

Journey To Nowhere

By Richard S. Shaver

Her voice came out of Space with seductive beauty—but it became a shriek of horror when two spaceships sailed to... nowhere!

An A\NN/A Preservation Edition.

[Notes](#)

JINKS did not know she was a monster. When she was first born, she did not seem very different from any of the other monstrous growths of quivering protoplasm about her. The others began to take note of her presence, however, after she learned to move about, for she belonged to a race of beings whose members never did much about motion, though they were able to pull loose at times.

These beings reproduced by the simplest of all means, that of budding. Jinks was revolutionary in that, too. She budded, all right, but her buds were not single and at the rate of one every four years; they came off her in scores, and each was quite as prodigiously active as herself! Soon Jinks' descendants numbered in the hundreds, and every one of them answered Jinks' thinking as the servant answers the master.

Jinks grew, became adult, and began to spend a great deal of her time out in the open, looking up at the mysterious stars. As she grew still older, and those stationary members of her race who remembered her unusual beginnings died off and were replaced by their own buds, Jinks became a law unto herself. She took up the already ancient science of wave communication, and step by step constructed the most tremendous aggregations of apparatus ever known to her race. Few of them had ever moved about enough to ever accomplish much with all their ancient knowledge. This moving about, this building and swift activity, this turmoil of decision without endless meditation—was frowned upon severely by the huddled groups of unmoving ancestors. But Jinks and her precious mob of sons and daughters only laughed. They had already learned to accept the original society of unmoving thinkers as just part of the landscape: handy to talk to and consult, handy to suck dry of their ancient, long-accumulated wisdom—but of little account in any practical matter that required labor and effort.

Jinks' descendants grew, all answering Jinks' constant mental orders as the hand the arm, and the work with the "radio" waves went on, it was the absorbing goal of all their lives. In the end they had their reward. Jinks' vast assemblies of weird and revolutionary apparatus brought in signals from the distant stars! The work went on then at a furious pace. They must establish contact must make the distant sender hear their transmitter!

PAUL Verne was thunderstruck when his short-wave set began to give off audible thought waves! They came from but one point of the compass: the antenna setting was very sensitive. But the content of the messages gave him little time to think about direction or its significance, in the beginning. He was too busy taking down the mysterious thought signals in shorthand.

The messages were extremely packed, the distant sender seemed one whose mind went at a super-rapid clip—it was very difficult, at first. But the days went by, the notes piled up, and Paul began to realize that the distant signals were not possibly from Earth.

Not from Earth...? Paul could not accept the stars as sources for a long time. He became very well acquainted with Jinks, that is with Jinks' husky voice, sensuous and loving and full of burning ambition, full of a sweet irresistible compulsion to work. It filled Paul with similar ambitions for the conquest of... the stars! and more besides. Plans were gone over between the two of them for week after week of intermittent discussion.

Then tragedy struck at Paul. Just as he felt almost ready to call in the engineers, the officials, the pundits and the experts to certify his star contact as genuine, Paul was stricken with a near-fatal illness. The illness was of such a nature as to throw doubt upon the validity of any of his work. For the doctors at the hospital diagnosed his trouble as brain tumor.

* * *

JUDY Petersen was one of those women who arouse the sex urge. Deplore it as you will, the urge is paramount, superseding all other drives in the human. The sex urge often drives a man toward what can never be. Toward what the man *knows* can never be, driving him against the dictates of his own logic and will. To Paul, to try to escape the dominance of this urge toward Judy was unthinkable—*before Jinks*.

Judy Petersen was one of those females who trigger off Mother Nature's most potent dynamite in all directions; who walk through a host of men with the ease and disregard of a ballet dancer traversing a mine field whose pattern she alone knows. And with Judy that was the case. She knew the pattern. Judy loved one certain man, which gave her an impervious armor.

After the doctors told her the news, Judy never expected Paul Verne to live. A brain tumor is not always fatal, but this one...

