture into this field of special speculation." (*From "Science-Fiction Fan", December, 1939*).

WE'RE planning this new department for the most part, to be a collection of items various science-fiction enthusiasts have written and published in various "fan" publications. But that doesn't mean we aren't interested in your own pet ideas, whether they've appeared in the fan press or not.

PIED PIPER

By Lyle Monroe



Master of war and peace was he, the man who had exacted a dreadful penalty to prove the grim truth of his creed: "I serve the world—but I am slave to no nation in it!"



"THE Prime Minister—and Field Marshal Yler!" Doctor Groot's secretary was obviously excited.

Doctor Groot did not lift his eyes from the laboratory bench. With a gentle, steady grip he held a tiny furry animal while he shaved an area on its thigh.

"So? Have them wait."

"But Doctor, it's the—"

"Are they more important than *this*?"

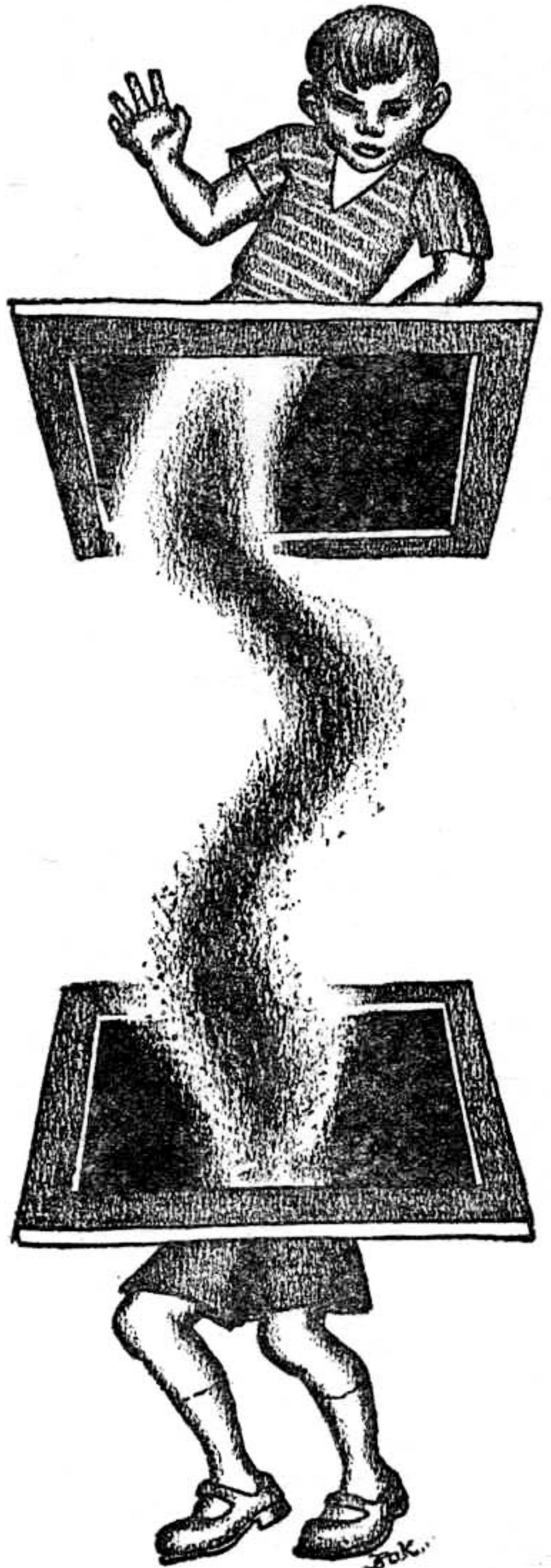
He reached for a hypodermic needle, loaded and waiting. His little specimen, a field mouse, did not resist the needle.

The secretary started to speak, bit her lip, and withdrew.

The statesman endured the wait somewhat better than the soldier. "I don't like this, Excellency," the field marshal grumbled. "Why should we be kept waiting while our host fiddles around among his stinks and bottles? Mind you, I'm not complaining on my own account; I learned to wait when I was a cadet; but you represent the state."

The Prime Minister twisted around in his chair to face Yler. "Patience, John. What does it matter if we are treated like job-seekers? We must have him to win the war, but does he need us? I doubt it—from his viewpoint. Would you and I be here at all if we were not already beaten?"

The general turned a darker red. "With



due respect to you, sir, our armies are not yet beaten."

"True. True," the statesman conceded testily, "but they will be in the end. You told me so."

The soldier muttered to himself.

"What," asked his companion, "did you say?"

"I said I would rather go down in honorable defeat."

"Oh, that! Of course you would. All your training is to fight. My anxiety is to win. That is the difference between politicians and soldiers—we know when to give way in order to win. Resign yourself to it; we must have the services of Doctor Groot in order to win this war!"

The soldier's answer was cut short by the secretary appearing to announce that Doctor Groot could now see them. She led the way; the politician followed; the soldier brought up the rear, still fuming. As they entered Groot's study, the doctor was entering it also, from the laboratory door on the far side.

His visitors saw a vigorous elderly man, a little below middle height, stocky and a bit full about the equator. Live, merry eyes peered out of a face appropriate to an old bull ape. This was surmounted by a pink, hairless dome of startling size. He was dressed in dirty linen pajamas and a rubber apron.

"Sit down," he said, waving them to big leather armchairs and seating himself in one, after pushing several books and assorted oddments to the floor to clear the chair. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was up to my eyes in some research that couldn't wait. But I found the answer to the problem."

The field marshal leaned forward eagerly. "You've found the weapon, Doctor?"

"The weapon? What weapon? I've found why field mice have herpies. Odd business—hysterical, just as in humans. I induced a neurosis; they responded by

developing herpies. Quite interesting."

The soldier did not conceal his annoyance. "Field mice! Wasting time with such trifles! Man, don't you know there's a war?"

Groot lifted his shoulders a fraction of an inch. "Field mice, or field marshals, who shall say what is important? To me, all life is important, and interesting."

The Prime Minister interrupted suavely, "No doubt you are right, Doctor, but Field Marshal Yler and I are faced with another problem of paramount importance to us. The sound of battle hardly reaches the quiet of your laboratory, but for us who are charged with the public responsibility of prosecuting the war, there is no escaping it. We have come to you because we are at our wit's end and need the help of your genius. Will you give us that help?"

Groot pushed out his lips. "How can I help? You have hundreds of able research men in your laboratories. Why do you think that one old man can help you win a war?"

"I am no expert in these things," replied the politician, "but I know your reputation. Everywhere among our experts and technical men I hear the same thing: 'If only Groot were here, he could do it.' . . . 'Why isn't Doctor Groot called in on this?' They all seemed convinced that you can solve any problem you put your mind to."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

The Prime Minister turned to the soldier. "Tell him, John."

RAPIDLY Yler sketched out the progress of the war; the statistics of men and materials involved, the factors of supply and distribution, the techniques employed in fighting, the types of weapons; the strategical principles.

"So you see that even though we started practically equal in manpower and technical equipment, because of the enemy's

greater reserves of capital goods, the tide has swung against us. Under the law of decrements, each battle leaves us worse off than before; the ratio against us has increased."

Groot considered this, then answered.

"And the second differential is even worse, is it not so? The rate of increase of your losses climbs even more rapidly than the losses themselves. And it would seem from your figures that the third differential, the speed with which the rate is increasing spells disaster—you cannot even hold out until winter."

The field marshal admitted that such was true. "However," he added, "we have dug in and are holding the strategic situation practically static while we try to decide what to do about it. That is where you come in, Doctor; we need some radically new weapon or technique to change the ratio of losses to our favor, or the end is in sight. I can hold this situation together with very little change for six weeks or so. If you can go into your laboratory and produce some new and powerful weapon of offense in that length of time, you can save the country."

Groot looked at him quizzically. "So? What would you like? An incendiary ray from a portable projector, perhaps? Or how about a bomb that would not cease to explode, but would continue to destroy for days or weeks? Or perhaps you would like a means of disabling their aircraft in midair?"

The soldier nodded eagerly. "That's the idea, Doctor, any of those things. If you can do even one of them, you will be the greatest hero in the history of our country. But can you really give us such weapons?"

Groot nodded casually. "But certainly. Any of those things are obvious possibilities. You provide me with the money and help and I can deliver such weapons, or better ones, in fairly short order."

The politician intervened. "Anything

you like, Doctor, anything at all. I shall direct the Secretary of the Exchequer to provide you with an unlimited drawing account. Any personnel you require will be ordered to report to you forthwith. Now suppose I leave you two to confer as to the most immediately important work to be done."

He arose and reached for his gloves and hat. "I may say, Doctor, that the reward will be commensurate with your service. Your country will not forget."

Groot motioned him back to his chair. "Don't be hasty, my friend. I did not say I *would* do these things. I said I *could*."

"Do you mean you might not—"

"In fact, I will not. I see no reason for helping you destroy our neighbor."

The field marshal was on his feet at once.

"This is treason," he raged. "Excellency, permit me to arrest him at once. I'll make him produce—or kill him in the process!"

Groot's tones were soft, mild. "Do you really think a man my age fears death? And let me tell you, my friend, a man with your blood pressure should not get into rages—it is quite likely to bring on a thrombosis, and result in your demise."

The politician's years of practice in controlling his temper and concealing his feelings stood him in good stead. He placed a hand on the marshal's shoulder. "Sit down, John, and be quiet. You know as well as I that we can't make Dr. Groot work, if he refuses. To talk of revenge on him is silly." He turned to Groot. "Doctor, when your fellow countrymen are dying to accomplish a particular end, don't you think you owe them some explanation if you refuse to help them in any way you can?"

Groot had watched the little by-play with amusement. He replied courteously, "Certainly, Your Excellency. I will not assist in this mass killing because I see no

reason why either side should win. The cultures are similar; the racial stocks are the same in about the same proportions. What difference will it make which side wins?"

"Don't you feel any obligation of patriotism, or loyalty?"

"Only," Groot shrugged, "to the race itself. Not to a particular gang."

"I don't suppose it would do any good to discuss with you the question of which side is morally justified?"

Groot shook his head. "None at all, I'm afraid."

"I thought not. We are realists, you and I." He gathered up his gloves again. "I shall do what I can, Doctor, to protect you from the results of your decision, but political necessities may force my hand. You will understand."

"Stay." Groot stopped him again. "I refused to help you win this war. Suppose I undertook to keep you from losing?"

"But that is the same thing," exploded the field marshal.

The Prime Minister simply raised his brows.

Groot proceeded. "I will *not* help you to win. But if you wish it, I will show you how to stop this war with no victory on either side, provided—" He paused—"provided you agree now to my kind of a peace."

He stopped and waited for the effect of his words. The Prime Minister nodded. "Go ahead. We will at least listen."

"If the war is finished with no victor and no vanquished, if the terms of the peace set up a new government which welds the two countries into one nation, indistinguishable, free, and equal, I shall be satisfied. If you can assure me of that, I will help you—otherwise not."

THE politician withdrew to the far end of the room, and stood staring out the window. He traced a triangle with his forefinger on his right

cheek, and repeated it, endlessly, his brows furrowed in thought.

The old soldier got up and joined him and expostulated in whispers, "—utopian! . . . impractical! . . . different languages, different traditions . . ."

The politician left the soldier abruptly and faced the scientist. "I agree to your terms, Doctor. What do you plan to do?"

"First you answer a question for me: Why are men willing to fight and die in a war?"

"Why? For their country, for patriotic reasons. Oh, I suppose a few regard it as an adventure."

"No reason is necessary for the men themselves," put in the field marshal, "under compulsory service. They *have* to."

"But even under compulsory service," said Groot, "there must be good morale, a willingness to die fighting, else you would be faced with chronic mutiny. Not so?"

"Mmmm—well, yes. You're right."

"Doctor, why do you think men are willing to die in war?" inquired the Prime Minister.

Groot answered solemnly, "To be willing to die in war has nothing to do with personal self-preservation. To go to war is suicide—for the individual. Men are willing to be killed in war for one reason only—that their tribe may live after them. That is to say, they fight for their children. To a nation without children, war is meaningless, not worth fighting. That is a primary datum of mass psychology!"

"Go on."

"I propose that we kidnap their children!"

"It's an infamous scheme. I will not agree to it."

"It is humane."

"It is contrary to international law."

"Naturally. International law defines the legal ways to kill men. This proposes an illegal way to avoid killing them."

"It violates every rule of civilized warfare!"

"Quiet, John! You'll do as you are told."

DEEP behind the enemy's lines in a moderate-sized city, life flowed quietly along. True, there were few men on the streets, and those few usually showed the marks of battle. The motor busses were driven by women; the clerks were women; even the street sweepers and rubbish collectors were women. On a hill at the outskirts of town, there stood a large boarding school, an orphanage for the children of the war dead. Here matriarchy was the natural thing.

It was recess time. The pleasant, gardened grounds swarmed and boiled with young life. Their high young voices were raised in shouts and calls that attend the age-old games of childhood; tag, ball games and the like.

In her private office, Madame Curan, superintendent, pored over her reports. The voices of the children outside reached her as a wordless, tuneless obligato, which she heard subconsciously and responded to by relaxing the tired wrinkles between her eyes.

She pushed a stack of papers to one side, and pressed a button. The outer office door opened almost at once, and she glanced up to find, not the stenographer she had rung for, but her second-in-command. The woman was plainly excited.

"Madame! Air raid!"

Madame Curan's finger was at once on another button. A siren mourned, and the shouts of the children were snuffed out.

"Are you sure?" she asked her assistant as they hurried out. "I don't understand it. They've never raided schoolhouses before."

Out on the grounds the children had formed into four queues and were being hurried down four covered ramps which

led underground. The playground supervisors, young widows, most of them with a too bitter knowledge of war, were urging them on.

Madame Curan glanced up. Settling out of the sky was a huge helicopter of bombing type. It was attended by a dancing, swooping swarm of little fighting planes. Three little white clouds appeared suddenly among the planes; then a few seconds later the breeze brought three short dry coughs. The anti-aircraft batteries had opened up.

Her assistant clutched at her arm. "Where are our planes?"

"There they come."

Three tiny specks, higher than the enemy, burst out of the glare of the sun from the southwest. They dropped their *V* formation, shifted into open column, and dived at full throttle, disregarding the convoying fighting planes in their eagerness to reach the big bomber. The bomber jerked away to the east, like a humming bird shifting to another blossom. But the column followed. It was plain that the leading pilot intended suicide by diving into the bomber.

One of the fast little fighters of the convoy beat him to it. The two planes, defender and convoy, collided a short distance over the helicopter. They seemed to disintegrate noiselessly into disorganized rubbish. The other two planes in the column ducked, one under, one over the floating rubbish, and passed harmlessly beyond the bomber. A few seconds later came the sound of the collision—the noise of a giant tearing a thousand yards of muslin.

The helicopter landed on the playground.

From the control cabin on the port side forward, a small door opened, a light metal ladder swung down, and two men debarked. They approached the women. The younger of the two men addressed them.

"Madame Curan, is it not? I am Lieutenant Bunes. Allow me to present Flight Commander Dansic. I will translate for him."

"It is not necessary. I know your language. What is the meaning of this cowardly attack?"

The commander saluted smartly, and made a slight bow from the waist. "Please, Madame. I am so happy that you speak our language. It will make everything so much simpler. I regret to inform you that you are my prisoner."

"Obviously."

He smiled as if she had been exceptionally witty. "Yes, of course. You, and your assistants. I am forced to require a certain service of you."

"I shall not help you!"

"Please, Madame. It will not be anything you do not wish to do. You will simply continue with your present duties of caring for the children. You see, I must take the children back to my country. You will be needed to care for them."

"I will not! I shall tell them to resist. You cannot possibly control three thousand children."

He shrugged his shoulders. "As you like, Madame. Did I not promise that you would not be required to do anything that do not wish to do?"

WHILE they were talking, a great door opened from the fat body of the aircraft, swung down like a draw-bridge, and a dozen men trotted out at double time. They broke into two single file columns and deployed rapidly around the buildings until they completely surrounded the school at fifty-yard intervals. Each carried a large tripod and had a pack slung on his back.

Once at their posts, they set up the tripods, unslung the packs, clamped them hastily on the tripods, and stripped the covers from the packs. Then each one grasped the end of a reel of wire which

was slung on his tripod, trotted away in a counter-clockwise direction toward the next adjacent tripod, paying out the wire as he ran. Each man clamped the end of his wire to the tripod of his left-hand neighbor, and ran quickly back to his post.

A non-commissioned officer standing at the helicopter door bellowed, "Report!"

"One!" "Two!" "Three!" "Four!" "Five!" "Six!" "Seven!" "Eight!" "Nine!" "Ten!" "Eleven!" "Twelve!"

The non-commissioned officer brought his right hand down smartly.

Nothing much happened. The trees and buildings beyond the line of tripods shimmered slightly as if seen through a soap bubble film. But a motorcycle squad of civic guards came charging up the boulevard from the city a moment later, and crashed into this iridescent phantom. They piled up in a tangled, sickening heap.

Inside the helicopter a young technician sat before a complex control board, his bony, nervous hands busy with knurled levers, a triple bank of numbered keys, and numerous switches. His eyes followed the responses on the instrument panel back of the control board, noting the readings shown by quivering needles, watched the wandering of the little lighted "bugs" in the zero readers, saw the ready lights flash on.

A green light flashed near the top of the panel. He pulled a screen down in front of his face and threw a switch. A picture rapidly built up on the screen of another pale-faced nervous man. The picture spoke:

"Hi, Jan. Ready on your side?"

"Yeah. I'll give you a stand-by warning."

"I don't like this, Jan."

"Neither do I. I'll run any machine that they put in front of me, but I prefer to take 'em apart first and see what makes 'em tick."

"Right. How the hell do I know what

goes on back of that board? I'm just punching keys in the dark. Besides, how do we know those kids won't be hurt? Nobody has ever seen this gadget in operation."

A shadow fell across the board. The technician looked up and saw the non-commissioned officer gesturing to him. He spoke again to the panel.

"Stand by! We're starting the music." He pressed three buttons in rapid succession.

The music reached the four standing on the grounds; Madame Curan, nervous and defiant; her assistant, frightened and looking for guidance; the commander and his aide, urbane and alert. It tinkled in their ears like a child's song. It sang to them of a child's cosmos, a child's heaven, wonderful, free from care.

Dansic smiled at Madame Curan. "Is it not silly to be at war when there is music like that in the world?"

In spite of herself she smiled back.

The music swelled and developed a throbbing almost below the audible range. Then a thin reedy piping was distinguishable. It wove in and out of the melody, embroidered it, and took it over. *Come away*, it said. *Come away with me*. It was piercing, but not painful—it seemed to vibrate in the very brain itself.

The children boiled up out of the underground ramps like so many puppies. They laughed and shouted and ran in circles. They rushed out of the ground and danced towards the helicopter. Up the incline they jostled, pushing and giggling.

The technician took a quick look over his shoulder, and barked, "Here they come!"

He threw a switch, and an empty frame beside the control board, six feet high, suddenly filled with opaque, velvet blackness.

The first of the children skipped up to the frame, jumped into it and disappeared.

Commander Dansic led Madame Curan

into the helicopter as the last of the children were entering. She suppressed a scream when she saw what was happening to her charges, and turned furiously at the commander. But he silenced her with a wave of his hand.

"Regard, please."

Following the direction of his pointing finger, she saw, framed in the television panel, a screen similar to the one in which she stood, except that in the picture the children were popping out of a frame of blackness.

"Where are they? What have you done with them?"

"They are in my country—safe."

The last of the staff of the school was persuaded or coerced into passing through the blackness; the helicopter crew followed, two at a time. Finally the commander was left alone, save for the technician, with Madame Curan. He turned to her and bowed.

"And now, Madame, will you come with me and resume your duties to your wards?" He offered her the crook of his right elbow.

She bit her lip, then grasped the proffered arm. They marched steadily into the black.

