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THE RED STUFF

from THE BEST OF JOHN WYNDHAM

John Wyndham

SPHERE BOOKS

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## INTRODUCTION

AT a very tender age my latent passion for all forms of fantasy stories, having been sparked by the Brothers Grimm and the more unusual offerings in the children's comics and later the boy's adventure papers, was encouraged in the early 1930s by the occasional exciting find on the shelves of the public library with Burroughs and Thorne Smith varying the staple diet of Wells and Verne.

But the decisive factor in establishing that exhilarating 'sense of wonder' in my youthful imagination was the discovery about that time of back numbers of American science fiction magazines to be bought quite cheaply in stores like Wool-worths. The happy chain of economic circumstances by which American newstand returns, sometimes sadly with the magic cover removed or mutilated, ballasted cargo ships returning to English ports and the colonies, must have been the mainspring of many an enthusiastic hobby devoted to reading, discussing, perhaps collecting and even writing, science fiction – or 'scientifiction' as Hugo Gernsback coined the tag in his early *Amazing Stories* magazine.

Gernsback was a great believer in reader participation; in 1936 I became a teenage member of the Science Fiction League sponsored by his *Wonder Stories*. Earlier he had run a competition in its fore-runner *Air Wonder Stories* to find a suitable banner slogan, offering the prize of 'One Hundred Dollars in Gold' with true yankee braggadocio. Discovering the result some years later in, I think, the September 1930 issue of *Wonder Stories* seized upon from the bargain-bin of a chain store, was akin to finding a message in a bottle cast adrift by some distant Robinson Crusoe, and I well remember the surge of jingoistic pride (an educational trait well-nurtured in pre-war Britain) in noting that the winner was an Englishman, John Beynon Harris.

I had not the slightest anticipation then that I would later meet, and acknowledge as a good friend and mentor, this contest winner who, as John Wyndham, was to become one of the greatest English story-tellers in the idiom. The fact that he never actually got paid in gold was a disappointment, he once told me, that must have accounted for the element of philosophical dubiety in some of his work. Certainly his winning slogan ‘*Future Flying Fiction*’, although too late to save the magazine from foundering on the rock of economic depression (it had already been amalgamated with its stable-mate *Science Wonder Stories* to become just plain, if that is the right word, *Wonder Stories*), presaged the firm stamp of credibility combined with imaginative flair that characterized JBH's writings.

John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris (the abundance of fore-names conveniently supplied his various aliases) emerged in the 1950s as an important contemporary influence on speculative fiction, particularly in the exploration of the theme of realistic global catastrophe, with books such as *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes*, and enjoyed a popularity, which continued after his sad death in 1969, comparable to that of his illustrious predecessor as master of the scientific romance, H. G. Wells.

However, he was to serve his writing apprenticeship in those same pulp magazines of the thirties, competing successfully with their native American contributors, and it is the purpose of this present collection to highlight the chronological development of his short stories from those early beginnings to the later urbane and polished style of John Wyndham.

‘The Lost Machine’ was his second published story, appearing in *Amazing Stories*, and was possibly the prototype of the sentient robot later developed by such writers as Isaac Asimov. He used a variety of plots during this early American period particularly favouring time travel, and the best of these was undoubtedly ‘The Man From Beyond’ in which the poignancy of a man's realization, caged in a zoo on Venus, that far from being abandoned by his fellow-explorers, he is the victim of a far stranger fate, is remarkably outlined for its time. Some themes had dealt with war, such as ‘The Trojan Beam’, and he had strong views to express on its futility. Soon his own induction into the Army in 1940 produced a period of creative inactivity corresponding to World War II. He had, however, previously established himself in England as a prominent science fiction writer with serials in major periodicals, subsequently reprinted in hard covers, and he even had a detective novel published. He had been well represented too – ‘Perfect Creature’ is an amusing example – in the various magazines stemming from fan activity, despite the vicissitudes of their pre- and immediate post-war publishing insecurity.

But after the war and into the fifties the level of science fiction writing in general had increased considerably, and John rose to the challenge by selling successfully to the American market again. In England his polished style proved popular and a predilection for the paradoxes of time travel as a source of private amusement was perfectly exemplified in ‘Pawley's Peepholes’, in which the gawping tourists from the future are routed by vulgar tactics. This story was later successfully adapted for radio and broadcast by the B.B.C.

About this time his first post-war novel burst upon an unsuspecting world, and by utilizing a couple of unoriginal ideas with his Gernsback-trained attention to logically based explanatory detail and realistic background, together with his now strongly developed narrative style, ‘The Day of the Triffids’ became one of the classics of modern speculative fiction, surviving even a mediocre movie treatment. It was the fore-runner of a series of equally impressive and enjoyable novels including ‘The Chrysalids’ and ‘The Mid-wich Cuckoos’ which was successfully filmed as ‘Village of the Damned’. (A sequel ‘Children of the Damned’ was markedly inferior, and John was careful to disclaim any responsibility for the writing.)

I was soon to begin an enjoyable association with John Wyndham that had its origins in the early days

of the *New Worlds* magazine-publishing venture, and was later to result in much kindly and essential assistance enabling me to become a specialist dealer in the genre. This was at the Fantasy Book Centre in Bloomsbury, an area of suitably associated literary activities where John lived for many years, and which provided many pleasurable meetings at a renowned local coffee establishment, Cawardine's, where we were often joined by such personalities as John Carnell, John Christopher and Arthur C. Clarke.

In between the novels two collections of his now widely published short stories were issued as 'The Seeds of Time' and 'Consider Her Ways'; others are re-printed here for the first time. He was never too grand to refuse material for our own *New Worlds* and in 1958 wrote a series of four novellettes about the Troon family's contribution to space exploration – a kind of Forsyte saga of the solar system later collected under the title 'The Outward Urge'. His fictitious collaborator 'Lucas Parkes' was a subtle ploy in the book version to explain Wyndham's apparent deviation into solid science-based fiction. The last story in this collection 'The Emptiness of Space' was written as a kind of post-script to that series, especially for the 100th anniversary issue of *New Worlds*.

John Wyndham's last novel was *Chocky*, published in 1968. It was an expansion of a short story following a theme similar to *The Chrysalids* and *The Midwich Cuckoos*. It was a theme peculiarly appropriate for him in his advancing maturity. When, with characteristic reticence and modesty, he announced to a few of his friends that he was marrying his beloved Grace and moving to the country-side, we all felt that this was a well-deserved retirement for them both.