The position was all wrong for a successful operation. The hospital staff had located the tumor with the new radioactive carbon tracer method, and after the Geiger counter had explained that Paul would have to die, they all stood around and patiently waited for the event of his demise.

Paul Verne refused to drop dead on schedule. The doctors began to come into his room to look at him reproachfully, but this did not hasten his demise. In fact, he began to put on weight from lying in bed.

Paul knew what he was expected to do, though no one told him directly. For Paul Verne was a young man gifted with a powerful set of deductive dendrons, neurons and other micro-characters making up his doomed brain. He had felt that pain at the base of his skull too long, too steadily, not to know very well there was a serious cause for it. But Paul wasn't very sick, and he would not consent to a last-ditch, long-shot operation. He felt it was too much like taking his last days away from him to prove the medical specialists right in their prognosis.

Judy came to see him every day. As he began to feel better, he started to insist he was not sick. He wanted to go home! Which horrified the doctors, worried Judy no end, and gave the nurses cat-fits. The doctors shook their dignified pates, looked at him with wondering eyes, and decided to run a new series of tests. To which new tests Paul submitted grudgingly, with eyes full of scorn and open doubt of their ability to treat a sick tom-cat.

To them it wasn't possible the man could walk! Let alone get up and go home under his own power. By all the rules he should have been in his grave. Judy's conversations with her love were very trying.

"Paul dearest, the doctors know best! Now you just be patient and obey orders; we'll get you out of here the very first possible second!" Paul would take in the way Judy filled out her sweater, the joy she unloaded with what in anyone else would be called a smile, and would say:

“Judy, I am not sick! These addle-pated croakers have made a mistake. Now you get it fixed up for me to go home! I’ve had enough hospital to last me the rest of my life!”

The sad truth in his words “the rest of my life” would move Judy from smiling encouragement to drenching tears—for Judy had not told Paul he had but a short time to live. Trying very hard not to let Paul see the tears, Judy would rush out of the room on an imaginary errand, dry her eyes carefully, make up her soft cheeks and rush back with the joyful smile just as potent as only Judy could make it. Then, they would do it all over again.

Judy was fast becoming an expert if heart-broken actress. But the lovely curves of her body and the long, delectable lines of her legs began to suffer as Judy lost weight. She was grieving herself sick over poor Paul dying by inches and not even being allowed to know it.

Finally Paul got up, shoved a doctor in the face, pushed a horrified nurse out of the room, put on his clothes and stalked out of the hospital.

No one argued over-much with the exit, as Paul Verne weighed a good hearty two-ten and had gained more, lying in bed.

When Judy caught up with him, at Paul’s home, she managed to make him promise to take in another round of medical experts to make sure he was able to be up and around.

When he did so, mysteriously all the indications of oncoming death from malignant tumor which the hospital staff had so carefully traced with the very latest methods had vanished. Paul was pronounced sound.

The concentrations of radioactive carbon they had watched build up around that certain unapproachable and inoperable area of the brain at the top of the spinal column were no longer present. Nor did the new doses of tracer follow the same course laid out by the previous tests.

The most noticeable and happy outcome of all this was that Judy Petersen regained her former state of delectable prominence in the right places, and everybody loved the miracle that had given her back her boy friend right out of death’s clutches. The interference of the tumor with the course of Paul’s communications with the stars remained a complete secret between Paul and Jinks.

AFTER his recovery, Paul went back to his first love, when he had time off from squiring Judy. Paul was a structural steel engineer during his working hours. During his spare time he was a radio enthusiast. Which is a superfluity of abilities and trainings to find in one man, but Paul was not an average man.

Judy herself was quite a student, and spent a lot of her evenings at night school, or under the lamp in her own home with a large volume of biology or a small book of advanced mathematics. Which suited Paul perfectly as it gave him time to tear down the ever-growing mass of amateur apparatus and reassemble it along new lines. These new lines had come to him during his enforced period of inactivity in a hospital bed.