The technician pulled off his earphones, made some last adjustments, and faced the framed darkness. He entered it with the air of a man about to take a cold shower.

Fifteen seconds later the packs on the circle of tripods blew up in a series of overlapping little pops. Ten seconds after that the helicopter blossomed into a giant mushroom, with a dull *whooo-hwoom!* that shook the ground.

THE two technicians need not have worried about the safety of the children. Back deep in the territory of their home country, Doctor Groot sprawled in a chair and watched the arrival of one consignment of the children.

A small, warm smile lightened his ugly face, induced by the sound of the unearthly music perhaps, or possibly by the sight of so many happy children. The Prime Minister stood near him, too nervous to sit down.

Groot crooked a finger at an elderly gray-haired female in the white uniform of a chief nurse.

"Come here, Elda."

"Yes, Doctor."

"You must see to the music yourself. Reduce the volume now to the least that will keep them quiet, free from tears. Put them to sleep with it tonight. But no music—*this* sort of music—tomorrow, unless absolutely necessary. It is not good for them to be happy as angels too long. They have still to be men and women."

"I understand, Doctor."

"See that they all understand." He turned to the Prime Minister, who pulled at his lip and looked distraught. "What is worrying you, my friend?"

"Well—Are you sure no harm can come to these children?"

"Do you not see?" Groot waved a hand at the frolicsome children, being herded in little groups to the quarters prepared for them.

"Yes—but suppose two of your receiving stations were tuned in the same fashion. What would happen to the children?"

Groot smiled. "You are confusing this with radio. My fault, perhaps. I called it mass-radio when speaking of it. But it is nothing of the sort. It is—how are you in mathematics?"

The Prime Minister made a grimace.

"Very well, then," continued Groot, "I cannot answer you properly. But I can tell you this: Those children were not broadcast like radio waves. They simply stepped through a door. It is as if I took that door—" He pointed to one in the end of the hall—"and twisted this building so that it fitted up against the door." He pointed to another on the other end of the

hall. "I have tampered a little, oh, such a very little, with world lines, and pinned a piece of space to another piece of space with which it was not normally in contact." He pointed to the mass-radio receiver present with them in the room. "That is one end of my pin. You understand?"

"Well—not entirely."

Groot nodded. "I did not expect you to. I did not truly explain it. Without the language of tensor calculus it cannot be explained; I can only tell you an allegory."

An orderly trotted up and handed Groot a sheaf of reports. Groot glanced at them. "Two more stations and we shall be ready for the shield. Have you wondered how that worked, too?"

The statesman admitted that he had.

"It is the same thing and yet different," said Groot. "This time we lock the door, very softly. The world lines are given a gentle twist and mass will not pass along them. But pshaw! Those are monkey tricks, mere gadgets, complex as they seem to the layman. But the music now—that is another matter. There we tamper with the powers of heaven itself, which is why I am so careful with it."

The Prime Minister was surprised and said so. He had been impressed by the engineering miracles. The use of music he regarded as a harmless crotchet of Groot's.

"Oh, no," said Groot. "No. No indeed. Have you ever thought about music? Why is music? What is it? Can you define it?"

"Why—uh—music is certain rhythmical arrangements of sounds which produce emotional responses—"

Groot held up a hand. "Yes, but what arrangements? And what emotions? And why? Never mind. I have analyzed the matter. And now I hold the secret of Orpheus' lute, the magic of the Pied Piper."

He lowered his voice. "It is a serious matter, friend—a dangerous matter. These other toys will go to the state, but this one secret I keep always to myself—and try to forget."

The orderly hurried up again, and handed him another report. Groot looked at it and passed it over to the Prime Minister.

"Time," he said. "They are all back. We will set the shield."

A few minutes later the lead wires of some thousands of tripods, spaced equally along four hundred and seventy miles of battle front, were joined. Telephonic reports were relayed to GHQ, two switches were thrown, and a shimmering intangible screen separated the opposing armies.

The war was over—*de facto*.

OFFICIAL PRIORITY MESSAGE

FROM: PRIME MINISTER

TO: CHANCELLOR

VIA: NEUTRAL LIAISON

EXCELLENCY, YOU ARE AWARE THAT HOSTILITIES HAVE CEASED BECAUSE OF OUR DEFENSIVE SCREEN. WE HOLD THREE HUNDRED FIFTY-SEVEN THOUSAND AND TWELVE OF YOUR CHILDREN AS HOSTAGES. PLEASE SEND OBSERVERS UNDER FLAG OF TRUCE TO ASSURE YOU OF THEIR WELL-BEING. WE ARE PREPARED TO MAINTAIN STATUS QUO INDEFINITELY. WE ARE READY TO TREAT WITH YOU FOR AN EQUITABLE PEACE WITHOUT VICTORY TO REPLACE PRESENT DE FACTO ARMISTSCE:

SIGNED AND SEALED BY THE
PRIME MINISTER

ON THE eleventh day of the peace conference, the chancellor asked for a recapitulation of the points agreed on. The chief clerk complied.

"First consideration: It is agreed that henceforth the two subscribing nations are one nation. Dependent considera-

tions:—" The clerk droned on. The two parliaments were to meet together, pending a census and a constitutional convention. The currencies were to be joined, and so forth, and so forth. It was provided that the war orphans in each territory were to be reared in the land of the former enemy, and that subsidies were to be provided to encourage marriages which would mingle the blood of the former two countries.

The armies were to be demobilized and a corps of technical experts were to be trained in the use of the new defensive weapons developed by Doctor Groot.

Doctor Groot himself lolled in a chair near the middle of the horseshoe of desks. When the clerk had concluded, the Prime Minister and the chancellor looked at Groot.

"Well, he said testily, when the pause had grown, "let's sign it and go home. The rest is routine."

"Had you considered," observed the chancellor, "that this new nation we have created must have a head, a chief executive?"

"What of it?"

"I cannot be it, nor can it be—" he bowed to the Prime Minister—"my honorable friend."

"Well! Pick one!"

"We have. There is only one man universally trusted here. He and no other will do, if this agreement is to be more than a scrap of paper. And that one is yourself, Doctor."

At this, the field marshal arose at his place at the head of his nation's table of military officials.

"Stop!" he shouted. "There is no need to go further with this fool's play. I shall not stand by while my country is dishonored and prostituted." He clapped his hands together. As if prearranged, two officers left the table, ran to the horseshoe and grasped Groot on each side.

"You are relieved of office, Mr. Prime

Minister. I shall conduct the affairs of our country until the war is over. Safe conduct will be provided for the representatives of the enemy. Hostilities will be resumed at once. And that—" he pointed at Dr. Groot and bristled in rage—"that meddler must be removed—completely."

GROOT sat quietly, making no attempt to resist his captors. But under the table, his shoe pressed down on a button concealed in the rug. In another room some relays clicked.

And the music started.

Not children's music this time. No, rather the *Ride of the Valkyrie*, the *Marseillaise*. Not these exactly, but rather that quality of each, and of every martial song, that promises men Valhalla after battle.

The field marshal heard it and stopped in his tracks; his fine old head reared up, listening. The two officers grasping Groot heard it, and dropped his arms. One by one almost every one of the uniformed men stood up and quested for the sound. Here and there an occasional frock-coated dignitary joined them. Almost immediately they formed a column of fours and

swung away down the great hall, their heels pounding to two-four time.

At the end of the hall a tapestry swung aside and revealed . . . nothingness . . . nothingness, in a large frame.

The column marched into the blackness. When the last man had disappeared, Groot released the pressure from the button. The blackness vanished, leaving an empty frame, with the wall just beyond it. A murmur of expelled breath filled the room.

The Prime Minister turned to Groot and dabbed at his brow with a fine linen handkerchief. "Good God, man, where have you sent them?"

Groot shook his head. "I am sorry. I do not know."

"You don't know?"

"No. You see, I anticipated some trouble, but did not have time to fasten the other end of my 'pin'."

The Prime Minister was horror-stricken.

"Poor old John," he muttered.

Groot nodded soberly. "Yes. I am sorry I had to do it. Poor old John. He was such a *good* man—I liked him so very much."

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FAN MAGS

(In every issue we will review as many of the current crop of science fiction fan magazines as space allows. All magazines for review should be addressed to ASTONISHING STORIES, Fictioneers, Inc., 210 E. 43rd St., N. Y., N. Y.)

FANTASIA: Louis Goldstone, editor July, 1941, 269 16 Ave., San Francisco, Calif. . . . A "quality" fan magazine, replete with a shivery atmosphere created by numerous, excellent linoleum cuts printed in various colors. Lou Goldstone, Nick Kenealy and George Cowie contribute some weird yarns. And don't pass up Harold Elliot's semi-humorous exhortation re pro mags. . . . 10 cents.

FUTURIAN OBSERVER: Bert Castellari and R. B. Levy, editors. This Australian semi-monthly is full of current chatter and news of general information . . . Suggestion: Why not expand this into a complete, detailed newsy? . . . This magazine is two pages, 8½" by 14", mimeographed in colored ink at 10a Sully St., Randwick, Australia. Seven issues sell for 25 cents. (See your post office about how to send for this and other foreign magazines).

SUN SPOTS, (The New): This earnest little fan mag takes the plunge and goes printed! Pros Manly Wade Wellman and J. J. Milliard are in the line-up, backed by a solid group of departments. Keep plugging, fellows, and lots of luck. The next issue will feature a cover by Roy V. Hunt. Published at 31 Bogert Place, Westwood, N. J. Edited cooperatively by R. Gaetz, Bob Blanchard and Gerry de le Ree, Jr.

FANTASY TIMES: This energetic newcomer to the stf. fan news field pops up with a beauty of a cover by old-time favorite Elliot Dold. Numerous news items of interest to professionals as well as fans are culled every month from the

fan press. Next month, Fantasy Times presents the future aims of *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*. Published by James V. Taurasi at 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y. Sam Moskowitz, assistant editor.

FANART: A new idea in mimeographed fan magazines conceived by Harry Jenkins, Jr. of 2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C. The entire content of this fan magazine is made up of full-page drawings of exceptional quality by well-known fan artists. A biography of a well-known fan artist is included in every issue. This time it's Roy V. Hunt. Published bi-monthly at 10 cents a copy.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD: The weekly news mag is still being mimeographed and not printed, as announced in the last issue of *Astonishing*. Julius Unger, 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. 3 issues, 10 cents. Features news of stf. and photos.

WAVELENGTH: Summer, 1941, issue. A newcomer to the field. Fourteen pages of good mimeographing containing a peppy selection of material by pros and fans. Ray Van Houten's article, "Science Fiction, 1941," should prove of interest to the fans. Suggest that the editor devise a more compact format. Magazine sells for 10 cents. Editor: Henry Andrew Ackerman, 5200 Maple Ave., Pimlico, Baltimore, Maryland.

ULTRA: Ultra is quite ultra as fan magazines go. It comes from Eric F. Russel, 274 Edgecliff Rd., Woollahra, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Feature of

this number is story and pictures of the Sydney, Australia, Science Fiction Conference, the first of its type ever held "down under." Aussie fans look astonishingly like Americans!

FMZ DIGEST: Published at 1426 W. 38 St., Los Angeles, Calif. A monthly digest of items of lasting interest taken from the fan magazines, and condensed and preserved by "Femmes." Magazine should be enlarged and all articles republished in full. Swell idea, but go all the way, boys! . . . 8 pages, mimeographed for 5 cents. Edited by Arthur Louis Joquel, II.

THE SENTINEL: Chris. E. Mulrain, Jr., editor. Still another newcomer to the stf. fan field. Published from Box 205, Absecon, N. J. Chris. tries hard with material by Harry Warner, Jr., Bob Tucker, Charles Beling and many others. Price 5 cents.

FUTURIAN WAR DIGEST: From war-torn England comes the brave effort of British fans to keep the flame of science-fiction alive. A half a dozen of the British fans have conceived the idea of each publishing several pages of a fan magazine, all to be bound and mailed together. The result is an interesting cross-section of British fantasy news and views of interest to every American fan. J. Michel Rosenblum, 4 Grange Terrace, Leeds 7, England. Will accept American pro and fan mags in lieu of subscriptions.

VOICE OF IMAGINATION: Published every six weeks by 4sj. and Morojo,

from Box 6475, Met. Sta., Los Angeles, Calif. Usually composed of letters from different fans, but the current August, 1941, issue contains in addition a long personal account of the Denvention. Cover in micro-crayon by Mooney. Numerous humorous cartoons interspersed among the letters lend a lively air to the magazine. Drawing of the red Martian on page nine is slick. 10 cents a copy.

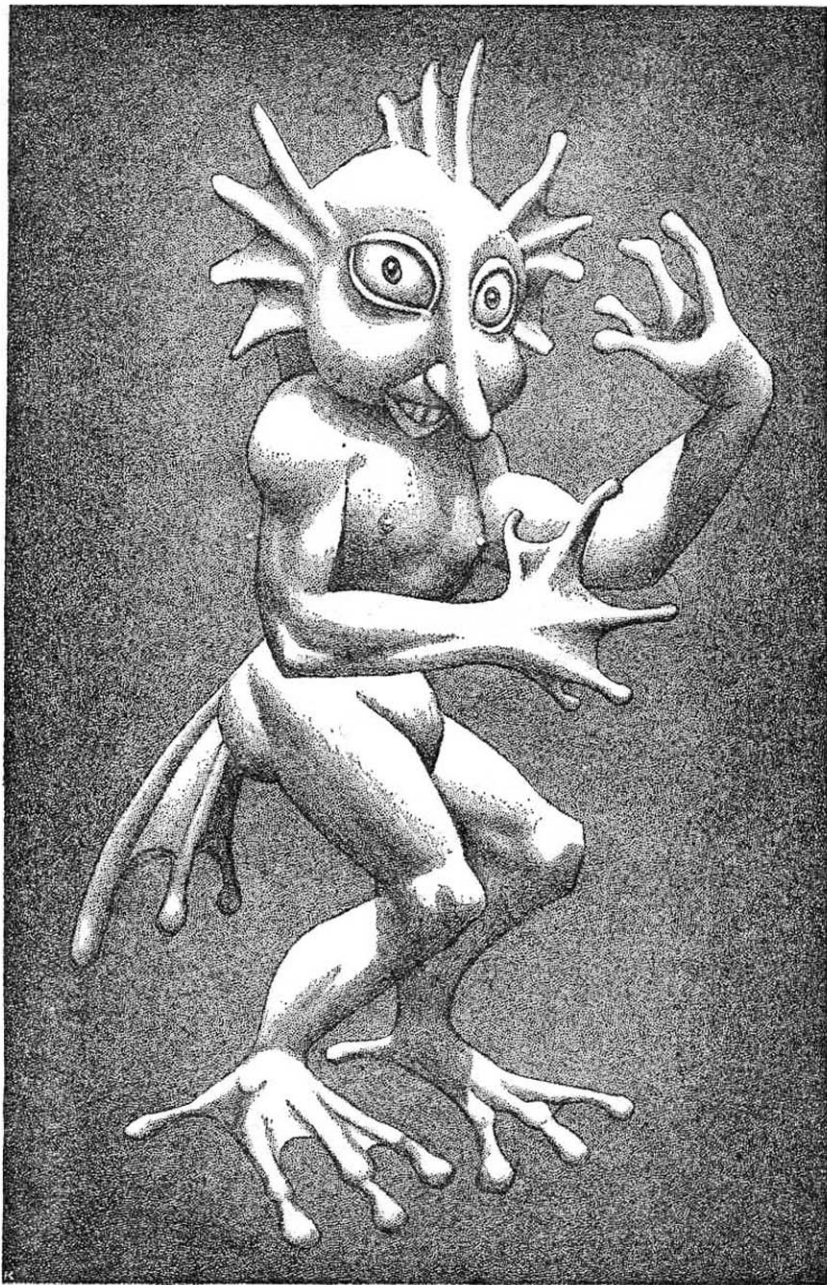
COSMIC TALES, August, 1941. Published by James V. Taurasi, 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y. 5 cents. . . . The publisher announces that this will be the last number of "Cosmic Tales" under the subscription policy. Henceforth it will be published as a free supplement to "Fantasy Times." The current number has an unusual feature in the form of "Cosmic-graph. A History Of The Future." complete with maps.

FAN-ATIC: Charles Beling, of La Roche Ave., Harrington Park, N. J., turns out another number of his fan magazine in quick order. Harry Warner, Jr. discusses the problem of getting "Bug-Eyed Monsters For Britishers," who are science-fiction starved. A featurette of the magazine is Archer Cusp, clever filler poet. 5 cents, bi-monthly.

NEW FANDOM: Sam Moskowitz, President, 603 So. 11th St., Newark, N. J. This is the official club-organ of an international fan organization. This, the ninth issue, is quite skimpy, but the president claims it's due to lack of funds. Mostly club news and discussions. 60 cents a year for memberships.







By James McCreigh

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WHAT it finally boiled down to was Earth, Mars and Venus—against the Oberonians.

Oh, there were other planets and races represented at the Peace Conference. Every nation in the Solar System was there. But the little nations, the minor powers, didn't count for much. Whatever permanent peace terms came out of the conference, they would be made by Earth, Mars, Venus—and the Oberonians.

And the Oberonians were out for war.

The Great War was just over, leaving every race decimated. I was a press attache to the Terrestrial delegation—which is really only a nicer way of saying I was a reporter. The fact that I held any kind of newspaper job was, I am proud to say, due to my work alone. But my managing to wangle the career-making assignment of covering the First Interplanetary Peace Conference can probably be traced to the fact that I am the son of Eustis Durand, Earth's World President.

None of my associates on the other papers and news services ever seemed unduly respectful to me because of my father's high position. I didn't mind; I liked it that way. It gave me a chance to know them better. And one or two of them, such as Barbara King, the Radio-vox correspondent, I wanted to know real well.

Barbara came into my room just as I was eating breakfast on the morning of the fifth day of the conference. She's tall, red-headed, and has a voice that reminds you of Braunschweig's electro-viol when he plays a Chopin nocturne.

She said, "Move over, Lower-order, and pour me some coffee."

Barbara King was liable to call you

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Daughters of Eternity

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"What do you mean, 'Lower-order'?" I asked. "I like me, even if you don't."

She smiled, showing teeth that were whiter than the rays of Sirius. "Then you haven't heard the news, I take it? Well, read this!" She flipped a news-transparency into my toast.

I fished it out, blotted it, and read: "*Strictly confidential.* Report to Terrestrial delegates. Do not file. Agents operating on Rhea, former colony of Oberonian Empire, report inflammatory speeches being made, seemingly with government approval, if not actual sponsorship. Oberonian racist theories are re-emphasized. Many references are made to Terrestrials and Martians as 'Lower orders of animate matter . . . unfit for rule, good only for slaves to the Oberonian Master race'. This is propaganda in di-

They were the war lords of the Solar System, with the fate of the ages in their hands, but they forgot one little burning obstacle to the best laid plans in history—men, nations and galaxies may perish, but a dead man's thoughts may live forever!

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rect conflict with the anti-nationalism clauses of the Armistice. If meetings are held under government approval, would seem to indicate that dissolution of Oberonian Empire was a fraud and that undercover reorganization work is being carried on."

I tried to keep my voice steady. "Where did you get this?" I asked. "And why are you showing it to me? Your outfit would like an exclusive story on a piece of news like this. Why cut me in on it?"

Barbara sighed. "Act your age, Lee," she said reprovingly. "You won't send that to your paper any more than I would. Do you think I would have showed it to you if I thought there was any chance of its getting out? I got it from a delegate—a guy who trusts me. Even if it didn't mean getting him in trouble, I still wouldn't send that. It's hot."

She was right, of course.

"Well—" I began—and stopped.

I drank the last of my coffee and lit a cigarette before I asked, "What are we doing about it?"

Barbara shrugged. "That I don't know. If the Oberonians are up to their old tricks, it means that this conference is a failure before it gets well started. And we're all wasting our time out here." She glanced at her watch and then rose hastily.