But ironically time – always a fascinating subject for speculation by him – was running out for this typical English gentleman. Amiable, erudite, astri-gently humorous on occasion, he was, in the same way that the gentle Boris Karloff portrayed his film monsters, able to depict the night-mares of humanity with frightening realism, made the more deadly by his masterly precision of detail. To his great gift for story-telling he brought a lively intellect and a fertile imagination.

I am glad to be numbered among the many, many thousands of his readers whose 'sense of wonder' has been satisfactorily indulged by a writer whose gift to posterity is the compulsive readability of his stories of which this present volume is an essential part.

— LESLIE FLOOD

## **THE RED STUFF (1951)**

(Note: The Government is of the opinion that in the present critical situation the widest possible publicity should be given to the facts of the case and the events which gave rise to it. It is, therefore, with official approval and encouragement that the proprietors of WALTERS SPACE-NEWS here reprint in pamphlet form the account first published in both the printed and broadcast versions of the issue of that journal dated Friday, 20th July 2051)

Here is an official Government emergency warning:

"From now until further notice Clarke Lunar Station will be closed to traffic. No vessel of any kind at present on the Station may put to space, nor will any local craft be permitted to take off from there. All vessels now in space, whether earth-ward or outward bound, scheduled to call at Clarke must make immediate arrangements to divert to Whitley. Outward bound craft will ground at the normal Whitley Lunar Station base; earth-ward bound vessels will be directed to the emergency field and *must* ground there. Any vessel ignoring this instruction will be refused grounding and be dealt with severely. It is

empha-sized that any vessel grounding at or near Clarke for any reason whatsoever will be refused permis-sion to leave. This warning is effective imme-diatly.”

It is likely that only a few of the millions who heard that an-nounce-ment, or the versions of it in other languages, broad-cast on the evening of Monday last, 16th July, took any great notice of it, in spite of its serious-ness of tone. After all, though we call this the Space age, only a frac-tional percen-tage of us have ever been or ever will be in space.

Readers of this journal cannot fail to have been troubled, more likely alarmed, by the order, but they think of space in a specialized way as some-thing directly affecting their calling or livelihood.

But to the average man, what is the Moon? It is an air-less, cheer-less cinder, the scene of some mining, useful as a testing ground for space condi-tions, but chiefly notable as a way-station appar-ently designed by provi-dence for the conve-nience of space-voyaging humanity. He knows that it is impor-tant, but he does not know *how* impor-tant, nor why.

He knows, perhaps, that the Clarke Lunar Station was first opened over fifty years ago, and that it was so named in honour of the octo-genarian Doctor of Physics who did so much to further space-travel, but he does not realize what, in terms of mathe-matics, of power and pay-load, the exis-tence of such a Station and fuel-ling base means. Nor that its absence would entail sus-pension of space-travel almost entirely for a very long time, until we could com-pletely orga-nize our methods — if we could.

Luckily we are not altogether denied use of the Moon by the closing of Clarke; we can still operate through the Whitley Station — at present. But if that cannot be main-tained in use, the question of conti-nued space-travel ships of the present types becomes grave to the point of hope-less-ness.

To our regular readers parts of the account which follows will not be new, but it has seemed to the editors desir-able that at this critical junc-ture all the infor-mation available should be collated and presented to the public in the form of a narra-tive giving as honest a picture as possible of the present situ-ation, and its poten-tiali-ties.

## CHAPTER I

At 20.58 G.M.T. on the 6th January 2051 the radio-operator of the *Madge G* . reported to the Captain that he had picked up a message globe and asked for further instruc-tions.

The *Madge G* . after a cautious route well out of the elliptic to hurdle the asteroid belt had corrected course and was now in fall towards her desti-nation, Callisto, Moon IV, of Jupiter. Her Captain, John G. Troyte, was not pleased by his operator's report. The passage of the aster-oids is always a strain for a con-sci-ent-i-ous man; even at wide berth there is still the chance of lonely out-flyers from the main swarm which will go through a ship as if she were a paper hoop. There is not a lot to be done about it: should the out-flyer be any-thing above the size of a foot-ball, it is just too bad; if it is smaller, prompt action can save the ship, provi-ding no vital part is hit. Alert-ness sus-tained for the long period is extremely tiring and Captain Troyte felt that he had earned a period of repose and relax-ation during the fall towards Callisto.

What was more, he was pretty certain it would not turn out to be a message-globe after all. He had had such a report half a dozen times in the course of his career, and it had always turned out to be untrue. In the whole of his time in space he could only recall five being picked up at all. They were a good idea, only they didn't come off: they'd have been all right if there hadn't been quite so much space for them to

get lost in, but, practice being so different from theory, it was little wonder that the clause for their compulsory carriage had been struck out of the shipping regulations. They stood, in his opinion, as little chance of being picked up as a two-ounce bottle in mid-Atlantic, probably less. He went along to the radio-cabin himself. The operator was humming in rhythmic harmony with the High-Shakers broadcast from Tedwich, Mars, when he entered.

“Turn off that blamed racket,” said Captain Troyte shortly. “Now what's all this about a globe?”

The operator clicked out the High-Shakers, and touched a switch to bring in the pre-set receiver. He listened a moment and then handed over the head-phones. The Captain held one to his ear, and waited: after a few seconds came an unmistakable da da, da da di. He looked at his watch, timing it. Exactly ten seconds later it came again —da da, da da di. He waited until it had repeated once more.

“Good heavens, I really believe it is,” he said.

“Can't be anything else, sir,” said the operator, smugly.

“Got a line on it?”

The operator had. He gave the angles. The Captain considered. The globe was ahead. By rough clock-face placing, at four o'clock 30 degrees oblique on the last reading, and widening. There was no likelihood of colliding with it.

“Is it coming towards us, or are we chasing it?” he demanded.

“Can't say, sir. At a guess I should say we're more or less chasing it. It's signal strength had improved, but only slowly.”

“H'm,” said the Captain thoughtfully. “We'll have to get it in. Keep an ear on it. Don't do anything until you're sure the signal strength is past maximum, there'd be a nasty mess if we were to hit it head on. When it's begun to fade get the activator going, and we'll fish it in. But for God's sake do it gently, we don't want the thing hurtling at us like a cannon ball. Better let me know once you've got it started.”