Since his return to the living, Judy always knew where to find her man when she wanted him. She found him there at midnight the night she learned about her rival.

Paul looked up at Judy from the maze of wiring he was soldering. When Judy was around hardly anyone looked at anything else. Paul knew she had hypnotic curves, but just now he was not being hypnotized.

“Be with you in a minute, beautiful. Gotta finish this thing tonight. I want to show you something a lot more important than a pain in my neck.”

Judy Petersen was still worried about her man. She knew there must be something wrong with his head, but she wasn't sure just what to worry about. Now Paul proceeded to give her plenty to worry about. "You see, my girl, I never told you. I have kept it a profound secret! I, in this little radio shack of mine, have managed to make man's first contact with the stars!"

Judy was scientifically educated about radio waves. That he should think a bunch of junk like this could send and receive signals from the stars was just too impossible! Judy put both hands to her face and got ready to burst into tears—here was her man saved out of the jaws of death and talking crazy! Then she pulled herself together.

"Paul, you *mustn't* believe such things! Radio waves won't traverse the infinite distances of space!"

Paul switched on the motor generator, tuned up a set of self-built coils, swung a big loop aerial in a short arc. From the loudspeaker came a voice of husky, sensual character; a vital, fascinating, compelling voice which made Judy burn up with sudden jealousy. The voice was more than a voice, in some strange way conveying directly to the brain the meaning of the words, which were thus strange in sound but quite plain in meaning.

"Calling Paul Verne. Signals again received and am calling. Please acknowledge. Where have you been? This contact must not be broken again! A world is at stake! Please acknowledge."

Judy sniffed, audibly. "You're just making a fool of me. That mumbo-jumbo has nothing whatever to do with the stars, and you know it. I don't like this attempt to make a fool out of me, Paul! I am about to commit angered mayhem and assault!"

PAUL was not paying any attention to a woman's whims. With rapidity that gave the impression of a madman trying to build a broadcast station in two minutes flat, he was throwing his various units of apparatus about, tossing coils and tubes and condensers together in a breadboard set-up, slapping bus-bar across connections, and in ten minutes and some seconds by the clock was speaking anxiously back to the unknown.

If Judy could have understood his strange-sounding words, she would have heard: "Signals received. Have been in hospital. Please proceed with our interrupted course of instructions."

Paul was not thinking about Judy's reactions to his furious activity, nor about convincing her of the reality of his contact with the far-off worlds of space. But as the meaning began to make itself understood in her mind in spite of the strangeness of the sounds of the words, she became convinced that something utterly beyond reason or ordinary concepts of possibility was indeed going on in front of her eyes. That sultry, she-male voice intoned endlessly through Paul's loudspeaker: "I have been put to extreme fatigue in keeping this fix upon your planet. Please do not break contact again! You must understand, dear friend, what I have for you and what I expect in return."

"Who *is* that lascivious character?" asked Judy, with all the antagonism of a woman meeting an avowed opponent in the greatest game of all. That "dear friend" meant many conversations in the past, and the fact that Paul had not mentioned it to her meant only one thing—Paul was interested!

"That," answered Paul with ecstasy in his voice and a glaze on his eyes, "is the first authentic signal from another planet ever heard by anyone but myself on all Earth."

Grave doubts of Paul's sanity assailed Judy, giving her again that agony of mind which had been hers for so long. She tried to fight back. "Signals from another planet! Why, that stuff isn't farther away than New Jersey! I'm going home if you persist in this stupid joke!"

Paul was not paying proper attention to her, which in itself was unusual and painful. The voice went on enigmatically: "I will proceed with the detailed description of construction which we were engaged in recording at our last contact. Please correct me if there has been any detail missed in the lapsed time. Is your recorder set?"

Paul turned on the automatic recorder, inserted record wire, and the voice went on. Paul turned to Judy, for there was no need his listening; the endless technical descriptions of apparatus had to be studied out painfully and at much slower speed in a playback. He wondered if he could ever get anyone to understand and to help.