"I've got to get going," she said. "I've got to interview Madame Lafarge—Earth's only woman delegate. Human interest stuff. I just thought you ought to know about this. Keep your eyes open when you're around the Oberonian contingent—and remember this, you owe me a favor for letting you see this."

She waved the message at me, then struck a match and ignited it. When it was burned completely she broke up the ash and went out.

"So long," she called.

"So long," I echoed thoughtfully.

I LEANED back in my pneumatic chair and drew a deep breath from my cigarette. The heavy Venusian tobacco smoke made excellent smoke rings. I blew one and stared at it, trying to see through it to what lay ahead for humanity.

The Oberonian Empire had started the last war. The five planets and moons which formed their empire had been the most potent military reservoir in the history of the Solar System. They'd made only one little miscalculation when they set off the fuse that plunged the nine planets into four years of carnage. They hadn't figured on Earth's immediate and decisive entrance into the war. Venus and Mars, the original targets for their attack, they could have vanquished within months. But Earth, the untapped reserve of man-power and industries; Earth, the most highly mechanized planet of all, had for once acted with courage and immediate decision.

The Oberonian drive had been stopped. Then the war had resolved itself into a contest of duration. The planet that could hold out the longest would win. Holding out meant building new rockets to replace those destroyed by enemy fleets; meant keeping up the morale despite constant attacks by raiders, despite occasional major defeats; meant diverting all of the planets' productive resources into the channels of war.

The Tri-Planet Confederation—Earth, Mars and Venus—had won. But at a terrific cost. Ten percent of the intelligent life of the Solar System was destroyed. Some planets suffered more than others—Mercury's frightful toll is too well known to mention. Others, such as the Oberonians themselves, lost comparatively little. But every planet, belligerent or not, felt the effects of that war economically at least. And the economic toll, in the long run, was perhaps even worse than the loss of life.

The war had ended finally through a palace coup in the Oberonian government. Faced with the inescapable fact that Tri-Planet production was increasing by leaps and bounds, the Oberonians had only one recourse: to stop the war. They stopped it for good and all, it seemed. Popular pressure forced the abdication of the War-minded emperor; no new king succeeded to the throne. The Oberonian Parliament proclaimed the independence of all the colonies, the end of the Empire, and the withdrawal of all the territorial claims that had inspired the war.

That move saved the skins of the Oberonians. For the traditionally sportsman-like Earthmen, as was to be expected, showed quick willingness to forget old wounds and to give the new regime a place in the Peace Conference. Nor was that a wrong thing to do. For the Oberonian Empire had been potent only because it was so large. Split into five separate groups, it was considerably less formidable.

Only, according to the secret message I had seen, it wasn't split at all, but was united as ever—probably by secret treaties and agreements which might even have been concluded before the formal announcement of the end of the Empire.

I lit a new cigarette from the butt of the old and tried to follow the thing through. Why would the Oberonians be anxious for a resumption of hostilities? They'd lost the last war. A new one, so soon after the first, would be hopeless. Everything was the same—wasn't it?

No! It wasn't the same at all!

For I recalled with a sinking heart the fact that Earth, and to a lesser degree Venus, had already begun the demolition of certain munitions industries. Scores of private space-yachts and freighters, appropriated by the space-navies for the war, were being stripped of their armaments and returned to their owners. The armies and navies were being demobilized,

their members returning to civilian life.

The thing that was different about the present situation was the Peace Conference itself. Where before it had been common knowledge that the Oberonian Empire was a rapacious, martial group of predatory nations, now people had dismissed that menace from their minds. A project of the Conference was to have been total disarmament. Earth's government had already begun on that. If the Oberonians should fail to follow suit, it would mean. . . .

It might mean almost anything—including a new war which Earth and its allies would lose.

I flipped my cigarette away and left for the press room. It was nearly time for the day's session to begin.

I HAD forgotten my pass and the Press Relations Bureau was very strict about things like that. They made me go back for the pass, which was also my identification. I couldn't blame them for taking every conceivable precaution to see that unauthorized persons were kept from the council room, but I still felt vaguely angry with someone as I arrived at my sealed-in booth ten minutes late.

A Martian delegate was speaking on the horrors of war. Purely platitudinous; just one of the things that a politician likes to get on the record. I made sure the recorder-tape was running so that I could send the text to my paper, then proceeded to forget the speaker.

The Council Hall was probably the largest and most magnificent enclosed room ever built anywhere. The Peace Conference couldn't meet on any major planet because of the gravity. For political reasons, it was advisable that it not meet on any planet, lest the government of the favored world feel that it was entitled to special favor. So an entire asteroid—Juno—had been hollowed out, fitted

with special sealed chambers for the delegates from each world, equipped with the newest and best equipment of every sort for communication, relaxation, comfort and efficiency.

The representatives of forty-two supposedly sovereign powers were here. Each group had its own gas-tight chamber, as luxuriously furnished as could be, each in the proper style for the beings it contained. The ammonia-men from Jupiter and Saturn sat ponderously in their rotating cells of high-pressure methane gas. The rotation provided them with the gravity to which they were accustomed; by special stroboscopic lighting devices they were able to view the outside scene as well as if they had been motionless.

The great black metal delegates from the Robot Republic stood utterly motionless in a perfect vacuum. They had no special gravity-effects; high gravity or low it made no difference to these "descendants" of the intelligent robots that had been banished from Earth and Mars scores of years back.

The Venusian representatives—there were two groups of them, one from each polar civilization—swam restlessly about in murky, tepid water.

And the Oberonians were there too, as well as the lesser delegates.

The Martian had completed his speech with an appeal for disarmament. I kept the tape running, but opened up the switch which kept me connected in direct, automatically coded radio with my paper's office on Earth. If there were going to be speeches on disarmament, I wanted to be ready to make my commentaries on them. I knew, probably better than any but a half-dozen others, how important that question had suddenly become.

An Oberonian signalled that he wished the floor. The Chairman for the day, a lank, demon-black Callistan, yielded it to him and the mechano-translators clicked and buzzed as the switch from Martian

to Rhean dialect of Oberonian was made.

The Rhea-Oberonian began to speak. I couldn't hear his voice, but I had a pretty good idea what it was like—a thin, whining twitter. That was Oberonian language, in whatever dialect. The mechano-translator, of course, made impeccable English of it.

The Oberonian, viewed in the synchronized stroboscopic lighting, was an impressive sight. That race runs to height, and this member of it was no exception. He was close to fourteen feet tall, and the light gravity of his home world had allowed him to spread out. On Earth he would have weighed close to a thousand pounds.

Except for the fact that they are a dozen times bigger, Oberonians greatly resemble lemurs. Their skin is furred—a necessity in their cold home worlds. The pattern of their fur reminds me of a North American animal, *mephitis mephitica*—skunk.

That's what their politics reminded me of, too.

I was all set to forget about diplomatic secrecy and send through a hot message to my office. The Oberonian, I was sure, would disregard what the previous speaker had said, and try to get the attention of the Conference fixed on some new topic. Disarmament would be something taboo with him—if that secret report had been correct. Perhaps he would talk about it in weasel-words, or he might even denounce it openly, though that wouldn't be at all in keeping with the Oberonian foreign policy. But it ought to prove interesting.

So I leaned forward in my chair, listening to the calm, metallic voice of the mechano-translator. . . .

And twenty minutes later, when the Oberonian had finished speaking, I was still leaning forward, in a tense expectation that had somehow gone sour.

For the Oberonian hadn't evaded the

issue of disarmament. Nor had he denounced it. He had, instead, presented what seemed to be a complete, efficient, and workable plan for disarmament—*plus* a proposal for an interplanetary police force with full authority to investigate every part of every planet and use any measures necessary to insure that the disarmament agreement was kept.

There might have been loopholes in the proposal—loopholes that the Oberonians were planning to wriggle out of. There might have been, and by all the evidence I'd ever heard concerning the treachery of Oberonians, there should have been. But I, who was looking for any such loopholes, who knew things that were supposed to be Oberonian state secrets, couldn't find them.

It was enough to shake my faith in Oberonian nature. I had a strong impulse to go over and brave the sub-arctic cold of their section to shake the speaker's hand and ask his apology.

It was a good thing I didn't.

THERE were a lot of other speeches made that day, but none of them counted for much. I walked out on them, after sending my notes and commentaries—minus the secret item—to the paper. I went back to my room and sat down to think. But I didn't get a chance. Without the formality of a knock, the door opened and Barbara King walked in. She had a companion with her—and the companion was Mercurian!

Not a live Mercurian, of course. There aren't any of those; they were exterminated to the last one in the War. This was one of the Mercurian semi-robots, the metal creatures in whose skulls were planted living Mercurian brains. Such brains came from the very highest type of Mercurian—and that was a pretty high type of individual, for the Mercurians were a brainy lot. The honor of having your brains transferred to a metal body

took away from you some of the pleasant bodily functions, but it carried some boons too. A life-expectancy of a thousand of Mercurian years, an average of about fifteen hundred Earth years, went with it, as well as complete freedom from aches, pains, diseases, and all other physical frailties.

The Mercurian "spoke" first—actually, he communicated by mental telepathy.

"I had not wished to come," he said gravely. "It is against the custom of the Conference for delegates of different powers to fraternize. But your young friend here has a certain claim on me, which she exercised."

Barbara flushed. "Not against your will," she reminded him aloud. "This will be to your interest as much as to ours."

The Mercurian made no visible motion, but I received an impression of judicious agreement, as though he had nodded his great, spined plastic head.

"True," he thought compellingly. "But it is not the habit of our race to violate custom—not even the customs of others."

I was still in the dark about the purpose of the visit.

He began to explain: "Have you noticed the wording of the resolution the Rhean delegate introduced today?" he asked. "No? I thought not. It was not intended to be noticed—one little phrase. The resolution, if enacted, would totally outlaw the construction of all existing types of warships. Those which are already built would be either destroyed or irrevocably converted to peace-use spaceships. And a very efficient policing system would prevent any power from disobeying that law. I have reason to believe that the Oberonians are willing to obey that law implicitly. To the letter of the law. But only that far, no farther!"

Barbara broke in there, her hazel eyes shaded. "What he is saying, Lee, is that there's a rider on that definition of a

battleship." She dug in the pocket of her coverall. "I'll read it to you. The construction is outlawed of 'all ships constructed in whole or in major part of steel, iron, a similar ferrous metal, or an allotropic form thereof, excepting'—Well, I won't read the rest. The exceptions are small ships. Do you see the catch?"

"No," I said frankly. "You can make passenger and freight ships without steel, because they have pretty easy going. But a battleship needs ray-gun armor, and that has to contain iron alloys. Nothing else is strong enough; Earth has tried practically everything else."

"*Earth* has," she flashed back. "But does it occur to you that the Oberonian Empire is not Earth? It's a good deal different—and that difference is important. The Oberonians have developed an allotropic form of mercury. It's harder than any steel yet devised. It works perfectly for ray screens. It's lighter than most steel, and it seems to have every necessary quality for making battleships. There's only one thing wrong with it, from our standpoint. At normal Earthly temperatures it's a liquid."

That was the why of the Oberonian's actions.

"Can you prove what you say?" I asked tensely. "How do you know about it?"

The Mercurian answered that. "We of Mercury have a special power for reading thoughts," he said obliquely. "It is not used ordinarily, for it would not be courteous. But now and again a situation will call for it. You'll see the delicacy of trying to prove any such statement. It would be necessary first for me to admit that I had—infringed on the privacy of the Oberonian delegate."

And that would not be good. It looked as if the situation called for some tall thinking.

I was getting ready to try and fill that order when Barbara said, "There's one

thing we haven't told you yet. Besides finding out about the new construction material, he found out that what we had deduced was true. There is a secret Oberonian Empire. It's run by a dictator, not the old emperor or any of his successors. The dictator is an army fanatic, one of the generals who forced the emperor into war. We couldn't get his name, but we found out one thing. He is in a warship of the new design, somewhere in space, not a hundred thousand miles from here."

WE THREE discussed the question for an hour or more without coming to any particular conclusion. The Mercurian, whose intelligence was unquestionable, nevertheless did not seem to be up to the problem of doing anything constructive about our dilemma. He became gloomier and gloomier as the discussion went on. Finally he left, after taking precautions so that he would be unobserved as he went back to his own quarters. He told us not to worry. The intimation was that he would take care of things for us. But I couldn't see what he could do.

I said as much to Barbara. She, surprisingly, seemed to put a lot of confidence in him.

"Don't forget, Lee, it meant a fight against all his training to come here at all. He said he'd help us and he will. I don't know what he can do, but mark my words, he'll do something."

He did something, all right. The next morning the news of what he'd done was all over Juno. Sometime during the night he'd taken a helico-ray pistol and destroyed his metal brain-case and the almost immortal brain within.

Confronted with a problem, his answer had been suicide.

A special funeral ship brought his remains back to his native planet, and an alternate delegate filled his place in the

Conference until a fully accredited one could be sent from Mercury.

In the three days that it took for the new delegate to arrive from Mercury, events moved rapidly. The proposal of the Oberonian had been adopted and implemented by codes and rules suggested by delegates from every planet. An interplanetary police force had already been authorized, to be paid for and staffed jointly by all civilized planets. An iron tracer, the military secret of Callisto, had been given to all, particularly to the policing agency mentioned before. With the aid of this device, it was possible to spot an iron-bearing ship within a distance of a half-million miles, and aim your guns at it without even seeing it.

The outlook for peace would have been rosy. . . . If the Oberonians hadn't managed to develop the new metal. For every bill for disarmament presented to the Conference was only an amplification of the first one drawn up by the Oberonians. And the definition of a warship remained the same.

I dropped hints right and left to all the Terrestrial delegates I could manage to buttonhole, but my hands were tied. Barbara had asked for and received a promise of secrecy in regard to everything she'd told me. As yet, it was not quite imperative that I act immediately. Full-scale disarmament, including the dismantling of all war rockets, wouldn't be begun by Earth until the Peace Conference was over and all the agreements signed. Before they were signed, there was no great need for action and I could keep my promise. If the actual signing became imminent without any encouraging sign, I'd have to tell the whole story to any Terrestrial diplomat I could convince.

I didn't see much of Barbara in those three days. I tried hard enough but she made herself scarce. And I was kept rather busy too, so I never had a really good chance to get her alone and find

out what she was planning to do.

The new Mercurian delegate came and nothing happened. I was one of the crowd of newsmen of assorted shapes and races who met him at the entrance-*porte* to the Halls of the Delegates when his ship landed. He was nothing special, I thought, just a typical Mercurian—and probably, I thought bitterly, as worthless as the one before him. He didn't pause for much of a personal interview, just distributed printed statements to the reporters and went off to his chambers.

But that night I suddenly found cause to remember him vividly.

I WOKE to find someone in my room, rummaging through my things. I rose and was about to challenge the intruder when he whirled and stared at me. It was the new Mercurian delegate!

The mind-power of the Mercurian cannot be overrated. His metal-glass eyes seemed to shine with a weird inner fire as they stared into mine. They enlarged and became more brilliant, and I found myself swirling off to sleep again. . . .

Pure hypnosis, a type impossible for a human being to exercise. But the superior mentality of the Mercurian made it possible for him to dominate my lesser mind so completely that I had to obey his unspoken command to sleep.

But the command could not have any lasting effect. It wore off, probably in a matter of seconds. As I came to again, I heard the door to my room slide gently shut.

I leaped out of bed and examined my belongings. I quickly discovered what the Mercurian had been after: my photo-key to the Press Relations Bureau.

Hastily I climbed into my one-piece coverall and followed.

No one was in sight in the corridors. I made my way quickly to the Press Relations room. I found the door open, and the night attendant asleep within.

The hall was almost totally dark, and, except for the Mercurian and myself, empty. I stared through the blurring transparencies and tried to find him. I saw him moving—yes, it was he—walking rapidly through the Callistan section to the Oberonian one beyond.

I followed. I was totally unequipped for such a venture. The Callistan section, I knew, would be all right. The air pressure would be lower and the atmosphere would have a pungent reek of rare gases, but otherwise it would be much the same as Earth's.

But the Oberonian—this was the Rhean division—section would be considerably different. Cold—frightfully cold.

So I was forced to watch his actions from a distance. He seemed to be doing something—I couldn't tell what—to the mechano-translator, by the light of a small pocket-torch, to judge by the feeble glow. Then the light went out and I could see his gleaming form coming back.

I made myself inconspicuous and allowed him to pass.

I followed him through the door to the Bureau, slipped past the again unconscious night man, and went back to bed. I immediately fell asleep. When I awoke my light-key was in its accustomed place once more.

That was the morning of the day the Oberonian Empire died once and for all. . . .

BARBARA KING saw the blow struck. "I was on the way from my room," she said that night while we were celebrating. "I had a little time to spare and I had an idea of what was coming, so I walked along the promenade. Lucky the Earth-section happened to be facing the right direction then. It was a big, blue flare of light. It blotted out the stars, almost blinded me."

"And it killed the Oberonian dictator,"

I said. "But I'm still wondering about some of the details."

I turned to the steel-bodied Mercurian who stood by, mentally benign. "I realize you could find out everything that was going on in the minds of the Oberonians by thought-reading. That's how you knew they were in tight-beam radio connection with the dictator on their new allotropic-mercury ship. And when you rigged up that super-heterodyne gadget on their secret transmitter, it started a vibration in the receiver located on the ship. I'll take your word for it that a vibration of that certain special type is all that's necessary to destroy one of their ships, by destroying the complex arrangement of the mercury atoms. But what I want to know is—how did you happen to bring the gadget with you?"

The Mercurian's thoughts turned suddenly grave. "For that we owe a debt to my predecessor, the delegate who destroyed himself. Thought transmission is normally carried on only at short distances. But by a special intense effort, thought can be made to reach any individual to whom the sender is attuned, wherever he may be, within hundreds of millions of miles. The consequences of an effort like that cause insanity to the sender.

"My predecessor—who was also my intimate friend—deliberately forced his brain to destroy itself by working it too hard. His mind reached out to me on Mercury, told me all that had happened. Then, when the first symptoms of degeneration began to be felt, he killed himself. And that served a purpose too. As a substitute for a dead man, my coming aroused no curiosity. As a diplomat, my effects were inviolate. I was able to bring in the 'gadget' with impunity."

Barbara nodded. "I was pretty sure that the Mercurian would do something."

I leaned back and lit a cigarette, feeling good. These minor powers with their mental powers were mighty handy allies.

THE MAIL BAG

What a Writer Thinks About It

Dear Editor:

The most astonishing thing about your November issue is that the Cummings story is actually readable. It's one of his very rare current tales that amused rather than irritated me. Apparently Ray has read "The Wizard of Oz"; that scene where all the nasty robots rust is terrific. And Morey did a honey of an illustration for the tale, too.

Well, to start off rightly: the cover strikes me as the best *Astonishing* has had this year, although that isn't the proper way, perhaps, of putting it. Rather, should I say, the only one this year that struck me as being anywhere near good. The September cover had its points, but was generally incoherent. However, I want to register one tremendous kick right here in regard to covers: silly-looking guns. Out of ten issues of *Astonishing*, five have had figures holding, brandishing, or firing silly-looking guns at some object or objects. This is no kick against guns on the cover. I'm in favor of them; I'm known for exclaiming loudly, at times, that stf covers need are more guns and less butter. But these idiotic, tin-plated, Buck Rogers things, which shoot little rings of gas—pfui! So Morley now calls upon all right-minded readers to join the cause. Our program is: better guns for the future, guns that look wicked and deadly instead of these would-be super water pistols.

The second plank in the platform (oh, this will gather adherents to the cause by the thousands) no more space-suited or helmeted heros. Enough of this pampering. Let them breathe space, say we. Out of ten covers on *Astonishing*, five have had the hero in a space suit. It's time the hero went on strike, begad!

Now for stories: "Wings of the Lightning Land" was smoothly written except for one point. The revelation of the sex of our story's narrator was clumsily done; it gave the impression that the machine had changed sex on the victim. And since that was supposed to be the ultra-terrific twist of the story (as the build-up indicated), it sort of flopped. Bok's drawings were good.