The Captain returned to his own cabin more interested than he admitted. The message-globe was an ingenious contrivance which had looked like being more useful than it had proved. The problem had been to provide a ship with some means of communicating its trouble in case of radio failure or wreck. In theory it was to be discharged in the direction of the nearest space-line where its signal could scarcely fail to be picked up; in actual use very few had been picked up and it had progressively less chance of being found as the area of space operation increased. The general opinion which had led to its omission from the statutory list of equipment was that the majority of the globes sent off continued to tick out their signals undetected until their power gave out whereupon they floated about in space as additional hazards. There was a feeling that the hazards of space were quite numerous enough without them.

The radio operator hung his phones on a hook where he could hear the intermittent signal from the globe conveniently, pondered whether he should try to listen to the High-Shakers at the same time, decided against it, and hunted for the sealed box in which the activator had lain ever since the *Madge G* was launched. After study of the instructions which he had not seen since the day when he'd mugged them up for his final examination, he got it set up. Then there was nothing to do but wait.

Two and a half hours later the meter showed the signal strength of the globe to be falling off slightly. He

lit a cigarette, took another look at the operating instructions and grunted. Then he pressed a key on the activator, and waited.

Nearly a thousand miles away in space the 2½-foot-diameter steel globe revolved slowly as it drifted in a leisurely way upon the orbit into which it had fallen. To all appearance it was as inert as any other fragment of flotsam in the void. Then gradually, almost imperceptibly at first, its revolution began to slow. In a few minutes it was revolving clumsily like a ball with its weight out of true. Another five minutes and it failed to complete a revolution, it paused as though just short of top dead centre, swung back, oscillated gently awhile and then came to rest.

Back on the *Madge G*, the radio operator called up the navigator who did some quick figuring. Out in space the globe swung a little in response to the calculations. The radio operator pressed another key. An observer, had there been one close to the globe, would have seen little jets of flame spurt from that side of it distant from the *Madge G* as the relays went in. Simultaneously he would have watched it break from its orbit and scud away on a course calculated to intersect with that of the ship far out of sight.

The radio operator informed the Captain that the globe was on its way. The Captain joined him, and together they bent over the signal-meter.

“What did you give?” asked Captain Troyte.

“Five seconds on low power, sir,” the operator told him.

The strength of reception according to the needle was almost constant.

“H'm. Our own speed, near as damn it,” said the Captain after a few minutes. “Better give it the same again.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

The operator pressed his key once more. Far away in the shining steel ball the relays clicked as before. Fuel was injected into the miniature combustion chambers and ignited. Little daggers of flame stabbed out into the darkness behind the globe, and it thrust forward on its way at twice its former speed.

“That'll do,” the Captain said. “You've no idea of its distance yet?”

“Impossible to tell, sir. If the batteries are strong it may be a long way off. If they're down at all it may be only a hundred miles or so away. No way of knowing, sir.”

“All right. Tell your relief to keep a check on it, and I'll have the navigator set a watch for it. If it is a long way off it may be a number of hours before we spot it?”

“Yes, sir.”

The *Madge G* continued uninterrupted in her fall towards Jupiter. The operator after further consultation with the navigator corrected the globe's course slightly in compensation for the increased speed. Again there was nothing to do but wait while somewhere outside in the blackness of space the little globe tore through the emptiness on a course designed to bring it to a rendezvous with the ship at a point far ahead.

“Better read up on this,” said the operator, throwing the instruction book to his relieving operator. “You may have to fish it in.”

The relief looked at the book.

“Oh God. Just my bloody luck. Might have known it when I skipped the lecture on the things,” he said, gloomily.

Five hours later his telephone rang.

“Think we've spotted it, Bill,” said the voice of the assistant-navigator. “Hold on. Let you know in a minute or two.”

He came through again in under the two minutes.

“No doubt about it now. Couldn't be sure before because the way it lies you can only see a crescent of it. It's coming in a few points from dead astern, making a fairly acute angle with our own course. Keep your box of tricks handy, and hold on here.”

The radio operator arranged the remote control set in front of him and waited, telephone in hand.

“Coming up,” said the assistant navigator's voice. “Coming along nicely.” He paused. “Over-hauling us fast. About three miles or so off I reckon. Doesn't seem to be converging much ... Hang it, it isn't converging at all: it's diverging. Must have pretty well crossed our course behind us. Better bring it over a bit, Bill. Give it a touch on the port tubes. Just a touch, gently as you can ... God, man, call that a touch? It leapt like a frightened kangaroo. Stand by to correct with star-board tubes. She's coming ... coming ... Blast, she's out of the field of this instrument — half a minute ... Yes, there she is swinging right across, and ahead of us now. Correct when I tell you ... ready ... ready... now!”

Through the instrument he caught the little flutter of fire to the right of the sphere as the radio-operator obeyed.

“Okay,” he said, “direction good. Travelling dead ahead of us. Only diverging slightly, but she's running away. Get ready to brake her. Better try three seconds on low power ... No, she's still pulling ahead ... Give another two seconds ... No, damn it, that's too much: we'll over-run her. One second low power acceleration ... That's better: that's much better. Now the least possible touch on her star-board tubes, again. And gently this time...”

The jockeying went on for quite a while. Gradually by correction, re-correction and correction again the globe was juggled closer and closer until ship and globe were falling through space together with only a few hundred feet between them. Again the globe was steadied, and once more orientated towards the ship. The operator gave the lightest touch he could on the main tubes, and almost immediately braked her again.

“Great work, Bill,” approved the assistant-navigator. “She's still moving, coming in nicely. Stand by for magnets ... I'll tell you when ... ready... now!”

The operator pressed another key. A moment later there was a clang which rang through the *Madge G*., as if she had been hit with a sledge hammer.

“Whew,” said the radio operator as he wiped his brow and started to search for his cigarette case.

Outside, as the current flowed into the magnets, the drifting globe had swerved in one last wild pounce at the ship, and now clung there like a limpet.

Two space-suited-clad figures emerged from the port and walked along the side of the ship on their magnetic soles. Reaching the globe, they slid it back along the metal hull and into the air lock. It was trundled in on the main deck, and a hand threw an electric blanket over it to even up the temperature before they went to work on it.

An hour later Captain Troyte received the bunch of papers taken from the message compartment of the globe. He read them through with some surprise and incredulity. Then he picked up the telephone and spoke to the navigator.

"Where's Pomona Negra?" he inquired.

"Where's what, sir?"

"Pomona Negra. I gather it's an asteroid."

"I'll ring you back, sir."

The navigator came back through with his information a few minutes later after consulting his tables.

"Pretty nearly at the other side of its orbit now, sir."