"You see, dearest Judy, I have been in contact with this strange signal source for nearly a year. I have been accumulating these records. I have had an increasing pain in the back of my head ever since I made this contact, and I suspect there is some peculiar and irritating quality to the waves the source uses in sending which causes the pain the doctors were so sure was a malignant tumor. But I had not associated the two things until I saw that the doctors must be wrong in their diagnosis. It was then I deduced that the unusual wave-lengths used in this apparatus, the unique combinations of frequency modulations and the terrific strength of the sender's wave must be in some way responsible by setting up a destructive reverberation in the sensory centers of the brain. You see, Judy, I don't know too much about this thing. I am strictly an agent under instructions from this far-off source—and they are of an alien culture! This seemingly harmless assemblage of apparatus must create by accident a sonic force-focus. But I have to go on, no matter the harm it may do me. That signal is from another world."

Miss Petersen, who was not uninformed, remembered the rash of signals supposedly from Mars that had accompanied the last conjunction of that planet. She, like most others, was sure the recipients of the so-called Martian signals were self-deluded. But she had no doubt that Paul would recover his good sense when he uncovered the identity and location of the party who was making such a fool of him. She mentally assured herself that the recent sojourn in the hospital quite naturally meant there was nothing organically wrong with Paul's brain, and she was sure that he was recovering. So she humored him.

Paul pulled her to the open window. The directional antenna pointed out that window. Paul picked up a slender rod from the table. He had used that rod before. "Look along the rod, Judy!"

Judy squinted, sighting along the rod. It pointed at a cluster of stars in the heavens.

"There is one star in that cluster, Judy. Now if you turn around, you will see by looking along the rod that it points at the center of the big loop aerial. No one but ourselves knows where that signal comes from or that there is a signal from the stars. You see, this apparatus, though of familiar parts, is built according to directions received when I first heard the signal over an experimental hook-up."

Judy didn't believe it. She hated to think of that sultry, commanding voice. She was glad it might be from another planet. After all, there wasn't much danger the woman could take Paul from her, if she was *that* far away. But the ecstasy on Paul's face when he heard that voice gave Judy the shivers. Paul didn't look like that when *she* talked to him!

MONTHS went by and Paul had completely proved that his contact with the stars was not only real, but from a being who ruled the people of a whole planet. Paul had brought in engineers, the engineers had brought their employers, and Paul had become the head of a group of people who listened to the broadcast of the Empress—she named Jinks—every evening. They had tentatively begun operations toward the construction of a space ship and Paul lived through the days in constant suspense, in an aura of exciting participation in the distant people's united effort to overcome the barrier of space.

A plan grew up, as the blueprints for the star ship were gone over. The future ship was discussed and

checked with the radio-personality of Jinks, who enthusiastically related the much more advanced stages of her own people's attempt to build a space ship. In what seemed an incredibly short space of time she told of the first successful flight of their star ship. So it was decided to build the Earth ship precisely like Jinks' successful ship except for improvements according to Earth techniques.

More months went by, and still the contact with Jinks remained the central point around which Paul and Judy and a group of engineers and financiers revolved, in an increasing certainty that man would reach space soon. The whole world knew of Paul's Empress Jinks and accepted her.

One singular fact no one could explain, Jinks could be reached only through Paul Verne! Only Paul was accepted by the singular Empress as a person worthy of *her* time and effort—as a trustworthy receiver of the immense values of her people's achievements. Every effort to tune in Jinks by other parties failed—and it was only in Paul's presence that the strange and distant waves came through and were recorded. But, strangely enough, almost every attempt in his presence was successful.

Judy lived through the exciting days that lengthened into months in a glow of reflected glory. As the traffic of visitors and dignitaries revolved around Paul, Judy became a kind of lovely door tender and secretary. But all the time she became more jealous.

The ship was finished at last, and the alien engines which drew power from the free energies of space itself demonstrated their adequacy in a series of short flights beyond the Moon. Then came the first voyage to Mars and the return... with the news that Mars was in truth both uninhabitable and uninhabited.

Then came Jinks' sensational proposal for a rendezvous of the two ships in space—one containing Empress Jinks and entourage, and the other from Earth headed by the famous Paul Verne.

There were endless discussions about the value of such a meeting, and some even pointed out that it might be a trap by the Empress—who now knew as much about their world as they did themselves. It could be possible that she planned to destroy their one space vessel and then sail on to conquer Earth and enslave all Earth men. But Paul scoffed the warning out of discussion with a single sentence.

“This Empress is not predatory. She is purely benevolent, else why has she spent such endless hours and given us so much valuable data that could be used against her if we were so minded?”

The point in space was decided upon, the ship was readied, Paul kissed Judy goodbye. Tears were shed by everyone—and Judy's jealousy of the she-being Jinks nearly overwhelmed her, but the great adventure must go on and she must remain behind to contemplate woman's lot in a man's world, as usual.

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THE space ship that Jinks had caused to be built was like nothing ever seen by man. It was of a peculiar eight-sided design, and it could have been navigated by a giant snail, as the controls were centralized in three huge levers, each of which could be manipulated by pressure—Jinks had small claws that could handle small tools, but she did not know if the distant race with whom she had managed to establish contacts were not like the motionless race of slugs on her own planet, Jinks always thought of them as the old-timers, the creatures who had preceded her advent. So she built a ship that even they could navigate.

Jinks had many reasons for her effort toward reaching space. Her world was small, her own progeny, now in their fifth generation, had almost filled all available space with their unsleeping activities. And Jinks herself was still growing. Jinks was ambitious for her children. That ambition lay behind her insistence

upon contact only with Paul Verne, for Jinks knew that Paul was completely under her influence, and no whisper of her real intent must get through to others of Paul's race. With Paul she could keep up the pretense of benevolence—with others, of a more suspicious nature, she was not so sure. Jinks did not conceive of herself as a monster about to annihilate a people and take over a planet; she saw herself as a mother providing food and space for her children—the instinctive and natural thing to do. For Jinks was the first of her kind, and made her own rules as she went along, having abandoned all the precepts and teachings of her forebears since they could not possibly apply in her case. Jinks was driven by the mother instinct, and brooded savagely and at length upon their future. Her forebears had children only in numbers that replaced their kind—Jinks ever-growing body threw off buds in ever increasing quantities as she reached full maturity.

Jinks' plans for Paul Verne and his simple-minded fellow aliens matured through the months of radio-contact as the projected rendezvous became the accepted plan—became perfectly clear and inevitably exact in Jinks' tremendous mind.

By this time, with the total powers of her own progeny—numbering in the millions—directed toward the construction of ships of war, Jinks became exultantly certain of the complete success of her plan. They would approach her with the only ship able to travel space; she would capture them, learn the complete details of their world and how best to conquer them, then... down from their skies would sweep Jinks' destroying fleet. Jinks figured it would be over in a matter of hours at the most. Then there would be plenty of time to plan the next step in making space the sole property of her own children. Room enough, food enough, and time enough!

Came the appointed day, and Jinks' ship lifted into the skies, and after her came her endless brood, like a swarm of bees about the queen at swarming time. Behind her Jinks heard the vast sigh of relief that went up from the old-timers who realized that at last they were free of the everlasting noise and bustle and pushing, the terrible fecundity of the strange off-spring of their ancient race. Jinks laughed to hear them, and dropped a chemical bomb which flared into incandescence behind her, wiped out some thousands of the statuesque mother race as a farewell.

Erasing the past from her mighty mind, Jinks turned her monstrous insect form to the communications panel, sent out the wave which would intermittently intercept the flight of Paul Verne and his group of dupes. Still chuckling, she smoothed her thought into the sexy, husky voice that Paul admired so very much.

“Calling World Expedition No. 1, please acknowledge...”

* * *

THE space ship built according to Paul Verne's directions was like nothing on or under the Earth. It was of peculiar eight-sided design, and it could have been navigated by a giant slug...

The controls were centralized in three gigantic levers, the walks and stairs were all slopes and ramps, a legless creature could have rolled about it, oozed up and down it, without difficulty. But the human engineers thought it better to stick to the communicated design exactly, to preserve the identical weight and balance and placement of engines. They had an enormous respect for Empress Jinks' engineering ability, and feared to change anything that might conceivably betray their ignorance by causing a fault in its performance.

Paul supervised the construction, making sure that specifications in vital details were adhered to precisely, and became immensely interested in the daily process of translation of the records he had taken into steel and plastic and magnesium. From voice to metal, it was an experience that never lost its wonder

and awe of the abilities of the distant Empress Jinks.

As the ship took form, and its complete variance from the human concept of what a ship should look like became apparent, Paul's interest grew.

When the ship finally lifted into the air on the supreme final test—the meeting in space with Jinks own expedition—Paul almost failed to show his sorrow of parting with Judy. Judy watched the great ship out of sight with fresh tears in her eyes. He had been so absorbed that not once had his eyes lost the absent, excited intentness upon everything but herself. But she forgave him, and went home to await his return.

The voyage was uneventful. Jinks' voice came in on the radio at three hour intervals, the space traversed on the given route was the expected 85,000 miles per second, and the days went by in a glow of speculation about the nature and appearance of the people whose Empress they were about to meet.

Then came the approach to the spot on the space chart given as the rendezvous. There came Jinks' somewhat puzzled voice, no longer husky and sensual and hypnotic, but now tense and somewhat doubtful.

“Calling Earth Ship No. 1! Come in! We have approximated position agreed upon and should be picking up your motors in our detectors. Can you see us?”

Paul's answer: “No sign of Jinks Ship No. 1. We will have to take up a circular course. Please make every attempt to get a fix on our signals. We should reach you soon; our directional signals reach you and you answer exactly as before. I suspect we have not reached radar range of your ship. We will circle and you continue as before...”

The search for the needle in the haystack of space went on and on. The change in signal strength was undetectable as it had been from the first which was a mystery the engineers had only shaken their heads about. Some thirty hours later, Jinks' ship and the Earth ship were still in perfect radio contact, still searching the area for each other with every device at their command—and were completely unable to get any idea of the other's direction or distance! Checking of star charts and comparison by radio gave them no point of difference on which to base a deduction as to the other's whereabouts. To find each other became an enigma before which Paul threw up his hands and went off for a long neglected night's rest.

WHEN he awoke, the radio engineer sat beside his bed with a little short wave radio set in his hand. On his face was a peculiar expression. On Paul's neck was fastened a tiny coil of copper wire by means of adhesive tape. Paul sat up, startled to wakefulness by the man's enigmatic eyes, the apparatus in his lap, the feel of the wires on the back of his head.

“Take it easy, Paul, there's nothing to get excited about, just doing a little checking of my own. I've kept silent so long in this thing I just had to make sure that my suspicions were correct...”

* * *

BACK home, Judy received Paul with all the glad relief of an angel welcoming a soul from the nether regions. “Oh, I never waited so long a time for anything as to see your face again! Oh Paul!”

After supper, Paul leaned back and prepared to regale Judy with the great adventure. And his tale ended with the words:

“So you see, Judy, it was all in my head after all! Jinks is a micro being, and her universe is a cell in

my brain. The doctors think she is really a mutated brain micron, the little nucleus creature which in unison with other brain cell microns, does all our thinking.

“But Jinks mutated, decided she was an individual and not a slave to the macro mind, and all our efforts to rendezvous with her ship were the purest kind of foolishness. We should have discovered it long ago... also her predatory purpose which she carelessly revealed.”

Of course Judy had to say: “Just as I suspected! I never trusted that woman, someday...”

As for Jinks, they never told her the truth and she sailed on, and on, and on...

THE END

Notes and proofing history

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