"Retreat to the Stars"—highly enjoyable. Can't say that I cared for the illustration much. However, story okay, and it was a relief to have the spy killed at the end, rather than have him change sides suddenly and be forgiven for his sins.

"The Man Who Didn't Breathe" was pretty old stuff. Swell art work on it. Walton's a fine writer, but you should make him use newer plots; this one is overdone.

"My Lady of the Emerald"—well, after all, look who wrote it. However, there are times such as this when you wonder if the artist ever reads the story. What in hell is that squat bird doing in the double spread? If *that* is Morey's conception of the Winged One, I'll make me a little wax image and start sticking pins in it!

"Daughter of Darkness" struck me as being very very funny. Morey did much better this time, while the interior Bok was cute. But I'd like to show this tale to an expert on Freud.

"The Last Drop" is the one story in the issue which struck me as being crummy. As did the illustration. Size stories are so damned overdone, and reductions with drugs—even Cummings has stopped writing them (I hope!). The one thing about it that I liked was the final paragraph. DeCamp and Hubbard should have cut that out and written another story around it.

The Mail Bag: Please make it bigger next time. And I hope you'll continue the book reviews.

Sincerely,
Wilfred Owen Morley.

Some He Likes; the Rest—Ah, Well . . .

Dear Editor:

So you've gone quarterly! Now, while the other fans (or the majority of them) hiss and boo and yell and make themselves look quite foolish, I am frankly glad. Quarterly publications seem to be able to turn out a distinct type of good s-f; practically no hack.

Now for the job of rating the stories in the November *Astonishing*. And due to such a large amount of good ones, it was a real hard one; anyway. . . .

In first place, of course, is "Wings of the Lightning Land" by James MacCreigh. And while it was good—yes, both plot and formation—where did you, or the author, pick up such a name? "Mud" would be just as explanatory as the Wings title. However, I liked the surprise ending. MacCreigh is swell.

"The Man Who Didn't Breathe" was a very close second by Harry Walton. It was the old, but, to me, well-liked story of an overused plot with a brand new, and thoroughly interesting twist.

"Daughter of Darkness" was definitely good, but quite a disappointment because it was a sequel to that superb yarn, "Into the Darkness." Ross Rocklynne did better in the first yarn.

Leigh Brackett's saga of space, "Retreat to the Stars," I thought was good, but it could have been much better. It takes fourth place. Good action, fine suspense, and a nice plot with fair handling. It might have developed into a first placer with the proper touch. Oh, well.

Fifth is "The Last Drop," by L. Sprague de Camp and L. Ron Hubbard. This contained a hackish plot, amusing twists, and a little something, maybe it was the atmosphere that Hubbard's stories can create.

Wilfred Owen Morley's "My Lady of the Emerald" contains a plot which I'd thought of using myself. A super-city in the heart of the Matto Grosso and all that. So in this pretty good sixth-placer he has terrible handling of a plot that could have even been a swell full-lengther.

Last place! Aha, guessed it. "Machines of Destiny," by Ray (the boys call him "Hack") Cummings. And this s-f story (?) is the only one in the issue that was a complete diet of Ray's middle name.

Bok's work in this ish was fine. Morey's pics were good, the one for Morley's yarn being the best in the entire issue. And for a change Thorpe did something worthwhile—amazing, or, should I say, *astomshing*! Giunta's ill was fair, and the cover was swell.

Well, disintegrate my brain, if I haven't run out of things to say!

Milton Lesser.

Mr. Azimov Makes Haste to Reply

Brooklyn, New York

Dear Editor:

This is to answer Mr. Kammler's letter in the *November* *Astonishing*:

To be sure, I expected to have "errors" pointed out by observant readers, but I had hoped the "errors" would be a bit more subtle.

In "Super-Neutron," I stated that the super-neutron was moving towards the sun at a speed of two miles a second. Now I have a nasty habit of meaning what I say, so when I said it was moving towards the *sun*, I meant towards the *sun*, and not towards a position in space occupied by the sun at any given moment. In short, my statement indicates plainly and unmistakably that every passing second saw the distance between the sun and the super-neutron reduced by two miles.

That the sun moves at a velocity of twelve miles per second relative to the galaxy as a whole, I will not deny. That that has anything to do with the problem, I also deny. The sun moves at a velocity of twenty-two thousand miles a second with respect to the farthest known nebula. Has *that* anything to do with the problem?

To be concise, the sun has no absolute velocity, nor has anything else—for absolute velocity is meaningless. Velocity can only be described in relative terms and I did so implicitly in "Super-Neutron" when I said the super-neutron's velocity was two miles a second—leaving unsaid the added phrase, "relative to the sun." Perhaps I should have stated it in so many words, but I think the phrase could have been inferred. Why clutter up the story with obvious statements?

I wonder if Mr. Kammler has ever considered what would happen to a spaceship going from Earth to Mars. Would it have to keep chasing after the speeding sun or could it ignore the sun's motion? The answer is that it could ignore it, for everything in the Solar System partakes of that motion. In short, to objects within the gravitational influence of the sun, that might be considered a convenient reference point, and its velocity neglected.

Sincerely,

Isaac Azimov.

A Little Acret Now and Then . . .

Dear Editor:

Having just dosed with "acret", I feel thor-

oughly qualified to criticize the new *ASTONISHING STORIES*. This November issue featured a drop in the quantity and, surprisingly, a drop in the quality of the stories. Three of the seven stories didn't ring the bell for me.

"Wings of the Lightning Land" was a masterful combination of unusual characters, strange setting, and smooth plot-sequence. The astonishing revelation that the narrator was feminine only added to the pleasing tone of the story. One of the better stories of the month.

A rung below MacCreigh's novelette was Miss Brackett's "Retreat to the Stars." Although in concept much similar to many stories—the "space hegira" plot is one of stf's basic themes—this yarn was somehow very interesting.

"The Last Drop" lacked some of the spontaneity that one rightly expects from de Camp and Hubbard, but it was deftly handled, with due consideration for scientific angles.

Walton did a creditable job on "The Man Who Didn't Breathe." In fact, it is his best story, I think, in two years. The ultra-literary style warned that it was told in this manner to cover up a decrepit plot, but the warning was a false-alarm.

The other stories were not so good. (Wonder if I took a large enough dose of "acret"?) "Machines of Destiny" gave promise that, in his short stories at least, Cummings is finally neglecting his usual plot for something different. "Daughter of Darkness" was too "other-worldly" to suit me. I prefer human characters to these "cosmic entities." No more sequels to "Into the Darkness," please! "My Lady of the Emerald" was virtually unreadable.

"The Mail Bag" should be enlarged next issue, and the addresses of the letter-writers should definitely be given. "Viewpoints" was fair enough, but "Editoramblings" should be expanded to a page or more.

Sincerely,

D. W. Boggs,
Minneapolis, Minn.

What's the Matter with Females, Pal?

Columbia, South Carolina

Dear Editor:

After finishing the November *ASTONISHING*, your humble servant drags out his trusty portable to let the editor know what he thinks about the magazine. Consequently, here I am.

First comes the fiction—"Wings of the Lightning Land" was impressive in only one thing, that being that the narrator was a female. It jest ain't ethical for narrators to be females or sumthin'. Boy, what a shock for Thorssen to call "him" Martha! Gee, I been rooked. On the whole, the story wasn't too bad, but—er—well. . . .

"Retreat to the Stars"—haw! This one's out of place. Golly! Pirates and villains, and bad men and—pardon me, but I can't stand any more of Miss Brackett.

Harry Walton takes an old plot, adds no new twists whatsoever, but does present a fairly readable tale. The writing is a bit on the better-than-average side, but still not good enuf to rescue the story.

(Continued on page 113)



VOICE IN THE VOID

By
Walter Kubilius

★

A voice from the past . . . a city of the dead . . . a man who dared gamble the secrets of the infinite—against his own life!

★

LADINAS sighed as he studied the quivering graph, then pushed aside the sheaf of papers that summed up months of painstaking recordings. He turned to his assistant.

"Sometimes," he mused, "I wonder if we are mad. No progress. Nothing. Nothing beyond that *click-click, click-click*, repeated over and over again. No variations."

Both of them looked at the graph, watched the red needle jump every other moment as it reacted to the invisible radiations from outer space. Ladinas reached over and adjusted the frequency dial.

"Stephen," he murmured as the young man carefully noted the day's work, "it may be that we are studying the matter from the wrong angle."

The young man's expression was one of quiet, sustaining optimism. "Some day we will get it. Perhaps tomorrow; perhaps next month; perhaps later. But one of these days the rays will give up their message."

The older man grunted. "A message, you say? What if there isn't any? Suppose the radiations are merely bursting stars, new born galaxies, the basic ether of matter—or any of the other theories of our so-called practical scientists. What then?"

"Cosmic rays," replied the other, "come from the depths of space—from infinity, perhaps. Can we localize infinity and point to new-forming star clusters as the source of the rays? Infinity is too vast; the rays must come from something vast as well. A thought is vast."

He paused when the old man smiled, then continued. "The idea struck me that perhaps the rays are a message from another dimension saying, 'Listen, we want to tell you something, tell you, tell you.' And the idea would go over and over in my mind—that the rays are thoughts, trying to express something."

Ladinas looked up at Stephen; then his glance rested at the little table with its mass of tubes and wires.

"How can a scientist deny a possibility? And who knows? Perhaps cosmic rays are rays of thought. A romantic theory, of course. But so many things we now know were once romantic theories . . ."

Click-click, went the machine, *click-click*.

KILANT roared with laughter as the grizzled figure stared at him, astonished. Taking off the protective lead sheathing, after switching off the circuit, he walked over to the waiting visitor, Varl, the soldier.

"Speak up," Kilant said. "I am not a god."

The soldier's eyes stared at Kilant, then at the maze of glass wires and steel in the center of the room, watching where a moment before darts of electric fire had spat upon a crystal stand.

"What is that?"

"That," replied Kilant, "is a machine."

Varl turned and strode about the machine, looking into the crystal stand as it shimmered with vari-colored lights. Kilant followed him, his eyes on the soldier's unsheathed sword, symbol of authority.

"Did you make it?" he asked. "The Machines were broken a long time ago."

"Not all of the Machines were destroyed," replied Kilant. "I found this one in an old building beside the riverfall. The dust of years was upon it, but I nursed it tenderly and it grew to what you see now."

"What does it do?" Varl asked, touching some wires gingerly, ready to spring back.

"Of that, I am not sure. But I shall find out."

The soldier wheeled abruptly and faced Kilant. "Do not dabble long," he said softly. "Others have tried."

Kilant nodded. "I know. The Masters killed them and destroyed the Machines. But will an old friend accuse me, bring me to my death and destroy my work?"

The soldier turned again and walked to the door. "There is whispering in the town. It is said that one man is working to bring the Machines back."

Kilant lifted his arms. "Look at my hands. They're as scarred as yours from labor. I do not curse the people for their wars against the hill enemies. Why do

they curse me in my war against ignorance?"

The soldier looked at him, thought of the young boy who played in the ruins while he and his other friends hunted the small animals of the field.

"Good Kilant," he replied, "I come to pay a debt of gratitude to an old friend. And that payment is a warning: Beware of your work with the Machine."

"And this is all the help I am to receive?"

"That is all. I am a soldier and the will of the Masters must be my will. I do not make the laws, Kilant; I only enforce them. And should I fail in my duty, you would still not be safe. I should be slain as a traitor, and others would finish what I refused to start." He walked up the broken steps and out into the street.

They shall not stop this work, thought Kilant as he looked at the entity of steel and iron in the center of the room. Shaking off the passing mood of sadness, he stood up and walked past the door into the room where Mila was bent over the table. He picked up a handful of warm crystals from a basket.

"And these?"

"Very little power," she answered. "But enough for an experiment." She fingered the tiny grains and asked expectantly, "Tonight?"

"Perhaps." He let the crystals fall to the table. "I was warned by one of the rabble's soldiers, an old friend. They don't like the Machine."

"Knowledge is never loved. They are fools."

"So are we all," he replied, waving his hand toward the laboratory. "Here we have a mass of wreckage and we, two relics of the past, try to lift a veil. What idiocy!"

Mila smiled and lifted a handful of crystals. "There is no idiocy in this. It may be the answer to everything. Think of it! All time and all space—and a step fur-

ther to the concept of life itself." Her eyes shone as she spoke. "For years we've assembled data, digging up wires and metal and glass from old ruins and buildings. We will soon be near the answer."

"Yet, will there be time?" Kilant gazed at an empty spot in mid-air. "We are near the truth, but it may be snatched away from us by our barbarian brothers."

"Only a few weeks more—a month, perhaps—then we will know."

Kilant sighed. "A long time ago this was child's play to those who lived here before us. We pick up, like children, their playthings, and dabble in their secrets."

As they worked, the daylight faded away.

VARL, the soldier, marched through the streets, crowds jostling about him. His cracked helmet caught the last fugitive rays of the sun; the rags of his uniform flapped with each breeze. Crude wagons, drawn by lumbering quadrupeds, rumbled through the streets to surrounding villages. Varl cursed as he tripped over a broken ledge on the sidewalk.

The city was rotting, he knew—ever since the Machines went. And now this new-found one would also be destroyed, and his friends, Kilant and Mila, smashed with it.

In the center of the ruined city was the dwelling of the Masters, its great bulk composed of crumbling walls, a few torn flags draped around the great door through which he entered.

In the hallway, whose dimness was broken only by the scattered light of torches, Varl could hear the dim rumble of a distant gathering. That was the great hall of the Masters.

He marched ahead, thinking of Kilant and Mila, and of the crackling Machine and the hope it might promise for the city. Vaguely he remembered the tales of waving banners that reached the clouds from

the walls of a powerful metropolis, and of argosies that once sailed to other stars from a city where now only falling walls reminded the people that a great civilization was dead.

Shaking his head to clear his mind of these phantasies, he entered the Great Hall and paused underneath one of the flags that hung over the doorway. The marble floor on which he stood was cracked and caked with the dirt of many years. From the doorway would come gusts of air that set the stench around him moving.

High above him canvas bags stretched across the top of the hall to keep rain and snow and wind out. Centuries ago, before the Machines had gone, the roof was made of stone and metal, and the great hall was white with the glare, not of crude torches, but of bulbs of pure light. But that was long ago.

Varl walked to a wooden platform near the back of the hall. From here he could see the shrouded figures of the Masters as they gazed down upon him. He waited.

"Then it is true?" a voice boomed.

"Yes," answered Varl, "it is true."

"And the Machine works?"

"It does."

"What does it do?"

Varl paused. "That," he said, "I do not know."

The speaker stood up and Varl looked at the great black cloak that almost covered him.

"Years ago," boomed the Master, "we destroyed the Machines because they sought to destroy us. Now one Kilant has found and rebuilt a metal monster, and he chooses to bring back the slavery which our fathers died to wipe away."

"No!" protested Varl. "No, Masters. It is not slavery he seeks, but knowledge. The Machine is only a search for light, not a means of endangering the city."

There was silence. Then another of the Masters spoke. "You are a good sol-

dier, Varl, but unversed in the ways of the law. And that is as it should be. But pity for enemies of the state is a weakness not to be tolerated. Guard against it, Varl."

Raising his hand in a salute to the darkness above them, the Master gave the verdict.

"We, the Masters, decree that all who search for a light to destroy the power and glory of darkness must themselves be destroyed. We have broken the power of the Machines once. They shall not rise again." He turned and spoke to the waiting soldier. "Destroy Kilant's work. If he protests, or seeks to impede your duty, then execute him. Otherwise, there is no need to do him harm."

Varl bowed. "Yes, Master."

The Master said nothing and Varl waited. "Is that all?" he asked.

"That is all. We have spoken."

The assembled Masters saluted as a sign of their common assent.

Bowing till his forehead touched the ground, Varl walked backward and left the House of the Masters. Hiding in the shadows of the smaller streets, he hurried to the outskirts of the city, thence to the home of Kilant. Time was short.

THE SMALL, grey shack was silent in the moonlight. Varl walked among the shadows till he reached the broken door. Looking about him, he slowly lifted the latch and walked in.

Feeling carefully in the semi-darkness, Varl could see the reflected moonlight on the crystal stand in the center of the machine.

"Kilant," he whispered. "Kilant!"

The scientist, clad hastily in skins, opened a side door. "Who's there?"

"I, Varl."

"Welcome, my friend. But what brings you here?"

There was a rustle in the darkness and Varl turned, drawing his sword. It was Mila.

"There is danger," she said. "I knew it! I knew it!"

Varl nodded. "Yes, there is danger. The Machine is to be broken—and you with it, if you resist. The Masters so ordered me just now."

Kilant spoke bitterly. "I offer them the answer to time and space and dimension and the fools stop me. I hold the world in my hands and they would murder me!"

"There is no time to lose. The Masters have not ordered your death, but the crowd would kill you anyway, and none would stop them. You must escape, Kilant. I will help you."

"Escape? And leave the Machine behind to be destroyed?"

"Escape! Yes! Yes!" whispered Mila. "We will escape in the Machine itself."

"No," stated Kilant. "No. The risk is too great; I am not yet ready."

"Whatever you do," said Varl, "must be done quickly. Your lives are forfeit in the city."

"What is life," asked Mila, "but the rays of our minds that come from the brain which initially begins them? When the body is part of an added dimension—those rays of thought will live and shoot out into the farthest parts of the universe. We will live, Kilant. In that Machine!"

"Will you dare try it?" asked Varl.

Kilant clasped Mila in his arms.

"We can try," he said.

"I'm sorry," said the soldier.

"Good-by, Varl." Kilant walked over to the control board and pulled the switch. Slowly the Machine pulsed into life. Arm in arm, Kilant and Mila strode up to the crystal stand and there they waited as the glow from the crystals began to diffuse over them.

The long grey and silvery bar over them began to glow and crackle with flame. Between the bar and the crystal stand the air became violet and pale yellow, shining brightly, then bursting into a loud roar. Varl watched the flames sub-

side as Mila and Kilant faded away, only their outlines remaining. Then there was nothing.

The soldier picked up a long iron bar and walked toward the machine. He waited as the glowing of the crystal stand became lighter, dying away, and thought of the blackness beyond the stars. The empty space in the far-off heavens were now one with Kilant and Mila—two wandering meteors in the skies.

Lifting up the iron bar, he smashed it down upon the crystal stand, and upon the delicate wiring and glass tubing. Lifting it up again he rained blow after blow upon the apparatus until the room was a mass of shattered bits of metal.

The Machine was destroyed. Varl felt old and tired.

STEPHEN looked up from his supper and spoke to the professor.

"It is possible that, in some pre-creation universe, on some forgotten galaxy, a people, or beings, lived so deeply within the secrets of infinity that they became a part of it."

Professor Ladinas smiled. "The conception that cosmic rays originate from some brain or disembodied intelligence, and that they are merely the thought-waves of such intelligence—well, it simply won't gain much credence in scientific circles."

"Of course," Stephen answered. "I know that. But still the feeling persists that some voice from another dimension, from a universe that is now gone, is trying to speak to us, to break the veil between us. The thought runs over and over in my mind whenever I listen to the audio-transformer."

He looked across the room to the laboratory where they kept the research apparatus. *Click-click*, went the machine, *click-click, click-click, click-click*; and Stephen kept thinking that somewhere, someone was trying to say something.

THE MESSAGE

SOMEONE was knocking on the door of my apartment. I opened the door. "Special delivery," the postman said, handing me a large, flat package.

The package was addressed in capital block letters which might have been printed by anyone. There was no return address.

Inside was a phonograph record. It was a large one, twelve inches across, grooved on both sides. There were labels in the center which said *Home Recorder*.

The postmark on the wrapper was blurred, but I could make out "New York, N. Y."

"This is my message. Keep away from your next assignment. No news story is worth the price of this one—a death of madness in an uninhabited future!"

I shrugged and put the record on the turntable of the phonograph.