"Other side of the sun, in fact?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good, that lets us out," said the Captain, gratefully. He sent the papers over to the radio operator with instructions to transmit to Chapman Station, Mars, in their entirety.

"Gawd," said the operator. "All that lot! Pity we ever hooked that perishing globe."

Which was truer than he knew.

## CHAPTER II

(Digest of information contained in message globe secured by the *Madge G.* 6 January 2051. Originals signed by D. L. Foggatt, Master.)

At 10.50 hrs. 20 December 2049, the Research ship *Joan III*, owned by Tempel Lines, London, and under my command, encountered a space phenomenon hitherto unobserved, or, to the best of my knowledge, unrecorded. One moment all was as usual; the next, without perceptible impact or shock, all instruments were obscured and all windows with them, and radio reception decreased to an almost inaudible whisper.

The *Joan III*, three months out from Gillington, Mars, is engaged on exploratory work in the asteroid belt. My crew is composed of men experienced in difficult and dangerous work of the kind, but none of them is acquainted either personally or by hearsay with circumstances like those in which we now



find our-selves. Leaving Mars we struck outward in the plane of the ecliptic. Upon approaching the Belt we turned, manoeuv-ring our approach upon a tangent, and gradually edging our way into the main path at a speed approxi-mately that of the asteroids them-selves.

Travelling with them thus and in their orbit, we settled too our work of plotting and charting — copies of such charts being enclosed here-with. For the follow-ing four weeks we moved with caution and restraint in that section of the Belt domi-nated by the large asteroid Pomona Negra, conti-nuing our work of classi-fica-tion and descrip-tion of the bodies, and occa-sion-ally putting in-vesti-ga-ting parties aground on certain aster-oids, though without making discov-eries of more than minor interest. Nothing unto-ward, nothing, in fact, but events of ordinary routine occurred, until on 19th December we sighted a red asteroid.

This we judged to be a body of no great size, esti-ma-ting its diameter at some three miles, but at a con-sider-able distance from us. It was distin-guished from all other objects as a brilliant scarlet crescent glowing almost as though it were afire. Detailed study of it was diffi-cult by reason of other bodies of vary-ing sizes which fre-quently inter-posed them-selves in the distance that separated us from it. After con-side-ration I gave orders to suspend other work while we investi-gated the matter. After we had been picking our way towards it for some two hours it was observed that other and smaller asteroids in its neigh-bour-hood were also glowing redly, though whether we had failed to detect them earlier or whether they had only recently become red I am unable to say. They also were diffi-cult to observe on account of erratic and puzzling obscu-ra-tions. Approxi-mately three hours after first sighting the red asteroid the sudden masking of our instru-ments and windows occurred.

At once I sent out the 2nd Officer and one of the men to investigate the cause. Radio commu-ni-ca-tion between their space-suits and our head-sets was found to be unim-peded.

I asked what the trouble was. The 2nd Officer answered me.

“I can't say, sir. It's a red stuff — red as blood. The whole ship's covered in it, as though she's been through a bath of paint.”

I inquired what kind of “red stuff”.

“Kind of slimy, sir, like — like a half melted jelly, only not transparent.”

“That's not a lot of help,” I said. “Anyway, the first thing to do is to clean it off the instru-ment glasses and then off the windows.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” he acknowledged.

I ordered the lights in the navigation room switched off, and we were able to see that the dark-ness was not com-plete. Experi-men-tally we un-shut-tered one of the windows sunward and found the glass behind to be shining with a fierce red glow. The navi-gator reported that one of his instru-ments had been cleared to a usable condi-tion, and the internal lights were switched on again.

We could hear the two men outside commen-ting on the unpleasant sticki-ness of the stuff they were clearing from a second instru-ment glass.

“Hullo, Navigator. How's that?” asked the Second.

“Okay,” replied the Navigator. “But the first one's clouded over again.”

There was a pause, then:

“That's funny,” said the Second. “It's almost as thick as before. Just a minute, I'll give it another wipe.”

For some moments there was silence. Then the other man's voice said in thoughtful surprise:

“Good Lord! This is a thing!”

“What's the matter, Mr. Docker?” I asked.

“It's queer, sir,” replied the Second. “I wiped some of it off, and then while we looked at it the edges of the smear started to creep over the glass again. They're still doing it. Not exactly flowing back like a liquid: kind of encroach-ing, it's ... There, it's covered the glass com-pletely again.”

“The other instrument's obscured again, too,” the Navigator put in.

“Well—” began the Second. Then he stopped and we heard him mutter, “Good God —” A moment later he added, as if to his companion: “What is it?”

“Well, what's it?” I repeated in irritation.

“I don't know, sir. It seems to be some-thing that — that grows.”

“All the same we must have those instru-ments clear,” I said.

“No good, sir,” he answered. “It grows back on them as fast as we can move it. It's growing over us too, sir. It's spread-ing up the suits. It's above our knees and on our sleeves half-way up to the shoulder already.”

I considered. Then I asked:

“Are we clear of all bodies?”

“Yes, sir. Nothing within miles of us.”

“All right then, one of you come inboard and we'll have a look at the stuff. The other to remain on watch.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” the Second responded.

Half a minute later a weird figure emerged from the air lock. His trunk was clad in the usual grey space-suit, but both arms and legs were enveloped in a brilliant scarlet.

The stuff glistened and did not look inviting to the touch. I scraped some of it off his sleeve with the blade of a knife and looked at it closely beneath the light. Quite percept-ibly it was creeping up the clean part of the blade, and it seemed, as the Second had said, to grow rather than flow.

The other men in the room stood round regard-ing the man in the space-suit curiously. One of them gave a sudden exclamation and pointed to his feet and the deck behind him. We looked down and saw the red film spread-ing out across the steel floor, not only from his feet as he stood, but from each footprint he

had left in walking from the air-lock. It was visibly, though slowly, extending even as we looked at it, and the substance on the man had passed beyond his arms to crawl on to his chest and shoulders.

I told a man to fetch blow-torches, and placed the knife carefully on to the floor near to the spreading mess. Instinctively we all avoided touching it while we waited.

The man returned with three blow-torches. When we'd started them up we tried one on a patch of the stuff on the floor. I think we all felt considerable relief when we saw the substance shrivel, smoke and char in the flame. The torches did not take long to destroy all that was left on the floor. The man in the space-suit had made no attempt to remove his equipment and the torches could be run over him as he stood without injuring the insulating surface. It was a lucky state for him: how the stuff can be cleared from an inflammable or delicate surface such as clothes or the unprotected body we do not know.