"Please listen to me," it began abruptly. I started at the words.

I KNOW you well enough to realize that you will hear this record through, but whether you will pay any attention to what I say, or remember when it becomes necessary, is another matter.

Because I want to get everything on one record, I will have to be very brief and can waste no time on explanations. Listen, please!

My editor sent me to interview Professor Spillane, late of California.

By Richard Wilson



"Probably just some crackpot theory he wants publicity for," he said. "But if it's anything good, phone it in for the afternoon paper. If not, write it up yourself—a couple of paragraphs for tomorrow'll be enough."

I took the East Side subway up to Seventy-second Street. Spillane was glad to see me and dragged me right up to his laboratory in the attic.

"Take your coat off; it's hot."

I humored him.

"It's amazing," he said. "Look."

He showed me a maze of apparatus that, to my unscientific mind, might have been anything.

"It's a time machine," he said, almost apologetically.

When I didn't look at him as though he were crazy, he went on: "This morning I sent a monkey into the future. I put him in this case—" It looked like a transparent phone booth—"and started the machinery. I could watch him as he traveled through time. He became blurred and far-away looking, but I could still see him. I let the machinery run for five minutes, then I shut it off.

"The monkey hopped out of the case and disappeared from my sight. He was gone for thirty minutes. I nearly went mad waiting for him to reappear. Finally he did, with something clutched in one paw. I brought him back to the present."

Spillane looked at me almost fearfully. I got the impression that it would be more than he could bear if I showed disbelief.

"What did the monkey bring back?" I asked.

"This," he said.

He handed me a calender. It was for the year 1993.

"Does that give you a story?" asked Spillane.

I told him that it did, but that very likely the copy desk would consider it a feature, or human interest story that would be fated to appear in a box at the

foot of page one, topped by a waggish head like *Monkey Ward Escapes to Future from Custody of Mad Scientist*. I told him it certainly wouldn't be taken seriously, even with a good deal more documentary proof than a calendar which might be a fake.

I walked over to inspect the tall glass case.

"Now, if a human being were to be sent into the future, say with a camera—"

"Like this?"

Spillane thrust a candid into my hands and shoved me into the case. Before I could so much as protest, he had fastened it from the outside.

I turned around to see him looking at me pleadingly, as if to ask forgiveness. He spoke, and his words came to me faintly through the glass. I gathered that he was not strong enough to resist temptation and that he hoped I would not permit my rancor to stand in the way of scientific experiment and observation when I reached 1993. I caught something he said about scoops and fame for the two of us and magnificent opportunity. My last glimpse was of him pressing the button that started the time-motor.

Don't think I was taking this calmly. I broke the camera trying to hammer my way through the glass.

I don't know how the monkey stood it, but my trip through time made me violently ill. When I had recovered somewhat, the hazy, rushing, spiral motion of my surroundings had stopped.

OBVIOUSLY, since I was locked in, the professor had expected me to be little more than an observer. There wasn't much to observe. I was in a perfectly square room with nothing in it but a desk of black metal and a chair of the same material. Sunlight came through a window over the desk. There was a door, too.

I kept expecting someone to come

through the door—and rather fearing it—but no one did. I waited for Professor Spillane to bring me back to 1941. That didn't happen either.

Half an hour of just waiting for almost anything to happen can be pretty nerve-racking. Finally I was able to stand it no longer. I covered my face with my arms and rocked back and forth in the tall case. I felt it go over. There was a crash of breaking glass. I was free.

This was not the house of Professor Spillane, 1941. It was larger, newer—and empty. I have seen no living thing since I came here. The grounds outside the house extend about fifty feet and end in a circular wall. The wall is about sixty feet high, circular, and smooth as marble. It is higher than the house, so that I can't see over it.

There are no trees in the yard, no grass or flowers, no insects or birds—no living thing of any kind. There is no sound from beyond the wall.

The rooms of the house are dusty. There are chairs and beds and tables, and bureaux and bookcases full of books. I have found two more calendars; one is dated 2008 and one 2024. Both are very old.

There is electricity in the house, fortunately. If there weren't, I think I should go mad. I keep a bulb burning the whole night in whatever room I spend the dark hours. The electricity comes from hundreds of storage batteries someone has left in the cellar.

No water comes from the faucets. I get my supply of drinking water from the basins and pans I set out on the roof to catch the rain. I daren't bathe. There isn't enough water.

There is a supply of canned and condensed food in one of the kitchens. It may last a month.

The books must have been collected by a casual reader. They are all fiction, and no help at all. The latest—for I have looked at each—is dated October, 2006. I had

hoped to find out through them what had become of Professor Spillane, but nothing is written about him. I have found no diaries or journals, or hand-written matter of any kind.

There is a stamp album. Evidently the collector specialized in U. S. issues, for it seems to be complete from Colonial days. A face that becomes increasingly prevalent in the latter part of the book is the hard visage of a man with short straight hair that stands up on his head and a mustache that runs across the face to join its sideburns. Beneath the engraving is only one word—*Defender*. It's a cruel face.

I have speculated on my position for hours. The only conclusion I come to is that I am the only living person in this part of the world—possibly on the entire planet. Else why no animal or insect life, why no growing thing, not even weeds? Why never a plane overhead, or the sound of an automobile horn or train whistle? Why this complete silence?

There are what I imagine to be latter-day improvements on the telephone and radio, but they are dead. Even as I expect to be before long.

In the cellar of the house is my only hope. Only there have I found a trace of Professor Spillane. There is apparatus far beyond my understanding which nonetheless strikes a chord in my memory. It is possible that some of it is what I saw when I covered my assignment—it seems so long ago—in 1941.

If it is the equipment of Spillane, he hasn't duplicated the tall glass case that brought me here. There is, however, something resembling it, made of brass and about one-quarter the size. I have been experimenting with the apparatus for a week, and I think I know how it works.

There is also a recording apparatus and one blank record. It is my only means of communication with you. There are no

pens or pencils anywhere. All mine were in my coat. There is what seems to be a strange, cylindrical writing machine on the desk, but I am unable to operate it.

When I have finished recording this message, I will put it in the brass box and send it back to 1941. The box is too small to admit anything larger than a cat, otherwise I'd try to return in it.

I will wrap the record in brown paper and address it with soot mixed with my blood. Uncancelled stamps I can get from the album.

Then I shall adjust the dials on the machine to carry its message back to 1941 and, if I calculate correctly, a few months before Spillane moves to New York from California. I hope whoever lived there before the professor will have curiosity enough to open the strange brass box he'll find in his basement—and that he'll be honest enough to mail it to you.

This is my message. Keep away from

Professor Spillane. Don't risk a death of madness in an uninhabited future for the sake of a news story.

When your editor sends you to see him, *don't go.*

Keep away from Spillane!

This is the end of the record. Good-by. Good-bye to life!

A MONTH later the editor called me over to his desk.

"Here's an assignment for you," he said. "See Professor Spillane up on Seventy-second Street. Probably just some crackpot theory he wants publicity for."

I took the East Side subway uptown. But I didn't see Professor Spillane. I rode back and forth in the IRT all morning, trying to put the pieces together.

Because the voice that had told the story to me through the phonograph had been *mine.*



"SILENT WAITS MY TOMB"

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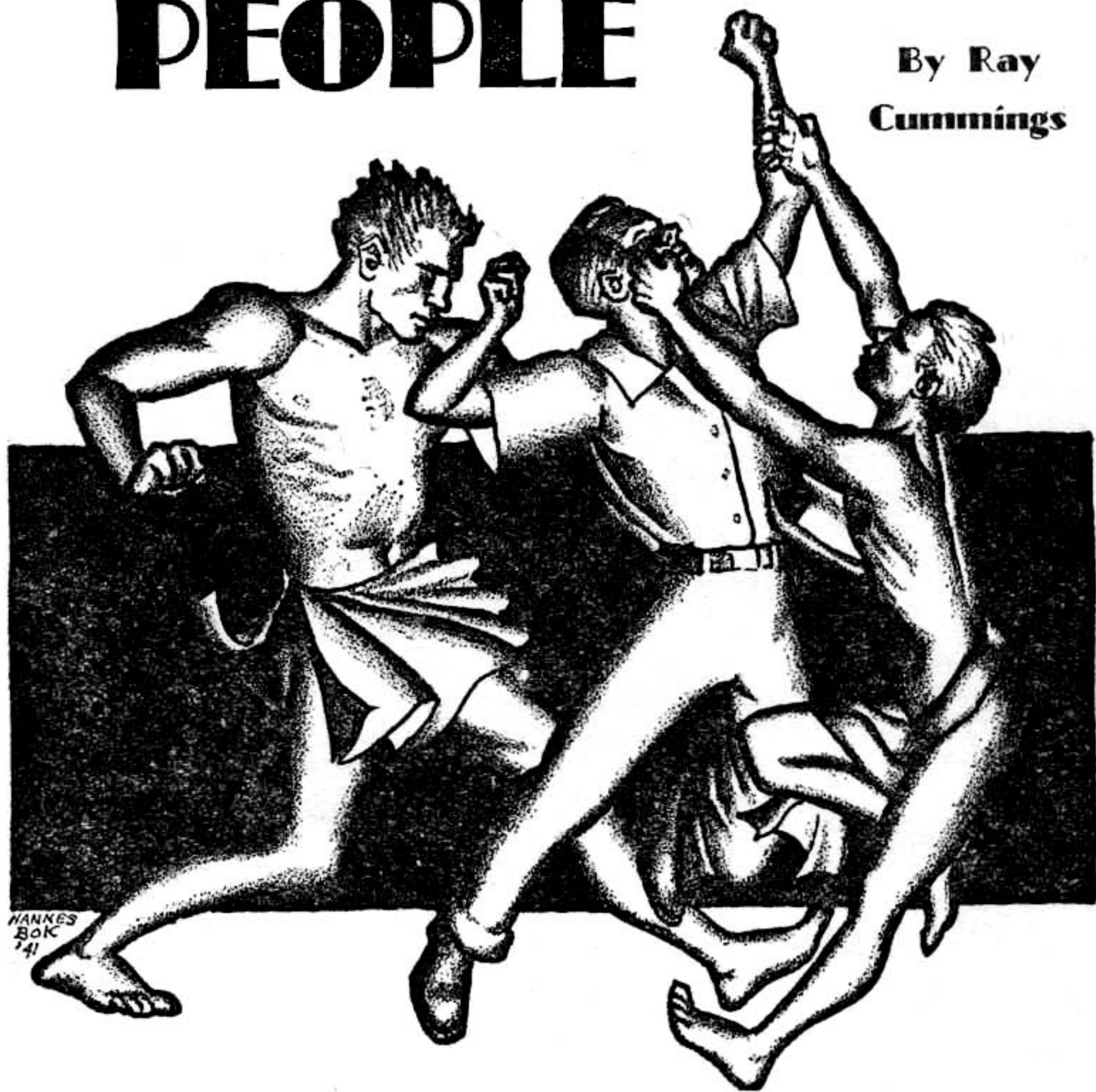
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THE SHADOW PEOPLE

By Ray
Cummings



Phantoms of the night—or masters of tomorrow—who were the shadow people of Targh, who had sworn to make our world their kingdom?

CHAPTER ONE

Invasion of the Targhs

“JAC CARTER speaking—Channel Split—62—American Broadcaster Service. Time—midnight minus thirty—29 August, 2001 . . . As heralded on this Channel yesterday, I am now alone in the so-called haunted house known as Black Stone. It stands on a

lonely promontory overlooking the broad Hudson River, some forty miles north of Great New York. The microphone is strapped to my chest so that I can tell you at intervals what—if anything—I am encountering. Have patience during the silences, won't you? They doubtless will indicate that things are happening to me—and certainly I'll tell you about them as soon as I can.

“I'm not afraid. That would be silly.

If I should see any of these ghosts—which, confidentially, I don't think I will—I know perfectly well they're not going to grab me by the throat and strangle me. Ghosts can't do that. Granted that you could see one, it's not tangible enough to injure you . . . I'm talking very softly, but I guess you can all hear me all right. This is certainly an eerie place. I'm seated on the old, crumbling stone flagging in a corner of a sort of interior courtyard. It's all overgrown with vegetation, neglected through the years. As I sit here, the broken, ivy-clad grey walls of the huge castle rise up around me. There's a little tent of the sky overhead, with the gabled roof framing it. Broken clouds. Sometimes there's a shaft of moonlight straggling down, but mostly the courtyard here is black with shadow. The windows of these interior facades—looks like about a hundred of them—they're all dark rectangles. Some with the panes broken—some almost hidden by ivy. A great empty old house. Nobody in it but me. There isn't a sound down here—nothing that I can hear but my own voice. . . .

"Nothing is happening—I haven't seen a thing so far. While we're waiting, let me review the background of the reputedly haunted old estate. Black Stone Castle, I understand, has stood here unoccupied for about ten years. The last tenants were an old man—his name was Ezra Lee—and his granddaughter, Anna. The farmers around here remember her as a little pig-tailed girl with freckles. Old Ezra was a weird sort of fellow—a recluse. He lived here alone with the kid. Nobody ever came to see them. The villagers were afraid of the old man—said he was a necromancer. Anyway, there were tales that he had a laboratory hidden here somewhere. If he did, it's never been found. He—

"Wait a minute! Is that something moving over there across the courtyard? Good Lord. . . . !

"That startled me, but I guess it was nothing. I jumped up and ran over that way about twenty feet. Could you hear my footsteps? If that was a ghost here, I frightened it. But I guess it was my own imagination—a trick of the moonlight. These low, swift-flying clouds—they cast moving shadows down here sometimes that look real. . . .

I was telling you about old Ezra. He was a scientist, engaged in some type of research work. And he was probably rather eccentric. Anyway, about ten years ago both he and the little girl vanished. Nobody ever knew what happened to them. . . .

"This place has always since been called a haunted house. That's natural; it certainly looks it. Well, three nights ago, as most of you know now, this haunted house stuff got a lot of publicity. A whole crowd of ghosts were seen roaming around here. That would be a silly tale if one person reported it. This was different. Eight or ten pretty reliable witnesses all saw the ghosts. A public roller-bus happened to break down on the road near here. A police car came out from the village; somebody had gotten hurt. Anyway, half a mile from them—over here at Black Stone—ghosts were roaming. The policeman and some of the passengers came close, on foot. They all say they saw the ghosts—half a dozen or more—roaming around these walls. The ghosts of men. One of the policemen fired a shot. In a minute or so the ghosts all vanished. . . .

"That was three nights ago. When intelligent law officers testify to a thing like that, what are you going to think? Next day this place was searched. Policemen were here all that next night and last night. Nothing happened. So just on the chance, we arranged for me to be here alone tonight. The theory is, maybe the ghosts were afraid of a crowd of uniformed men stamping around here, but

they won't be afraid of me. I'm just an inoffensive young fellow, alone here. That's the theory, if you believe in ghosts. And if there's some hoax to it—or maybe something criminal going on around here—well, Jac Carter, at your service. I'm the fellow who's going to find out what it is. Confidentially, I've got a Banning flash-gun on my hip, but I hope I don't have any reason to use it. I'm just a news reporter. I—

“There *is* something over there across the yard! That's not my imagination. I'm going over there. . . . Good Lord! I certainly saw an upright white thing over here by this broken doorway. I'm across the yard now. Wait a minute—let's listen. . . . Did you hear anything? I didn't. . . . Yes I did! I *do* hear something! It's a very soft humming noise. . . . Why—why good Heavens—It's—why—my God, *this damned thing*—” . . .

“CONTROL ROOM, A. B. S. Great New York Studio—Operator 125 speaking. We've got Channel Split 62 still open. This is an unrehearsed broadcast—authentic—it's—it's certainly too authentic. We're keeping the Channel open. That long silence—sorry—we were listening. Things we could hear—here in the control room. There was a sound from Carter—a sort of scream. Then a thump—we think he fired his Banning gun. . . . The Channel is still open. . . . No—just now—it's dead. His microphone is smashed! Stand by everyone! I'll keep open! We've sent the local police to Black Stone—that order went to them sixty seconds ago. It's a run of four miles from Alto Ridge over to Black Stone Castle. Stand by—the police will report—we'll flash it to you. . . . Our newscaster—young Jac Carter—in that haunted house—something has happened to him. We can't tell you yet. Stand by; we'll have more soon. The police are on their way there. Stand by. . . .

“Control room, A.B.S. Great New York Studio—Operator 125 speaking. Sorry for the silence. The police just reported from Black Stone. . . . Midnight plus 28 minutes. . . . We've got the report. There was so much excitement—chaos here in the studio. . . . The police found nothing at Black Stone! Nothing! Our newscaster, Jac Carter, reporting to you from there half an hour ago—he's gone! Disappeared! They haven't found any sign of him yet. Searching the entire Castle now—no sign of him. He's just—gone!”

BIG, crumbling old Black Stone Castle stood dark and brooding on its promontory, with a broad sweep of a curve of the Hudson River behind and below it. At the Trinight Hour, a hundred and eighty minutes after Midnight, the Alto Ridge police had finished their search. For over two hours their flashing searchbeams had prowled the eerie old building. There was nothing found. Nothing save a little burned streak by the casement of a crumbling doorway down in a corner of the interior courtyard—a burned mark on the masonry to show where Jac Carter's Banning-flash had struck.

But of the young newscaster himself there was no sign.

Now, at the Trinight Hour, the police had withdrawn. Some had returned to Alto Ridge, but a few others remained, on watch outside in the neglected, overgrown gardens of Black Stone, where a fringe of excited townspeople and neighboring farmers stood gaping in awe at the old building. . . .

Another hour. To the east, in a patch of open sky, the stars were paling with the coming of dawn. And suddenly from one of the watchers a startled shout sounded. There seemed to be some sort of pallid apparition, over by the front rampart which faced the river.

"A ghost! Look! See it? I see one. . . ."

"Two of them! I see two!"

"Why—look down there! In the ground—under the castle wall."

Suddenly there were a dozen of the pallid phantoms. Tenuous, vaporous things. Floating—no, they were climbing—running. Under the castle ramparts, things in the faint, blurred fashion of men—strange, weird-looking men, phantoms so unsubstantial that they plunged through the solid masonry.

And then two of them met, and seemed to fight! Weird, silent combat! Soundless shapes! It seemed that there were a dozen of them now, locked together in desperate struggle under the Castle.

"Look! One of them's a woman! A girl! Isn't it a girl?"

"She's fallen! No, she's up! Look, one of them is carrying her!"

Amazing, fantastic struggle. And now—what was this? A rumble, down there within the solid castle walls, where the pallid, shadowy wraiths were struggling. It was a weird, toneless rumble.

The townspeople and the policemen made a mad flight backward. The dim outlines of Black Stone Castle, pallid in the

moonlight, were quivering now. Another second and the quiver had become a tremble. Then the gray ramparts, the walls, the gabled roof—all of it was shaking.

As though torn by a monstrous, muffled, exploding earthquake, the foundations of the old castle heaved upward. And then Black Stone rocked, fell apart, and with a wild, pounding, grinding roar came down. For a moment there was only a cloud of shattered, heaving masonry rolling up, like smoke—a shroud to hide the chaos. Then the night breeze blew the shroud away. . . .

Municipal Hospital

Alto Ridge, Prov. New York
Anglo-America

10 November, 2001

My name is Jac Carter. Nobody disputes that, though I'm lying here pretty well smashed up so that I guess you could hardly recognize me by my looks. But my story of what happened to me—people just smile tolerantly and think that the brain concussion I had threw me off mental balance. I was one of those ghosts. But people think that I'm just trying—

"MURDER'S NOT MY LINE"

THAT'S what Dave Groton insisted when the red-faced cop clapped him in the can . . . and he still figured that way when the black-haired beauty with hate in her eyes tried to gun him out of town. . . . But when the client he had come twenty-five hundred miles to see kept an earlier rendezvous with a killer, and when each bloody corpse was a clue that led to the next, in a weird treasure hunt of death, Dave knew he'd have to change his line—or else be the next to die! Don't miss W. T. Ballard's gripping crime novel.



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with the cleverness of one who is mentally deranged—just trying to fit a wild narrative into what those policemen and townspeople say they saw when Black Stone so mysteriously was destroyed. Most newscasters have called it a localized earthquake, and said that the phantoms were just the imagination of the excited watchers. A few scientists have come here to see me at the hospital. They can't dispute the possibility of what I say. I grant it isn't very probable—except that it happens to be true.

I'm going to try and write it here. Just a brief, factual narrative. That ought to be more reasonable than talking. When you talk you get excited—incoherent maybe. Or you get mixed up on details. Especially when you're lying pretty sick in a hospital bed where for about seventy days you've been expected to die.

Little Anna didn't die. At least, I hope she didn't. I like to think she's down there, alive, thinking of me—just as I am thinking of her. We'll never stop thinking of each other—and hoping. Though maybe both of us will have to die before we can join each other again. Surely her world and mine, after death, would be the same

You see, that's the trouble, my mind wanders. Why wouldn't it? I had a pretty terrible shock; I'll try to be more coherent.

I was broadcasting. Maybe you who read this heard me that night. I was sitting there describing that eerie inner courtyard of Black Stone. Then I saw something moving—a blurred, upright, pallid shape. It ducked when I ran at it—ducked seemingly into a broken arcade doorway, where a dim corridor led back into the castle. For a minute I stood tense, peering. There was nothing; just silence. Then I was aware of a faint, throbbing hum. It grew louder. I think that never in my life was I so startled as at that instant. I had a vague vision of

phantoms abruptly there, almost upon me! Two of them. No—there were three. For a split-second I was aware that almost at my elbow a giant, ghostly man-shape was materializing—a pallid gray thing six feet or more in height. A humming thing! I stood for that instant, transfixed. Ten feet away there was another phantom—a man with a girl in his arms. A girl who was struggling.

How can I be coherent, factual? I had a chaos of impressions. The three shapes came out of nothingness. I saw the dark gray walls of the castle corridor through them. But the shapes were solidifying. Another instant. Abruptly the humming ceased. There was a low, suppressed cry—the girl's cry of terror. Then the thumping of solid footsteps—and a man's thick guttural voice:

“Stop it, you little fool! We've got you.”

And the other man's voice: “We're out! Hold her, Boroh!”

I do not think the shapes had seen me until just then. The giant beside me gave a startled oath, leaped sidewise and then came at me. A knife was in his hand. A weird giant shape, with a flat helmet and wires strung down his arms and legs. It was then that I fired the Banning gun.

The sizzling Banning flash went through the fellow's neck. His oncoming body, with head horribly dangling, had enough momentum to strike me full. A very ponderable “ghost” indeed, for under the impact I fell backward with the huge, twitching body half sprawled upon me. There was no time to fire again. I was aware that the other shape had dropped the girl. It was upon me in a second, a sweep of fist knocking away my gun. And before I could disentangle myself and rise up, I saw my assailant's hand clutching a chunk of broken masonry. It crashed upon my head so that the dimness of the corridor split into a roaring burst of light.

There was just the sound of the girl's terrified scream, mingling with the roar in my ears, as I fell. Then my senses faded, and I drifted off into the blank, soundless abyss of unconsciousness. . . .

I CAME to with an awareness that something terrible was happening to me. My aching head roared. Blood matted my hair from the wound where I had been hit. But it was only a superficial injury, knocking me out ten minutes or so, I afterward learned. And now, with consciousness and strength swiftly returning, I heard a low, ironic, man's voice:

"Sit still, Anna; you can't get away."

And the girl's voice: "Boroh, please—he—he—it will kill him. . . ."

"Oh no it won't. He's conscious now; what is the difference?"

Something was clamped on my aching head. My hand fumbled for it. I knew now that I was lying on the masonry of the corridor where I had fallen. The girl was crouching in terror near me—a small, slim, dark-haired girl, hardly twenty. A brief garment was draped around her. Her dark hair flowed free over her shoulders, and her white limbs were pallid in the straggling moonlight. A queer helmet was on her head, with wires from it down to her wrists, her waist and ankles.

Then I realized that the weird apparatus was on me also. . . .

"Don't touch it!" the man's voice growled. "You'll kill yourself—or I will kill you! We are starting now. Lie quiet!"

His hand went to a switch at my belt. There was a little sizzling pop of current, then his tense voice:

"Now—you too, Anna! We must stay together!"

I heard the hiss from her mechanism, and then from his, and I could see him and feel him as he crouched close between me and the girl. Weird transition. There was a staggering swoop of my senses; the hum of a tiny current, which in a moment,

I knew, was communicating itself to all the minute cells of my body. It caused a horrible quivering within me. But my head was steady. The reeling, sickening sensation passed so that what I felt was almost pleasant. A sensation of lightness. My body, lying here on the stone corridor, seemed to press less heavily.

"Are you—are you all right?" the girl murmured.

"Yes—I guess so."

The shape of the man between us had shifted, or floated away a few feet. Was I too floating? Was I a wraith now? A phantom? I gripped my leg. It was solid. I reached out and touched the girl's arm. It was tangible, warm, trembling. I could see the fellow Boroh, our captor, quite near us. He too was solid—a big fellow with a close-clipped bullet head encased in the helmet. He was clad in what seemed crudely-made leather garments—a draped toga and wide leather belt from which weapons were hanging. His broad, puffy-jowled face, flat-nosed, was visible in the grayness.

All three of us were solid. To us, it was everything else which was changing. A wild, queer freedom was upon me. Wraith-like walls of Black Stone were now becoming dissolving shapes in a grayness, a soundless abyss. It seemed as though we were drifting downward a little. Time was passing . . . A void of empty time so that I could not guess its duration. . . .

Then I could see, mingled with the fading, spectral outlines of Black Stone, that something else was here—another set of ghostly outlines. Rocks? Were they rocks? It was a wide grey sweep of nothingness, gradually taking form. A phantom vista of rocky hillside; we seemed to have settled so that now we were crouching on a steep, rocky path. I seemed to see a mound-shaped group of houses, off to one side on the slope of the hill. Great shadowy crags were here—the wraith of an outdoor scene of gray twi-

light. There was a rock building with a round tower fifty feet above us at the top of the path.

Spectral, mysterious new realm! And mingling with it, like the double-exposure on a photographic plate, Black Stone was still faintly here. Just a wisp of it remaining now; and as I stared, suddenly it was wholly gone!

CHAPTER TWO

Realm of Shadows

THIS amazing new realm! Surely my body had moved in space, if at all, no more than a foot or two. Yet I had crossed an abyss, mysterious, unnamable so that now my own world was remote, vanished into the dark, enshrouding enigma with which our Creator has cloaked so much of His great, wonderful universe.

"Put your hand on that switch at your belt," Boroh's voice muttered near my ear. "When I give the word, you press your switch. We are almost arrived."

I could feel the ground quite tangibly under me now—solid, rocky soil. We were on a path that wound steeply upward among crags and boulders. Above us there were dim, flickering lights in a stone building on the hilltop. Off to my left, the descending slope went down into a broad valley, with trees and little mound-shaped houses. Movement and tiny lights showed down there. People—and in the distance, where a line of gray hills rose against a blurred gray vault of heavens, there were open fields. Movement in them; people tilling the soil. . . .

"Ready now!" Boroh warned. "And you, Anna—ready—"

Then at his sharp word, I shoved the little switch lever. There was a shock to my senses; a sudden sense of heaviness. And as my head steadied, at once the night scene was clarified.

Weird aspect. Difficult to describe. It was a dim night scene of open rocky countryside. A primitive realm. Nothing weird in that. Then I realized that there was no color here; it was all a great, flat monochrome of gray—shades of gray and nothing else, so that suddenly, despite its obvious reality, I felt that here was a realm of shadows. Gray shadows. I was on my feet, staggering a little. And the girl, Anna, came running to me. "Oh, I am so sorry. They caught me—and you too."

Complete reality. Apprehension, terror, were upon her. She ranged herself beside me; but the burly, leather-clad Boroh almost instantly was upon us.

"Targh will be glad to have you back, little Anna." Irony was in his heavy voice.

My strength had come back from that crack on the head. I gazed up into Boroh's gray, flat-nosed face.

"Look here," I demanded. "What the devil is this? What are you—?"

He grinned. "You are going to Targh. He will be glad to have you. Much information you can give him of the great outside world. Before he starts—tonight—"

It brought a little cry from the girl, and he whirled on her. "You—and this outside man—if you give trouble. . . . What is your name?" he demanded of me.

"Jac Carter," I said. "Look here—" His knife blade, gleaming gray in the flat half-light, menaced me. "You will make no trouble?"

"No. But look here—"

I stood, certainly futile enough. I was unarmed, with the weird transition mechanism upon me, and on my chest the smashed microphone.

"All right," he said. "I shall take you to Targh." He thumped his brawny gray chest, and his evil grin broadened.

He was shoving us up the path.

Then suddenly he roared, "Get back, you curs! Keep away from us!"

I was aware that among the crags here, skulking figures were watching us. Queer-

looking, primitive people—men and flat-faced women in crude animal skins or garments of dried gray fabric.

Half shoving us, Boroh led us up the steep path. The big, flat-roofed stone dwelling on the hilltop stood frowning, with windows like winking, luminous eyes of a squatting monster. I could see the figures of men, sentries pacing the roof. Then we passed through a lower, stone doorway; along a crude, winding inner corridor. . . .

"In here," Boroh said.

He shoved us through a doorway. I saw a dim room with some sort of brazier to one side where something was burning.

It was a strange, stone room, with two outer windows which were barred. There was crude stone furniture. A primitive apartment. I stared at one corner. A bed was there. A little rocking chair. A small, battered dresser; and on it a photograph—a white-haired old man with a little dark-haired girl in his lap. . . .

"You will be comfortable," Boroh said ironically. "Roa will bring you food."

I stood docile while he stripped me of the transition mechanism, then removed Anna's.

"I would not tempt you," he said sarcastically.

Then, with the weird apparatus folded under his arm, he left us.

THERE was much that Anna tried to tell me during that half-hour or so we were alone in her room, before the woman, Roa, came with food and drink for us. Ezra Lee, of Black Stone Castle, had been her grandfather. She had lived in Black Stone, remembered it very well. Always her grandfather, in some hidden room down under the castle, had been mysteriously working. And then one night, with his eyes gleaming, he had come to tell her that he was taking her into another world. . . .

There is so much that a child's memory can only give in fragments. You who read this must bear with me; I am doing the best I can. . . . The child and her grandfather made the trip. And then she

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of *Astonishing Stories*, published quarterly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1941. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Astonishing Stories*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Fictioneers Inc., 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Fictioneers Inc., 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1941. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 26, Register's No. 2-W-178. (My commission expires March 30, 1942.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

was told that she was to live in this other realm.

I interrupted Anna. "He brought this furniture down here?"

"Yes. He made several trips. There was a time when he had a larger apparatus—which brought inanimate things through the transition. But that was smashed a year later.

"This was our house here," Anna was explaining. "This was my room. And then—grandfather died—"

"Died?" I echoed.

"I think Targh killed him," she said. "The evil here in this world—it was coming out, in Targh. The lust for evil power bursting out in Targh. . . ."

Queer phrasing! But presently, as I questioned her, at least I seemed dimly to understand it. This was a primitive world here, co-existing with the great world outside. Two realms, separate, not in space, not in time—but only in the basic state of matter comprising them. The fourth dimension? Call it that if you like. Indeed, I found that Anna—just a girl, dependent upon her memory of what her grandfather tried to explain to her—was vague enough, in very truth. But, lying here upon my hospital bed at Alto Ridge, I have had several noted physicists call upon me. And from them I have gotten my clearest understanding of what that weird transition must have meant.

A changing of the vibration rate of the basic substance out of which my body is comprised! Vibration unquestionably is the governing factor of all states of matter. Heat and cold; solid, liquid, gaseous—all the same thing, differing merely in the vibration of its molecules. What we call substance, in its essence certainly is a thing wholly intangible. Back midway of the Twentieth Century, that was clearly proven. You probe into matter. You find molecules, atoms, electrons—just names for things that you might think were substantial. For when you get to the end,

you find an electric particle—a thing which is merely a vortex. A vortex of what? Of nothingness!

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of." The great Bard spoke more truly, from a scientific aspect, than he knew. A whirlpool of nothingness! And its very movement—like the swift-moving jet of water from a nozzle which, if you try to put your hand into it, will seem solid rather than liquid—that very movement of the basic Nothingness creates the pseudo-substance which is the only material upon which our great Universe is built.

And from this, by vibration, is built the very complicated structure of all the things we see and hear and feel. Our world. All dependent upon vibration.

Ezra Lee, with some weird electronic current no scientist of our world yet can match, altered the vibration rate of whatever substance, animate or inanimate, came within the enveloping aura of the mechanism he devised. And that current? There is so much vibration above the light that is visible to our limited eyesight: the ultra-violet. And so much that is below: the infra-red. And if not in those ranges—there is a vast world of vibration rate above what we can hear—and below it. Different states of vibration. Radiowaves—the X and N-rays; more of them are being discovered and harnessed to our human needs all the time.

And here was one which, unique to himself, old Ezra Lee had found. That mechanism changed substance, making it incompatible with our realm—and compatible with the other. Perhaps a higher, more rapid vibratory scale. To us, by comparison, a more tenuous world—a shadow realm.

Shadow realm! The words strike me with awe, even now as I pen them. To me, it is as though that weird realm of shadows, co-existing in space with ours, was perhaps a shadow of us. A realm, real to itself, but created in some myster-

ious way out of us. Those people—English was their language, as with us. Primitive people, a primitive world—as though it were just a replica of ours, stripped naked to the primitive. The same sort of humans—same hopes and terrors, and lusts and passions . . . Ourselves, not as we perhaps think we are, or pretend to be—but stripped to the naked soul. . . .

I SAW so little of it that brief tumultuous night—And Anna had so brief a time to try and explain it to me. . . . There had been a ruler here of these primitive people. He had died, just before old Ezra and his young granddaughter came. He had been a good ruler. For a long lifetime there had been contentment and peace there, with the evil passions of man which always must exist, held submerged. . . .

“When we came,” Anna was saying, “and they saw us so miraculously appearing, like ghosts materializing, they thought we were supernatural.” She smiled her little whimsical smile, gazing at me sideways. “I remember I was just a child. I liked it. They worshipped me as their little princess. And they still do. They call me their goddess.”

Ezra Lee had ruled them. And he too, had been a factor for good. He had kept his transition apparatus secret. To him, then, had come the belief that only evil would result from an open mingling of this peaceful little realm with his great outside world.

“But I think he was tempted,” Anna said. “I don’t know, perhaps Targh influenced him—or threatened him.”

This Targh, rising from the people, had come to be an assistant to old Ezra. Together they had built a laboratory. It was in a cave here on the hilltop, near this house where Anna and her grandfather had lived. Ezra and Targh had built a number of the mechanisms. And then Ezra suddenly had died. And Targh,

appearing before the people encased in one of the mechanisms, had dissolved and reappeared again. Stricken with awe and fear, they had bowed to him as their new ruler.

“But he is evil,” Anna declared. “He has gathered with him the worst of the men here—a band of them. Our people—they hate and fear Targh now. Targh and his men—mistreating our women. We have marriage here, and families that hold together and love each other. But there is no sanctity of that—not for Targh and his men.”

A rule of terror, with smouldering revolt here now. Targh had decided that it would aid him to proclaim Anna as his goddess—to rule the people with him.

“He had me imprisoned here,” she was saying. “Strangely, he doesn’t want to force me, but wants my consent to be his wife. I—I got one of the mechanisms and escaped—through these walls and into Black Stone. But they followed me—caught me. You—you know all about that.”

I nodded. “How did you get the mechanism?”

If we could get the mechanisms now, and get out of here! It flooded me queerly—this weird thing. . . The great empty castle of Black Stone was right here. This room in Targh’s house, with the sentries on its roof, and other sentries guarding our barred windows—not an inch of space, nor a second of time was between us and Black Stone. And yet, what a gulf!

I voiced my thoughts. “Maybe we could get mechanisms now? Then we could—”

“Mine—I got it from—” She checked herself suddenly. I followed her mute gaze across the flatly illumined gray room to the big stone door. Had there been a step in the corridor out there? It seemed that we heard some sound.

“Careful what you say!” Anna warned softly.

I SAW abruptly that in the room wall, over there by the door, a tiny panel had slid aside—just an inch or two of opening. In it a portion of a face appeared. Someone was out there, watching us; listening to us.

"You've got a comfortable room," I said. "I like it here."

"Yes. I think you will. Your name—it's Jac?"

"Yes. And yours is Anna? I like you. And really—I'm willing to help Targh—whatever he wants. . . ."

The panel in a moment was closed. We heard retreating footsteps in the corridor.

"Was that Targh?" I whispered swiftly.

"No, I don't think so. Boroh, maybe. Targh and his men—I think they are getting ready now for the raid."

"Raid?"

We stood across the room, swiftly whispering. This night—momentous indeed. In the laboratory near here, Targh and a dozen of his men had equipped themselves. They had already made a few experimental trips into Black Stone. . . . They were the apparitions which had alarmed and mystified the neighborhood. And tonight Targh's band would make a real foray. . . . For young women—like the beautiful little Anna—women of the great outside world. Like the Sabine women of old. What prizes they would be, brought in here!

Anna was whispering, "You see, Targh—he wants more men to join him. Prizes like that—and food from your world that he can bring back! And he wants to create terror up there. Larger and ever larger bands of ghosts, appearing out of Black Stone. But he is mad indeed that he thinks he could in the end terrorize, and even rule the great outside world. . . ."

Mad indeed! But only mad with a lust for power, ever expanding. . . . In our own Earth history, how many great

international criminals there have been who were mad, just like that!

"We—we were planning to try and stop it," Anna murmured. "Down in the village—a young man named Loto. He—and there are a few others. . . . I was able to tell them Targh's plans. I never have been to the laboratory up here—but I told Loto where I thought it was. He was going to try and steal some of the mechanisms—"

"Did he succeed?"

"I don't know. He said he would try—tonight."

"If he did—he could come here?"

"Yes."

"Or if we could get two, for ourselves—here now—"

"And get to Loto," she finished. "The people—many of them—know what is going on. Tonight—the chance now to kill Targh—that is what Loto plans. You see, they would want me for their goddess—and if these evil men could be killed. . . ."

Again she checked herself. The bars outside our door were clanking. Then the door opened. A woman came in and closed the door.

"Hello, Roa?" Anna said.

"I bring you food and drink. The master will be here soon to see this stranger." She came forward with her tray and put it before us. She was a small drab woman, gray, flat-faced and flabby. But she looked young; and perhaps she was pretty, by the standards of this world. She gazed at me with a sullen stare, and then eyed Anna.

"I tried to escape," Anna murmured. "I did—really. You ask this man; he'll tell you. Boroh caught me—and him too."

"So you came back," Roa said grimly. "You are here—as always before. You lie to me."

"No—no I don't. Roa, listen—"

"I don't know just what you're talking about," I said. "She certainly tried to escape—didn't want to come back here."

The woman whirled on me. Her face was contorted; her big dark eyes blazed. Her voice was venomous, heavy with suppressed fury. The fury of jealousy. I understood it now.

"You do not know her," she said grimly. "A little cheat with her unearthly beauty. She has bewitched the master—"

"Roa! Roa, don't be silly," Anna protested.

"For years she has bewitched him. And she lied to me—so that I stole one of the mechanisms for her—"

"Not so loud," I suggested. "That was decent of you, Roa. Targh doesn't suspect you stole it?"

"No, I think not. She said she would go, and stay—"

"I tried to, Roa."

"You lie. You go and you come back with another of the men you have bewitched."

That could have been funny, if the woman had not been so deadly grim, almost pathetic with her jealous fury. And that last idea of hers—another of the men you have bewitched—it stabbed at me suddenly that it had a little truth in it.