By the time the last traces of the red stuff had been cleared the radio operator was reporting that he was receiving no reply to his calls, and that reception was faint and growing fainter even on full power. It appeared that the red substance must have some masking or leakage effect on the hull-aerial system.

The Second Officer came through again on the headset. He reported that the coating on the ship appeared to be building up and thickening.

"How's it with you?" I asked.

"It's all over me now, sir. I have to keep wiping the face plate every half minute or so to see at all. Otherwise I'm okay, sir."

There was no falling off in his transmission which suggested that we had been right in assuming that interference with the hull-aerial system was the trouble. The radio operator decided to see if he could rig a serviceable internal aerial. So far, twenty-four hours later, he had not been successful in achieving transmission — at least, we were without replies to his messages.

It is difficult to see what can be done. Were we near any body with an atmosphere we might try by traveling reverse and flying into the blast of our own main tubes to burn ourselves clear of the mess; but, unfortunately, the only place with an atmosphere within many hundred thousand miles is Mars which we can have no hope of reaching with our instruments out of commission.

The only other way which suggests itself to us is the construction of some kind of pressure torches operated from our main fuel supply with which we may be able to incinerate the stuff, and the engineers are at present attempting to construct devices of the kind.

Whether, if they are successful, it will be possible to carry out the operation in space we cannot say. We are therefore cautiously and by visual findings only of an officer on outside watch in the direction of Pomona Negra on which asteroid we can ground if necessary.

In the twenty-four hours which have passed since we encountered the red substance I have myself been outside twice to inspect the vessel. There is no doubt whatever that the layer which covers us is increasing in thickness, and in traversing the side of the vessel one's feet slide through it as through a semi-liquid mud. The officer on watch is covered with the stuff so as to be almost indistinguishable from the ship, and is under the necessity of wiping it from the faceplate of his helmet several times in a minute.

The nature of the substance we have not been able to determine since we dare not retain a specimen

inside the ship for examination. It is necessary to be most thorough in the de-contamination of all persons re-entering after duty outside as any minute particle overlooked is capable of growing with surprising speed. The air-lock so rapidly began to choke that it has to be de-contaminated after every entrance or exit.

From superficial examination it has occurred to us that the substance may be some algae-like form capable of sustaining life by the creation of light alone, and of transferring this nourishment throughout the whole, though we are aware that this is somewhat in conflict with its observed ability to grow or reproduce itself within the ship as swiftly as without.

It has been decided to send out these particulars and other documents in a message globe lest we should be unable to establish radio-communication. The dispatch port will be cleared on the outer side by specially modified blow-lamps so that it is hoped that the globe may be released without contamination.

Any vessel approaching us should be warned of the highly active nature of the substance, and is advised not to make use of magnetic grapples or any other devices which may give a physical link with the ship.

The date beneath the signature of the Master to the full version of the above report was 21st December 2049.

### CHAPTER III

On the 10th of February of the current year, a little over a month of the finding of the message-globe, the *Anna-belle*, a service and research ship out of Gilling-ton, Mars, made rendez-vous with the Space-Control's vessel, *Circe*, dispatched from Mexico, Earth, by way of Clarke Station.

The *Annabelle* pulled into the appointed area situated within the Asteroid Belt in the sector of Pomona Negra to find the *Circe* already arrived and lying idle at orbit speed as she waited. Even as his braking tubes went into action Captain Richard Bentley of the *Annabelle* made personal radio report to his opposite number in the other ship, and announced himself.

“Oh, it's you, Dick, is it?” responded the *Circe's* Captain, with a tinge of relief evident in his tone. “They didn't tell me who'd be in your ship. Glad you're here. I'd a nasty feeling it might be one of those trip-round-the-Moon merchants—you never can tell with Head Office. I think the best thing would be for you to come over and have a chat once you're up to us. Suit you?”

Bentley agreed. The *Annabelle* continued to brake smoothly until she too was down to orbit speed. Then, with occasional little tufts of flame from one steering tube and then another her pilot expertly manoeuvred her until she lay close in to the other ship. A magnetic grapple floated out towards the *Circe* with its cable looping lazily behind it. It moved a trifle wide of the ship and looked likely to miss it, but a momentary touch of current down the cable caused it to veer in the right direction. A minute or two later it made contact on the hull and clamped itself there as the power was switched on. Captain Bentley emerged, space-suited, from the air-lock of his ship, laid hold of the cable and pulled himself across the void which separated the two. He seemed to swim through the black emptiness, using only one hand on the rope with a dexterity which revealed experience.

Inside the *Circe's* lock Captain Waterson greeted him and, after he had got rid of the suit, led the way to his cabin. He handed the visitor a drink in a space-bottle, tapped a globule into his own mouth from

another with the skill of long practice, and lit a cigarette. Dick Bentley lit one also and inhaled.

“Lucky man,” he said. “Our owners don't allow smoking.”

“Bad luck,” said Captain Waterson. “Anybody would think we were sailing in wood and paper ships to read some Company's rules. They want to spend some time in space and learn that a contented crew is more impor-tant. Well, now, what about this business?”

“I don't know any more than there is in Foggatt's report.”

“Nor does space-control. That's why we're here. They want all the details we can get.”

“What's your own view?” Bentley asked.

“I'm not forming any views yet, but I'm not dis-count-ing anything Foggatt says; he is — or was — a sound man. It's clear that Space-Control takes it seriously or they wouldn't have arranged for the two of us to be on the job.”

Bentley nodded.

“Well, you're in charge, Tom. What's the plan?”

“We've got two jobs really. One is to locate the *Joan III* and give all assis-tance we can. The other is to find some of this red stuff Foggatt talks about. Learn what we can about it, and collect some speci-mens for exami-na-tion at home.”

Bentley nodded again.

“There shouldn't be a lot of diffi-culty about the second part. From Foggatt's account of the red asteroids I gather he thought that it existed on them. They're some-where in this area, so they ought not to be hard to find. What isn't at all clear is how the *Joan III* became covered with the stuff. If the report's right it didn't gradually grow over her. The instru-ment glasses and windows were all covered at once at more or less the same moment.”

“I know,” Captain Waterson agreed. “It would seem almost as if she ran through a cloud of the stuff just lying about in space, as it were. Queer things *do* lie about in space ... I've seen one or two myself in my time, but all the same ... Besides, how was it they didn't spot it before they ran into it? They don't seem to have had a sus-picion there was any-thing there.”

“There was some reference to obstruction of obser-va-tions at the time,” Dick Bentley recalled, “though it seemed as if it referred to inter-vening flocks of petty asteroids...”

“H'm. Well if we find them maybe we'll learn a bit more —but it's a big if. Nearly four-teen months now since they sent off that globe. Seems to me one of the things we've got to keep a sharp look out for round these parts is that we don't get into the same kind of mess they did.”

“Maybe that's why they sent the two of us,” Bentley suggested, thoughtfully.

They got down to the details of operation. There could be no doubt about the first move. It would be to examine the Asteroid, Pomona Negra, for any signs that the *Joan III* had indeed landed there as her inten-tion had been. It was quite possible that crippled as she was on the navi-ga-tion side and depending

only on the directions of a look-out who would find difficulty in the conditions in using even field-glasses, she had been unable to reach it. If neither she nor any sign of her presence was to be seen, there would be a further conference on the method of search to be adopted.

Captain Bentley was content to leave the arrangement at that when he returned to the *Anna-belle*. Half an hour later the two ships, at a speed very little above that of the asteroids themselves began to nose their way with a delicate fastidiousness into the Belt in the direction of Pomona Negra.

The next days were tedious with slow movement. The imperative quality was caution. It was impossible to observe and avoid all contact with asteroids which travelled not only in swarms, but often solitary and might be in size anything from a pebble to a large building and therefore necessary to limit their speed to one at which the larger bodies could be seen and avoided, and glancing or direct blows from the smaller would do no harm. For all on board the ships it was a disagreeable period of weariness which frayed the nerves and shortened the tempers.

Were Pomona Negra an out-flier such as Pallas or Eros, approach would be simpler; unfortunately she holds an orbit of low inclination to the ecliptic and travels attended by considerable ruck of cosmic debris, and there is no path to her that does not require patience and caution. Almost two weeks passed before *Circe* signalled observation of a body 75 miles in diameter in the position nominally occupied by Pomona Negra.

Bentley contacted Captain Waterson:

“What's this ‘nominally’ stuff, Tom? There can scarcely be two asteroids of that size around here.”

“That's just the trouble, Dick. If Pomona Negra means anything it should be The Black Apple — because, presumably, the thing's black. This isn't — it's bright scarlet.”

“Oh-ho,” murmured Bentley thoughtfully.

“Exactly my sentiments. Oh-ho, followed by, now what?”

“Well-what?”

“Investigate cautiously. Decrease speed, proceed with added care to avoid any suspicious object or substance. Pick your own course — it's wiser to separate in case whatever the *Joan III* ran into is hanging around. Rendez-vous 1

twenty-five mile level to sun-ward of Pomona. Keep in radio touch. In case of radio failure the ship in trouble will reduce to Pomona's orbit speed and the other ship will go to her aid. Got it?”

“Okay. That's clear. And at the rendez-vous we inspect and decide further?”

“That's it. Good luck. Dick.”

“And to you, Tom.”

Three days later the two ships hung at the appointed twenty-five miles above the surface of the reputed Pomona Negra. No one had the least doubt that it was the right asteroid, but the name was now thoroughly inappropriate; no single spot of black was visible on its surface.

Bentley, visiting the *Circe* once more, suggested that the first thing to do was to recommend that its name be changed to Pomona Rosa.

They looked out of the window at it: a globe of scarlet touched here and there by the fall of the light with a faint oily irri-descence. The surface was smooth, fat, bulg-ingly un-pleas-ant as if dis-tended. More than any-thing else it reminded Bentley of a boil, angry and bloated with pres-sure.

Captain Waterson's expression as he gazed at it was serious.

“That thing,” he said, “should be a ball of rough black rock. Instead, it's a perfectly smooth globe. God knows what quan-tity of the stuff there must be to have level-led off over all that area. The rate of growth! It doesn't bear think-ing about.”

“Assuming that the *Joan III* in brought it here, you mean.”

“I think we're justi-fied in that. It can't have been like this before or Foggatt would have noticed it and reported it.”

“He did report some of those red asteroids,” Bentley reminded him.

“But nothing like this. We saw some small ones our-selves some twenty-four hours back, a few twenty or thirty footers, I expect you did. This is colossal, horrible — And it must have over-run the whole thing in less than four-teen months: that's what gets me. I'd not believe it possible any-thing could grow at such a rate. Think of the area it covers!”

They gazed down in silence for some minutes on the asteroid. The more Bentley looked at it the less he liked it, for though at moments it had the aspect of a vast vivid pearl, its constant suggestion was repul-sively obscene tumes-cence.

“What do you suppose it is?” he asked at length.

Waterson shrugged his shoulders.

“What is life anyway? — some kind of seed floating about the universe until it finds suitable condi-tions to develop? May be. Lord knows what there may be in all this Space. Perhaps we were once a few chance spores; perhaps there are a lot of different kinds of life floating about waiting for time to give them their chance...”

“Still, that's for the scien-tists to argue about when they get some of the stuff. The present question is what about Foggatt and the *Joan III* .”

Bentley stared down at the red mass.

“I'm afraid there's not much question there. Even if they could keep the stuff out of the ship, and manage to survive as long as this — which is doubt-ful, what is there to be done about it? Nothing if they're buried in all that muck. You could try full power on the radio, but it's un-likely, by the report, to reach them — and even if it could, it's highly im-prob-able that they've had anyone listen-ing on the chance all this time. Honestly, I don't see that there is any-thing to be done, poor devils.”

Waterson pondered, and then agreed reluctantly.

“Nor do I, hanged if I do. I'm afraid that was finish for poor old Foggatt and his lot. Still, I shall go down and take a closer look — there might be some-thing though I doubt it. Any-way, I've got to get the speci-mens. Your job'll be to hang around here and keep an eye on things.” “Okay, Tom. For Heaven's sake be careful, though.” “Oh, I'm not going to take any risks. Just shoot down some auto-matic-ally closing speci-men bottles and have a man standing by to burn them clean when we haul them up again. Simple. No, I'm not taking any chances with that stuff. Loathsome-looking muck, it is.”

Back on the *Annabelle*, Bentley watched the *Circe* go down on a spiral matched to the rota-tion of the scarlet globe. Through the instru-ments they watched the shuttle-like, silver shape level off a mile or less above the surface and set itself to circle the asteroid.

“What's it look like from there, *Circe* ?” the *Annabelle's* navigator asked his opposite number.

“More revolting, if possible,” the other assured him. “Like a mass of red mucous; dis-gusting. Not altogether stable, either. Unless it's a trick of the light, there seem to be undu-la-tions in it. Might be a sort of tidal move-ment — or it might be some-thing to do with its meta-bolism as it revolves, if Foggatt's-notion of its drawing sus-te-nance from sun-light is right. Going to make a circuit now.”

Reception faded as the *Circe* passed round the other side of the mon-strosity, and came back as she reappeared.

“The same all the way round,” said her navi-gator. “Just a nasty big blob. Another circuit at 90 degrees now.”

He watched the silver shape turn into line with the axis of the body and disap-pear over the nearer pole. No great time elapsed before it came into sight again flashing in the sun-light on the opposite side.

“From what you can see in the dark round there, there's no dis-ting-uish-ing feature any-where,” came the navigator's voice again. “Going down now. Descen-ding to 300 feet, to take samples.”

From the *Annabelle* it looked as though the other ship ? were stationary. Only the reports of her navigator's voice as he gave decreasing alti-tudes told them that she was actually sinking closer to the viscous surface. They heard him sing out: “Three hundred” and then: “Aye, aye, sir,” and, after a pause: “Two hundred, and steady, sir.”

Through the *Annabelle's* instru-ments it was possible to discern some kind of disturb-ance on the red sur-face below the other ship. A sort of tide or tremor in roughly circular ripples seemed to be running through the mass. At first Bentley attri-buted it to the impact of the sample bottles which, he judged would now have been propelled into the sub-stance, and thought it in conse-quence to be in a much more liquid state than he had hitherto imagined. Then he realized uneasily that the ripples were not spreading out-wards as from a stone dropped into water, but inwards. He doubted if the effect were, as clearly observable from the close range of the other ship, and leaned over to speak into the navi-gator's phone.

“*Circe*. There's some-thing queer going on just below you,” he said.

A voice came back:

“It's okay, sir. Just the effect of — 'Strewth!’”

Bentley turned back to his instru-ment just in time to catch a glimpse of the cause of the excla-mation.



The stuff had gathered in a kind of mound beneath the *Circe*, and flung out towards her a vast shape-less limb of itself, a reach-ing pseudo-pod like a licking red tongue.

Those on board wasted no time. There was a gush from the *Circe's* main tubes, and she leapt forward like a flash. But swift as she was, she did not draw clear in time. She tore through the top of the extend-ing tongue like a streak and emerged from it with speed un-dimin-ished, but she was no longer a silver ship: from bow to tubes she was coated in brilliant scarlet.

At once with her hull aerial system fouled, radio communication died. Captain Bentley seized a head-set of the type built into space-suits, and began calling. Evidently Waterson had done the same. His first remarks were vivid, but unprint-able. Bentley waited for the pictures-que-ness to sub-side.

“You all right?” he asked.

“What do you mean, ‘all right’? The main radio's dead, and we can't see a bloody thing outside, other-wise I suppose we are. Except that we'll have lost the man in the air-lode putting down the bottles, I'm afraid.”

Another voice cut in, speaking some-what unsteadily:

“I'm still here, sir, in the lock. Must have been knocked kind of silly for a minute when we started like that.”

“Good man. Look here —”

Bentley broke in on them :

“Tom, what about braking? You're still running free, you know.”

“God, yes!” He heard Captain Waterson shout orders for decelera-tion equal to pre-vious impetus.

The man in the lock spoke again.

“The place is crawling with this ruddy muck, sir.”

“Is the outer door damaged?”

There was a pause.

“No, it's shut all right, sir.”

“Good. Well, keep it shut. You've still got the blow-torch?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Right. Clean up with it as much as you can in there. Don't touch your suit fasten-ings. When you come out I'll have a couple of chaps here with torches to finish it off. That clear?”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Captain Waterson turned his attention back to Bentley and the *Annabelle* .

“Where are we?” he asked.

“About three hundred miles sun-ward from Pomona,” Dick told him. “You made some jump. We're coming up to you now. You're lying pretty well at orbit speed. Hold it like that.”

“We're covered in the stuff, I take it?”

“Every inch.” He caused for another burst of lurid comment which ended with Waterson's inquiry:

“What the hell do we do now?”

“I suggest I try to burn you clean.”

“How?”

“First thing, I'm going to send over two grappels, one to bow and the other to stern.”

“The stuff will spread back along the cables to you.”

“We can take care of that. The thing I want to know is can you roll your ship? With-out giving any direc-tional move-ment, I mean.”

“Roll? What, you mean horizontally?”

“Sure.”

“God knows. In all my years in Space I've never even wanted to try. You'd better speak to the engi-neer about that. What if we can?”

“Then I turn my tubes on to you. That ought to burn pretty near anything off.”

“It'll shove you away.”

“Not if I put on the braking tubes to balance the thrust.”

“H'm. It's an idea,” approved Captain Waterson. “Yes, it's worth trying — only don't go and con-certina your ship in between the two thrusts.”

“We'll take good care of that,” Bentley assured him, and turned to his prep-ara-tions.

The two magnets were floated out, and since accu-rate placing was neces-sary, were guided into posi-tion by space-suited men equipped with propul-sive pistols. The two men took good care to project them-selves back from the red hull before contact was made. The rest watch-ing intently from the *Annabelle's* windows broke into comments; within half a minute it was possible to see the red sub-stance begin to swarm up the sides of the magnets; in four it was start-ing to travel along the cables connect-ing the ships. Once it had begun, it conti-nued to extend along them at a sur-prising rate. Then, some fifty out from the *Circe* , it came to an obstruc-tion. The *Annabelle's* men watched anxiously, and then relaxed for the progress of the red sub-stance was checked. It had encountered the three foot sections that had been wrapped in asbestos and bound with wire which now glowed incan-descent, and it did not like them. The

advance was stopped, and it contented itself with thickening upon that part of the cable already covered.

The *Annabelle* manoeuvred delicately to place her-self stern on to the other ship, and slightly closed the distance between them.

“Hello, *Circe*,” Bentley called. “I’m about to start. Have your out-side party ready with lamps to mop up when we finish. Be ready to start rolling when I give the word — and make it as slow as you can.”

A blaze began to glow from both for-ward and stern tubes of the *Annabelle*. Gradually it increased to a blast of fire gushing out from the stern tubes to envelope the scarlet ship in a roaring gale of fire. The effect upon the sub-stance was imme-diate and en-courag-ing. Under the searing heat the red coating shrivelled, smoked and blackened.

“Roll *Circe*. Gently over,” Bentley ordered.

Slowly, still bathed in the fiery spume, the *Circe* began to turn on one side, and as the farther side rolled into the heat the scarlet vanished to leave nothing but a sticky, incinerated mess.

Bentley was being cautious. The *Circe* made six com-plete revolu-tions before he gave her the word to stop, and shut off his tubes.

A moment after she had ceased to turn half a dozen men with their adapted torches already lighted emerged from the air-lock and scattered about the hull. Another half dozen joined them a minute later, and already a party was floating across from the *Annabelle* to join them. They found the smooth hull steri-lized of all life. The remains were now no more than an inert rough covering baked on like a black varnish. Even so, the stuff had not been com-pletely elimi-nated. Where there were crevices or angles protect-ing it from the direct flame it had managed to survive the heat of the metal beneath it, and with a persis-tent tenacity was starting to spread again from such sheltered spots as the bunched flanges mount-ing fore and rear tubes and others which had chanced to lie in the lee of some project-ion. The men swarmed around the danger points playing their flames into any and every cranny which had the least chance of holding a grain of the scarlet pest intact. After an hour’s work they were satisfied that the last vestige save for that enclosed in the specimen bottles had been completely exter-mi-nated. Never-the-less, Captain Waterson was taking no chances; when his men were called in, an outside party of four remained on watch, ready to pounce upon the first speck of red they might spy.

He and Bentley adjourned to his cabin, and toasted the occasion.

“Well, thank God they did send two ships — most intelligent thing I’ve ever known them do,” he said. “Even after Foggatt’s report I didn’t realize what a hell-brewed stuff it is until it got us. But for you, Dick—” He shrugged and turned his thumbs down.

“Well, hang it, that’s what I was here for, wasn’t it? But I’m afraid it makes it pretty certain what happened to the *Joan III*.”

Waterson nodded, and looked out of the windows towards the red globe which was Pomona.

“It does, Dick. That’ll be the report. If they want to find her now, they’ve got to find some means of clearing away that muck. God, if that stuff did get at them — horrible! Why, it’d smother and blind you within five minutes.”

“And that’s all we’ve got to tell ‘em,” Bentley said.

“Yes, that's it — but we've got samples of the stuff. I suppose that's the really important thing. It may save others from going the way Foggatt did — and we nearly did.”

Some few hours later the two ships turned sunward and began again their wearisome, cautious progress. Clear of the Belt they put on speed, risking the out-fliers, and their ways diverged. The *Anabelle* set course for her home port on Mars. The *Circe* to return to Earth by way the Clarke Lunar Station.

## CHAPTER IV

What happened while Captain Waterson and his crew relaxed and slept in the rest-house at Clarke Station during the period when the *Circe* was refuelled, checked and inspected preparatory to her home drop to Earth remains a mystery at present, and one to be cleared up at the official inquiry before the Space Control Commissioners.

It is difficult to believe that any member of the ship's company, after their recent experience, would be either care-less or negli-gent where the red sub-stance was concerned. The specimen bottles are said to have been locked into a steel cup-board in the Captain's cabin. If they were, and it is believed that evidence on this point is unim-peach-able, then it would seem that one of two things must have happened; either some person moved by curiosity or the hope of a valuable find broke into that cup-board and opened one or more bottles: or some of the containers were faulty or damaged and the contents leaked — it would be able to pass beyond the door since an air-tight fit for lockers and cup-boards are not normally safe equip-ment in space. Possibly we shall never be certain which was the cause.

Whatever took place, the lament-able fact is that no report of the leak-age was made until several hours later. That much is clear for the first party to notice a pool of ‘red jelly’ found its edges already some yards from the ship. They were interested, but not alarmed, taking it at first for a pool of some kind of lubricant, and had even walked several steps into it before paying it serious attention. It then occurred to the leader that the extent was greater than he had supposed, and thinking it likely that it might be some kind of fuel and possibly danger-ous, he ordered his men back and went to report. Thus both he and his men spread it farther on their boots.

The Station Official on duty who accom-panied him to make ex-ami-nation was better informed, and realized what it was, but in his inex-perience lacked the caution to avoid all contact with it. By the time the news of the out-break reached Captain Waterson it was spread-ing in all direct-ions from trails left by men who had stepped in it and others who had crossed them; half a dozen offices were already infected, and a number of workers daubed scarlet from head to foot were spread-ing it farther every minute.

Confusion followed. Efforts were made to remove all un-conta-mi-nated ships, and force had to be used to prevent the Captains taking off in craft which had been conta-mi-nated. There is nothing to be gained by mini-miz-ing the fact that for a time a regret-table state of panic reigned. But it is to the credit of certain officials that no infected ship did, in fact, succeed in leaving during that time.

Little could be done. The only torches modified to work in airless condi-tions were aboard the *Circe* . Had they been avail-able they were too few and too small to have appre-ciable effect upon the area now affected. Fuel was plenti-full but since it will not burn without an atmos-phere, it was impossible to ring the area with fire.

So far it has been im-possible to check the spread of the substance. Fire pro-ject-ors of various kinds are being adapted as quickly as possible and will be rushed to the scene via the Whitley Lunar Station as soon as they are available. Every precaution is being taken against the starting of new out-breaks.

The state is one of the gravest emer-gency calling for the en-list-ment of all scien-tific effort. Not only is our whole system of space navi-ga-tion based upon use of the Moon as a way-station so that with-out it we must become earth-bound again until new and more power-ful fleets have been constructed, but there is the menace of the red sub-stance itself.

There is no need for panic, but it is necessary for every one to realize the full gravity of the situation. What-ever the cost, this sub-stance must be prevented from spread-ing; above no grain of it must be allowed to reach Earth.

Volunteers are already fighting and dying on the Moon in order that that shall not happen. All our resources must back them without stint. Hope is expressed that certain radio-active materials may prove effec-tive against the menace. Every-thing must be tried at all costs.

If anybody doubts the necessity of the sacri-fices he may have to make, let him look through even a low-powered teles-cope at the Moon. A little east of Plato in the semi-circle of the Sinus Indium, where Clarke Lunar Station used to stand, he will see a bright scarlet patch already flowing out across the Marc Imbrium. Let him imagine that it was not the Clarke Station, but his own town that stood there, and let him make his sacri-fices to prevent imagi-nation becoming reality.

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