I smiled, and gripped the shaking Roa by her shoulders.

"All right," I said. "She has bewitched me. And neither of us want to stay here—"

"Oh, that part is true, Roa," Anna put in. "If you—"

I shook her by the shoulders, trying to get a little sense into her.

"We're all talking too loud," I murmured. "Roa, listen—you get two of the mechanisms now—for her and me. Do you think you could?"

"Well—"

"You go try. Be careful—and hurry."

All three of us were abruptly stricken by the sound of a heavy tread in the corridor.

I whispered hurriedly, "Targh is yours, Roa. No argument on that. You

get us out of here. I promise we won't be back."

"I will try. Later—"

She stooped, arranging the food and drink on our tray as Targh came through the doorway. Then, with a low gesture of homage to him, she went out through the doorway as he entered.

CHAPTER THREE

Like a Wraith Through the Abyss

"**T**HE stranger from outside? So you are he? I am glad to have you here."

It was a suave, ironic voice. Targh, the master. He stood before us—a big fellow, taller than Boroh. A gray skin clothed with stark simplicity his stalwart figure. There was no ornament of his rank upon him; but somehow he did not need it. With his feet planted wide, and his hands locked behind him, he stood surveying me. His head had close-clipped black hair, with a tinge of gray in it. His face hawk-nosed, was more sleek than most of the men of this realm whom I had seen; a mouth with cruel thin lips drawn now into an ironic smile.

He needed, indeed, no ornament of rank to denote him a leader. Upon him queerly there was an aspect of power. I could not miss it. A personality here—evil, of course—but a personality so forceful that instantly in his presence I could feel the radiance of it. A little shudder ran through me—a sense of terror. Certainly I should not have cared to be a victim of his wrath.

For that silent moment he stood regarding me with interest, as though by studying me he could learn something of the great outside world, still so unknown to him. And on his lips, and in his luminous eyes there was the play of an amused contempt.

"So?" he said. "I suppose you are a

fair specimen of the men of your world. Interesting. Informative. I am glad that Boroh did not harm you."

"He tried his best," I said. "And now, what do you—?"

"Don't question me." His voice was a rasp.

And then, as though I had for the moment lost interest to him, his darting, serpent-like gaze went to Anna.

"Sit down, child," he said. "You are trembling. You have been frightened, but not hurt? Boroh assured me that no harm came to you."

Queer change in him! His gaze at her, his soft, gentle tone of solicitude. Yet, as I eyed him, it seemed as though, mingled with his real and earnest gentleness toward her, still his irony persisted. As though he saw it as a game he was playing with her—a game to win her love. . . .

"I am all right, Targh," she said. "I—I tried to get away. . . ."

"You should not have done that, Anna. Our triumph is coming—don't you see? Surely you are not afraid of me, Anna?"

"No. No, of course not."

But her voice trembled, despite her obvious effort to control it. I saw on his face a sudden spasm of his anger. His sleek hands at his sides twitched a little. A faint smile again played on his lips.

"Of course you are not. You know you are going to love me. Why, Anna, this world here—I give it to you. All the good that is in it—I freely give to my little goddess. And outside—that other world—you shall see what Targh will do in it. All for you, Anna—to win your love. . . ."

He swung on me. "Your world!" Again his voice was a rasp—a rasp of contemptuous irony. "The great Targh—your people will call him a ghost! But they shall see he and his men are more than that. Things to be reckoned with. Things of terror. . . ."

His gaze went to the tray of food. "You have not eaten yet, Anna?"

"No," she murmured. "We—we were just starting. . . ."

"You eat. I will come back to you later. And you are Jac Carter?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"You come with me. I am starting with some of my men on a great adventure now. There are things I want to ask you—things of this castle of Black Stone into which I am going."

He gestured for me to follow him. I flung a glance at Anna. Did I dare try to resist him now?

Outside in the corridor hurried footsteps sounded. Boroh burst upon us.

"You, Boroh?" Targh murmured angrily. "You—unheralded, unbidden?"

"Master—something has happened. You should know at once—"

Targh drew him aside. They whispered. Upon Targh's expressive face came a look of fury. My heart pounded. For an instant I thought that Roa's duplicity had been discovered. But it was not that.

"Another mechanism stolen by men from the village?" Targh rasped. "That new keeper of the laboratory—like the other, he shall be killed."

"More than one, this time," Boroh said. "There are six of the mechanisms gone. I don't know—I cannot imagine how, Master. I had nothing to do with this."

"We shall see of that. You come with me." Targh, with a fury of rage upon him, strode for the door, with the quaking Boroh after him. The door clanked; the bars outside rasped into place. Again Anna and I were alone.

"Loto," I whispered. "He must have gotten what he was after."

"Yes. Yes, I guess so. Oh, if only Roa would be able to get two of them for us. . . ."

"Not now, she won't," I said grimly.

(Continued on page 100)

DO WE HAVE TO DIE?

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(Continued from page 98)

"Not with all that turmoil out there."

And what would Targh do now? Would his ruffians make a raid upon the village to recover the apparatus? Did he suspect Loto?

"Oh, I do not know about that," Anna said. "Maybe he does. If only we—"

If only—

Such words are so futile! We stood for a time with the food and drink neglected; stood in an agony of apprehension. Never have I felt so helpless. Locked in that room—from the barred windows there was a vista of gray darkness. The vague shapes of Targh's men, on guard out there, were visible.

"Oh Jac—" We both heard it—approaching footsteps. We stood tense as the door slowly opened. Would it be Targh, come back for me?

IT WAS Roa. She came in swiftly, silently, and shoved the door closed. A long gray cloak enveloped her. Silently she drew it aside. Two of the transition mechanisms were revealed.

"You got them!" I murmured. "Now, Roa? We were afraid, with all the commotion. . . ."

"I had already taken them. And someone now has taken four others. You—you and Anna—you will go now? Oh hurry, please."

Certainly we needed no urging. Within a moment we had the apparatus adjusted.

"Well—good-by, Roa." Anna touched her.

"Good-by," Roa said grimly.

At my signal, together we switched on the current. Again there was that reeling of my senses. But one may get used to anything; it seemed far less than before. With my arm around the girl, we stood swaying in the center of the room. Weird

(Continued on page 102)

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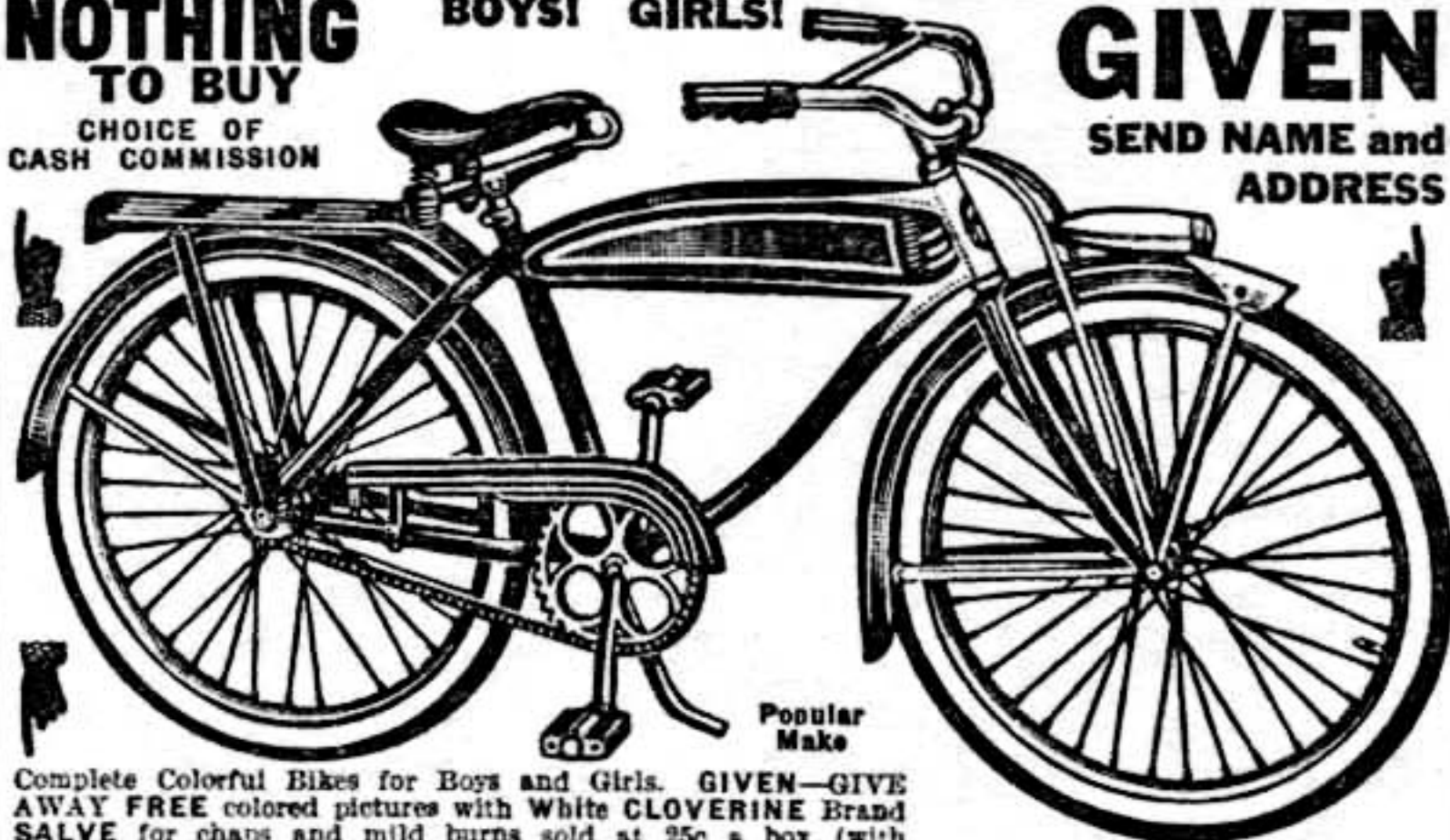
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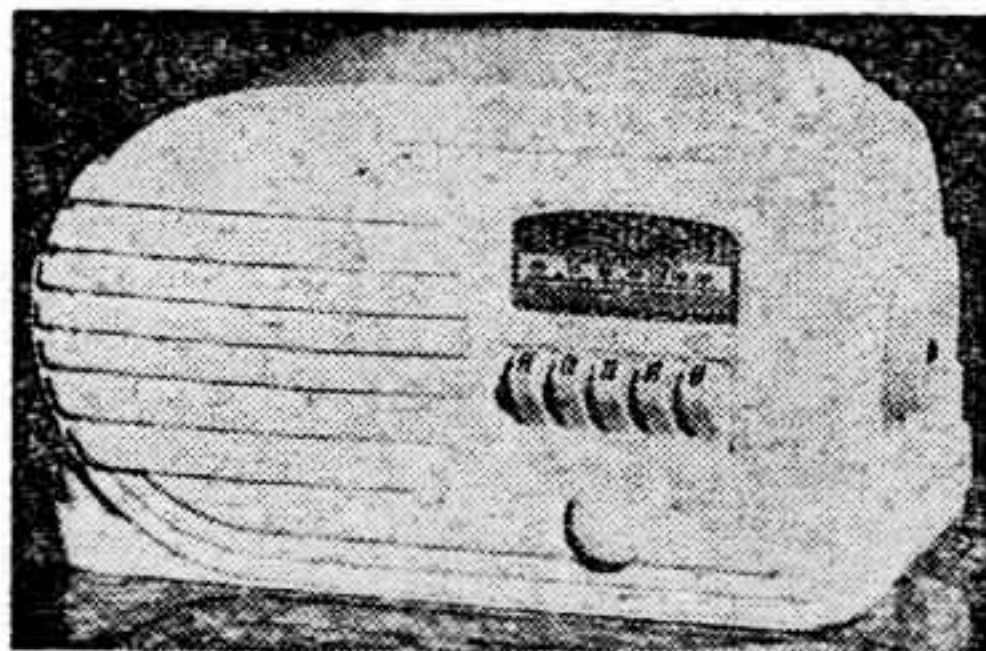
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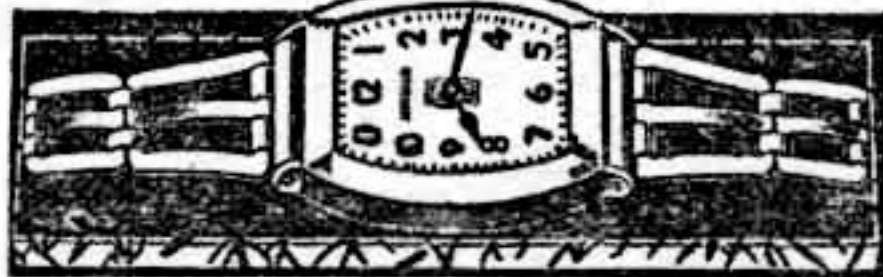
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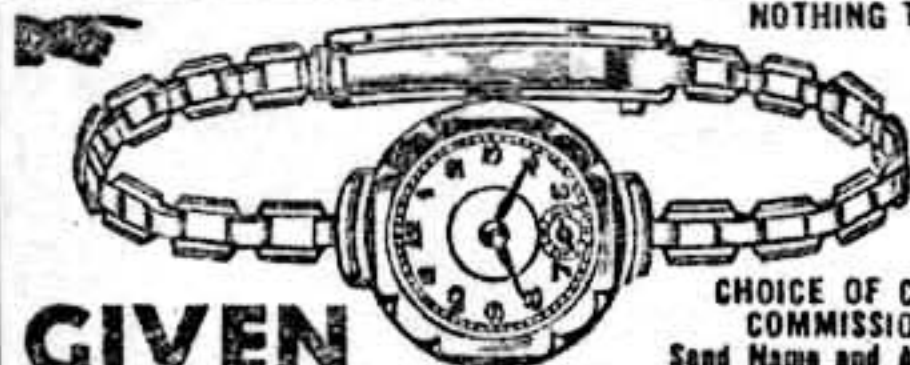


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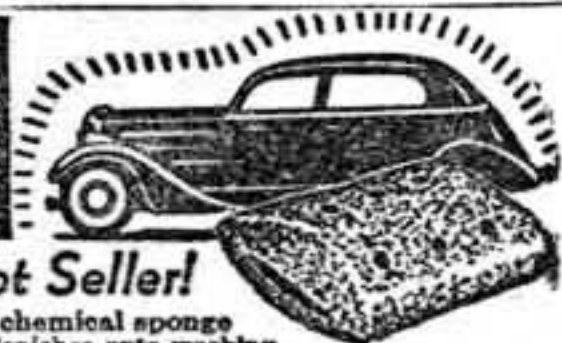
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ASTONISHING STORIES

(Continued from page 100)

room of gray, shifting shadows. Already it was turning spectral. The woman, Roa, standing over by its closed door—a ghost-woman—was staring at us.

And abruptly Anna's clutch upon me tightened. "Jac—Jas, look there. . . ."

I stared, numbed. The room's door had burst suddenly open. Targh was in the doorway—a spectral Targh, gazing astonished at Roa—at the otherwise empty room. And then he saw us—to him, dissolving phantoms. His voice, dim, disembodied, inexpressively weird, seemed to reach us as though across a vast abyss.

"Why—why you, Roa—you, damnable traitress—"

Amazing scene before us! The filmy form of Targh leaped for the cowering woman; his plunged knife sank into her breast. Her faint cry was almost lost to us as we saw the dim, transparent outlines of her sinking down at her killer's feet. . . . My hand at that instant went to my belt with some vague idea of surging back into Targh's reality. But Anna restrained me.

"Too late, Jac!"

The spectral room now was almost faded. Poor Roa. We could still dimly see the pallid outlines of her lying there. And the wraith-like Targh leaping over her—rushing for us.

Instinctively I braced myself for the shock. But his phantom shape seemed to rush through me—there was nothing. . .

Dissolving wraith. . . . He was presently gone. The room outlines—gone!

In the grayness of the abyss, we sank down. I clung to Anna.

"Will you know what will be in this space—when we arrive?"

"Yes. A room at the top of Black Stone. My grandfather told me—"

"People from Alto Ridge may be there—police—looking for me."

(Continued on page 104)

FORTUNE IN CASH PAID FOR OLD MONEY



HIS "LAST DIME," yet if that dime was of the year 1894 with a mint mark "S" Max Mehl, the Texas Money King, would have paid him \$100.00 for it. He could have been dining on steak instead of coffee and doughnuts.



COINS WORTH FORTUNES may pass through your hands unnoticed, if you do not know how to recognize them. Mrs. Harvey, wife of a Fulton, Mo., farmer was paid \$140.00 for three small coins which she obtained as part payment for some produce.



IT PAYS TO BE POSTED—the owner of a number of \$5.00 and \$10.00 notes of the Kirtland (Ohio) Safety Society Bank was about to burn them, but hearing of Max Mehl, sent them to him and it was discovered they bore the signature of Joseph Smith, the late founder of the Mormon Church. They were, therefore, of considerable value.



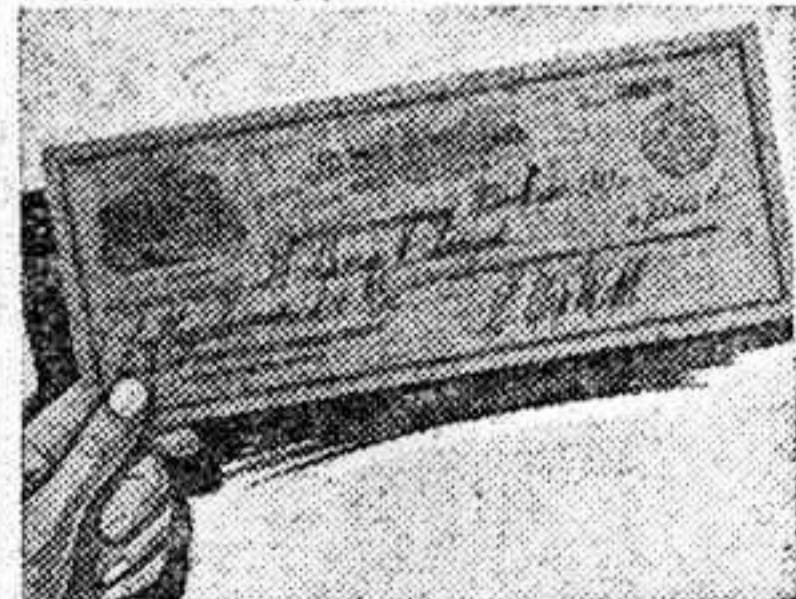
ONE OF THE LARGEST TRANSACTIONS in the history of coins was the purchase by B. Max Mehl, the Texas Money King, of 832 copper cents from Dr. George P. French, of Rochester, for \$50,000.00. Above is shown a newspaper picture of B. Max Mehl handing over the check. The coin illustrated is one of the pennies dated 1793. Three of these were valued at \$5,000.00.



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(Continued from page 102)

As a matter of fact, as you who read this already know, the police had searched Black Stone long before this. They found nothing. Anna told me now that while I was lying unconscious, Boroh had hidden the body of the man I had killed, taking the mechanism from him to put upon me. He had found my Banning gun; had thrust it into his pocket, not knowing how to use it.

Again we passed through the weird transition. . . . A time, indescribable—it seemed not so long now as we talked of our plans. . . . To get to Loto, down in the village. . . .

"I see the outlines," Anna suddenly murmured. "Look—isn't that a wall?"

Around us, presently, blurred shapes were taking form. Spectral walls; a ceiling, a big arched doorway, a huge broken window that seemed to have a balcony outside it. . . . Then I could see moonlight.

There seemed a vague pressure of floor under our feet when abruptly I was aware of a moving shape—then another! The forms of men! Men in uniform! Policemen! In a spectral corridor outside our room, the shapes of them prowled past. They did not see us.

Then we had materialized, with the current momentarily off.

MY OWN world! A silent, dimly moonlit room, fetid with the musty smell of cobwebs and the gathered dust of years. We crouched on the floor in the moonlit dimness.

"You remember this room, Anna? Its general location?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And we want to get downstairs—and outside perhaps—the space where your village is, where we can find Loto?"

"Yes. I will lead you. I think—I think I know about where to go. . . Listen! I hear—"

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29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
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6.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
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THE SHADOW PEOPLE

"Men downstairs—yes, I hear them. We'll keep away from them."

Surely we had no time to disclose ourselves—to be engulfed in police turmoil. As though we were skulking shadows we padded down through the great silent Castle. The noisy policemen, tramping about with flashlights, were not hard to avoid. And then we were outdoors—out where the broken, ragged cliff fronts the broad Hudson. . . .

We climbed down, crouched in a rocky recess; then switched on the current. My world faded into spectres again—until at last, again there were the new faint outlines.

The hilltop, with Targh's house at its summit—I saw it now above us, to one side. And rising around us, on the undulating waves of a valley floor, were little mound-shaped houses of the village. Crooked streets—a sort of park, where trees and unfamiliar vegetation grew. . . .

Anna gestured. "Over there—the place where Loto ought to be."

Enough of pseudo-solidity was under our feet so that we could walk and run.

We were in the ghostly little park. We had been discovered now. The phantom shapes of people were scurrying away from us. And then I realized that Anna had led me into a sort of cave opening, with a descending corridor. A light-glow was ahead of us. A cave, with spectres of men who saw us—who were not afraid of us; men who came running and then stood in a group, watching us as we materialized.

"Now, Jack! Now—"

We turned off the current.

"Loto! Loto dear!" Anna cried.

He was a slim young fellow—handsome, perhaps, in the fashion of his realm. An animal skin was draped around him; a gray leather thong about his forehead tied his thick dark hair from his eyes. A dozen other young men like him were



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ASTONISHING STORIES

here—and among them were four of the mechanisms.

"You came, Anna," Loto said. "We heard that you were up there at Targh's—we were going after you."

The haste upon us all made that brief scene one of turmoil. The explanation of who I was—what had happened. . . And then the young men were drawing lots to see which of them could go with us—Loto, and three others.

When we told Loto that already our escape had been discovered by Targh, he gasped, "Then he won't go to raid your world, he will be only after Anna—"

From the cave doorway there came a shout. "Loto! Look! Come here!"

From the mouth of the cave we could see up beyond the village—Targh's house on the hilltop. The guards on the roof up there were staring down and gesturing. Our hiding place here already had been discovered! The spectral shapes of Anna and me had been seen scurrying in here—seen by Targh's men! How many mechanisms did Targh have? No one here seemed to know. A dozen more perhaps. . . .

Then someone gasped, "There they come! See them—starting already."

They were faintly visible now—spectral men—a dozen at least. I seemed to distinguish the huge forms of Boroh and Targh among them. And then from the village a great cry went up! The people were frightened by the phantom shapes.

Anna gripped me. "And look! Jack look—he thinks maybe we will merely try to hide here! His men are coming down the hill!"

Fifty or more of Targh's men, normal to his realm, without mechanisms, were coming down the rocky path at a plunging run, waving weapons, and shouting. The villagers were scattering before them.

Loto whirled on his gathered group. "All of you scatter now! Go!"

THE SHADOW PEOPLE

Loto and three of them would go with Anna and me. We would take her into my world where she would be safe, and we would give the mechanisms to our scientists, who could duplicate them.

"And we'll come back," I promised. "Surely it won't be long—or, if in the transition we can meet Targh—"

"All the rest of you—get out of here now!" Loto ordered. "Tell the people to be patient. We'll come back. Anna—our little goddess—she'll come back to you. That you can tell the people."

Obediently the young men dispersed.

"Better hurry it," I warned, as the six of us adjusted our mechanisms. "Here they come!"

We were dissolving as Targh's guards burst into the cave. There was just the ghostly vision of them as they stood baffled, watching us go.

ONCE more the transition. Surely now it was weirder than ever as we tried to keep together. Anna led us as we ran over the ghostly dissolving landscape of the village, out to the path that led up to Targh's house. We were upon it, down near its bottom when it became too tenuous to perceive. Then we were in the void, with the abyss of the half-world around us.

Those distant vague blobs—dim things hovering like ourselves—were those our adversaries?

I whispered, "Anna—where are we? In the space of my world where are we? In Black Stone?"

"Under it, I think. Its cellar—its foundations."

"And if—if we should materialize—not in empty space. . . ."

Thought most horrible. It swept me then with terror. But I had no time to pursue it.

Beside me one of the young men whispered, "So weird—why, this thing—"

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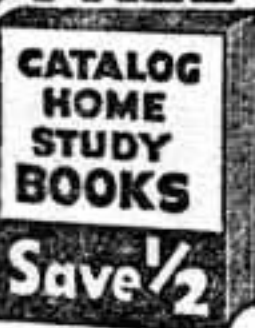
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ASTONISHING STORIES

They were all, even Loto, numbed by the strangeness of this, their first experience with the transition. I tried to keep my wits. Spectral outlines were forming around us. Walls? No, not just that. Blurred shapes—monstrous blurred masses. I seemed to feel something pressing at me, shoving me sidewise. A gentle, edging, shifting shove. . . .

"Anna—good Lord, what. . . ."

She understood it. Something solid was in the space here. And we were alien—still so tenuous that natural forces were edging us along. We seemed to come to some space where the shoving ceased. I could feel the pressure of ground under my feet.

Loto murmured, "This is a room, isn't it? In that place you call Black Stone?"

It could have been the cellar. Shadowy outlines of a huge broken place—I seemed to see what could have been an old furnace.

I think all six of us were standing in a swaying group. And suddenly, without warning, Targh and his men, appearing to us as solid as ourselves, came leaping from the ghostly shadows and were upon us!

I clutched at Anna, trying to shove her behind me. Then I had gripped her and was running. Targh and a dozen of his men were here.

"Run!" I shouted at Loto. "Scatter! Too many of them; we cannot fight them!"

We tried to scatter. I saw one of our men go suddenly down, with a Targh man on him; a knife sinking. . . . We were all armed with knives. I crouched somewhere in some unnamable, spectral place in the phantom abyss, with Anna behind me. To one side, I saw Loto leap suddenly upon a giant figure. Boroh. The giant went down. Loto's triumphant voice sounded toneless in the abyss:

"Got him! And here's another—you

THE SHADOW PEOPLE

too!" They swayed backward—vanished for a moment behind a blurred mass. And then I saw that they were fighting in it—heedless that it was shoving them, pushing at them as they materialized. . .

No two material bodies can occupy the same space at the same time. The thought of that flashed to me—but all this was happening in seconds—chaotic seconds. I had barely time to think at all—no time to reason. Just a few seconds of fighting by instinct—the instinct to preserve myself and Anna, to kill these adversaries.

Wherever it was that I crouched for those seconds, I was aware suddenly that forces were shoving at me and Anna. But I had no thought to heed them—no chance to heed them, for abruptly there was a guttural cry, and from somewhere Targh came leaping. I rose to meet him with my knife poised.

Anna screamed; and then her agonized words reached me. "Jac! We're almost out—not here! We can't come out here! The switch at your belt—!"

I BARELY realized the import of her words. Targh's solid bulk struck me, my knife sinking into his arm, and his grazing my shoulder as we went down together. Ghastly chaos! I was aware of sounds beyond Anna's screams and Targh's panting, grunting breath as he strove to sink his knife into me. Horrible, blurred sounds—a distant rumble—a heaving, grinding rumble. . . . Gray, shadowy masses, almost solid now, were around us. . . Walls rocking. . . .

By some miracle of threshing combat, my knife went into Targh's heart. . .

"Why—" he gasped. "You did it. . . Impossible—"

Impossible that the mighty Targh could meet his end like this! The wonder of it was in his staring eyes as he sank limp under me and died. I staggered erect, with Anna gripping me and a spectral

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chaos, so monstrous that I have no words to depict it, tumbling and heaving around us. The bodies of Targh's men, fighting with Loto and his fellows . . . already some of them had materialized, heedless that this was no space in which they could exist in material form. A wild chaos of grim, unnatural horror. Just a few seconds of it—seconds, each of them a grisly eternity.

"Jac! Jac, your switch! We must go back—"

Around us Black Stone was rocking, coming down. Spectral walls—but with flying seconds of passing time, they were almost solid.

"Jac—Jac dear!"

My fingers twitched at the little switch-lever in my belt. It would not work! The fight with Targh had jammed it!

"Anna—I can't! You go back, Anna—"

A ghastly, heaving rock was here at my elbow. I pushed myself away from it. Then there was a moment when in a wild frenzy I think I was carrying Anna—staggering with her in the chaos.

"Oh, Jac dear. . . ." She still would not turn her switch. I reached for it; shoved it. Then it seemed that she was dissolving in my arms so that I lowered her to the rocking ground. I staggered on. . . . Faintly I heard her voice:

"Oh Jac! Some time—come for me. . . Some time—"

"Yes—yes, I will. . . ."

The ghost of her was dissolving. Then I was swept away from her. As I staggered, I remember that there seemed a little space. I fell into it—pulled the jammed switch until I tore it from its fastenings.

I was down! I felt the current go off, with a monstrous roar of the reality of my world surging around me. Rocking, grinding, roaring and splintering chaos. In it I was aware that the deranged

(Continued on page 112)

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ASTONISHING STORIES

(Continued from page 110)

current within my mechanism was burning me. I cast it off; staggered on. And in a moment fell again, into what must have been a partly sheltered recess, where I lay in the roaring darkness with the avalanche of the shattered Black Stone coming down on me.

Then something pinned me, crushed me, until mercifully my senses faded. . . .

THEY tell me that I was found, still alive in the wreckage, a day later. And ever since then I have been here in the Alto Ridge Hospital. You have read the truth of what happened to me that ghastly night. But there is little or nothing to prove it more than a vagary of my deranged fancy. Those partly materialized bodies in the ruins; naturally they have not been found. But some fragments perhaps should be there—and my mechanism, buried under tons of masonry.

Who is going to trouble to try and find it, just to prove I am telling the truth? But perhaps some day, someone will uncover it.

And so now I am lying here, just a bit of human wreckage, who doubtless would be better off dead. I lie here and think of Anna. I like to think that she got back there safely. . . . She would be their goddess now. . . . And sometime perhaps, in this life or another, I will join her.

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(Continued from page 76)

"My Lady of the Emerald" by Morley is an excellent bit of writing in spots, and falls off in others. But—that booful ending, that superb climax and stuff, is so unlike the regular hack stuff that it gives the tale a second place in the issue.

Need I say more than to state that "Daughter of Darkness" equalled its great predecessor "Into the Darkness?" Rocklynne handled a difficult situation superbly. As Ross says in his "Science Fiction Simplified" in the October *Writer's Digest*, stf readers like to toy with immense distances and sizes and they make toy models which eliminate all concepts of immense distances. And does he put this theory to work in his "Darkness" stories! Thought I might just mention this in connection with the last statement, though.

Quote: "Sun Destroyer laughed with him, and moved a step nearer." That struck me as being humorous midst the billions of years, and universes, and stuff.

"The Last Drop" isn't up to the standards of either de Camp or Hubbard in this reader's humble opinion.

And still Cummings rolls on! "Machines of Destiny" wasn't, on the whole, a bad little short.

The Viewpoints department must have been written months and months before it appeared. For the information of your columnist, Johnny Baltadonis hasn't been active for at least eight months. And—it's John Russel Fearn, not John Russel Fern. Add to revue of the *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*: the cover is not by the well-known stf artist, Frank R. Paul, but by Miss Paule, an artist in the LASFS.

However, the revues and the entire "Viewpoint" section should be kept and enlarged, if possible.

The letter section, as usual, is too small. Howsabout at least four pages of the elite type?

Now, with a vicious snarl, our hero tears into the art work. The cover is more than a little on the unimpressive side. Bok's illustration, the first one, for MacCreigh's tale, takes the cake. Whatever the cake is.

Thorp zooms to new heights with his illustration for that—uh—Brackett—uh—story. Bok's pic for "Retreat—" is well executed in the typical Bok style.

Johnny Giunta has a fairly presentable drawing, but I wouldn't brag about it.

Well, Mr. Editor, I'll be looking forward anxiously to your first selection of stories, since I've heard that the last stories were those inherited from Freddy Pohl. But it's a heck of a long way to December 31st, and "The Man Who Knew Roger Stanley." A heck of a long way.

Our hero shuffles his feet nervously, gapes around hoping that someone'll say goodby, and then, when all eyes turn to him, bolts out of the door with a lingering

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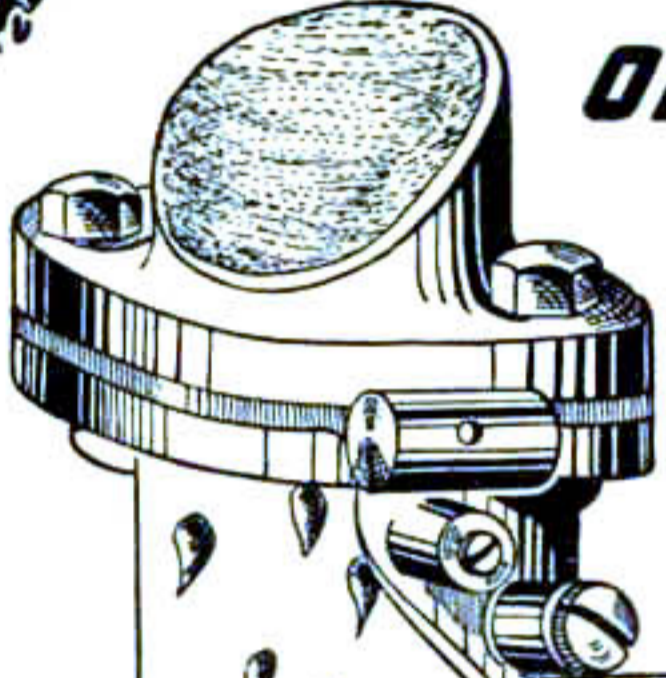
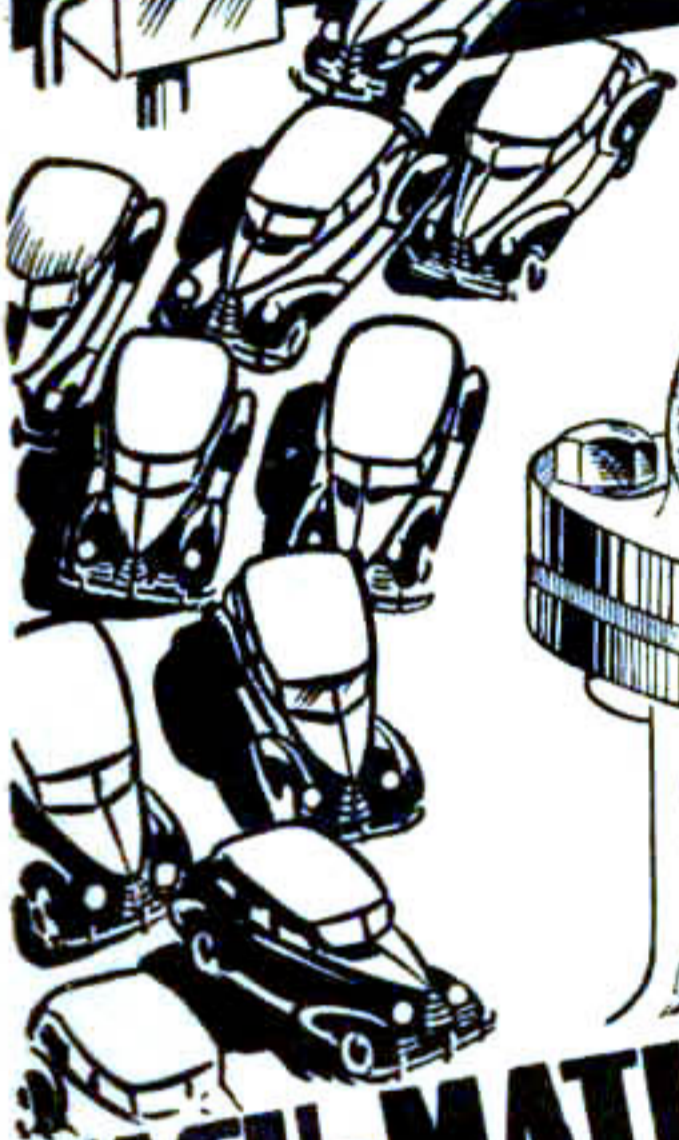
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VACU-MATIC

SETS NEW COAST-TO-CHICAGO RECORD

Scores Again!

Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills—gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power—greater speed—quicker pickup—faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is entirely different! It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required to save dollars on gas costs.

BOB MCKENZIE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
LEAST TO GREAT

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State Street
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 3322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3-1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

Yours very truly,
Bob McKenzie

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

Fits All Cars

Easy To Install

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

The Vacu-matic Co. Wauwatosa, Wis.

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.



Signed *Marcus J. Clauz*
Notary Public

AGENTS Get Yours FREE For Introducing

Vacu-matic offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. If you help us introduce it to a friend, you can obtain your own free. Check and mail coupon today.

SEND THIS Free Offer COUPON

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-613 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Please send full particulars about VACU-MATIC, also how I may obtain one for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Check here if interested in Agency Proposition.

10¢ A DAY - buys a Diamond or Famous Watch

On Our

NEW SAVINGS BOOK PLAN



Yes - only 10c a day on my Savings Book Plan will buy your choice of these Diamonds or Watches. It's simple - here's how you go about it . . .

WHAT YOU DO:

Send coupon below with a dollar bill and a brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. Indicate the watch or diamond you want on coupon, giving number and price.

WHAT I'LL DO:

I'll open an account for you on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN, send the watch or diamond you want for approval and

10-DAY TRIAL

If satisfied, you pay 10 monthly payments. If you are not satisfied after wearing the watch or ring for 10 days, send it back and I'll return your dollar on our

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

A Savings Book will be sent to you to help you save your dime each day. YOU PAY MONTHLY by money order or check. Try this easy, convenient method that has helped thousands to own fine diamonds and watches without burden on the pocket-book or savings. All prices include Federal Tax.

FREE TO ADULTS

A postcard brings my complete 48-page catalogue and full details on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN. No Obligation.



\$27.50

A7 - Brilliant Cut Diamond Engagement Ring. 14K yellow gold. \$1 deposit \$2.85 a month



both \$33

A84 - Bridal Set. 8 Brilliant Cut Diamonds. 14K yellow gold. \$1 deposit \$3.20 a month



\$35.75

D122 - Man's Twin Ring. Diamond and simulated blue sapphire. 14K yellow gold. \$1 deposit \$3.48 mo.



\$22

I157 - Man's Initial Ring. Diamond; 2 initials on black onyx. 14K yellow gold. \$1 deposit \$2.10 a month



P122 - Ladies' 10K coral rolled gold plate KENT Watch. 7 jewels. Guaranteed. Extra link bracelet.

\$1 deposit \$1.83 a month



R154
17 JEWELS
\$33.75

M140
15 JEWELS
\$33.75

Bulova Watch Features for Men and Women. Both 10K yellow rolled gold plate case. Order by number.

\$1 deposit \$3.28 a month



T568
17 JEWELS
\$22

O567
15 JEWELS
\$22

Famous Benrus Watch Features. Both 10K yellow rolled gold plate cases. Order by number.

\$1 deposit \$2.10 a month



\$27.50

K308 - Waterproof Watch for Service Men. Sweepsecond. 17 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate.

\$1 dep. \$2.65 a mo.

JIM FEENEY
L. W. Sweet, 1670 Broadway (Dept 12B)
New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find \$1 deposit. Send me No. _____
Price \$_____. I agree to pay the balance
in 10 equal monthly payments, otherwise I'll return
selection and you will refund my dollar.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

L.W. Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS, Inc.
Dept. 12B 1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK