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OF SCIENCE

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S CHALLENGE
SUMMER 1944

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CAPTAIN FUTURE

WIZARD OF SCIENCE

VOL. I, NO. 3

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By
EDMOND HAMILTON



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Who made possible this shining bright future for **CAPTAIN FUTURE?** You, you, and you! For **CAPTAIN FUTURE** is a magazine with thousands of editors. Every one of the many enthusiastic letters written us represents a reader who shares in the perils, the secrets and the conquests of the Futuremen.

Your criticisms and suggestions have been heeded, and they are helping mold the destiny of the Solar System's most colorful planeteer—**Captain Future**.

Curt Newton and his loyal band of comrades have won the hearts of fantasy followers everywhere! Write us again and as often as you like—this is your magazine and the Futuremen are your characters!

The following letter, just received, is typical of the warm reception being accorded the **Wizard of Science**:

"Captain Future and his merry band of space-roving Futuremen are the gayest family in the Universe. Somehow, I feel part of that family. Count me in on all their forthcoming exploits. And how about starting a club for devotees of Captain Future?"—Emil Lord, Chicago, Ill.

A CLUB FOR FUTURE FANS

Mr. Lord's proposal of a *Captain Future* Club is an excellent one, one that we have been considering for some time. A *Captain Future* organization, with members throughout the country, has great possibilities. It would unite the thousands of **CAPTAIN FUTURE** followers everywhere.

We'd like to start the ball rolling by preparing attractive **FREE** silver-colored membership certificates.

We hope to give you further details in the next issue, after we've heard from you. So don't fail to do your bit by writing in and letting us know whether you favor such an organization!

Tell us what you think the scope and aims of the club should be—also, please suggest a suitable name for the club. We'll carefully consider every one of your suggestions. Shoot them along!

SIMON WRIGHT, THE BRAIN

Numerous readers have suggested that Simon Wright, the Brain, be equipped with a mechanical body. Thus, they argue, he would be able to accompany the Futuremen physi-

cally on all adventures, instead of being restricted to the holds of the *Comet*.

Other readers, however, maintain that the Brain should continue as before—a bodiless, transparent mental giant. Having the Brain endowed with a mechanical body, they contend, would make Grag superfluous, rob the Brain of his austere, cold personality.

What do the majority of the readers think? Shall we give the Brain a body for just one story, as an experiment?

COMPOUND CHESS

The future will have marked changes in the field of sports, as in the realm of science. Games in the future will be different, too, and will probably utilize a knowledge of science.

What do you think of the scientific chemical game, "Compound Chess," played by Grag and Otho in this issue's feature novel, **CAPTAIN FUTURE'S CHALLENGE?** We think it's pretty fascinating. As a matter of fact, we'd like to play it.

Should enough readers be interested in further details concerning the game, and instructions as to how to make a copy for home use, Edmond Hamilton will be glad to write a brief article on "Compound Chess," which we will publish in an early issue. In the meanwhile, watch the Futuremen for details concerning more games of tomorrow!

—THE EDITOR.

GRAG VS. OTHO

By Mickey McCarly

I like the quarrels between Grag and Otho. I favor the idea of a time traveling novel.
—1228 Elizabeth Avenue, Charlotte, N. C.

SOLAR SYSTEM SAVER

By D. B. Thompson

No. 2 of **CAPTAIN FUTURE** is, I think, a little better than No. 1. Edmond Hamilton, "The World Saver" of early S. F. maga, is now definitely established as "Solar System Saver."

I have two definite suggestions. One, previously suggested by others and myself, that "The Brain" be given a robot body, preferably one in no way human. (Equip it with wheels; gravity nullifiers and flight apparatus; several arms with tentaculate hands; direct all-wave radio receptor, perhaps even perceptrons for the entire gamut of radiation, from radio to cosmic rays—in other words make it practically self-sufficient.)

Two, don't let Captain Future get into one hole after another through his own stupidity and carelessness. A pet peeve of mine, (recently mentioned to me by another fan, so I know it isn't mine alone) is the peculiar custom of writers in letting their super-cops make one dumb error after another, only to be extricated by a bit of luck or a brilliant bit of strategy; while even the slightest slip by the crook leads to his eventual undoing.

I don't mean the hero should be perfect,

(Continued on page 8)



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UNDER OBSERVATION

(Continued from page 6)

never making a mistake—he just shouldn't make stupid ones. For example, the capture of Captain Future at the Martian Observatory could not be charged to stupidity—Joan was over-wrought. His capture by the Stygians with the metal nets was also, I should say, not due to such carelessness. But charging into the beast's cage where Grag saved him by killing the beast, was a little too obvious. Eek, the moon-pup, is a nice addition to the long list of strange extra-terrestrial animals in sciencefiction.

A trip to the planet of the octopus-men of the strange spaceship might be the basis for a good adventure for Curt Newton.

The two short stories are very good. I wonder if Dr. Keller's masterpiece appeals to your younger readers? I like the detached style which marks all his stories, but it is in strange contrast to the direct, active style of most authors. The cover is much improved.—Lincoln, Nebr.

(Don't you think that equipping the Brain with a robot body would have him conflict with Grag? And won't the Brain lose his personality by gaining locomotion? Think it over—Ed.)

GIVE EEK AN OPPONENT

By P. Retep

I enjoyed reading your second issue very much. I would like to make a few suggestions, if I may. You ought to give Otho a pet also, and these two pets would fight between themselves. I believe you ought to start a Captain Future Club. Also, you ought to publish at least once a month.—1133 Boston Road, New York City, N. Y.

WAIT UNTIL YOU READ CURRENT NOVEL!

By Bernard Eddings

I finished the second issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE several days ago and it was swell. My biggest objection is that I have to wait three months for each issue.

I like the companions of Captain Future, but I am against his having any more. I think it would be interesting if Otho got a pet and it fought with Grag's moon-pup as their masters do. I like to see Grag and Otho quibble, but I think that Otho carries it too far.

The first issue's cover wasn't so good but the stories made up for it. The first installment of "The Human Termites" was excellent but the second installment slipped a little. Paul's illustrations are excellent. He is my favorite illustrator. CALLING CAPTAIN FUTURE is every bit as good as CAPTAIN FUTURE AND THE SPACE EMPEROR, but I don't see how Edmond Hamilton is going to keep writing such good stories. However, I am wishing you every success.—1627A McClung Street, Charleston, W. Va.

REQUESTS

By King Kopp

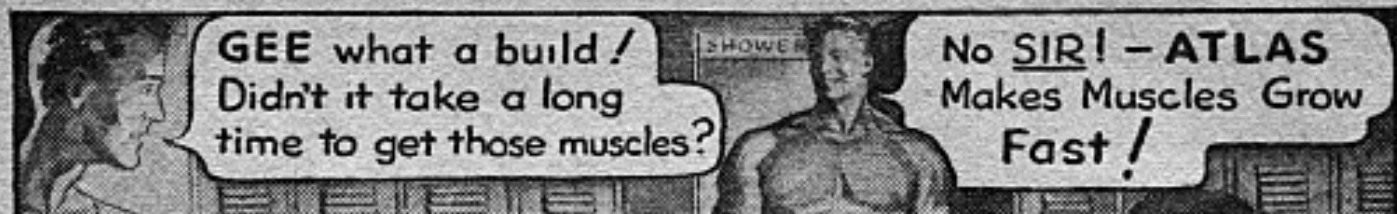
I have just bought the Spring issue of your mag and I was disappointed not to find an account of another Futureman. Please put out your publication at least 6 times a year.

I enjoy CAPTAIN FUTURE immensely and would enjoy having him go to different stars and planets in another Universe. I also would like to have Captain Future go to the edge of infinity.

In this issue I enjoy mostly the account of the "Saragossa Sea of Space." Please have Captain Future go back and see those Octopus-men again. Have him find out where they came from and why.

I have only one objection to some of my worthy fellow letter-writers. I don't want Curt Newton to go back millions of years into the past on Earth, as so many other authors write on this theme and it bores me.—30 Edna Avenue, Bradford, Pa.

(Concluded on page 10)



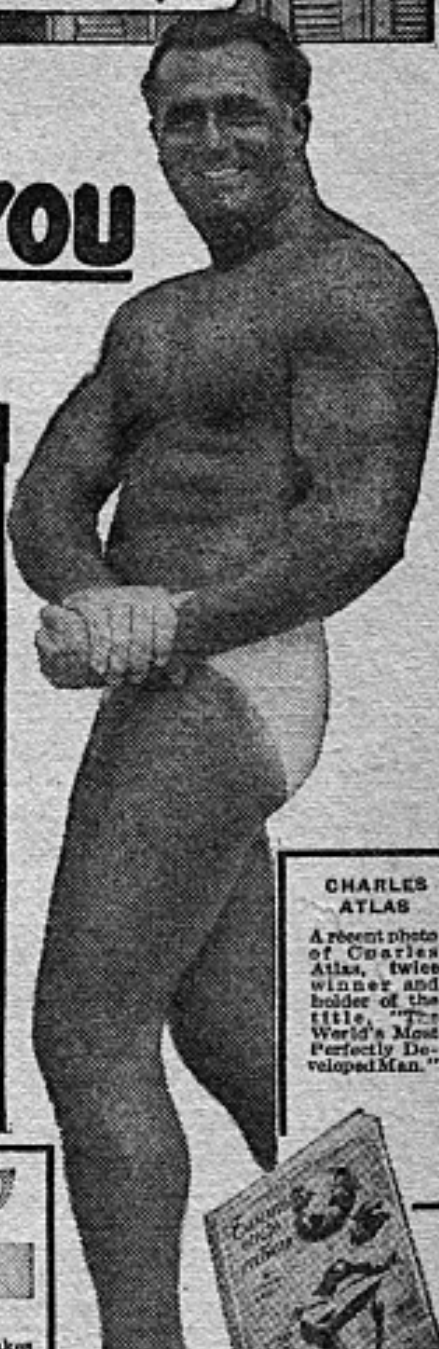
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UNDER OBSERVATION

(Concluded from page 8)

DEPARTMENTS WELL-PLANNED

By Dan E. Anderson

Congratulations on the first great issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE. The entire magazine left nothing to be desired. Every department was well-planned and critically designed for every lover of scientification.

As for the Captain Future novel, it was Edmond Hamilton at his best. And, as every fan knows, that is tops! The addition of new pals for the Captain should depend on the situations in which Mr. Hamilton plans to put Future. Let new characters come in only when, and if Mr. Hamilton finds them necessary. I think they'll be more lifelike if they develop with the series, and not just because some of the readers think them necessary.

Keller's "The Human Termites" promises to be a real treat for those of us who did not read it before.

The shorts were very short, but both of them were more than up to par.

I feel sure that the response to CAPTAIN FUTURE will be overwhelming, and it'll soon be appearing bi-monthly, which will be often enough for novels built around the same group of characters.

Best wishes for continued success to CAPTAIN FUTURE and your other companion scientification magazines.—East New Market, Md.

STICK TO SOLAR SYSTEM

By Lynn Bridges

The first issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE is not bad. I'll even go so far as to say it's good, taking into account, of course, the fact that C.F. is primarily an adventure mag.

As a strong advocate of science in scientification, however, I must frown upon gravity equalizers, invisibility charges, or anything else unknown to present-day science, and which is left unexplained.

"The Human Termites" was a pleasant surprise, even though three months seems a long time between installments. Around these parts, copies of the early Wonder Stories are about as common as green-eyed androids, so reprints of the earlier classics are more than welcome.

And now, since you request it, a few remarks concerning the future of C.F. Hamilton asks whether or not CAPTAIN FUTURE should be limited to our Universe. He should not only be limited to this Universe, but to our own little corner of it, the Solar System. After all, science moves in short, easy steps, not in running broad jumps, and we don't want Captain Future to get too far ahead of that 21st century world of his.

As to adding more companions to the group the answer is again no. Grag, Otho, and Simon Wright are three of the most interesting characters I have ever read about, and adding to them is apt to destroy the balance of the group. Anyhow, with characters like those why should more be necessary?

That's all, until next issue, except for the hope that C.F. can become at least a bi-monthly in the near future.—Lynn Bridges, 7730 Pitt, Detroit, Michigan.

FOSTERS OTHO-GRAG FUN-FEUD

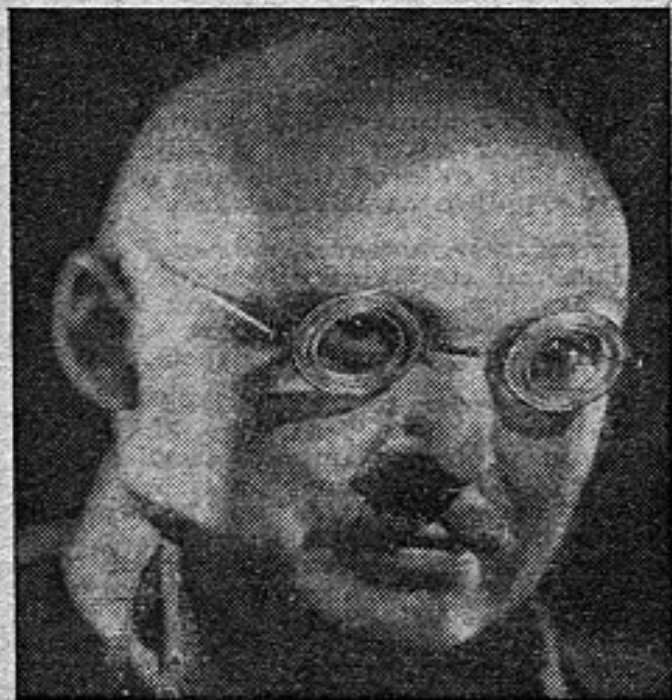
By Richard Aukerman

You've asked for comments in your first issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE, and liking the story I decided to give you my impression of "Captain Future and the Space Emperor."

The characters were fine, the plot excellent. The description of various planets and other places in the story were realistic.

Curtis Newton is undoubtedly one of the most likeable fiction characters that I've ever read about, and I have read a good deal. Your other characters, Otho and Grag, both deserve their just due as they are almost human in their jealous attitudes toward each other. Keep them squabbling by all means. It is a fine comic side issue.—819 Euclid Avenue, Martins Ferry, Ohio.

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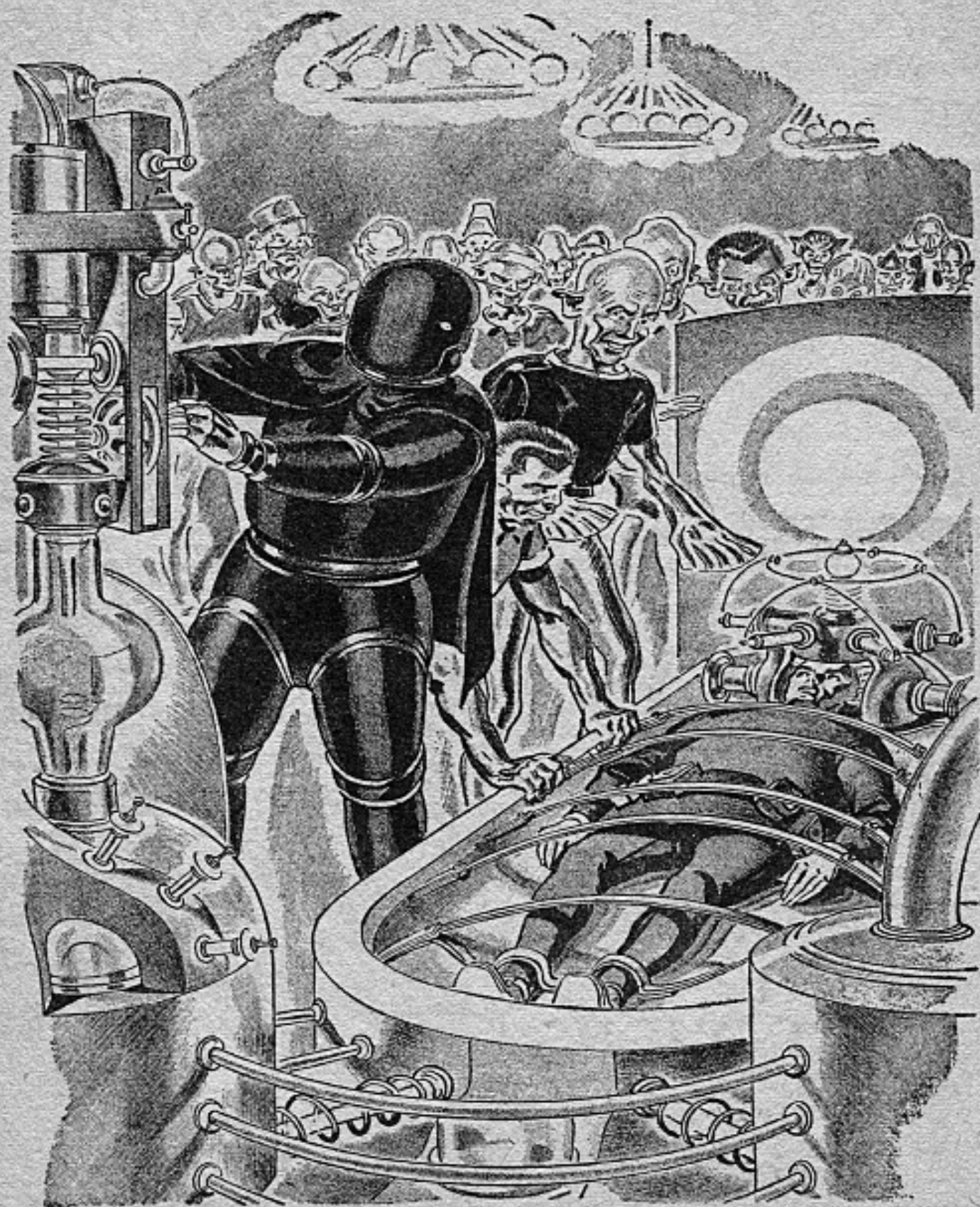
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Author of "Calling Captain Future," "Captain Future and the Space Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER I

Zero Hour

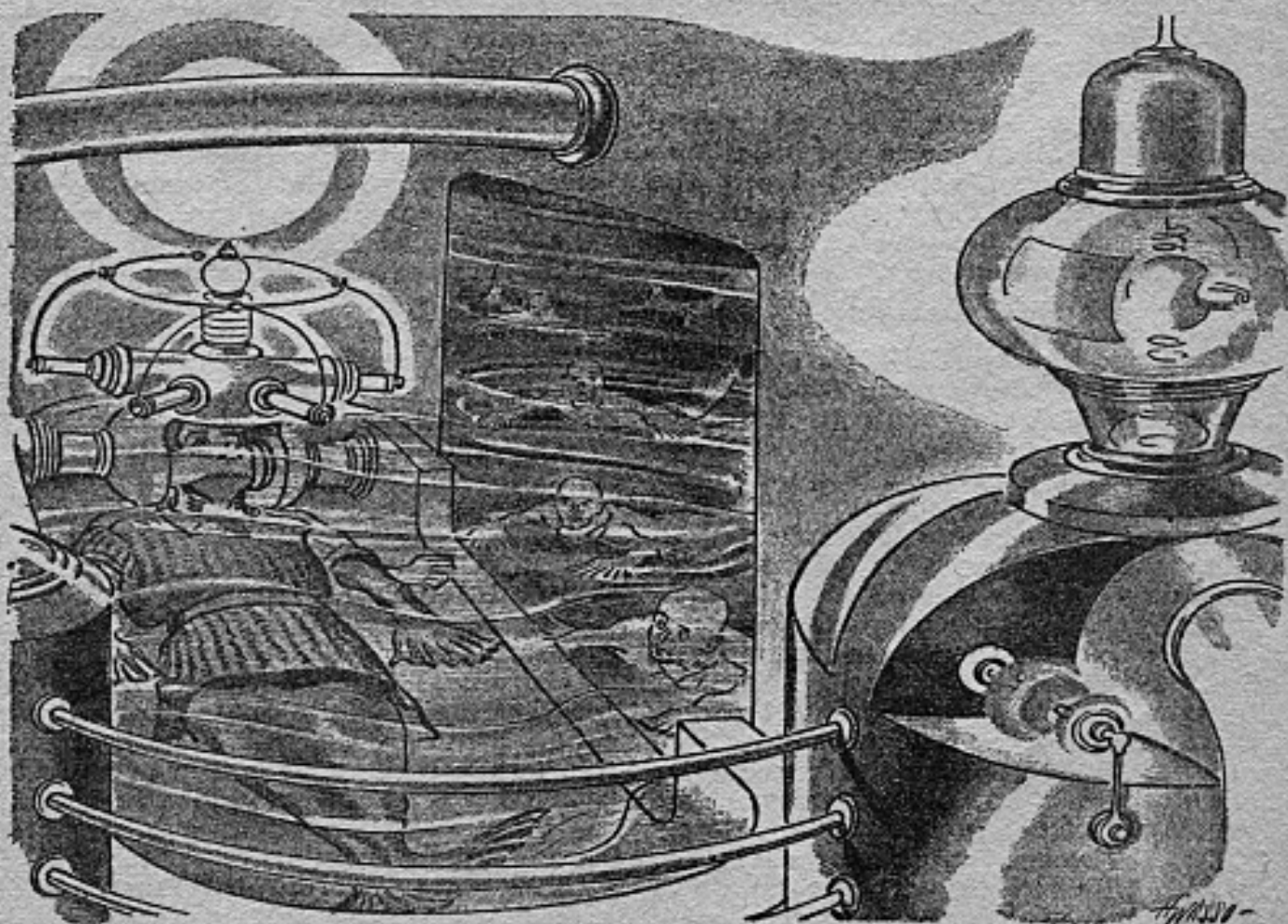
THE man who sat before a powerful television transmitter in the dim, cubbylike room might have been an Earthman. Or he might have been a Martian, or a Jovian, or any other planetary native. It was impossible to tell which.

For his whole body was concealed by a black space-suit. Even the glassite

helmet of his suit had been painted black, except for the eyeholes. The man inside it could see, but he could not be seen.

He reached toward the towering panel of the big television and tuned to a secret wavelength. Generators built up to a snarling, angry whine. Then he spoke into the microphone below the visi-screen. "The Wrecker calling Ship One!" he hissed.

On the visi-screen appeared the interior of a small spaceship. Then ap-



bursting-point against the metal straps (Chapter XV)

peared the face of the spaceship's commander, a white-skinned, dark-haired young Venusian. His eyes stared strangely at the screen, hollow-eyed, and there was a stiff, awkward jerkiness to his speech as he spoke.

"Ship One reporting, sir."

"You are at the designated position?" demanded the hissing voice of the man who called himself the Wrecker.

"Yes, sir, we are lying off Mercury now."

"Good—you will strike at exactly ten o'clock, solar time."

The Wrecker pushed another button. "Ship Two!"

The interior of another spaceship flashed into the screen. Its commander was a lanky, gray-skinned Neptunian, but he had the same hollowness of eye and uncanny stiffness of speech as the Venusian.

"Ship Two reporting, sir," the Saturnian said. "We are progressing toward Mars on schedule."

"Strike at exactly ten, solar time," ordered the Wrecker's sibilant voice.

Another button was pressed. "Ship Three!"

A hulking Earthman, as oddly strange in appearance as the other two ship-commanders, reported from the third ship. "Ship Three off Saturn, sir. We are ready to descend and blast the stockade at any moment."

"Blast at ten, solar time," the Wrecker ordered.

Then the black-veiled figure of mystery touched the switch that called across the Solar System to a fourth spaceship.

A big green Jovian, his large, circular dark eyes hollowly solemn, answered in thick, jerky accents from the fourth craft. "Ship Four, sir. We are approaching Earth's Moon."

The Wrecker's dark figure tensed.

"Your mission is the most perilous of all," he told the Jovian. "Remember, if you make one slip, you'll fail to get this man. He *must* be captured or he'll ruin our whole plan. Ten o'clock solar time is the zero hour," rasped the Wrecker. "Attack at exactly that time."

The Wrecker touched a larger switch. The visi-screen went dark, and the snarling whine of generators sank and died. The dark-veiled figure of

mystery hunched, brooding.

"The plan can't fail, now," he told himself. "The one man who might spoil it will be in our power. The System, reeling under this blow, will call to him for help as usual. But he won't answer *this* time. Nobody will answer."

The Wrecker's dark form stiffened.

"Gravium! The key to the whole Systems' life—and that key will soon be in *my* hands! Only forty minutes to zero hour—"

ZERO hour. . . .

The Hot Side of the planet Mercury sizzled under the scorching heat of the sun that seemed to fill half the brassy sky. That flaming orb, only thirty-six million miles away, kept this side of the planet at a temperature above the melting point of most metals!

Yet there were men at one spot in this hottest place in the nine worlds. Upon the seared, blackened rock-plain of the Hot Side stood the clustered smelters, barracks, offices and open rock workings of one of the System's five gravium mine-companies.

This mine was protected from the fearful heat that otherwise would instantly slay all here. From a towering radiator-mechanism arched a domelike "halo" of blue force, a screen of vibrations that barred terrific solar radiance.

A young Mercurian metallurgist came out of the laboratories and glanced up at the colossal orb flaming overhead. He speculated, for the thousandth time, what would happen if the "halo" failed and the solar heat penetrated.

"Thank the gods of space the 'halo' radiator is failure-proof," he told himself. "Otherwise there'd be no mine here. Even as it is, gravium is the only thing that would draw men to this place."

Gravium! The most precious and important metal in the Solar System! For upon gravium depended all the interplanetary trade and traffic of the nine worlds. Without gravium there would be no gravitation equalizers, no interplanetary flight.

The young Mercurian glanced at his watch. "Ten o'clock, sun time! I'd better be getting back to work—" He

stiffened suddenly.

A black space-cruiser was diving down out of the brassy sky. It roared over the "halo"—shrouded mine, and a small black object dropped from the cruiser toward the "halo" radiator.

Next moment, with a roar and flash of white fire, the big radiator mechanism flew to fragments.

"An atomic bomb!" yelled the Mer-



Captain Future

curian. "This means death for—"

Even as he realized the imminence of death, he died. The fearful solar heat, striking the little mine-settlement as its screen of protective vibrations was destroyed, reduced that young Mercurian's body to a charred black cinder instantaneously.

Within ten minutes, every trace of the Mercury gravium mines and its workers had been completely destroyed by the terrific solar heat.

IT was night in the equatorial desert of Mars. The stars shone brilliantly in the chill, clear air, and the two meteorlike moons coming across the

heavens shed a pale radiance. That light illuminated the busy mine of the Mars Gravium Company. For here on Mars, too, was mined a small quantity of the precious gravium that made interplanetary travel possible.

Two Martian laborers came out of a tunnel for a breath of air. Red-skinned men with bold heads and big-chested figures, they breathed in the chill night air gratefully. It lacked two minutes of ten o'clock, solar time—

"What's that up there, Arraj?" the younger Martian asked, pointing up.

The older man looked. Up there against the superbly blazing Milky Way, a tiny black spot was growing.

"Looks like a meteor coming this way," he said quickly. "But it must be a big one—"

"Look, Arraj—it *is* a meteor!" cried the younger Martian excitedly. "And there's a ship guiding it!"

The two stared for a moment at the incredible spectacle. That expanding black spot was clearly a giant meteor, rushing now at tremendous speed toward Mars. And close beside the booming meteor rushed a dark spaceship, playing rays upon the great mass. The ship was propelling the meteor toward Mars—

"That meteor's going to strike here!" yelled the young Martian wildly. "That ship's deliberately guiding it to hit the mines here—"

The great meteor was rushing straight down toward them, looming larger and larger. The ship that had guided it until the last moment was now rocketing back out to space.

The younger of the two Martians tried to scream an alarm as the monstrous mass darted down. He could utter no sound; paralysis gripped him.

Then the giant meteor struck. The concussion shook the lonely Martian desert for leagues. And when the quaking shudder of the planet ceased, the gravium mines had—disappeared. The impact of the great meteor had made that whole region a fusing, superheated wreck of shattered rock.

DAWN was breaking over the southern part of Saturn. Low on the northern horizon, over the great plains which cover most of this giant,

prairie-world, the stupendous arc of the Rings glittered less brightly against the star-studded sky.

Down low in one of the southern valleys of Saturn, the rising Sun gleamed off the white cement buildings and raw rock pits of the gravium workings. For here, too, was mined some of the precious gravium vital to the System. Around the whole gravium mine towered a stockade of atomic flame. Atomic projectors set close together formed a ring whose unceasing jets of flame alone kept out the gray, creeping monsters that could be glimpsed outside.

Those gray, great crawling things were the dreaded Silicae—strange beings composed of inorganic compounds with a siliceous base. Like all siliceous life, they ate metal, and would attack any place to satisfy their avid craving. The exposed veins of gravium in the workings, the metal of the machines here, were a constant lure to the Silicae. Always, they hungrily circled the stockade of flame.

The tall, blue-skinned Saturnian engineer who came out of his cabin, rubbing sleep from his eyes, stared distastefully at the crawling gray monsters visible outside the flame-fence.

"Damned vermin," he muttered disgustedly. "I'm tired looking at them. What I need are some bright lights and pretty girls."

It was ten o'clock Solar Time. The engineer started toward the barracks to rouse his men for the day-shift. Suddenly he stopped and peered upward.

"What the devil—"

A black spaceship was diving toward the gravium mines. From it darted a powerful atom-beam that struck and demolished the atomic projectors of a whole sector of the stockade. That whole part of the flame-fence died. The ship darted up and away with a thunder of rocket-tubes. The Saturnian engineer, his face ghastly, pitched toward the alarm-bell control.

"All out—the stockade's broken!" he yelled, as he sent the alarms ringing.

Half-awakened men poured out of the buildings. But already, through the gap in the flame-fence, a horde of the Silicae was pouring!

Two hours later, the monstrous Silicae flowed leisurely away. The cement

buildings remained, and the broken bodies of dead men. But every trace of metal was gone, eaten by the monsters. The machinery, the tools, the scraps of metal on the persons of the men, and even the gravium in the open workings—all had been ingested by the strange creatures. The Saturnian gravium source had been wiped out.

ZERO hour. . . .

Brilliant sunlight bathed the side of the moon that faced Earth. In the flood of light, the lunar peaks and craters rose stark and bare, the lunar plains stretched in deathly desolation. At only one place was there movement on this forbidding, barren globe.

That place was in the mighty mountain-ring of Tycho crater. A black spaceship had landed stealthily in the jagged peaks of the crater. A score of space-suited men, each wearing on his breast his flat gravitation-equalizer, were cautiously moving out onto the flat, white rock plain of the great crater.

The leader, a big Jovian whose dark eyes looked oddly hollow and strange inside his glassite helmet, stopped suddenly and pointed toward a big glassite window set in the crater-plain ahead.

"That's the place!" muttered the Jovian to his men on his suit-phone. "That's where they live—Captain Future and the Futuremen!"

Captain Future, most redoubtable and mysterious adventurer in the System, the champion of law and the foe of crime, the legendary planeteer who had blazed a fighting trail across space!

And the Futuremen, the three awesome, unhuman aides of the great adventurer, who dwelt with him on this frigid world!

"Do we attack at once?" asked one of the men.

"No, the Wrecker said to wait until the Futuremen have gone on their regular trip to some laboratory they have on the other side," the Jovian said. "There they go now! Get down, all of you!"

Out of an underground hangar, a tear-drop shaped little ship was rising. It zoomed in a streak of fire across the peaks of Tycho crater.

"Now, Captain Future's alone!" the Jovian leader exclaimed. He looked at

his watch. "And it's ten now—zero hour."

He unhooked a gunlike weapon from his belt and aimed it at the glassite window ahead. As he pulled trigger of the instrument he muttered tensely: "This will get Captain Future!"

CHAPTER II

Upon Earth's Moon

CURTIS NEWTON, known throughout the Solar System as Captain Future, had been working for hours upon an engrossing scientific experiment. Now he stepped back and surveyed the device on which he had labored, a rueful frown on his face.

"Hang it, why can't I reverse the electronic orbit-compression?" he wondered. "There must be some way."

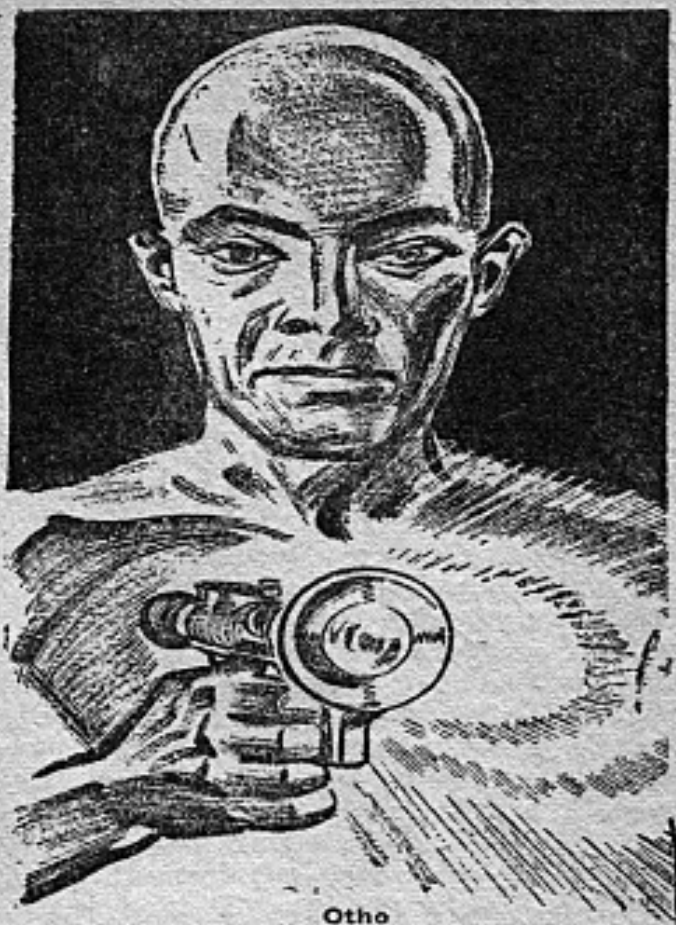
Standing there deep in thought in a corner of his big sub-lunar laboratory, in the flood of filtered sunlight that poured down through the great glassite window overhead, Curt Newton made a strikingly picturesque figure. Six feet-four tall, his shock of unduly red hair flamed in the softened sunlight. He wore a close-fitting zipper-suit of tan synthesilk that could not conceal the long, lithe muscles of a rangy, perfectly coordinated body.

Curt wore but one ornament—if such it could be called. That was the big ring on his left hand, whose nine jewels moved ceaselessly around a radiant central gem. Those moving jewels represented the nine planets of the Solar System, and that unique ring was the identifying emblem of Captain Future, legendary wizard of science and champion of law.

"Must be some way to reverse the process," Curt muttered perplexedly. "I can do it—why in the world can't I undo it?"

The thing that held Curt's attention was a small electrical projector, between whose lens lay a square block of solid gold.

It was only one of the many mechanisms and instruments in this big laboratory. This large room, excavated out of the solid moon-rock beneath



Otho

Tycho crater, was the greatest citadel of science in the System—the laboratory of Captain Future and the Futuremen. Here, besides ordinary telescopes, spectroscopes, and big atomic-power generators, were many instruments whose design and purpose were known only to the young wizard of science and his three comrades.

The voice of one of those comrades sounded in Curt Newton's ear now, as he thoughtfully surveyed his experiment.

"Listen, chief, how about letting me go to Venus for a few days?" that voice asked hopefully.

"Nothing doing, Otho," Curt replied without turning. "You've got to go with Simon and Grag over to the sub-lunar testing chamber."

"But it would only take me a day or so to make this little trip to Venus—" the voice persisted.

Captain Future turned exasperatedly. "What are you talking about, Otho? You've no reason to be going to Venus."

It was Otho the android who faced him. He was one of the three unhuman

Futuremen who were an awesome legend in the System. Otho was a man—but not an ordinary human man. He was a synthetic man, or android. He had been *made* scientifically, long ago in this very laboratory—had been created bodily out of artificial synthetic flesh.

THE synthetic body of Otho was manlike in general outline. But his rubbery white artificial figure contained strength and speed and agility beyond that of any human. The slanting, slitted green eyes in his hairless white head flamed with a spirit of devil-may-care recklessness and audacity. They were coaxing in expression now as he pleaded with Captain Future.

"Can't you let me take the *Comet* for a trip to Venus?" Otho begged. "It's for scientific reasons," he added hastily. "There's a rare specimen of fungoid creature on that unexplored north Venusian continent that I want to get."

Curt Newton chuckled.

"You and your rare specimens!" he scoffed at the android. "You're just bored here on the moon, as usual, and trying to think up an excuse to get off on one of your crazy, hell-raising space-jaunts."

"Well, anyone would get bored hanging around this cursed moon where nothing ever happens. Since we got back from Pluto, we haven't been off this shriveled little world."

A rasping, metallic voice interrupted the android's sulky complaint.

"If you want something to do so badly, Otho," rasped that harsh, unhuman voice, "your wish is gratified. You can take Grag and me over to the sub-lunar test chamber."

Both Curt and Otho turned. The other two Futuremen had appeared in one of the doors of the laboratory. One of them was Grag, the robot, whose mighty metal shape loomed seven feet in height. Like a huge metal travesty on mankind he towered, his massive jointed arms and legs hinting the giant strength he possessed. Grag's eyes—gleaming photoelectric eyes set in the front of his bulbous metal head—looked inquiringly toward Captain Future as he towered high there.

Curled up familiarly on Grag's metal

shoulder was his particular pet—a little bearlike animal with gray, siliceous flesh, a sharp nose and curious little eyes. And the great robot held in one metal hand the handle of the case which contained the third Futureman.

The third Futureman had no body. He was Simon Wright, known from one end of the System to the other as the Brain. For he was simply a human brain that lived in a square, transparent case. Inside that case were the compact pumps and serum-purifiers that circulated artificial blood-serums to keep the Brain living. In the front of the case were the Brain's artificial lens-eyes, mounted on flexible stalks, and the resonator-mechanism by which he spoke.

Strangest trio in the whole System—these three unhuman Futuremen who were spoken of with awe on every world! Simon Wright, the living Brain who had once been an ordinary living man; Grag, the great metal robot, strongest being in the whole Universe; and Otho, the synthetic man. Three unhuman comrades, with scientific powers and strange abilities beyond compare, who companioned Captain Future, the greatest scientific wizard of all, on his hazardous adventures in defense of law and right!

The Brain was speaking again, his lens-eyes turned toward Curt Newton's face as his mechanical voice rasped.

"Have you solved the problem of your experiment yet, Curtis?" he asked.

Curt shook his head ruefully.


"Not yet. I can compress the electron-orbits well enough, but can't reverse it. Watch—"

He reached toward the switch of the electrical projector, beneath which lay the little square block of gold.

"Wait!" boomed Grag hastily. "Eek is there—"

The little gray siliceous animal that had been curled up on Grag's shoulder had spied the gold, and had made for it. Eek was a moon-pup, a native lunar siliceous animal who was non-breathing and who ate metals and ores. Eek especially loved silver and gold.

"Better get him out from under that projector, Grag," chuckled Curt, "or he'll be reduced in size with the gold."



A horde of Silcae
poured through the
fence (Chapter I)

"Say, that's the best idea I've heard yet, Chief!" exclaimed Otho. "Shrink Eek down to the size of a molecule, and then the little pest won't be forever chewing up things and making trouble."

GRAG had snatched Eek hastily from under the projector. Now the big metal robot turned wrathfully on Otho.

"You're always complaining about Eek!" he accused Otho. "You forget that Eek saved all our lives out on Pluto."

"I deny that!" Otho shouted. "And even if that cursed moon-pup had saved my life, I still wouldn't like him."

"That's because only humans like myself like pets," Grag said proudly. "Of course, since you're not quite human, Otho—"

"Quiet, Grag!" said Curt hastily, as Otho began to answer furiously. "I want to show Simon my experiment."

Captain Future closed the switch. A beam of red light shot down from the projector onto the little block of gold. The gold block shrank. In minutes, it dwindled in size until it was only one-tenth as big. Curt turned off the red beam.

"I could make it so small as to be invisible," he said. "Trouble is, I don't know yet how to make things big again."

"Well, we will be back in a few hours," the Brain told him. "To the Comet, Grag. Come along, Otho."

Soon, Curt Newton heard a roar of rocket-tubes as the Comet, his super-

swift space-cruiser, took off from its underground hangar for the short flight around to the Moon's other side. Curt remained standing, looking musingly around the now silent laboratory, his red head bathed in the sunlight from the great window overhead. He loved this strange dwelling on the wild moon. It was home to him. Here, indeed, he had been born.

All Curt's first childhood memories were of this place, and of the three Futuremen, the robot and android and Brain. To him, those awesomely un-human beings had never seemed strange, but familiar and dear. They had been his protectors, his tutors.

The Brain, master of science, had given him the unparalleled scientific education that was the foundation for his later wizardry of science. Grag the robot, strongest of all beings, had developed his strength and endurance. Otho, most daring and agile and swift of all, had trained him in quickness and skill. They loved the growing boy, and Curt gave them the affection another lad would give his parents.

Not until he had reached manhood, had the Brain told him of his parents. Of how Roger Newton, young Earth scientist, had fled here to the moon years before with his young wife and with the Brain himself. For Simon Wright was an Earth scientist himself, whose brain had been removed from his aging, dying body and encased in its present serum-case, to live on.

His father and mother, Curt had learned, had fled to this refuge on the moon to escape plotters who coveted their scientific discoveries for sinister purposes. Here in their new lunar home, Roger Newton and the Brain had carried on their great attempt to create artificial living beings. And here they had created two such beings—Grag, the metal robot, and Otho, the synthetic man.

But the plotters they had fled from had followed them to the moon, and had murdered Roger Newton and his young wife. Grag and Otho had slain the murderers. And, dying, Curt's mother had left her newly born son in the care of the robot and android and Brain, begging them to protect and educate and aid him.

ALL this, Curt Newton had learned when he had reached manhood. And, learning, he had come to a great decision—a decision to apply his unparalleled scientific wizardry and superhuman abilities to a war against all interplanetary criminals.

"The growth of interplanetary traffic, the mingling of planetary races and increase of scientific knowledge, will bring dangers to the System peoples!" Curt had declared. "Danger from such criminals as murdered my parents. With your help, and with the education you've given me, I can help the System peoples fight those dangers."

"It is what your dying mother wanted, lad," the Brain had rasped. "And Grag and Otho and I will fight at your side. But it means devoting your life single-mindedly to this great cause."

"I know," Curt had said earnestly. "I'll probably go under, sooner or later. But until I do, I'll use every ounce of my brains and strength to crush those who try to exploit the System's races."

Curt had flown secretly to Earth that very night and offered his services to the President of the System Government.

"If you ever need me, flash a signal-flare from the North Pole," he had said. "I'll see it—and I'll come."

"But who are you, anyway?" the bewildered President had asked.

And a debonair smile had lit Curt's face as he answered, "You can call me—Captain Future!"

Thus had been born the career of Captain Future. Since then, the North Pole signal-summons had flared many times. And each time, Curt Newton and the three Futuremen had answered quickly, and by sheer daring and scientific mastery had crushed the plots and plotters who endangered the System.

Curt's reverie of memory was interrupted by a soft chiming note. He looked up at the wall. On that wall were ten clocks. Nine of them showed the exact time on each of the nine worlds. The tenth clock showed the standard solar time used by all space ships. It was just ten o'clock.

"Time for me to be getting back to work, instead of wool-gathering," Curt told himself. "Now, if I used a higher

frequency beam in this projector, would it—"

He was turning toward the projector, as he spoke. But he suddenly stopped. A paralyzing force had struck him. He slumped to the laboratory floor like a dead man.

"Something's blocking off all the electric nerve-currents in my body!" the thought flashed through Curt's mind. "This is no accident—someone's causing this—"

He made a superhuman mental effort to move. If he could just get to a cabinet across the laboratory, he could use the instruments in it to neutralize this paralyzing force. But he was helpless, unable to stir a finger. He lay prone. And in a moment, he heard men entering the air-lock outer door of the sub-lunar dwelling.

Captain Future waited grimly. Into the laboratory cautiously came a band of space-suited men. The foremost, a bulky Jovian, held a gunlike weapon whose fan of invisible force covered the red-haired scientific wizard.

Curt, still unable to speak or move, surveyed his attackers with flaring gray eyes. Hastily, they tied him with unbreakable metal ropes, keeping out of the range of the invisible force themselves. Then the Jovian snicked off his weapon. Curt found he could move. He made a tremendous effort to break his bonds, but it was futile.

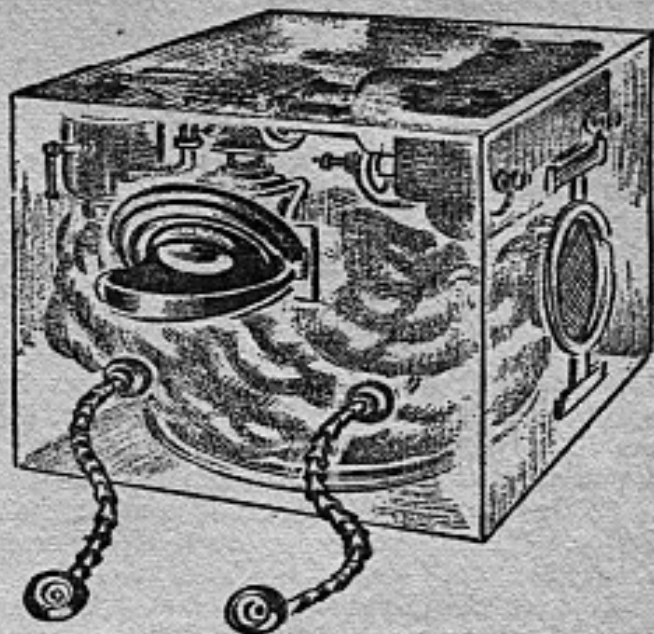
"Put a space-suit on him," the Jovian was ordering. "He mustn't die as we take him to the ship—the Wrecker's orders!"

Curt's voice was low and deadly as he spoke to the Jovian.

"Who is the Wrecker? Who ordered you to do this?"

THE Jovian laughed hollowly. "You'll meet the Wrecker soon, Captain Future. You've ruined a lot of schemes, but you won't ruin his. He's too smart—he struck at you first!"

Curt's eyes narrowed. There was something strange about this Jovian and his men. Their set expressions, and hollow eyes. . . . Inwardly, Curt was seething. Whoever the Wrecker was, he was the first who had ever dared made a deliberate attack on Cap-



The Brain

tain Future's home. It was a challenge to Captain Future—a challenge Curt grimly accepted.

The Jovian leader had taken from his belt a small square recorder-machine into which he spoke in loud tones.

"To the Futuremen!" he said loudly. "We have your leader, Captain Future. Make no effort to trace us, make no effort to leave the moon, and he will not be killed. Otherwise, he dies!"

The Jovian hung the recorder by the door, and set a trip-switch so that it would speak the words when the Futuremen came.

"Now out of here quick, before they return," he continued hastily. "The paralysis-beam wouldn't work on all three of those unhuman devils. That's why we had to strike when they were gone."

Curt had been garbed, still bound and helpless, in a space-suit. Now his captors carried him out of the lunar laboratory and across Tycho crater to a black ship waiting hidden in the peaks.

Captain Future was tossed into a small supply-room off the main corridor of the ship. The space-suit was removed, but not his bonds. And a tall, stringy, yellow-faced Uranian stood guard over him with a drawn atom-pistol.

Curt felt the ship lurch upward with a roar of rocket-tubes, then hurtle off

through space. He squirmed around to look through the window. The ship was flying away from the moon and Earth, and heading almost straight toward the blazing orb of the sun.

"They're going to coast close past the sun, which means they're heading for one of the worlds now on the other side of the System," Curt thought quickly. "Jupiter, or Uranus or Neptune—"

Captain Future craned toward the window. His heart went cold as he glimpsed the green sphere of Earth. On its North Pole, a brilliant little flare of light was throbbing forth.

"The signal!" Curt muttered appalledly. "The summons from the President!"

It was the beacon-flare used by the President to call Captain Future and the Futuremen when peril threatened the system. And he, Captain Future, who had never failed to answer that summons swiftly, could not answer it now, for he was being carried off across the void, a helpless prisoner.

CHAPTER III

Solar Peril

CURT NEWTON felt an emotion as near despair as he ever had experienced. That call from Earth meant grave danger, a vital emergency of some kind. And he couldn't answer! He was tied hand and foot with unbreakable metal ropes. Over him stood the armed Uranian guard.

But Captain Future had won out of equally perilous situations in the past. That trap on the Prison Moon of Pluto, and the death-pit in the Place of the Dead on Jupiter, and many others. He lay still, his bronzed face immobile, his keen gray eyes roving about.

The ship was throbbing on its course sunward. Curt realized that its objective must be either Jupiter or Uranus or Neptune, the three planets on the other side of the System. Which was it?

Curt started as he heard his captors talking. They were saying something about the wrecking of some of the

System's gravium mines. Did that mean that the Wrecker, the mysterious leader behind these strange men, was striking somehow at the System's gravium supply?

"It must be so," Curt thought. "A threat to the gravium sources of the System—that must be why Carthew called for me!"

Gravium was the very life-blood of interplanetary civilization. For without it, gravitation-equalizers could not be made. And without equalizers, men didn't dare visit other planets of greater or lesser gravitation than their own.

The first space explorers, back in 1971, had found that out. Landing on worlds of lesser gravitation than Earth, their circulation, internal organs, their whole anatomy, were damaged. All were sickened, many crippled and killed. It seemed at first that it would be impossible for men ever to live on other worlds.

Then Mark Carew, one of those first explorers, had discovered on Mercury a queer metal unknown on Earth. He called it gravium, for an electric current sent through a coil of this metal would decrease or increase the weight of any matter immediately around the coil, according to the current's polarity and strength.

Carew invented a gravitation equalizer, whose core was a gravium coil. The equalizer, worn in a flat case on the body, could be set to compensate automatically for any difference in gravitation. The wearer of the equalizer always felt the same weight, no matter how strong or weak was the gravitation of the world he visited.

The gravitation equalizers had made widespread interplanetary traffic possible! Every interplanetary traveler wore one. Because of them, Earthmen could visit Jupiter and the other giant planets without ill-effects, and similarly Jovians and other planetary races could visit Earth. Without equalizers, space-travel would stop.

And it was only the precious metal gravium that made the equalizers possible. Small wonder that gravium was the most valuable metal in the System! The companies which mined the gravium were required to sell all of it to the System Government, which super-

vised the manufacture of the all-important equalizers.

"If this Wrecker and his crowd have really ruined part of the System's gravium supply," Captain Future thought, "it's no wonder that President Carthew called for me."

Then renewed remembrance of his present situation, his inability to answer that call, swept over him. He writhed mentally. His mind worked at top speed to discover a way out of his captivity. The yellow Uranian still watched him like a hawk with those hollow eyes, his atom-pistol ready in his hand.

Curt looked out the window. Hours had passed, and the ship was now flying very close to the stupendous orb of the sun, which it would pass closely on its way to the other side of the System.

THE ship already had its "halo" working, Captain Future saw. The "halo", a screen of vibrations that repelled radiant heat waves, was a necessity to all ships routed close to the sun. It enclosed the craft like a shell of blue light.

The Uranian guard saw Captain Future looking out of the window, and laughed hollowly.

"You don't want to go outside, do you?" the guard asked ironically. "You wouldn't live long if you did, Captain Future."

Curt knew that. Only the "halo" kept the ship from being destroyed by the terrific heat of the sun. The sun was an overwhelming spectacle. Though several million miles away, the giant star seemed near enough to touch. Its radiance was blinding even through the light-filter windows. Out from it raged huge prominences—tongues of solar flame capable of destroying a world, leaping out like claws clutching at the ship.

Captain Future was not stunned by the sight. He had been far closer to the sun than this when he and the Futuremen had carried out perilous solar researches in their ship, the *Comet*. His mind was concentrated now on a desperate scheme of escape that he had evolved.

Curt twisted a little to bring his left

hand into full view. On that hand he wore his famous ring—the emblem of Captain Future, with its nine little bright planet-jewels revolving slowly around the central radiant sun-gem. Curt spoke to the yellow Uranian guard.

"Would you help me escape if I gave you this ring?"

The Uranian answered scornfully. "Of course not! I could take it away from you, if I wished so."

"But it's a unique, valuable ring," Curt Newton pointed out. "See how those nine jewels revolve around the central one, so that they duplicate exactly the movements of the nine planets?"

The Uranian, though not at all tempted, did look at the ring more closely. Simultaneously, Curt pressed his thumb against the back of the ring, where was the switch of the ring's tiny atomic motor. The brilliant jewels of the ring began to move imperceptibly more quickly. Revolving ever faster, smoothly spinning points of light, they seemed to fascinate the Uranian.

"They move around and around," Curt said softly. "Around and around—they never stop—they go faster and faster—"

His voice was a soothing, soporific monotone. As he pressed harder against the ring's switch, the jewels were spinning ever more swiftly, before the Uranian's fascinated eyes.

"Faster and faster—they keep going faster and faster—" Captain Future continued, his voice low, soft, hypnotic.

Hypnotic—yes! The spinning jewels of the famous emblem-ring were a perfect device for inducing the hypnotic state. Curt had used it for that purpose before, for the red-haired scientific wizard was a past master in the science of hypnotism.

The spinning little lights of the ring, and Curt's drowsy, soothing voice, were having their effect. The Uranian's eyes were wide, dilated, staring fixedly at the ring. For minutes Captain Future continued the dual process of revolving lights and soothing talk. Then he spoke suddenly, in low, authoritative tones.

"You are asleep now," he declared.

The Uranian, without taking his gaze off the ring, answered slowly.

"I am asleep."

"You will obey my command," Curt said.

"I will obey," came the slow answer.

"Untie these ropes around me at once," Captain Future ordered.

HE held his breath, then. But it worked. The Uranian was utterly hypnotized. The man bent slowly, and with motions like those of a sleepwalker, began to unfasten the flexible metal ropes bound tightly around Captain Future's limbs.

The instant he was free, Curt stood erect.

"Sleep now and do not move," he told the staring, swaying Uranian.

The guard remained standing, frozen. Curt snatched the slender proton-pistol from the holster at his belt.

"So sure I was helpless that they didn't take *this*," he muttered.

He sprang into the corridor. He had to get to the televisior room of this ship, at once. There wasn't much time.

There wasn't any time! For suddenly a thin Venusian appeared at the other end of the corridor. The Uranian's relief!

The thin, pale beam of Curt's proton-gun dropped the Venusian in his tracks before he could yell. Swift as a Plutonian ice-cat, Curt leaped down the passage. From inside a closed door came the snarling whine of generators. The televisior-room! He opened the door. A Neptunian looked up from the powerful televisior he was just turning off.

Captain Future's hissing proton-beam knocked the gray-faced operator back out of his chair, unconscious. In a second, Curt was in that chair, his hands flying over the switches and tuning dials of the powerful televisior transmitter. He was tuning to the secret frequency used by himself and the Futuremen alone. As he tuned, his eyes were swiftly reading the space-position of the ship from the dials above the set. A hissing, frantic voice came from the televisior receiver, and Otho's wild face appeared in it.

"Chief!" cried the android, back on the moon, as he glimpsed Captain Future's face. "Devils of space, where—"

"Listen, Otho!" Curt rapped. "I'm getting out of this ship. Come for me at once in the *Comet*—you'll find me floating in space—near position 14.2 outward, 34 degrees countersunwise, 2.7 below ecliptic plane."

"But that position's close to the sun—you can't live in space a minute in that heat!" Otho protested. "Chief—"

"No time to talk—come at once!" Curt ordered, and snapped off the wave.

Then he tore away the whole front panel of the televisior. His deft hands, working against time, unfastened two small transformers, a condenser, and a little auxiliary atomic power generator, that he fastened together into a compact mechanism. Finally he finished hooking together his improvised machine.

Slinging it over his shoulder, Curt re-entered the corridor and hastened along it to the mid-ship airlock by which the ship was entered or left. In the inner chamber of the airlock, spacesuits were hanging as usual. In a moment, Captain Future was inside a suit. The mechanism he had improvised, he kept slung over his shoulder, outside the suit. Then he opened the outer door of the lock. The air of the lock puffed out. Curt leaped out with it, jumping forth with all his strength so as to escape from the gravitational attraction of the ship.

THE red-headed adventurer leaped out into an inferno of raging light and heat—into a hell of radiation flooding from the sun whose orb jammed the firmament. But as he leaped, Captain Future switched on his makeshift mechanism. Its generator and transformers began humming. It projected a spherical shell of blue light that completely enclosed Curt as he flew out into space—a "halo" or vibration-screen that would protect him from the solar radiation which otherwise would kill him instantly!

Curt found himself floating in space. The raider ship was receding, a black mass surrounded by the blue flicker of its own halo. Then the ship was gone,

his escape unsuspected as yet. And Captain Future, inside his space-suit and protected only by the fragile "halo" from the withering radiation, floated alone in space, only a few million miles out from the sun.

"It's going to be cursed close," Curt muttered to himself. "If the Futuremen don't hurry—"

His position was a truly appalling one. For though he seemed floating in space, Curt knew that he was really falling at ever increasing speed toward the sun.

The gigantic gravitational grip of the stupendous flaming orb was pulling him toward fiery death, by a speed that accelerated each minute. It would take but a few hours for him to fall right into the outer layers of the chromosphere. Could the Futuremen reach him in time, even in the super-swift *Comet*?

"It's a gamble," Curt thought grimly. "And not the first one I've taken—but one of the biggest!"

Even through the filter-glassite helmet, the glare of the sun was overwhelming. He seemed suspended above a titanic ocean of raving flame that filled the whole Universe. Soon heat began to invade Curt's suit. Curt turned the generator up to higher power, increasing the intensity of the "halo."

"Generator can't last long at this rate," Curt thought.

Before long, he had to turn it up again. And now the generator was beginning to falter, its small charge of atomic fuel depleted by the extraordi-

nary demands made upon it to maintain the fragile screen of vibrations.

Captain Future felt a queer chill, despite the stifling heat inside his suit. Could this be the end? Had he dared the space gods once too often?

"No, they'll come," Curt muttered doggedly. "The Futuremen won't fail me—"

And as though to confirm his loyalty, the *Comet* swept out of the upper void like a streak of flashing fire! The teardrop-shaped little ship, the swiftest thing in space, had its shrouding blue "halo" out. It volleyed around in a dizzy turn and drove level beside Curt, its air-lock door open. He clutched, scrambled into the air-lock. In a moment he was inside the little ship, divesting himself of his smoking hot space-suit in the mid-ship laboratory cabin.

"Chief, we were afraid!" Otho was babbling wildly as he helped him shed the heavy suit. "We broke all our own records getting here. Grag flew the ship like a madman—"

Grag had set the *Comet* on an upward course away from the sun, and now the great robot came clanking hurriedly back into the cabin.

"Master, you're all right?" he cried.

"All right—yes," Curt clipped. "But there's work to do! You saw the signal-flare on Earth calling us?"

"We saw, lad," rasped the Brain, his lens-eyes staring at Curt, "but we were helpless. We couldn't answer the call—knowing that your captors would murder you, if we did."

(Turn page)



CURT NEWTON'S gray eyes were flaring.

"I'll settle the score later with those raiders—and with their leader who calls himself the Wrecker. But right now, we've got to contact the President. That call meant an emergency!"

In a few minutes, as the *Comet* sped out of the perilous solar neighborhood, Curt had got through a televisor call to Earth, to President James Carthew of the System Government.

Carthew's fine, aging face was haggard and pale as he looked out of the televisor screen at Curt.

"Captain Future—thank God!" he cried. "I've been almost frantic, since you failed to answer the summons. Why—"

"I'll explain later why I couldn't answer," Curt said quickly. "Right now I want to know why you called me. What's wrong? Is it something to do with gravium?"

"How could you know?" faltered Carthew. "Yes, that's it. Captain Future, at exactly ten o'clock solar time, an unknown organization struck and destroyed the gravium mines on Mercury, on Mars and on Saturn. They're utterly wrecked!"

"What about the mines on Uranus' moon and on Neptune?" Curt asked.

"They've not been harmed yet, but we're afraid they too will be attacked," Carthew replied. "I've had calls from the president of the Uranian Gravium Company, Zuvalo, and from Julius Gunn, of the Neptunian Company. They fear an onslaught also!"

"Do the heads of the Mercurian and Martian and Saturnian gravium companies have any idea as to the identity of the wreckers?" Curt asked.

"No, they say they haven't," was the President's answer. "The officials of all five companies have been deluging me with televisor calls, asking me to do something. That's why I called you."

Carthew continued haggardly, "Captain Future, this mysterious attack on the gravium supply must be stopped! You know what it means if the Uranian and Neptunian gravium mines are destroyed—no more gravitation-equalizers can be made, interplanetary travel and commerce will be strangled, all the System's life will fast wither—"

"I know, and that must be prevented," Curt Newton clipped. "But we'll have to work fast. First, I want to consult as quickly as possible with the heads of the five gravium companies."

"Shall I call them by televisor to meet you here on Earth?"

"No, I want to meet them secretly," Captain Future answered. "The Wrecker behind this plot will now think that I'm dead, killed by the solar heat. I want him to keep on thinking



that—it will put him off his guard. So tell the gravium magnates to meet me at a secret rendezvous in space, in the asteroidal zone, at position 39.5 outward, 18 degrees countersunwise, 0.2 below ecliptic plane. I'll be there on the 22nd, at noon solar time."

"I'll televise the gravium officials to be there," Carthew exclaimed, "and to keep the whole meeting an utter secret."

Captain Future snickered off the televisor and turned to his three comrades.

"Get started for that space-position at once, Grag," Curt ordered. "And save that space-suit I stole from my captors' ship. It may give us a clue as to where that ship of the Wrecker came from."

"A clue in the space-suit? How?" Otho asked.

"The air in that suit's tank was pumped in at whatever world that ship came from," Curt pointed out. "We can analyze that air and find out just what world's atmosphere it contains."

Then he looked at the Brain. "This thing is serious, Simon."

"Aye, lad—deadly serious," rasped the Brain. "Carthew is right—we've got to keep the gravium supply from destruction, or interplanetary civilization just can't survive."

"We'll do it," Captain Future said, his tanned face determined. "The Wrecker dared to challenge us first—we're going to answer that challenge!"

CHAPTER IV

Conference in Space

CURT NEWTON and the Brain, working intently on the space-suit atmosphere clue, listened to their televisor as the *Comet* hurtled out through the solar spaces beyond Mars' orbit.

An Earth news-caster's taut voice reached their ears.

"Grave situation caused by the mysterious disasters to the Mercurian, Martian and Saturnian gravium mines," he was saying. "Panic is becoming evident as the public fears similar disasters to the Uranus and Neptune mines, which would shut off the gravium supply completely.

"This panic is rapidly paralyzing space-traffic! Space-sailors of many ships are refusing to leave their native worlds, for fear their equalizers wear out on the voyage and new ones prove unobtainable. Shipping lines have had to cancel many sailings. And this is having disastrous effects already upon the life of every world in the System.

"The grain-boats from Jupiter haven't sailed, and most worlds face a bad grain-shortage. Meat shipments from the Saturn ranches are dwindling. Sea-food consignments from Neptune have dropped to a trickle. Worse still, industries which depend on metals and materials from other worlds are having to shut down. All interplanetary colonization projects are canceled, from lack of equalizers. Unemployment is mounting, prices skyrocketing, ruin threatening, on every world!

"People fear a complete collapse of interplanetary traffic. If the remaining gravium sources are destroyed and no more equalizers can be made, we'll be thrown back into the dark ages before space-travel began—the ages when each world was completely isolated. Progress will be set back by centuries!"

Captain Future had been listening, his work with the spectroscope on the atmosphere-clue temporarily forgotten. Now his bronzed face was sober as he shut off the televisor.

"That danger is real, Simon," he mut-

tered. "Danger of the collapse of the interplanetary civilization that has taken so many decades to build. No wonder people are in panic!"

"Aye, lad," rasped the Brain, his lens-eyes brooding. "But who would want such a collapse to occur? What can be the motive of this Wrecker whose organization is striking at the gravium sources?"

"We've got to find that out," Curt declared determinedly. "This air-sample from the space-suit may be a lead—"

Captain Future had put into the chamber of a comparator-spectroscope a sample of the air from the space-suit from the Wrecker ship. Now he touched a button. Electric discharges swiftly heated the sample of air. He peered through the instrument, checking the elements shown in its spectrum.

"Nitrogen and oxygen as usual," he muttered, "but no traces of argon or krypton. Small traces of radon and xenon—"

"Sounds like the atmosphere of Uranus' fourth moon," observed the Brain, watching keenly.

In this mid-ship cabin laboratory was crowded the matchless scientific equipment of the wizard of science and his Futuremen. A cabinet held exhaustive files of star and planet spectra. There were racks of rolled maps of the planets, moons and many of the asteroids—maps which showed hidden lands and seas that only Captain Future and the Futuremen had ever visited.

BESIDES the compact chemical and physical apparatus, there was a superb surgical outfit; there were mysterious psycho-scientific instruments; a philological file containing spoken records of scores of planetary languages; and an exhaustive scientific reference library whose countless books and monographs were all on microfilm.

Curt took a thin vial from a cabinet that held atmosphere-samples of all the System's worlds and moons in scores of containers. He put a sample of the air from this vial into the view-chamber.

"I'll check with this atmosphere

sample from Oberon, Uranus' fourth moon, to make sure," he said. "But unless I'm way off my orbit, it's the same."

A moment later, Captain Future looked up.

"It checks," he said tersely. "The air in that space-suit is from Oberon. Which means the Wrecker's ship that captured me came originally from Oberon."

"Then maybe the Wrecker's base is on that moon of Uranus?" Simon Wright suggested.

Curt scratched his red head, and stared with thoughtful gray eyes at the starry abysses outside the windows.

"There's a gravium mine on Oberon, remember," he reminded. "It's operated by the Uranian Gravium Company, one of the five companies. Wonder if that has any connection with this clue?"

He got to his feet.

"Well, we'll look into it later. We're nearing the asteroidal zone now."

Captain Future went forward into the transparent-walled control-room. The automatic pilot was maintaining the *Comet* on its course, while Grag and Otho sat playing "compound chess."

"Compound chess" was a semi-scientific game Curt had devised. There was a board of a thousand squares, and each player had ninety-odd pieces representing the different elements. The idea was to move the element-pieces onto squares occupied by the opponent's elements, so as to form known scientific compounds. Whoever formed the most compounds, won the game.

Otho was fidgeting restlessly, glowering at big Grag who sat like a metal statue studying the board with his gleaming photoelectric eyes, while Eek gnawed playfully at his impervious metal arm.

"Well, go ahead and move!" Otho finally exploded. "You know you're beaten—my next move will win the last compound."

"I'll move when I'm ready," Grag boomed calmly.

Finally Grag reached his metal hand and moved his "radium" piece far across the board to the square of Otho's "chlorine!"

"Radium chloride—that's the last

compound and it's mine," the robot boomed triumphantly. "I win the game."

"Better luck next time, Otho," chuckled Curt.

"He always wins!" Otho said disgustedly. "I'm through playing him—how can a man beat a machine?"

"Take control and pilot straight to the rendezvous, Grag," Captain Future ordered. "We're nearing the asteroid zone."

The *Comet* rushed on through the void. Far ahead in the abyss swam the brilliant white speck of Jupiter, and the fainter green sparks of Uranus and Neptune.

Close ahead stretched the great belt of cloudy specks that was the wilderness of thousands of asteroids and meteor-swarms which whirl between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Most interplanetary shipping avoided this dangerous zone. That was one reason why Captain Future had chosen it for the secret rendezvous.

The robot steered expertly through the maze of meteor-swarms and booming planetoids. Finally they glimpsed ahead a cluster of five small, swift-lined space-yachts, floating together not far from the edge of a great meteor-swarm.

"The gravium magnates are here," Curt commented. "Space-suit on, Otho—you and Simon and I will go over to them. Grag, you'd better stick around the *Comet*."

"While I'm waiting, can I try to find some heavy metals over in those meteors?" Grag asked, pointing toward the nearby drifting swarm. "I want some for Eek—he's hungry."

"The pest is always hungry," growled Otho.

"Go ahead, Grag—but don't go far," Curt said.

CAPTAIN FUTURE led the way out of the airlock. He and Otho in space-suits, the android carefully carrying the Brain's case, they leaped out from the *Comet's* side toward the five space-yachts.

Despite the grave urgency of their mission, Curt felt a thrill of elation as he and Otho and the Brain shot together across the narrow gulf of empty space. It was good to be out in star-



Grag seized the deadly DRIDUR, grappled with it (Chapter V)

decked space again, after the long weeks of quiet research on the moon.

One of the five small yachts shone with light. The three comrades entered its airlock, and a moment later were inside. In this space-yacht, besides a crew of three hardy Earthmen space-sailors, were six men who came forward with startled exclamations as Captain Future and his companions appeared.

"Captain Future?" said one, extending his hand. "Glad you're here. I've heard a lot of your abilities. Hope it's all true. I'm Julius Gunn, president of the Neptunian Gravium Company."

Julius Gunn was a middle-aged Earthman who looked as gray and hard and unyielding as a block of granite. His square, stony face, cold eyes and clipped speech gave the impression of a domineering, aggressive capitalist accustomed to power.

"You all kept this conference with me absolutely secret?" Curt Newton asked him keenly.

Gunn nodded. "All of us. Each of us came in his own space-yacht—didn't even tell our sailors where we were going."

Then the magnate jerked a thumb toward the younger man beside him. "Carson Brand, my company superintendent. Brought him along. Thought you ought to hear what he has to tell."

Carson Brand was a wiry Earthman engineer of thirty with stiff tow hair, bright blue eyes, a brown, battered, pleasant face.

"Say, this is an honor, Captain Future," the superintendent said eagerly, looking respectfully at the two Futuremen.

Julius Gunn waved a powerful hand toward the other four men, naming them one by one.

"Zuvalo, head of the Uranian Gravium Company; Quarus Qull of the Saturnian company; Orr Libro of Mars; and Kerk El of Mercury. All competitors of mine, of course. But competition doesn't count at a time like this. Emergency's too grave for that. This destruction of gravium mines must be stopped. At once!"

Curt asked a pointblank question.

"Have any of you any idea as to the identity of the wrecker? Who is he

and what's his motive?"

"I'm sure I can't guess," clipped Julius Gunn. "Must be an irresponsible madman."

Kerk El, the Mercurian, laughed mirthlessly.

"You would say that, of course, Julius."

Gunn turned his cold gaze challengingly on the Mercurian. Curt Newton also looked sharply at Kerk El.

The Mercurian was the youngest of the five magnates. Lithe and swarthy of skin, with tawny eyes, bristling hair and long, curved, talonlike fingers, he was a typical representative of the catlike race whose cities dot the Twilight Zone of the inmost planet.

"What do you mean by that?" Captain Future asked.

Kerk El's tawny eyes flashed.

"I mean that it's damned strange that only the gravium mines of Quarus Qull and Orr Libro and myself were destroyed. How do we know that Gunn and Zuvalo didn't do it, to get a monopoly on gravium?"

Julius Gunn stared contemptuously at the accusing Martian. "You're out of your head, Kerk El. Feeling bad about losing your mine. So you accuse Zuvalo and me of doing it. Sheer nonsense."

"Of course it's nonsense," put in Orr Libro, the Martian magnate, smoothly. "We didn't come here to quarrel among ourselves but to get Captain Future's help in this thing."

ORR LIBRO was a middle-aged Martian dandy, his big-chested, stilt-limbed body attired in brilliant synthesilks, his red, hairless head and face smoothly groomed, his voice a soft purr.

"My own company's mine on Mars is ruined, too," he said, "but that's no reason to accuse our friends here of doing it."

"Our friends?" echoed Quarus Qull, the Saturnian, in his harsh voice. He laughed gratingly. "Since when were Gunn and Zuvalo anybody's friends? Both would cut anyone's throat for profit."

The Saturnian was glaring suspiciously. Blue-skinned like all his race, with pale eyes squinting from a bony

face, he had the thin, rangy body and slightly bowed legs customary among the people of the planet of great plains and horsemen.

Gunn snorted contemptuously at the charge.

"You've always been jealous of the Neptunian Company's success. All of you. That's why you make these wild accusations."

"You deny the accusations, then?" Curt asked coolly.

"Deny then? Of course I deny them!" barked Gunn. "I had nothing to do with the mysterious disasters to their mines. In fact, I'm afraid my own mines on Neptune are menaced. That's why I took the trouble to come here."

"We're worried out on Neptune, Captain Future," the tow-haired Carson Brand said troubledly. "Mr. Gunn's three big submarine mines may be threatened. Mysterious accidents that have occurred lately have made us afraid of sabotage."

Curt shot a question at the Uranian magnate, Zuvalo. "I haven't heard you deny the charge of Kerk El and Quarus Qull."

Zuvalo smiled faintly. The Uranian was a fat, imperturbable, Buddhalike figure with a moon face, and the yellow skin and small black eyes of all his race.

"Such wild charges are not worth denying," Zuvalo murmured in his husky voice. "I've no desire to wreck other companies."

"Your own mine on Uranus' moon hasn't been harmed or threatened?" Curt Newton asked.

The Uranian shook his head. "No, I've been lucky."

Curt's eyes narrowed. He was thinking of the atmosphere-clue that had pointed to Uranus' fourth moon.

"There's only one thing to do, Captain Future," Julius Gunn was saying aggressively. "That's for you to help us protect our Neptunian gravium mines. They're the biggest gravium source. Neptune is rich in the metal, and our company has the only concession to mine it."

Orr Libro, the Martian, interrupted in his soft, purring voice.

"Your company *had* the only gravium concession on Neptune, my dear

Julius," he said. "But that is not so any longer."

Gunn stared at him. "What do you mean? Say, what's in your mind, man—don't palaver like all your race."

Orr Libro's drooping eyes flashed fire.

"My race had a mighty civilization on Mars when Earthmen were still half-apes! Twenty-six dynasties of Martian kings reigned in glory when—"

Then, as though his mask of polished courtesy had only momentarily slipped, Libro's red face smoothed. "But that is not important now. What is important is that the System Government has granted to the companies of Kerk El and Quarus Qull and myself concessions to develop new gravium mines on Neptune."

"What?" yelled Julius Gunn, thoroughly aroused. "You're lying. The Government gave us sole gravium concession on Neptune."

"It did," Orr Libro agreed, "but conditions have changed. It's vital now that the supply of gravium be increased. That's why our three companies are now permitted to mine on Neptune."

"You don't like that very well, do you, Julius?" mocked Kerk El, and the Saturnian magnate smiled grimly also.

"It's a damned outrage!" Gunn declared. "My company developed submarine mining in the Neptunian ocean. We did the pioneering and advance work. Now you three come sneaking in to cut in on us—"

GUNN stopped, his granite jaw shutting like a trap, his eyes narrowing.

"Now I see it!" he clipped. "You and Quarus Qull and Kerk El, or one of you, wrecked your *own* mines so that you would be able to coax a Neptunian gravium concession from the Government."

"Why would they want to destroy their own valuable mining properties?" Captain Future demanded bluntly of Gunn.

"Bah, their mines are no longer valuable," Julius Gunn replied. "Gravium nearly exhausted in all of them. Running without profit. They've all been

envious of my Neptunian concession."

Voices rose hotly in denial and counter-charges. Suddenly the televisor-set in the wall buzzed sharply. Carson Brand answered the call. The face of a worried-looking, gray Neptunian appeared in it.

"It's Gygo, one of our company officers on Neptune!" Julius Gunn exclaimed. "What is it, Gygo?"

The Neptunian in the televisor answered quickly.

"You asked me to call you in case of more trouble, sir. Well, we've had two accidents in Mine One and another in Mine Two today. Trouble with the tubeways and pumps, sir."

"More of the mysterious accidents that have been occurring out in our submarine mines, Captain Future!" Carson Brand exclaimed.

"Brand and I will return at once," Julius Gunn told the Neptunian crisply. He swung around to Curt Newton. "We've got to return to Neptune, Captain Future. Can't stay here listening to myself accused of crimes, while my own mines out there are having trouble!"

"And I, too, am worried about my mine on Oberon, and want to return to it," quickly put in the fat Uranian, Zuvalo.

Curt Newton considered. He hadn't learned much from the magnates—but he had learned something that pointed the same way as his atmosphere clue. He wanted to follow it up.

"Very well, gentlemen. You may all go. But I'll be seeing you all again, perhaps sooner than you think." Curt bade them farewell.

He was silent in thought as he and Otho and the Brain returned to the *Comet* Grag was still out meteor-mining, it seemed. Curt called him on the wave of his pocket-televisor. "Return, Grag."

"Coming, master," came the robot's booming answer from the instrument.

THE five space-yachts of the gravium magnates disappeared one by one in the direction of distant Uranus and Neptune.

"What do you make of it all, lad?" Simon asked.

"One thing stands out," Curt de-

clared. "The only gravium company which has had no trouble is—"

He stopped suddenly. He felt a queer chill. Then, with sudden insight, he glanced up through the window.

Two black space-cruisers, from one of which a long gunlike tube projected, were swooping down toward the *Comet*!

"The Wrecker's set an ambush here for us!" Curt yelled. "They're using that paralyzing-weapon to freeze me until they can finish us off—"

He sprang toward the control-room.

"Their paralyzer won't work *this* time!" he blazed. "I took care to put ray-proof pads over my spinal centers, on the way out here. Take the proton-gun, Otho!"

The two black ships of the wrecker, just overhead now, loosed from their atom-guns a hail of shining, deadly flares aimed at Curt's ship.

But Captain Future had slammed the cyclotron switch and yanked back the throttles. With a roar of rocket-tubes, the *Comet* leaped and avoided the deadly flares.

In an instant the two black attacking craft and the *Comet* were circling, looping, rolling in a mad dogfight through the heart of this dangerous asteroidal wilderness.

"We're leaving Grag behind!" cried Otho, from the breech of the big proton-gun to which he had leaped.

"We'll come back for him later. Try to get one of those ships before they box us!" Curt yelled to the android. As he piloted the tear-drop ship in the whirling, circling fight, Curt turned and shouted back to the Brain.

"Simon, this attack by the Wrecker ships means that the Wrecker knew I was still alive and knew that I'd be here at this time."

"But if the Wrecker knew about the secret rendezvous, he must be—" the Brain started to say, startled.

"The Wrecker must be one of the six men who just left here!" Curt finished. "They alone knew of the rendezvous!"

Locked in a death struggle, the *Comet* and the two black attackers plunged wildly on through the asteroidal wilderness.

CHAPTER V

Grag Becomes a God

GRAG the robot watched Captain Future, Otho and the Brain plunge across space to the waiting ships of the gravium magnates. Then Grag began preparations for exploring the nearby meteor-swarm in search of heavy metals.

"There ought to be lots of copper over in those meteors, Eek," the robot told his pet. "Maybe even gold or silver."

Eek's eyes gleamed hungrily. The little moon-pup could not hear Grag's words, but he got the thought behind them, for on the airless, soundless moon where Eek's species had evolved, telepathic hearing had developed.

Grag went out through the airlock. The robot did not put on any space-suit for he never had to breathe. Eek did not breathe either, and so the moon-pup could survive in airless space too.

Eek clung tightly with his claws to Grag's metal shoulder as the great robot leaped out from the *Comet* toward the swarm of meteors. Using the reactive kick of a tubular rocket-impeller, Grag shot toward the swarm.

Originally, Grag had caught and tamed the little moon-pup because he had thought that to have a pet made him seem more human. The robot yearned more than anything else to be thought human. Nothing could so enrage him as Otho's gibes about the unhumanness of his metal body.

Gragg had a slight inferiority complex in regard to his comrades, the other Futuremen. He never thought of Captain Future as anything but the adored master, of course—the helpless baby he had aided in rearing on the lonely moon, the boy whom he had taught strength and endurance, the brilliant man for whose slightest wish Grag would gladly have courted destruction.

For Simon Wright, Grag had a feeling of unconquerable awe. The vast, cold intellect of the Brain, and the fact that the Brain had been one of the two



Grag

who had created him, inspired in the robot a deep respect. And as for Otho, the swiftness and agility and more human appearance of the reckless, temperamental android had always inspired a secret envy in Grag.

But there was one being who thought that Grag was the pinnacle of creation, and that was Eek. The moon-pup had plenty of faults—he had a bad habit of stealing precious metals to eat, he was a terrible coward, his curiosity was forever getting him into trouble. But he was nevertheless single-mindedly devoted to the great robot, and satisfied Grag's wistful desire to be admired.

"There is a likely looking meteor, Eek," the robot boomed, his glowing photoelectric eyes peering ahead. "We shall see what we find there."

Grag had floated into the meteor swarm. On all sides could be seen great, jagged black meteors that floated and turned and ground together like flotsam of space.

The robot impelled himself toward one of the largest of the jagged masses. Landing on it, he put the moon-pup down.

Eek scrambled away across the pitted, jagged black rock surface of the

meteor. He stopped and began to dig furiously with his strong little paws.

"Let me do it, Eek," Grag boomed. "I can dig faster."

From a little locker in his metal torso the robot took a set of drills and chisels that he inserted in place of his detachable metal fingers. Then he began boring into the rock. Soon he unearthed a pocket of rich nickel ore. Eek at once devoured the ore, champing it between his chisel-like teeth.

"There's nothing better here than nickel and iron," Grag declared. "We will try another meteor."

HE leaped off the jagged mass with Eek, came to rest on another spinning meteor-mass. Again the two began digging. Suddenly from the pocket-televisor at Grag's side sounded the buzzing call-signal, followed by Captain Future's voice.

"Return, Grag."

"Coming, master," Grag answered hastily. He picked up Eek, who was munching a copper fragment. "Come, Eek—we must hurry!"

Grag started back out through the meteor-swarm toward the *Comet*, his rocket-impeller kicking him along through space. Then the robot, looking ahead, saw something that made him shout.

Two black space-cruisers were diving out of the upper void onto the *Comet*! Their atom-guns were spitting shining death-flares—but Grag saw the *Comet* whirl suddenly aside and avoid the flares. Then the tear-drop ship and the two attackers circled, looped and dived away, proton-beams and atom-flares crisscrossing. Locked in deadly struggle, the three ships receded.

"Wait, master—I am coming!" Grag yelled vainly, urging forward with all the power of the rocket-impeller.

But the *Comet* and its two antagonists were already disappearing in the asteroidal wilderness. Struggling like hawks of the void, they passed from sight.

"We must follow, Eek!" Grag cried. "Master will need us!"

And, kicked forward by repeated blasts of his impeller, the big robot followed through space in the direction

in which the three ships had disappeared.

Eek, clinging to Grag's shoulder, peered with bright, scared eyes. Eek knew there was fighting, and the moon-pup wanted no part of it. He believed in peace at any price.

But Grag's strongest emotion had been aroused—his devotion to Captain Future. On and on through the jungle of meteor-swarms and booming planetoids he went, like a great metal projectile propelled through the void by his impeller's blasts.

A misty white speck loomed ahead. It grew in size at appalling speed, into a small, tailless comet hurtling toward them. Eek's teeth chattered in panic as the glowing coma flared before them.

Grag hastily swerved out of the way. The small comet passed, its coma's electric force tingling through them. And still Grag kept on. He had no sense of time, no thought of peril. Now there was no sign of the *Comet* and the other two ships. Fear came to the robot. Had the two attackers destroyed the ship of the Futuremen and then sped away?

He tried calling the *Comet* on his pocket-televisor. But it was only good for short distances, and he got no answer.

Abruptly, Grag's rocket-impeller went dead, its charge exhausted. And now the robot floated helplessly in space, drifting powerlessly through the great zone of space-debris and asteroids.

"Don't be afraid, Eek," he reassured his panicky pet. "Master will come back and find us."

Grag became aware that he was floating slowly toward a small green asteroid in the distance. It was a little world of no more than a hundred miles diameter, he estimated, and he knew it had atmosphere because of the faint atmospheric halo around it.

Faster and faster the robot and Eek floated toward that green little world. He saw now that it was covered with forests of tall reeds, green except for areas of brown, dead reeds. Pulled by the little planet's gravitation, he fell toward it, and presently crashed down through the air to its surface.

The shock shook Grag up, but did

him no real harm. This planetoid's gravitational pull was so weak, and his metal body was so massive, that he felt quite uninjured. The pocket-televisor at his side was smashed, however. Eek was unhurt.

GRAG got to his feet. His gravitation-equalizer made him the same weight as ever, even on this small world. He found that he had fallen onto a grassy clearing in the towering reeds. Nearby was a huddled village of wicker-huts. And closer to him, staring in awe at him, stood a horde of humans.

By the brilliant starlight that is the day of the asteroidal zone, Grag perceived that these people were really sub-men. They were small, timid, ignorant savages with brown bodies clad in skin tunics, and unintelligent, childlike faces.

"There are asteroidans on this world, Eek," Grag boomed, staring at the sub-men.

"Asteroidans" was the name given to the strange humanlike race who inhabited many of the countless planetoids of the zone, and most of whom were of a primitive type of people. They had apparently spread from one asteroid to another by somehow bridging the gap from world to world when the swarming asteroids came close together. They all had the same language.

And Grag, as he spoke to the scared moon-pup, saw the Asteroidans recoil in panic from the sound of his voice.

"It speaks! It is alive!" went up panicky shouts.

Grag understood them, for he knew something of the Asteroidan tongue. And their words nettled the robot.

"Of course I am alive!" he boomed angrily. "Why should you think otherwise?"

The appearance of the angry robot, towering like a massive metal statue, his great arm raised, his photoelectric eyes gleaming, and the weird little moon-pup clinging to his shoulder, was an alarming spectacle in the brilliant starlight.

The Asteroidans shrank back, still more terrified.

Grag grunted. "These people are not intelligent, Eek. Doubting that I'm

alive! And why are they so terrified of me?"

The terror of the Asteroidans had suddenly increased. They were pointing beyond Grag, and screaming "*A dridur! A dridur!*"

Puzzled, Grag turned. The robot stiffened. Out of the brown, dead reeds behind him an incredible monster was coming. It was myriopodal, with a black body like that of a gigantic python supported on dozens of short, powerful legs. Its head was a nightmare of coldly blazing faceted eyes, wide jaws, and cruel fangs.

The creature had apparently been about to raid the village for prey. That the Asteroidans feared the monster above all else was evident from the way in which they were flying for shelter.

But the *dridur* had noticed that Grag did not flee. The creature turned toward him, poised a moment, then shot toward him with appalling speed, a charge of incredible swiftness. Grag tossed Eek aside and reached forward his great metal arms. Next moment, the *dridur* struck him and knocked him over. But he had gripped the monster, was grappling with it.

THE *dridur*'s fangs clashed furiously on Grag's metal arms and legs. But not even those teeth could make impression on the impervious metal of the robot's body. The creature at once coiled its many-legged body around Grag, to crush him.

But Grag had got a grip on the monster's neck, and had not let go. Now the robot squeeze'd tighter and tighter. The myriopodal monster's coiled body threshed in ferocity and agony.

Weird battle of the great robot and the nightmare *dridur*, beneath the brilliant stars of the asteroidal sky! A battle that had for witnesses only the panicky asteroidans peeping from their huts, and the scared moon-pup cowering in the reeds.

Grag's photoelectric eyes blazed, his hands made a wrenching movement of awful power. The *dridur*'s snaky neck snapped. The creature went limp, its coils sliding to the ground. The robot stood still, his metal body scratched, his eyes blazing. And now the Asteroidans rushed joyfully from the huts.

"He has slain a *dridur*!" they cried incredulously. "He has slain the monster that cannot be killed!"

Eek, seeing the battle over, crept out of the dry reeds, cautiously eyed the dead monster, then bit it savagely. Then Eek looked up as though to say, "Well, we two certainly finished that thing!"

"He is a god—a metal god who came to us from the sky to protect us from the *dridurs*!" the Asteroidan chief shouted.

"Homage to the god from the sky!" rose the cry.

Grag stalked into the village, followed by the joyously shouting Asteroidans. The big robot sat down on a rock and then spoke to the Asteroidans in their own language.

"Bring copper and silver and gold. We are hungry."

"The god eats metal!" whispered the sub-men awedly.

They hastily brought silver ingots, nuggets of raw gold, scraps of copper that they had collected for weapons and ornaments.

Eek began devouring the gold and silver with gusto. Grag, who felt the need of renewing the atomic energy which activated his own body, opened a hinged plate in his metal torso and thrust a mass of copper into the receptacle of his vital atomic-power mechanism.

The awe-struck people watched Eek greedily devouring all the gold and silver. Grag gave orders to bring more. His obsequious worshippers hastily obeyed.

Then the Asteroidans, gathered in the dim light, began a long chant humming the prowess of their new god from the sky. Each time the chant rose, the gathered throng bowed low toward the great metal robot sitting facing them, beneath the eternally brilliant stars.

Grag was enjoying his godship. But the great robot was deeply troubled by thought of Captain Future. How was he to rejoin his master? He had no way of leaving this little world now. And even if Curt came searching for him, he couldn't call the *Comet* on a broken television. He was marooned, hopelessly!

CHAPTER VI

Thunder Moon

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S superiority as a space pilot was unmatched in the whole System. He utilized all his skill now in the struggle with the two black ships that had attacked the *Comet*.

Diving, zooming, corkscrewing through space in a series of dizzy maneuvers, Curt fought to evade the deadly atomic flares that the two enemy ships continued to loose upon him.

Curt Newton had a fighting grin on his tanned, handsome face, and his gray eyes were blazing as his strong hands shifted the brass control-throttles with lightning-swift movements. Even in this moment of deadly danger, fighting against outnumbering enemies, his adventure-loving soul savored the thrill of it.

And it was thrilling, this death-combat through the spinning meteor-swarms and booming planetoids of the zone—this giddy whirl and swoop and rush out here in space beneath the eyes of the solemn stars!

"They're going to box us!" Otho yelled from the breach of his proton-gun. "They're closing in—"

The two enemy ships were seeking to catch the *Comet* in a cross-fire of atom flares that would soon destroy it.

"Hold on, Otho!" Curt shouted back. "Here's where we take the bumps—stand ready to gun that outward ship!"

Captain Future's keen eyes had described a big meteor-swarm ahead, in the path of the running fight, and his quick brain had instantly devised a daring and desperate plan.

As the two black attackers came closer, Curt Newton's right hand jerked down a burnished red lever in the control panel, while his left hand opened a throttle suddenly wide.

The *Comet* suddenly spouted a tremendous flood of glowing ions from its rocket-tubes as the red lever was pulled—a shining cloud that enveloped the tear-drop ship and swept back in a

long, flaring tail. It was as though the ship had abruptly become a real comet! It was Captain Future's method of camouflaging his craft.

Simultaneously, the ship swerved sunward and bore directly on the attacker on that side. The spectacle of the flaring, glowing *Comet* coming at them was too much for the men in that ship. Their pilot swerved his craft instinctively away.

That swerve was fatal. It took the black ship right into the meteor-swarm that they were coasting. In a moment, before they could escape from the swarm, the attacking craft had crashed head-on into a veritable hell-nest of meteors.

"That got them!" Otho yelled tri-



The COMET drove level beside Curt
(Chapter IV)

umphantly. "Now, the other one, chief—"

Captain Future's clever maneuver had disposed of one attacker. He had already turned the *Comet* in a vicious swoop toward the remaining enemy.

"Now's your chance, Otho!" he shouted.

Until now, Otho had been unable to use the proton-guns effectively upon the two antagonists on different sides. But now the situation was changed,

with the reduction of the enemy by half.

As the flaring *Comet* looped over and leaped at the remaining enemy, Otho was already bringing the proton-guns to bear. Through the hail of atom-flares from the enemy there lanced the pale, deadly proton beams.

They caught the surprised antagonist craft in the tail, wrecking its rocket-tubes. The speeding, disabled ship reeled off its course, toward a rushing, oncoming planetoid. Next moment, the craft hit the planetoid and was a fusing, flaring mass.

"Got her!" Otho hissed in blood-thirsty delight.

"The devil—I wanted to disable that ship and capture and question the men in her," Curt exclaimed ruefully.

At that moment the televisior behind Curt Newton broke into a frantic buzzing—an emergency call on all wave-lengths.

Curt snapped on the instrument. In the screen appeared the frantic face of Kerk El, the Mercurian gravium magnate.

"Calling Captain Future and all Planet Police ships!" cried the Mercurian wildly. "We're being attacked by a black outlaw craft—position 42, 19.6, and 0.4 below!"

"Captain Future coming, Kerk El!" yelled Curt. He swiftly swept the *Comet* sharply around and sent it screaming outward from the asteroidal zone.

"What the devil—is all space alive with the Wrecker's ships?" gasped Otho. "Two that attacked us, and now one that's attacking Kerk El—"

The *Comet* flashed out from the asteroid zone in the general direction of Uranus and Neptune. In only a brief time they sighted the space-yacht of Kerk El. It was floating aimlessly in the void, and its hull had been riddled in scores of places by atom-flares.

"Too late!" swore Otho. "And the ship that did this got away!"

Curt turned to the Brain.

"Simon, will you and Otho sweep space with the electroscope and see if you can pick up the trail of the ship that did this?"

Captain Future was hurriedly don-

ning his space-suit. A moment later he was aboard the wrecked space-yacht. Inside it, one look was enough. Kerk El and his three-man crew were all dead. They had died of the cold of space even as they were trying to put on their space-suits.

Sorrowfully, Curt returned to the *Comet*. The Brain was searching space in all directions with the tube of the electroscope, a delicate instrument that could detect the recent course of any space ship by the trailing ions of its rocket-discharge.

"If Simon can pick up the trail, we'll split space after them till we catch them and blast them!" Otho exclaimed.

"First, we've got to go back into the asteroidal zone and pick up Grag," Captain Future reminded him.

"Devils of space," Otho swore, "I forgot about Grag roosting in that meteor-swarm. It'll spoil our chance to overtake that ship!"

"Got the trail, lad!" rasped the Brain. "The ship that wrecked Kerk El's yacht headed straight toward Uranus from here."

"Uranus, eh?" Curt Newton said, frowning. "Then we're going there after it, soon as we pick up Grag. I want to investigate Zuvalo's gravium outfit on Uranus' moon, Oberon."

"You think maybe Zuvalo's the Wrecker?" Otho asked.

Curt shrugged. "We know the Wrecker is one of the six gravium officials who met us in that secret conference. Only they knew we'd be there, only one of them could have planned the ambush to get us. And now that Kerk El is dead, we have five suspects."

Captain Future opened the throttles and sent the *Comet* streaking back into the asteroidal zone like a new, true comet.

"We'll pick up Grag and then hit the trail for Uranus with all rockets open!"

But when they returned to the meteor-swarm where Grag had been left, there was no sign of Grag, nor did the robot answer their televisior calls.

"Something's happened to Grag!" Curt exclaimed, his face anxious.

"Perhaps he tried to follow us through the zone when he saw us fighting those two ships," the Brain suggested.

"We'll cruise in that direction," Curt said worriedly.

But as the shining *Comet* cruised on through the jungle of asteroids and meteors, no answer came to their calls. Then Otho pointed to a small green asteroid on their sunward side. A red, winking spark of light flared on it.

"That might be a signal, chief!" the android said.

"It can't be Grag," rasped the Brain. "He'd simply call us on his pocket-televisor—and he hasn't called."

"We'll investigate anyway," Curt decided.

He swept the *Comet* in toward the asteroid in a flaring rush. They ripped down through the thin atmosphere and saw now that the red flare came from a great section of burning dry reeds.

"There's a little village of some kind—and there's Grag!" Otho yelled, hopping delightedly.

"So you're glad to see the old boy after all?" Captain Future grinned, himself relieved.

OTHO checked his elation.

"Aw, I don't care what happens to that walking machine-shop—I just want to get going to Uranus."

They landed in the smoky red glare of the burning reeds, by a hut-village whose sub-human brown people stared in fear. Grag came stalking quickly to them, Eek clinging to his shoulder.

"Master, I was afraid you wouldn't come!" boomed the robot, his photo-electric eyes shining. "I saw the *Comet* flaring through the sky and recognized it, but my televisor was broken and I couldn't call. So I had some of my people here fire the reeds as a signal."

"Your people? What do you mean?" Otho demanded.

"These people recognize my true worth, Otho," Grag answered loftily. "They think I am a god from the sky."

"Why, the space-struck idiots—" Otho exploded.

The Asteroidans were timidly crowding around Grag now, staring at Curt and the two Futuremen. The chief spoke to Grag.

"Are these your servants, god from the sky?" the Asteroidan tribal leader wonderingly asked the robot.

"Me, Grag's servant?" Otho howled.

"They are my friends," Grag boomed to the chief, "and I am going back with them to the sky."

A wail went up from the primitive Asteroidans. "But you must not leave us!"

"I will return sometime," Grag declared. "Farewell!"

As the *Comet* screamed up from the little world, Curt looked back and saw the disconsolate sub-men staring after them.

"I hate to leave there, in a way," Grag boomed thoughtfully. "They were good people. They gave Eek and me plenty to eat."

Curt sent the *Comet* flying out of the asteroidal zone, the sun at their backs, the faint green sparks of Uranus and more distant Neptune beacons ahead.

"We're rocketing for Uranus, Grag," Curt told the robot, and explained briefly what had occurred.

"And if we trail down the Wrecker's ship there, you'll see some fireworks!" Otho added.

Hour followed hour as the tear-drop ship ate up the millions of miles, hurtling toward the green disc of Uranus, the seventh planet.

Finally, Uranus bulked as a great green sphere filling half the starry firmament. Around it moved its four moons, Ariel, Umbriel, Titania and Oberon. Unique in the System, the four satellites circled Uranus in a plane perpendicular to the ecliptic.

Curt and the Futuremen knew Uranus well enough. The planet was called the "mountain world" because of its enormous, sky-storming ranges of mighty peaks, and vast, mysterious caverns. But Captain Future had no intentions of visiting Uranus itself. His objective was Oberon, the outermost moon, for on Oberon were the mines of Zuvalo's gravium company.

"Head around to the night side of Oberon, Grag," he directed. "According to my maps, the gravium mine is there."

Grag, who held the controls, obeyed. The ship's comet-camouflage now cut off, he shot the craft around to the dark side of Oberon, also known as Thunder Moon because of its many active volcanoes.

Thunder Moon! One of the most

awesome and dangerous of all the worlds in the System. Curt Newton had good reason to remember it, for on this hazardous sphere had been staged one of the most dramatic episodes of his great struggle with the villainous Lords of Power.

Thunder Moon—a rugged wilderness of mountains, valleys and gorges, illuminated now by the ghostly green radiance of the huge planet that hung in the heavens overhead, and also by the ominous red flare of countless volcano craters that seethed and smoked at innumerable places.

WILD and forbidding indeed was this unearthly moon, whose core was a mass of molten lava that was forever bursting up through the craters in violent eruption.

"Only the lure of gravium would ever induce men to stay long on this moon," muttered the Brain, staring downward.

"There're the lights of the gravium mine—down in the valley beyond that big volcano!" Otho exclaimed.

Captain Future had seen. In a long, narrow valley at whose head a huge black volcano smoked, were clustered lights.

"That should be the office building at the side of the valley," Curt commented keenly. "Land there."

Presently the *Comet* came to a landing in the semi-darkness near the metal office structure.

Curt turned to the Brain.

"Simon, will you use the electroscopes and see if you can detect the rocket-trail of any ships that have landed here recently? We know the Wrecker ship that got Kerk El came on to Uranus, and it may have landed here on Oberon."

"I'll see what I can learn, lad," Simon promised.

"Grag, stay here and help Simon with the instruments," Curt ordered the robot. "Come along, Otho."

He and the android emerged from the ship into the darkness. The gravitation equalizers had already automatically compensated for the changed gravity.

The spectral green light of huge Uranus overhead illuminated the deep, narrow valley in which Curt and Otho

stood. The semi-dormant volcano at the head of the valley flung a sullen red glare that clashed weirdly with the viridescent light.

The air was sulfurous, pungent to the nostrils. And there was a constant, dim tremor of the rocky ground beneath them, a ceaseless faraway muttering of thunder as of distant storm.

"I don't like this cursed moon any more than Grag does," declared Otho. "Always feel that when I'm here, I'm walking on thin ice over the mouth of hell."

Curt nodded agreement.

"Eruptions are pretty common here. Zuvalo has lots of courage to go in for mining here."

Farther up the valley, under suspended lights, yellow Uranian laborers were excavating gravium ores from open workings. But Captain Future and Otho made toward the offices.

Curt and the lithe android strode into the offices. There was only one man in the lighted rooms—Zuvalo, the gravium magnate. The fat, moon-faced yellow Uranian looked up amazedly at them.

"Surprised to see us, huh?" hissed Otho suspiciously. "Maybe you thought we were all as dead as Kerk El, by now."

"Kerk El—dead?" exclaimed Zuvalo startledly.

"Shut up, Otho," Curt Newton ordered. Then his gray eyes bored the Uranian's moonlike face. "Yes, Kerk El's yacht was attacked by one of the Wrecker's ships. They got him, all right."

"Poor Kerk El," murmured the fat Uranian. "Im sorry to hear about his murder."

"How do you account for the fact the Wrecker hasn't bothered your gravium mine here?" Curt demanded.

Zuvalo shrugged.

"This mine isn't large. There wouldn't be much reason for the Wrecker to bother it." Then he added, "I trust that the fact we've escaped here doesn't make you think I have any connection with the Wrecker?"

"The Wrecker is connected with Oberon somehow," rasped Captain Future. He told of the atmosphere-clue. "That shows that one of the Wrecker's

ships, at least, came from this moon."

The Uranian's small eyes narrowed.

"Describe that ship for me, please."

Curt did so. And Zuvalo looked relieved.

"I thought so!" he said. "Your atmosphere clue doesn't mean anything, Captain Future."

"Why not?" Curt demanded.

ZUVALO explained. "The ship you describe was formerly one of the gravium ships, used to transport the metal from the various planetary gravium mines to the equalizer factories on Earth. They're specially swift ships, and they have always called at Neptune, at Oberon here, and at Saturn, Mars and Mercury to pick up gravium.

"In the last few months," the Uranian continued, "four of those gravium ships disappeared strangely in space. The ship you describe as being one of the Wrecker's craft now is one of those four vanished gravium ships! Not long before it disappeared it had taken on air here on Oberon, when it stopped here, which is why you found Oberon air in that space-suit.

"Therefore, it now seems certain that the Wrecker's men stole those four gravium ships somehow, and are using them," Zuvalo concluded. "No doubt, they chose them because they were so swift, and would make ideal outlaw craft."

"Then our atmosphere-clue isn't a lead to Oberon, after all?" Otho exclaimed dismayedly.

Captain Future's lips tightened. "I don't know. Zuvalo may be lying," he clipped. "I'm going to search this moon, and search it well. First the mine, the ship-decks, everything in this valley, and then—"

At that moment came a clanking, pounding sound. Grag, the robot, came running into the office.

"Master, Simon says he has located the trail of a ship that is circling in fast toward Oberon!" the robot exclaimed.

Curt jumped.

"We'll go—what was *that*?"

Boom! Boom! With deafening sound came the two heavy detonations. The windows of the office rattled wildly. Captain Future sprang to the door. He emerged into the greenish



The Wrecker

dark, then uttered a cry.

"Look at that volcano!"

The huge volcano that towered at the head of the narrow valley was now throwing a wild red glare against the heavens.

"There's a ship up there!" Otho yelled. "See—"

Curt Newton had already seen. Over the volcano crater hung a black space ship. Curt divined its purpose instantly.

"That's one of the Wrecker's ships!" he cried. "It's dropping atomic bombs into the crater to stir it into eruptions!"

"Gods of Uranus—look!" shouted Zuvalo wildly.

Even as they had glimpsed the Wrecker ship, it had dropped a black object that struck the crater-wall on the side nearest the valley. It was an atomic bomb that exploded with a terrific white flash. It blew out part of the crater-rim.

And out of the broken crater came boiling the red hell-fires of lava that had been stirred up by the previous bombs—a fiery, molten flood that rolled down the volcano-side into the valley of the gravium mine!

"Get your miners out of the valley!" Captain Future yelled to the Uranian magnate. "That lava is going to cover everything here!"

Zuvalo seemed stunned.

"No!" the fat Uranian gasped. "I can't desert my mine—it's taken years to develop it—"

In the ghastly light, the Uranian's fat face was sagging and frozen, like a grotesque mask of unbelieving horror.

A Uranian mine-foreman came running terrifiedly up to them. The man's eyes were distended with terror, as he raced against the fiery flood pouring into the valley.

"What are we going to do?" he yelled to Zuvalo.

THE fat magnate seemed too stunned to answer. But Captain Future's whiplash voice answered the foreman.

"Get the men out of the valley at once!" Curt cried. "I'll try to hold back the lava until they've all escaped!"

"You can't hold back that fire-flood—nobody can!" shouted the fear-crazed foreman. "We're all doomed—"

"Do as I say!" Curt flashed, pushing the man away.

Then, with Otho, he raced toward the *Comet*. Curt sprang toward the controls, sent the little tear-drop ship zooming up above the valley.

Zuvalo's doomed valley was now an appalling sight. The great flood of glowing red lava was still pouring into the valley down from the broken crater. The Uranian laborers in the gravium workings were fleeing wildly to escape.

"There goes the Wrecker's ship!" yelled Otho, pointing fiercely at a fleeing black ship. "We can catch them this time and gun them down!"

"No time to chase them now!" Captain Future cried. "Unless we hold back that lava a little, not a man in the valley will escape. Cut the banks with our proton-beams to make a temporary dike!"

The *Comet* streaked halfway up the valley toward the volcano. Curt kept the little ship hanging, while Otho swept its powerful proton-beams to slice at the steep, overhanging sides of the narrow valley. Masses of soil and rock fell, dislodged by the beams, and formed an irregular dam or dike across the valley.

He was not a moment too soon! The hissing, blazing flood of lava pouring

down the valley reached that dike a moment later. Balked for the moment, the molten flood stopped, rapidly rising higher.

"Cut down more of the sides—make the dike higher!" Curt ordered. "Give the men a few more moments to escape!"

Again the terrific beams sliced, and more rock and soil fell, keeping the burning lava dammed back a little longer. The Uranian laborers in the workings were scrambling up the valley walls.

"There goes the dike!" Grag boomed a minute later.

The precarious makeshift dam had suddenly given way under the pressure of the lava. The molten rock poured down the valley triumphantly, covering the gravium workings with a hissing flood.

"The laborers all got away in time," Captain Future panted. "If we hadn't held that lava back—"

"Look—Zuvalo!" cried Otho. "He's gone crazy!"

CURT saw, farther down the valley by the office building, the fat gravium magnate. Zuvalo had not fled. He was standing in the path of the advancing lava, gibbering and shaking his fists at the approaching deadly flood.

"He's gone clean crazy at seeing his mines destroyed!" Captain Future exclaimed. "We've got to save him—"

"Too late, master!" cried Grag an instant later.

Even as Curt had started the *Comet* swooping down toward the crazed magnate, the fiery lava had rolled over him. A few minutes later, and the whole valley was covered with molten, seething rock, from end to end.

Curt's face was grim as he looked down.

"The Wrecker scores," he said between his teeth. "He's destroyed the Uranian gravium mines, like the others. Only the Neptunian mines are left now."

"Who is the Wrecker?" cried Otho. "We know now it wasn't Zuvalo. And Kerk El is dead—"

"And that leaves four men, one of whom *must* be the Wrecker," Curt said. "Julius Gunn, Carson Brand, Quarus

Qull and Orr Libro. And they're all on Neptune, or on their way there."

"Neptune!" rasped the Brain. "Then the Wrecker and his base are somewhere there—on the eighth world!"

Captain Future nodded grimly.

"And there too is the greatest menace to the System. For the great submarine mines of Neptune are the only source of gravium now. If they are destroyed, the Wrecker wins the game."

Curt's voice rose like a trumpet calling to battle.

"We're rocketing for Neptune at top speed! That's where we're going to trap the Wrecker!"

CHAPTER VII

On the Ocean World

Freezing out by Pluto,
Roasting near the sun,
Drenched by the rains of Saturn's plains,
It's all a space-man's fun!

Tramping old Mars' deserts,
Or sailing Neptune's sea,
Or wading the damp Venusian swamp,
Oh, that's the life for me!

LUSTILY, Otho sang the old space-song as he sat at the controls of the *Comet*, racing on through the void. A vast distance had been covered since leaving Uranus. Now Neptune was only a few million miles ahead.

"I didn't know that you could sing, Otho," said Grag, who stood in the control-room and had been listening intently.

"Sure I can sing. I can do anything humans can do because I *am* human, see?" retorted the cocky android.

"Do you suppose you could teach me to sing too?" Grag asked eagerly in his booming voice.

"You?" Otho's slitted green eyes were disdainful. "Your brain must need a little oil, Grag. You'd sing just about as well as an old-fashioned steam-engine, with that mechanical voice."

"Is that so?" Grag said angrily. "Your singing would not last long if I were to squeeze your putty neck."

"Putty?" The reference to his synthetic flesh infuriated Otho. "You call me that again and I'll stop your clock-

work for you! I'll—"

"You'll shut up and watch where you're going," came the severe voice of Captain Future from behind him. "Start cutting speed, you idiot! You can't go barging in to a planet like Neptune with the velocity of light."

Curt yawned and stretched his broad shoulders. He had been sleeping until Otho's lusty singing had awakened him.

He looked over at the Brain. Simon Wright, his serum-case resting on his special pedestal, was staring thoughtfully with his lens-eyes at the great planet and its big moon.

"Orr Libro and the others must be there already, lad," rasped the Brain. "I hope Ezra Gurney and Joan have checked on them as you asked."

Curt grinned. "Old Ezra would go to any lengths to get in on a scrap. He'll have the dope, never fear."

Upon leaving Uranus, Captain Future had hurled a televisor call to Planet Police Headquarters on Neptune, asking them to keep a close watch on Orr Libro, Juarus Qull and the other two suspects when they arrived.

To Curt's surprise and delight, he had previously learned that two old acquaintances of the Police were at Neptune. They were Ezra Gurney, veteran old interplanetary marshal, and Joan Randall, girl secret agent. They had worked with Curt and the Futuremen in the Space Emperor case on Jupiter and the more recent and dangerous Doctor Zarro case on Pluto.

"Police Headquarters switched us from Pluto to Neptune to investigate the sabotage in the submarine gravium mines here," old Ezra had drawled to Curt on the televisor. "And if you're comin' here, Captain Future, this must be the storm-center of the thing."

Curt had named the four suspects.

"One of them is the Wrecker, Ezra!" he had warned. "Have them all watched when they arrive on Neptune."

Now, looking toward giant Neptune and its big moon, Triton, Curt's eyes twinkled. "It'll be good to see old Ezra again," he said.

"And Joan Randall too, huh?" asked Otho slyly. Then he ducked hastily. "Don't blow your rockets, chief—I was

only doing some harmless kidding."

Captain Future stared thoughtfully at the moon, Triton. "I think we'll land on Triton first," he declared.

Otho showed uneasiness.

"Why land there, Chief? That place gives me the creeps."

"We know the Wrecker's base is somewhere here at Neptune, but it might just be on the planet's moon," Curt reminded him. "I want to find out for certain before landing on Neptune. The Tritonians can soon tell me if anything's going on on their world."

Skillfully, the android sent the *Comet* circling in toward the big moon. Soon they were dropping in its atmosphere. Triton was not an ocean-world like its parent planet. The moon was covered with rolling green plains, and seemed a peaceful, inviting place. Yet Captain Future was the only person in the whole System who ever dared to land on that innocent-seeming world!

"There's the Tritonians' city," Curt said soon, pointing. "Land just outside it, Otho."

"The queerest city in the System," growled Otho. "A city without buildings."

"The Tritonians are too far advanced mentally to have need of material buildings," commented the Brain in his rasping voice, his lens-eyed peering keenly.

THE Tritonian "city" was nothing but a great smooth metal platform of circular shape, several miles across. The *Comet* landed nearby. Curt and the Futuremen emerged, Grag carrying the Brain. As they stood in the thin sunlight, they became conscious of a tingling force pervading them.

"We're inside the Tritonians' zone of 'creation force' warned Captain Future. Watch your thoughts!"

"That's the devil of this place!" complained Otho. "You think of something like a Plutonian ice-tiger, and right away—"

"Look out—you've done it now!" Curt shouted.

For as Otho spoke the words, the very beast he had mentioned appeared suddenly out of thin air beside him, miraculously solid and real.

A Plutonian ice-tiger, a great, hairy,

snarling beast that reared up furiously to charge the android!

"Think him away quick, Otho!" yelled Captain Future. "Think him into something else!"

Desperately, Otho thought of the snarling monster changing into a harmless rodent. And, immediately, the ice-tiger changed miraculously into just such a scared little rodent.

"Haven't you learned yet?" Curt asked. "You know that inside the Tritonians' 'creation force' zone, every thing you think of materializes. If you'd thought of a Jovian 'digger'—"

Instantly, the horrific, ratlike shape of a big Jovian "digger" appeared in front of Curt. Hastily, Captain Future shifted his thoughts to flowers. The ratlike monster faded into a great clump of Venusian swamp-lilies.

"Hell take this cursed world!" gasped Otho. "I'm going back to the *Comet* if this keeps up—"

"Look what I've got, master!" cried Grag happily.

The big robot had thought of gold, and a great nugget had magically appeared by him. "It's for Eek," Grag explained.

"Keep your thoughts on flowers and birds and things like that," Curt chuckled. "Come along."

As they moved toward the nearby metal platform of the Tritonian "city," brilliant flowers and flashing birds and wonderful jewels appeared magically all around them, all of them solid and real but all vanishing as they thought of something else.

The scientific magic of the Tritonians was responsible for this weird experience. For the Tritonians had learned how to cause a zone of pervading force through which the electrical vibrations of the thinking mind instantly operated. Whatever tangible object the mind thought of was instantly created solid and real, by an amplification of electric mental currents operating to assemble free atoms. As soon as the mind ceased thinking of the object, control broke down and the object dissolved instantly into free atoms once more.

Interplanetary travelers had had such appalling experiences on Triton that they all shunned this world now.

Only Captain Future had been able to win the respect and friendship of the strange Tritonians.

The Futuremen stepped up onto the metal platform of the "city." "There're the Tritonians—come along."

The Tritonians—some hundreds of them—were gathered in immobile groups near the center of the big metal platform. The creatures were like

Future! We perceived your ship landing and knew you would be here."

"Thanks," Curt Newton answered. "How goes life here in your city?"

"All is well with us," The Tritonian answered affably. "We continue our search to create new forms of matters, as you see."

Otho snorted. "New forms? This city reminds me of a madhouse."

Immediately, near them, appeared a big stone building from whose windows men of many planetary races gibbered wildly.

"Shut it off, Otho!" Curt said hastily. With an effort of thought, the



A Pentonian ice-tiger appeared out of thin air (Chap. VII)

enormous, semi-human heads supported by ridiculously tiny, spiderlike limbs.

They were engaged in the pursuit in which they spent all their lives—thinking of things that became solid and material instantly, and remained so till their thoughts shifted. Around one Tritonian, generations of weird animals were born and died and evolved with unearthly speed. Still another was creating new, wonderful jewels. The "city" was a maze of weirdly appearing and disappearing objects.

The Tritonian who squatted at the exact center of the circular city greeted Curt Newton in a piping, childish voice.

"It is the Earthman called Captain

android obeyed. The stone madhouse vanished.

"Do you come to spend a time with us searching for new expressions of thought?" the Tritonian asked Curt.

"Not this time," Curt answered hurriedly. "I came only to inquire whether any men of my own race have established a secret base upon this moon. We hunt a criminal called the Wrecker,

whose organization is based somewhere at Neptune."

"His base is not here," the Tritonian piped. "No men dare land here, except yourself, our friend. The last who landed here thought of dangerous beasts, and were almost frightened to death when their own thoughts materialized. It was very amusing."

What a sense of humor!" Otho hissed.

"We'll be going on to Neptune, then," Curt told the Tritonian. "Perhaps later I'll be able to pay you a longer visit."

As they moved hastily off the weird "city" and back toward the *Comet*, Otho declared, "I won't be along on that visit!"

"Nor I," Grag said. The robot complained. "The lump of gold I thought up for Eek has disappeared, master."

"It disappeared as soon as you left the zone of 'creation force,' of course," the Brain told him.

They entered the *Comet*, and Otho hastily sent the tear-drop ship flying up from the surface of the big moon.

"Well, we know now that the Wrecker's base isn't on Triton," Captain Future said thoughtfully. "So it must be somewhere on Neptune itself. Head for Amphitrite in the Rock Isles when we reach the planet, Otho."

Less than an hour later the *Comet* swept down through thin gray evening mists toward the surface of Neptune. That surface emerged as a vast, green tossing ocean.

Neptune—wild, mysterious ocean-world of the Solar System! The great planet was covered from pole to pole by a shoreless sea. There were no continents, and the deep sea rolled eternally around this world, swept by awful electric storms, urged by the lunar tides.

There were no continents but there were islands on this sea-covered world, small archipelagoes of rocky islets scattered mostly in the northern hemisphere. Upon some of those northern islands existed the scant numbers of the native Neptunians, a semi-civilized race. And upon one of the islands had been built the interplanetary colonial city of Amphitrite, in which swarmed men of all planets who had come here

to engage in fishing in the vast ocean or in the equally dangerous work of excavating, from submarine mines, gold, platinum and gravium.

Gravium! Captain Future's tanned face was sober as he stared across the tossing, endless blue waters. Beneath those waters was now the sole remaining source of gravium in the System. There was enough gravium here to supply the whole System indefinitely—if he could prevent the Wrecker from ruining the submarine mines here!

"This sabotage is going to stop here," Curt vowed silently. "And the man who organized it is going to pay—"

"Rock Isles ahead!" sang Otho from the controls.

"Head for Amphitrite Island and land in the rocks west of the city," Captain Future ordered.

Through the gray evening mists, a cluster of small rocky islands became visible in the vast, rolling sea.

UPON the largest isle of the archipelago rose the city Amphitrite. It had been built of green native stone. Its square stone buildings huddled along the shore of the sheltered harbor, whose edge was fringed with docks, submarine-mine barges, fishing boats with black sails, and a cluster of other craft.

The spaceport, on which rested space ships from many worlds of the System, was at the north edge of the town. But Otho slid the *Comet* smoothly through the mists and brought it down upon the desolate, uninhabited rocky shore west of the city.

Curt Newton outlined his plans. "I'm going into Amphitrite and check with Ezra and Joan first. Later, I'll question Julius Gunn and his superintendent, Brand."

Newton's tanned face was serious.

"The first thing I want to is to get at the bottom of the sabotage here—it's vital that the gravium mines on this world remain unharmed. And I want to ask about the concession that Kerk El, the murdered Mercurian, had here."

"I'll go with you, lad," rasped the Brain. "I've an idea of my own I'd like to check."

"And I've a lot of ideas!" Otho exclaimed. "For my money, that foppish

red Martian, Orr Libro, is the Wrecker behind all this. He murdered Kerk El, and he'll murder Quarus Qull if he gets a chance, and destroy Gunn's mines. Then he'll be the gravium king. Watch me force it out of him when we get into the city."

"The only forcing you're going to do is right here in the *Comet*," Captain Future told the android witheringly. "Our rocket-tube Number 16 needs cleaning—I noticed on the way out from Uranus it was missing. You and Grag can dismount it and clean it while I'm gone."

"Have a heart, Chief!" pleaded Otho. "You'll need me in there. Cleaning out rocket-tubes is just a waste of my talents."

"See that he stays here and helps, Grag," Curt said.

"Yes, Master," boomed the big robot. "If he tries to get away I'll spank him like I do with Eek when he's bad."

"You'll spank *me*?" flared Otho. "Why, you—"

Chuckling, Curt Newton picked up the handle of the Brain's serum-case and, after wrapping the case with a light cloth cover that left only Simon's lens-eyes exposed, stepped out of the ship.

In the twilight, the scene along the rocky shore was weirdly desolate. The surging, swinging thunder of great waves battering the shore was a reverberating monotone. Far out into the dusk stretched the vast vagueness of the planetary sea.

Curt's gray eyes kindled, and he breathed the salt, tangy air deeply. There was something about this wild ocean-world that called to Captain Future's unfettered spirit. The knowledge that that dim sea stretched for a hundred thousand miles around the giant world was somehow stimulating. Vast reaches of that mighty watery waste had never been sailed by men, though there were horrific legends about it.

Captain Future strode purposefully through the dusk along the surf-pounded shore with his strange, bodiless comrade. Soon he entered the stone streets of the moonlit city Amphitrite. Lights were flaring along the main avenues, but the tall, red-haired space-man and

the cloth-covered case he carried aroused no attention. One more Earthman was nothing noticeable in this city that drew its population from nearly all the worlds of the System.

Here were green, flipper-limbed Jovians, handsome white Venusians, hairy men of icy Pluto staring with saucerlike phosphorescent eyes, and among others, a great number of swaggering Earthmen. Submarine miners, fishermen, space-sailors, officials of all kinds. And there were some of the native Neptunians — gangling men with seemingly boneless bodies, oily gray skin, and strange peaked skulls.

"Not as many space-sailors as usual, by far," Curt Newton muttered. "Space-traffic is falling off sharply, all right."

"Aye, lad," agreed the Brain. "People don't want to be caught on another world if the gravium supply gives out, and no more equalizers can be had. The fear is beginning to paralyze the System."

"They're scared, all right," Curt said. "Damn the Wrecker anyway! What can be the devil's motive for causing all this?"

A SQUARE building with the emblem of the Planet Police over its door was just ahead. Curt Newton stepped inside. A dark-uniformed policeman—a reedy Martian—came forward, glancing casually at the square case Curt carried.

"What are you selling, Earthman?" he asked curtly.

"Nothing that you would want to buy, Martian," rasped Simon Wright.

At the retort from the case, the Martian officer recoiled. Curt, chuckling, held out his left hand.

"Captain Future!" exclaimed the Martian, respect that was almost awe appearing in his face as he glimpsed Curt's ring.

A tough, wiry Earthman with iron-gray hair and a shrewd, weatherbeaten, wrinkled face came hurrying out of an inner office, a dark-haired Earthgirl behind him.

"I recognized that raspin' voice of the Brain!" exclaimed Ezra Gurney, pumping Curt's hand. "There ain't but one voice like that in the whole System!"

Joan Randall's brown eyes were shining with pleasure, her pretty face vivid with breathless excitement as she faced Curt.

"Hello, Joan," drawled the tall young wizard of science, smiling. "I told you we'd meet again when we parted on Pluto."

"If the amenities are all concluded," said Simon Wright sourly, "I suggest we find out what Ezra and Joan have learned."

Curt's face sobered.

"Simon's right—there's no time to lose."

"Don't I know it!" exclaimed Ezra Gurney. The old marshal's faded blue eyes snapped. "The space-traffic of every world is bein' strangled right now by fear—fear of the gravium giving out. And what gets me is—what's the Wrecker goin' to gain by this? He's worse than that devil, Doctor Zarro! Bad as Doctor Zarro was, we at least could understand what his motive was. But I can't figger this Wrecker's idea nohow!"

"What about the four men I asked you to have watched when they arrived?" demanded Captain Future.

Joan Randall answered eagerly.

"We've had men watching them every hour since their arrival, Captain Future. But they've done nothing suspicious. Libro and Quarus Qull are arranging to prospect and develop their new gravium concessions. Julius Gunn and his superintendent are occupied by the troubles in their mines."

"Gunn's company has three big sub-sea gravium mines away out in the ocean," Ezra explained. "In two of them, they've had a lot of queer accidents and their men are getting afraid to work."

Curt came to quick decision.

"The safety of those three mines is paramount right now! We'll go over and see Gunn and Brand. If their mines are in danger, the danger has to be eliminated before we can spend any time ferreting out the identity of the Wrecker."

Ezra Gurney led the way out of the Police building, and along the streets toward the harbor. Ahead, at the edge of the crowded harbor, loomed the great warehouses of the Neptunian

Gravium Company. In the moonlit water beyond were anchored the company's fast supply-boats, trouble-boats, wide-beamed prospecting-boats, and great caisson-barges. The fishing-docks were some distance around the curve of the harbor.

Curt Newton saw men dashing out of the metal office-building beside the warehouses, and heard raw voices.

"Something's happened here!" he exclaimed, stiffening. "Come on!"

"Maybe another murder by the Wrecker?" Simon Wright suggested as they ran forward.

Then, at the entrance of the office-structure, they collided with a tow-haired, wiry Earthman whose face was taut with emotion. It was Carson Brand, and the superintendent was in a mad hurry.

"Captain Future!" he cried, stopping at sight of Curt. "I'm damned glad you're here—"

"What's happened, man? Speak up!"

Brand's words tumbled over each other. "We just got a distress-call from Mine One—one of our three submarine mines out there in the sea. The men out there are in panic—they claim the whole sub-sea dome is giving way! If it does, that whole mine will be flooded!"

"The Wrecker's working here already, lad!" Simon Wright exclaimed metallically.

"Looks like it," Curt Newton snapped. He swung. "Ezra, you and Joan take Simon back to the *Comet*. I'm going out with Brand to Mine One."

"But Captain Future, if the sub-sea dome gives way and you're out there—" Joan Randall cried fearfully.

But Curt was already racing with Carson Brand toward the dock, where a big trouble-boat's motor was already roaring loudly.

CHAPTER VIII

Trap Under the Sea

ROARING a song of unleashed power from its cyclotrons, its rocket-tubes churning the waters to flame by their discharge, the big trou-

ble-boat shot out onto the moonlit sea.

Captain Future's lithe figure hunched beside Carson Brand at the bridge of the hundred-foot boat. The pilot and engineer were gray-skinned Neptunians. The boat itself was a tubular shape, streamlined and covered by a transparent, watertight over-deck.

"It'll take us half an hour to get to Mine One, even in this craft!" Carson Brand was crying to Curt. "God knows what may happen in that time."

The wiry young superintendent's browned face was wild with anxiety, his eyes dilated as he peered ahead.

"Who called you from Mine One?" Captain Future asked.

"Vasc Avam, our Jovian mine-boss there," answered the superintendent. "He said the laborers down in the dome are panicky—claim the dome is weakening. They've been scary lately, anyway."

"Our laborers are mostly Neptunians," Carson Brand explained, "and they're a superstitious lot. They hate to go down into the submarine mines—they've got all kinds of weird legends about the sea and the things that live in it. If something's actually gone wrong with the dome, they'll be crazy."

The trouble-boat was picking up velocity now. They were far out of the harbor, the lights of Amphitrite dropping out of sight behind them. They rushed southward over the moonlit ocean.

Now, on the open sea, they met the great tidal combers. The pull of the moon Triton produced ceaseless running tides in the Neptunian sea—tides that rolled endlessly around the water-covered planet in immense waves. Mercilessly those waves jounced and pounded the speeding craft.

The submersible trouble-boat could have run more smoothly beneath the surface, but that would have cut their speed a little, and Carson Brand and Captain Future preferred to submit to the rough battering of the sea rather than lose time on their urgent mission.

"Storm coming up!" Brand called, pointing toward an ominous violet flicker of lightning far ahead. "Hope it holds off till we get to Mine One."

Curt Newton nodded. "I know what Neptunian storms are like!"

Captain Future knew this world well. His whole life so far had been spent shuttling to and fro among the thronging worlds and moons, on his great struggle against interplanetary crime and criminals, and he had visited Neptune often.

But Curt realized that even he did not know a tenth of the mysteries that this mighty planet hid. The native Neptunians had many weird legends about hidden wonders of their world, Curt knew. Legends of monsters of the deep even more huge and terrible than the dreaded "swallowers" and *ursals*; legends of strange floating islands upon which grew poisonous flowers of exquisite beauty; legends of so-called "sea-devils" or semi-human, super-powerful and super-cunning water dwellers who were supposed to have strange submarine cities far out in the depths of the sea.

Magically beautiful rolled the tossing, moonlit ocean before Curt Newton's eyes, as they sped over it now. Yet he knew what mysterious and mighty shapes of dread that sea concealed. Even as he stared, he saw the looping coils of a great Neptunian sea-snake appear on the moon-silvered surface far to the west, darting its head out after a flying flock of "air-fish."

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S mind swung to the problem at hand, to the Wrecker who now was apparently beginning increased sabotage of the three all-important submarine gravium mines here.

"There's a vast, cunning purpose behind this apparently senseless destruction," Curt muttered. "But what purpose?"

The floating depot of Mine One suddenly came into view. It was a big, square floating metal platform upheld by large vacuum-pontoons. Upon the platform stood metal machine-houses and pump-shacks, and to it were moored supply-boats, and big flat scows piled with gray gravium ore.

Captain Future knew that that gravium was mined in the submarine workings far below the floating depot. The ore was loaded into the scows and towed to the big smelters near Amphitrite.

Brand and Curt Newton leaped onto the great floating platform as their trouble-boat ran alongside. There was a deafening confusion of throbbing pumps, grinding machinery. Frightened Neptunians came running to meet them.

Carson Brand singled out their leader. "Where's Vasc Avam, the mine-boss?" he cried to the Neptunian foreman.

The foreman chattered in broken Earth-speech.

"Down in the dome—he's trying to keep the laborers from stampeding. The dome walls have bulged a little in one place. Vasc Avam says there's no real danger, but the men—"

Carson Brand waited to hear no more.

"Come on, Captain Future!" he cried. "Maybe you can influence the men down there—keep them from deserting work!"

Curt ran with the superintendent toward the center of the platform. Here was the mouth of the tubeway that ran down to the air-tight submarine mine on the sea bottom far below. The tubeway was a huge, annulated metal tube of twenty feet diameter, that dropped straight down into the sea from the floating depot. The great air-pumps whose throbbing filled the night pumped air under pressure down this tube.

And in the tubeway was a moving, endless chain of big buckets, one side ascending from below and the other descending. They were used to bring up gravium from below, and take down men and supplies—a mechanical conveyor.

Curt leaped with Carson Brand into one of the big buckets, as the Neptunian at the conveyor-control stopped it momentarily. Then, in the bucket, they were dropping down the dark tubeway.

"Could some of your own laborers here be sabotaging the dome?" Captain Future demanded of Carson Brand as they dropped through the darkness.

"It seems the only possible answer to what's been happening!" Brand cried distractedly. "Yet they've never given trouble before. The whole thing is so unexpected—"

Curt saw light far below. They had descended in the tube through thousands of feet of sea, and the lights below were those of the big mine on the ocean floor.

The conveyor-bucket they rode in dropped suddenly out of the dark tubeway into a great, brilliantly-lighted space. This was the submarine mine itself. It was an enormous, dome-shaped metal caisson, a thousand feet in diameter, resting firmly on the rock sea-bottom.

Such caissons, Curt knew, were lowered over a spot where submarine prospectors had located rich ores, and then the water was pumped out and a constant pressure of air maintained.

SEVERAL scores of Neptunian laborers were in this brightly-lighted chamber at the bottom of the deep sea. Open veins of gravium ore in the rock bottom showed where they had been working. But they were not working now—they were clustering excitedly around the conveyor, while a big Jovian boss held them back with his atom-gun.

Carson Brand sprang toward this Jovian, followed by Captain Future. The green face of the Jovian showed relief.

"These scared devils have nearly mobbed me, they're so crazy to get out of here!" Vasc Avam, the mine-boss, told Brand.

"Let us go!" yelled the Neptunian laborers wildly. "This dome faces destruction — the sea-devils take vengeance on us for invading their watery realm!"

Vasc Avam flourished his gun.

"Back, you gray-faced scum! I'll blast down the first who gets in the conveyor!"

"What terrified them like this?" Captain Future demanded swiftly of the Jovian boss.

Vasc Avam pointed a flipperlike hand toward the north wall of the dome. There, near the rock floor, the super-heavy metal wall had bulged slightly inward at one point.

"That bulge there—the gray devils saw it and began yammering about the sea-devils," the mine-boss told Curt. "Damn their superstitious souls."

Carson Brand's brown face paled as he saw the slight bulge in the dome wall. Then he shouted to the Jovian.

"Let the men out of here—get them up to the surface at once, before the whole dome gives way!"

Vasc Avam protested. "But that bulge isn't dangerous, Brand. I looked at it, and I'm sure the wall won't give."

"Let the men out, I say!" Carson Brand cried. "That wall's going to let go!"

Unbelievably, the Jovian boss stood aside. And without lingering, the Neptunian laborers piled frantically into the slowly moving buckets of the conveyor to be raised out of sight into the tubeway.

Carson Brand pushed the Jovian toward a bucket, and was following him, when he stopped and shouted to Curt Newton. "Captain Future, aren't you coming?"

Curt Newton had started away across the floor of the dome, toward the north wall.

"You go ahead, Brand!" Curt called back. "I want to look at this bulge."

"But if the wall gives way and catches you down here—" Brand called urgently in warning.

But Captain Future paid no attention. The red-headed young scientific wizard was hastening on across the deserted rock workings. He reached the north wall and began keenly examining the long, straight bulge in it. Curt knew there was danger in lingering here, but he was gambling that he'd have time enough to make an examination.

For here, he was sure, was some of the handiwork of the Wrecker's or-

ganization! Alone now, Curt bent down and began inspecting the ominous bulge in the wall.

CURT'S gray eyes widened with the surprise he soon experienced. He had believed that the wall had been somehow weakened secretly by some of the laborers—an inside job. But his trained eye perceived that this wall had been weakened somehow from *outside*. Yet, as Vasc Avam had said, it did not seem very dangerous.

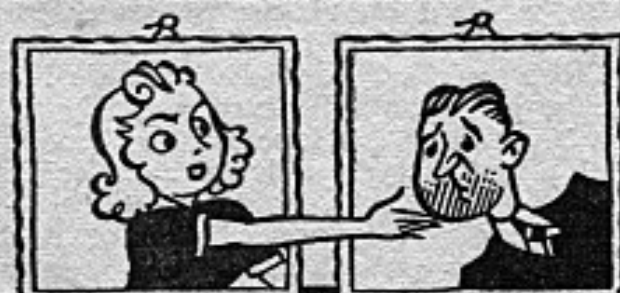
Swiftly, Captain Future pawed in the capacious pockets of the gray tungstite belt in which he wore his proton-pistol. That belt contained the super-compact emergency outfit of scientific instruments and weapons that more than once Curt had found invaluable. In it were his device for inducing brief invisibility, his infra-light spectacles, his pocket-televisor, and many compact tools and instruments.

He drew out a little tube with curious quartz lenses at each end. It was a fluoroscopic X-ray scope, a smaller model of the powerful outfit in the laboratory of the *Comet*. Curt applied it to his eye, snicked on its switch, and peered *through* the heavy metal of the wall by means of its projected radiations.

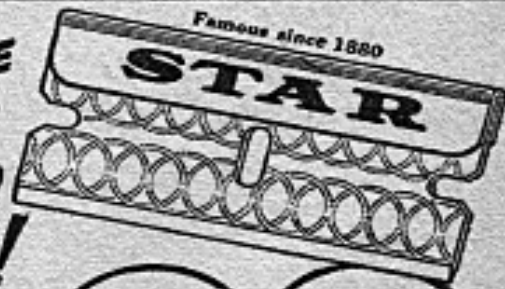
He saw the inmost crystalline structure of the metal as though cloudily semi-opaque. And he saw that the outer side of the wall bore marks of a powerful flame that had produced the inward bulge by playing upon that part of the wall.

That mysterious flame was still playing upon the outside of the dome-wall!

(Turn page)



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It showed in the instrument Captain Future was using, as a bright radiance playing all along the wall. Someone or something out in the deep sea outside was using that flame to break down the crystalline structure of the wall's metal!

"Jumping jungle-cats of Jupiter!" Curt exclaimed. "Someone out there in the sea, sabotaging the dome! But how—"

There was an ominous *screaking* sound and the dome-wall bulged still farther inward in front of his eyes.

"I'd better get out!" Captain Future muttered.

He raced back toward the conveyor whose empty buckets were still endlessly ascending and descending in the tubeway. But, as Curt neared it, the conveyor stopped suddenly with a harsh, rending sound of metal being torn far above.

Suddenly, down out of the tubeway entrance in the roof of the dome, there poured a terrific stream of sea-water, like a solid cylinder of down-shooting sea.

"Whoever's outside has wrecked the tubeway—torn it in half somehow!" Curt exclaimed, for the moment appalled.

Crack—crash! The bulging north wall of the dome had split! A horizontal jet of water drove in with terrific speed and pressure through the crack. And the crack was widening.

Already the water in the dome was boiling up around Captain Future's legs. The dome was giving way, and he was trapped in it!

CHAPTER IX

Alien Minds

BACK in the *Comet*, Grag and Otho prepared to dismount and clean the ship's fouled rocket-tube as Captain Future had ordered before he went with the Brain to Amphitrite city.

Otho hated routine work. Now the rubbery android made a cunning attempt to get out of the irksome task.

"It's a good thing you're here, Grag,"

said Otho. "I could never get that rocket-tube out by myself."

Grag, getting out the necessary tools, grunted.

"That is because you are not strong like me."

"You certainly have lots of strength," Otho declared admiringly. "Though I'll bet you couldn't do this whole job alone."

"Of course I could!" boomed Grag disdainfully. "I don't need any help to—"

The robot stopped suddenly, and stared at Otho with fixedly gazing photoelectric eyes.

"Oh, no you don't!" Grag exclaimed. "You think you can fool Grag into doing all the work. No, you're going to help."

"But I've got other things I want to do," pleaded the android. "Didn't I save your neck out on Pluto? Aren't we pals?"

"We are only pals when you want me to do something for you," Grag boomed. "You come along and help."

"That's what I get for trying to appeal to the sympathy of a robot!" Otho complained bitterly as he followed Grag out of the ship.

The brilliant moonlight of speeding Triton illuminated the rolling ocean and rocky shore, and gleamed off the curved sides of the *Comet* as the two Futuremen dismounted one of the cluster of rocket-tubes from its tail.

Grag, with his enormous strength, did the lion's share of the work in getting out the big tube. Then the robot straightened his massive metal body and turned to Otho.

"Now you clean out the inside of the tube, while I check the power-connections in the ship," he directed.

Otho picked up an atomic-hand torch, and looked discouragedly into the big tube. Its interior was crusted with a choking deposit of metallic residue that had to be burned out.

As he gloomily prepared to start the messy job, Otho's attention was attracted to Eek. The little moon-pup, which had followed Grag out of the ship, was idly pawing at a piece of rock to discover if it had any metals in it.

A labor-saving idea was born at once in the android's brain. He spoke quick-

ly to the alert little moon-pup.

"Come here, Eek."

Eek got the thought-request, but the moon-pup only looked belligerently at Otho, who he well knew disliked him.

"See, here's some nice copper for you to eat," Otho coaxed, holding out the atomic hand-torch.

"Come and get it, Eek."

Eek still looked suspicious. His bright little eyes seemed to say, "Since when have you been so friendly to me?"

But the moon-pup couldn't resist the lure of the luscious copper torch. He scuttled toward it—and Otho grabbed him.

Instantly, Otho shoved the little gray animal into the end of the encrusted rocket-tube. "Now if you want out of there, eat your way out, Eek," he hissed. "If you chew away all the deposit in there, you can get out the other end of the tube."

And, congratulating himself on a labor-saving discovery, Otho put a rock at the tube's end to keep Eek from escaping, and then sat coolly down to rest.

Eek squirmed frantically in the tube, but Otho paid no attention. The android was staring out over the vague ocean and wishing Captain Future had taken him with him, when he heard Grag come hastily out of the ship.

"Eek is in trouble of some kind," Grag boomed worriedly. "I can get his telepathic talk, and just now I sensed—"

THEN the robot heard the squirming in the tube. He kicked aside the rock. And a thoroughly angry and frightened moon-pup bolted from the tube and climbed hastily to the robot's shelter.

"You did that to Eek!" Grag accused Otho furiously.

"Aw, he isn't hurt," said the android disgustedly. "He might as well earn the metal he eats by doing a little work."

"Eek is a pet, and pets don't work," Grag declared angrily. "When master returns, I shall tell him what you did."

"That's it — squeal to the chief," hissed Otho. "You big metal baby!"

Outraged, Grag advanced menacing-

ly. "Why, you little rubber-man, I'll—"

Grag suddenly stopped short. He turned his head.

"I hear a rocket boat!" he muttered. "Landing up the shore—"

Otho had heard nothing but he had faith in the super-keen hearing of the robot's microphone-ears.

"Men are coming from it this way!" Grag announced a minute later. "Several men—approaching stealthily—"

The robot and android peered eastward along the shore. But Triton had set, and they could see nothing in the darkness.

"They're sneaking up on us — and that means they're enemies trying to surprise us!" Grag whispered. His photo-electric eyes gleamed. "Instead, we'll surprise them. You keep making a noise, Otho, and I'll cut along the shore and get behind them."

"Right—get going!" snapped Otho, his slitlike green eyes sparkling with excitement. As usual, the two had forgotten their quarrels the instant an emergency appeared.

Grag tossed Eek into the ship, and then the robot hastily moved through the darkness toward the edge of the sea. Quickly, Grag climbed down into the water until he was completely under the surface. The robot, who did not breathe and could exist perfectly well under water, meant to steal along the shore, under water, and get behind the furtively approaching men.

Otho, left alone, began burning out the rocket-tube with his hand-torch. And the android sang a space song loudly, to reassure the stealthy coming ones that their presence was unsuspected. As he sang, Otho loosened his proton-pistol in its holster. Every faculty of the android was on the alert.

Now he heard the soft footsteps. There were five men, he guessed. They were coming as silently as Jovian "crawlers."

"Now! Rush them!" suddenly ordered a harsh voice.

Otho spun around with an inconceivably rapid movement, at the moment that the five men charged forward, guns raised.

He glimpsed the five as a motley group—two hairy Plutonians, a Jovian, a Uranian and a Venusian. They fired

their atom-pistols as they saw Otho move.

But the android's blurring speed was too much for them. Their deadly flares missed Otho, and his own proton-beam drilled through one of the Plutonians and sent the man tumbling.

"Get him!" yelled the other hollow-eyed Plutonian, apparently the leader of the party.

But before the men could charge Otho, Grag took a hand. In the darkness behind the four men appeared the great robot, dripping wet, his metal arm raised in terrible menace. Down came Grag's arm, and his metal fist flattened the Jovian and the Venusian. With yells of terror, the remaining two men retreated in the darkness.

"After them!" Otho hissed fiercely, triggering his proton-pistol and sending its pale beam lacing through the dark. But though he and Grag sprang forward in hot pursuit, the two remaining attackers had the advantage of the utter dark.

IN a moment, as the robot and android searched along the shore, they heard the rocket-motor of a nearby boat putting off hurriedly. The droning throb of rockets rapidly died away.

The robot and android returned to the scene of battle and examined the men they had felled. The Plutonian Otho had shot was dead, his head burned through. Dead too was the Jovian, his bulbous green skull shattered to a mess by Grag's fist.

But the Venusian Grag had flattened was only unconscious. He had dodged, and the robot's metal fist had grazed him.

"I'll soon correct that," muttered Grag, taking the Venusian by the throat, with deadly intent. But there was an interruption in the form of other footsteps now approaching, from the distant city.

"More of the Wrecker's men!" Otho cried, snatching out his pistol again. "Imps of the sun, are they—"

"Wait—listen!" Grag exclaimed.

A familiar, rasping voice came through the darkness.

"What's going on here? What was that scuffling I heard?"

"It's Simon!" cried Otho. And a mo-

ment later, as the newcomers appeared: "And Joan Randall and Ezra!"

Old Ezra Gurney's faded blue eyes had a dour grin in them as they looked at the bodies on the ground.

"Up to your old tricks, you two, eh?" said the veteran marshal.

"What's happened, Grag?" Joan asked the robot urgently, her brown eyes wide with wonder.

The Brain was surveying the other two Futuremen with severe disapproval.

"You've got into trouble?" he rasped. "I might have known we didn't dare leave you two alone."

"We didn't go hunting trouble—it came hunting us!" Otho defended. He explained the surprise attack of the Wrecker's men.

"Looks to me," drawled Ezra Gurney, "as though the Wrecker had given orders to some of his henchmen to attack the *Comet* secretly while Captain Future wasn't here, destroy the ship."

"That must be it," the Brain agreed. "The attackers underestimated Grag and Otho, though."

"One of them isn't dead yet," Otho said nonchalantly, "but that's all right—Grag is going to kill him now."

"Oh, no!" Joan exclaimed, horror in her eyes.

Even Ezra Gurney had shivered a little at Otho's casual tone. For though Grag and Otho were strong friends of theirs, there were times like this when he himself was a little awed by the unhuman Futuremen.

"Don't kill that man," the Brain ordered raspingly. "Take him into the *Comet*. Here's a chance to find out who the Wrecker is."

Grag carried the unconscious Venusian into the ship, deposited him upon a metal table that he unfolded from the wall. Ezra put the Brain on his pedestal so he could examine the man.

A moment later the Brain was examining the unconscious Venusian prisoner with his glassy lens-eyes, inspecting every detail of the man. The Venusian was a typical specimen of his race—white-skinned, with unusually handsome features and dark hair and a body of medium height.

"Seems average enough," rasped the Brain. "Yet Curtis believed there was

something queer about all the Wrecker's men—"

Otho had gone through the stunned man's pockets.

"Nothing here. But the identity-disc he wears gives his name—Ki Iri."

THE BRAIN looked at Ezra Gurney.

"Can you check that name by televisor with the Police station in Amphitrite? Find out all you can about a certain Ki Iri, Venusian."

"Look—he's starting to come out of it!" Otho said.

The stunned Venusian was moving upon the table. He had not yet opened his eyes, but he was stirring his arms and legs. He stirred them in odd, graceful, sweeping movements, completely unlike the ordinary use of human limbs.

"That's queer," muttered the Brain. "He doesn't show the normal reflex responses. And listen—"

The unconscious man was speaking in his trance. From his lips flowed a stream of words, seeming to roll thickly and distortedly from his tongue, and in an unfamiliar language.

"That doesn't sound like any Venusian language I ever heard," the Brain muttered. He glanced up. "Get the philological record-file on Venus, Grag."

The robot hastily extracted a small speech-recording mechanism and record-tapes from a large cabinet.

Grag ran the tapes through the recorder, at Simon's order. Voices spoke from the mechanism, in one language after another. Here was contained a spoken record of every language and dialect known on Venus.

"None of them is the remotest bit like this man's language!" the Brain declared. "Nor is his language like any other I've ever heard."

"What difference does it make?" Otho demanded.

"Don't you understand?" retorted the Brain. "In his present condition of traumatic shock, this man is certain to speak only his *native* language. And his native language is one never heard of on Venus or any other world of the System."

"This man has the body of a Venu-

sian," the Brain added broodingly. "But in that body, if I'm right, there is a completely alien mind!"

CHAPTER X

Menace of the Depths

CAPTAIN FUTURE, trapped in the submarine dome far down in the Neptunian sea, realized the deadliness of his peril. The water that was shooting down from the severed tubeway and in through the cracks in the wall already swirled to his knees.

The walls, weakened by the flame that had played on them from outside, were slowly cracking further. Solid streams of water roared in under terrific pressure. It was only a matter of minutes before the whole dome collapsed!

"There must be some way out of this hell-trap!" Curt Newton muttered, glancing swiftly around. "Curtis, my boy, unless you can think of something quickly, your number is up."

Curt knew that when the dome collapsed, the tens of thousands of tons of water that would smash in would reduce him to a pulp. If he only had an undersea-suit! But there was none here, nothing but the atomic tools abandoned by the workers—

"The buckets!" Captain Future exclaimed suddenly. "I'm a space-struck idiot not to have thought of it before!"

He leaped and grabbed up a heavy atomic chisel, designed to gouge through rock. Grasping the tool, Curt ran through the rising water toward the wrecked conveyor-chain of buckets.

The solid stream of water pouring down the tubeway from above plunged down at Captain Future, knocking him from his feet, as he sought to cut away two of the big metal buckets with his tool. He finally succeeded in the attempt. Dragging the two buckets through the rising waters, he set one on its bottom, got into it, and reached out for the other bucket.

There was an ominous cracking sound from the walls of the dome, audible even over the roar of inshooting waters. Curt glanced up and saw

that the whole north wall of the great caisson was now bulging inward, from the base to the top of the dome.

The realization that the whole dome would collapse within a few minutes at most, spurred Captain Future to accelerated activity. He grasped the second big bucket and, turning it with its open top down, placed it on top of the bucket in which he stood.

The two buckets thus formed a large metal barrel. In the darkness inside it, Curt Newton swiftly drew his proton-pistol, set the control of its beam, and then turned the pale ray upon the juncture of the rims of his buckets.

The ray started to melt the metal almost at once. The two buckets fused together solidly at their rims. And Curt played the beam around the whole rim slowly, fusing every inch of the two rims solidly together.

The smoke and smell of molten metal were almost overpowering inside the makeshift barrel. Curt could see only by the pale flash of the ray itself. Yet he kept grimly on, well aware that it was his one slender chance of escape.

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S eyes streamed, his lungs gasping for pure air, when he finished welding the two buckets together a few moments later. He crouched now inside a strong, one-piece, air-tight metal barrel that he had made from the buckets.

"Can't breathe this air in here for many minutes before I suffocate!" he choked to himself. "If the barrel doesn't escape when the dome let's go—"

Curt was staking all on the chance that the barrel would be swept out of the collapsing dome when its walls gave way.

"Here she goes!" he muttered tensely an instant later, bracing himself with arms and legs.

There was a loud crash! With a scream of rending metal, the walls of the dome were torn asunder by the weight of waters, and the sea rushed in. Curt felt his barrel flung like a bubble against a wall, a shock that nearly stunned him. The boiling sea inside the shattered dome carried his makeshift diving-bell dizzily around.

He felt the queer barrel bump against the top of the dome—floating up as he

had known it would, due to its air-content. Captain Future's heart plummeted. His plan hadn't succeeded. The barrel had not escaped from the dome, but was still trapped in it. And the air in the barrel was already almost unbreathable—

"Can't complain, I suppose," Curt gasped. "I've played the game out to the end, and nobody can do more. But I hate to go out like this and leave the Wrecker at work—"

His lungs seemed parched, bursting — his brain spinning as the foul air overcame him. He could feel the barrel, trapped down here in the sea-filled, shattered dome, bumping to and fro as the currents rubbed it against the roof.

Curt Newton's darkening mind flashed back over the brilliant career that now seemed about to be extinguished. Pictures flashed through his brain—of his boyhood on the moon, of his first trip to other worlds with the Futuremen, of peril and excitement and combat from one end of the System to the other.

"Hope—Simon and Grag and Otho get the Wrecker," he choked. "Looks like I—"

At that moment, his dimming senses became aware of a new motion on the part of the barrel. Instead of rubbing along the roof of the broken dome, it was now shooting wildly upward.

"By all the nine worlds' gods!" Captain Future cried. "It's got out!"

His barrel, carried to and fro under the roof of the wrecked dome by the currents, had finally escaped through one of the great cracks and was shooting up to the surface like a bubble!

Curt, half-unconscious, felt the metal around him grow hot from friction. He felt the barrel rush up out of the sea into the air, poise a moment, then fall back down with a smacking splash to the sea, and float on its surface. With his last, waning strength, Captain Future pulled trigger of his proton-pistol. The beam tore out through the metal side of his improvised barrel, after a few moments. Through the little opening splashed some water — and also blessed, pure fresh air.

Curt had to wait until he could gulp many breaths of the new air into his starved lungs, before he set about get-

ting out of his floating barrel. Using the proton-beam, he cut out the top of the barrel.

Captain Future found himself floating on the nighted Neptunian sea, tossing up and down on the great tidal waves. It was completely dark except for the bright stars. Then Curt saw the lights and black bulk of the floating-depot of the destroyed submarine mine nearby.

He dived into the chilly waters, and swam with powerful strokes toward the floating-depot, on which men were running about, with shouts of excitement and dismay.

Carson Brand saw Curt draw his dripping figure out of the waters. The superintendent seemed unable to believe his own eyes, and Vasc Avam, the Jovian mine-boss, was similarly stunned.

"Captain Future!" Brand cried. "Why, we thought you dead long ago down there! How in the name of all that's holy did you get out?"

Curt explained his strategem. And admiration near to awe showed in the faces of Carson Brand and the Jovian.

"No wonder they say you're unbeatable, Captain Future!" exclaimed Brand impulsively. "Lord, man, but I'm glad to see you. This would have been an even blacker disaster if you had perished in it."

"The disaster's black enough," Curt said tersely. "One of the three gravium mines here on Neptune completely ruined!"

VASC AVAM, the Jovian, made a sound of anger and stared fiercely at the scared gray Neptunian miners cowering nearby.

"If I had the spies among us who are sabotaging our domes, I'd kill them by slow torture!" he exclaimed.

"That dome was weakened and wrecked from outside," Captain Future told him. "A cutting flame was used from outside to weaken the dome walls, and to sever the tubeway."

The Jovian stared.

"It was done from outside? But who could there be out in the deep sea to do it? You surely don't think it was the legendary sea-devils the Neptunians talk about?"

"Men in sea-suits could have approached the dome secretly from outside, and have done it!" Carson Brand exclaimed.

"Yes, they could have," Captain Future agreed swiftly. "But such men would have to be brought out here to this region of the sea, and taken away again, by a boat. Where's the boat? We ought to search the sea all around here."

"We will — we'll use the trouble-boat!" Brand cried, his eyes flashing. "Come on, Vasc Avam!"

The three men jumped into the powerful craft that had brought them out from Amphitrite. Carson Brand started the motors, and yelled to the Jovian.

"Sweep the sea with the searchlight while I circle!"

Vasc Avam snicked on the powerful fluoric searchlight outside the tubular hull. Its reddish beam sliced through the heavy darkness as Brand piloted the roaring craft outward.

Captain Future peered keenly with the Jovian, as Brand steered their craft in great, widening circles. The reddish beam of light showed nothing but the great, heaving tidal combers of the shoreless ocean. Then Curt's eyes saw a black mass sliding away swiftly in the distance.

"A boat of some kind to starboard!" he cried to Brand.

Brand saw it, and sent the trouble-boat leaping after it like a hound after prey. The black craft in the distance, caught in the fluoric searchlight, put on speed to dart away.

"It must be the Wrecker's bunch!" Brand cried excitedly. "They're trying to escape—"

Curt slid back an upper transparent panel, cupped his hands, and shouted aloud as they overhauled the fleeing craft.

"Boat, ahoy! Stand by and wait for us or we'll gun you out of the water!"

"But we haven't any atom-guns on this craft," Vasc Avam objected puzzledly.

"They don't know that," Curt retorted coolly. "Ah, as I hoped—our little bluff worked."

The boat ahead had stopped. Brand drove their own craft up beside it. Captain Future, his proton-gun cradled in

his fist, leaped aboard the other craft, with Brand and the Jovian following.

The other boat was a much larger, heavier, broader-beamed one. The crew was a mixed lot of Neptunians, Venusians and representatives of other planets. Sullenly, half-scared, they faced Captain Future's tall, commanding figure. Curt glimpsed a half-dozen heavy, jointed metal suits lying on the deck, still dripping.

"Those are sea-suits!" Carson Brand yelled. "These are the men who wrecked our mine from outside—the Wrecker's men!"

"What's this about the Wrecker?" demanded a man who had hastily emerged from below decks, and now faced them.

It was Orr Libro, the red-skinned gravium magnate from Mars.

CHAPTER XI

Storm Over Neptune

CAPTAIN FUTURE stared suspiciously at the Martian magnate. Orr Libro met his gaze with a bewildered expression on his smooth red face.

"Orr Libro!" Carson Brand hissed. The superintendent's face flamed. "Now we know who the Wrecker is!"

"I don't understand," said the Martian quickly, still looking puzzled. "You're surely not implying that I am the Wrecker?"

"What are you doing out in these waters by night?" Curt Newton demanded crisply. "What were you using those sea-suits for?"

"It's easy to see what he was using them for!" Brand accused violently. "He had his men down in the sea, wrecking our Mine One from outside!"

"Mine One wrecked?" Orr Libro looked astonished. "But that is deplorable. Yet I assure you I had nothing to do with it."

"Answer my question—what's your errand out here?" Captain Future snapped.

The Martian replied hastily.

"I have a concession to mine gravium on Neptune now, remember. I came

out with this crew I hired in Amphitrite, to prospect for gravium deposits which I could develop. As you know, such prospecting must be done by divers in sea-suits. I had a half-dozen of these men down on the sea-bottom."

Orr Libro added contemptuously, "But they got scared of their own shadows and insisted on coming back up to the surface. Claimed they had seen some of the mythical sea-devils of this ocean!"

One of the sullen Neptunian divers standing nearby broke into loud assertion.

"We *did* see the sea-devils in the distance!" the gray-faced, peak-headed planetary native declared vehemently. "Down there in the waters, a whole party of them swimming along—half-men and half-fish, just as the old terrible legends tell!"

"That's why we wouldn't stay down there," another Neptunian added corroboration. "It's dangerous enough to meet the 'swallowers' or *ursals* or other monsters of the deep. But we can face those dangers. The sea-devils are different!"

"Bah!" said Orr Libro scornfully. "You people of this watery world are a credulous lot to believe such stories."

Captain Future, listening, had been struck by the two Neptunian divers' stories. It was not the first time that Curt had heard these legends of the sea-devils. The Neptunians firmly believed the ancient tales which told of a fierce, powerful, super-civilized race of fish-men haunting the unexplored depths of the mighty planetary ocean. Curt wondered momentarily if those legends had any truth behind them.

But, Curt realized, all this talk of the Neptunian divers might be just an alibi planned by Orr Libro. The dandified Martian's craftiness was not to be underestimated.

"How does it come," Captain Future sternly demanded of the Martian, "that you choose this particular region of the sea near Mine One to do your gravium prospecting?"

Orr Libro looked doubtfully at Carson Brand, and then answered with apparent frankness.

"To tell the truth, Captain Future, I picked this region because it is near

the Neptunian Company's Mine One. I hoped I could locate the vein of gravium ore they were working. That's why I tried to get away without being discovered. I was afraid Brand and Julius Gunn would be angry if they learned what I was doing."

"You dirty red-faced sneak!" spat Carson Brand.

THE Martian shrugged.

"Sorry you don't like me, my dear Brand," he said silkily, "but I'm not breaking any law by trying to pick up the same gravium vein."

Captain Future had stepped away from them, and was bending over the heavy metal sea-suits that lay on deck, still wet from use. Curt bent over them, inspecting them carefully, especially the feet.

"Have you any heavy atomic torches aboard?" Curt asked the Martian.

"I think there's two in the equipment," Orr Libro answered wonderingly. Curt found them, inspected the tools whose purpose was to create a powerful atomic flame for cutting purposes.

The two boats were tossing more violently on the pitch-black Neptunian sea, by now. Wind was rising, soughing through the night and sending stinging blasts of spray across their faces.

"I'd like to get back to Amphitrite before that storm breaks," Orr Libro said anxiously. "You can see one's coming."

Thin sheets of violet lightning had begun to flare far in the southern night, and the wind was still rising. It was apparent that one of the terrific storms of Neptune was approaching. And Orr Libro, like all natives of desert Mars, was a poor sailor.

"All right, you can go ahead to Amphitrite," Curt Newton said shortly. "But we're following you, and I want to go into this matter further there. There's a lot that needs explaining!"

He and Carson Brand and Vasc Avam returned to their own craft. Presently they were running along the nighted, heaving sea after the Martian magnate's craft.

"Orr Libro's the Wrecker!" Brand exclaimed emphatically to Captain Fu-

ture. "His divers wrecked Mine One from outside."

"Their atomic torches hadn't been used; they showed a full charge," Curt replied, peering thoughtfully ahead into the night.

"They could have been quickly re-charged!" Carson Brand insisted. "I tell you, that Martian is behind all that's happened."

Curt looked at him.

"But you've had mysterious accidents and trouble here in your mines for weeks, Brand," he reminded. "And Orr Libro has only been here on Neptune recently."

"He could have had an organization here working for him, even though he wasn't here himself," Brand declared. "Orr Libro was here on Neptune a few months ago—all the gravium magnates were, to consult together about raising the price of gravium."

Captain Future frowned. It seemed that the deeper he probed into the mystery, the more enigmatic it became. Curt felt that the destruction of Mine One had given him one definite clue to the Wrecker's identity. Yet that clue seemed nonsensical in the face of the other evidence at hand.

The storm was upon them, now. The sky was lit incessantly by sheets and flares of violet lightning, each of which revealed the vast waves of the Neptunian sea towering skyward like moving mountains of water.

Vasc Avam, steering their long, tubular craft, turned his green face worriedly from the wheel.

"We'll have to run beneath surface or these waves will smack us to pieces!" the Jovian mine-boss exclaimed.

"Go ahead—but keep right after Orr Libro's boat," Carson Brand directed.

The Martian's craft was also submerging, ahead. Vasc Avam shifted the control of the deflecting rudders and their own boat slid down and throbbed along twenty feet under the surface.

CAPTAIN FUTURE, deep in thought, looked out through the transparent wall of their craft at the lightning-lit waters they were traveling through. Each violet glare showed the teeming life of the sea about them.

Shoals of brilliant, sparkling "diamond-fish" flashed away, like living gems. "Air-fish," those weird winged creatures that could live with equal ease in the air or in the sea, flew away in startled undersea flight.

"Coming into Amphitrite harbor!" sang out the Jovian after a time, bringing the long boat back to the surface.

Captain Future slid back one of the over-deck panels and peered keenly ahead. Orr Libro's boat was just ahead of them, also breaking surface as they entered the sheltered waters of the harbor.

They slid toward the dark docks that fringed the lighted Neptunian city.

"I want to see Julius Gunn, your president," Curt told Carson Brand. "Will he be at your company offices this late?"

Brand nodded, his brown face haggard.

"Yes, he'll be there to wait for reports on Mine One. I hate to tell him what happened!"

Their craft bumped the dark dock of the Neptunian Gravium Company. Orr Libro's boat was tying up at a dock nearby. Captain Future was waiting for the Martian when he landed.

"You come along with us," Curt told the Martian crisply.

"Look, there's Quarus Qull's outfit coming in!" Brand exclaimed, pointing out into the harbor.

A long craft was entering the harbor from the wild, storm-whipped ocean outside. A flare of the lightning showed it heading for a dock farther along from the one on which they stood.

Quarus Qull, the thin, blue-skinned Saturnian gravium magnate, was giving orders to his crew as he came ashore. Curt's eyes fastened on the sea-suits in the Saturnian's boat.

"The devil—has everyone been out in the sea tonight?" Curt wondered ruefully.

He strode forward to Quarus Qull. The Saturnian's bony blue face stiffened, and his pale, squinting eyes narrowed as he saw Captain Future.

"I suppose that you too have been merely out prospecting with divers for new gravium deposits?" Curt asked ironically.

"Yes, that's what I've been doing,"

Quarus Qull answered. "Why? What's happened?"

"What part of the sea were you prospecting?" Captain Future demanded, ignoring the questions.

Quarus Qull gave the longitude and latitude. The position was between Mines One and Two of the Neptunian company.

Curt laughed shortly.

"Just like Orr Libro, you wanted to poach on the deposits Gunn's company located, eh?"

The blue Saturnian's thin mouth tightened.

"I don't do anything that isn't legal."

"Come along with us," Curt snapped. "Some cursed queer things been happening that need clearing up."

Silently, the oddly assorted little group moved toward the offices of the Neptunian Gravium Company. As Captain Future and his three companions entered the brightly-lit offices, a man who had been sitting at a desk talking hoarsely into a televisor jumped erect and came toward them.

IT was Julius Gunn, president of the Neptunian company. The gravium magnate's aggressive, square face was pallid with emotion, his voice raw and high.

"Brand—Captain Future—a terrible disaster!" he cried. "One of our three mines has been utterly destroyed!"

"You've heard about Mine One's destruction, then?" Brand cried to his employer. "I didn't think you'd know yet—"

"Mine One?" Gunn repeated, bewildered. "What are you talking about? It's Mine Two that has just been wrecked! I got the televisor call from its mine-boss at the floating-depot, a quarter hour ago. The whole mine-dome gave way. All miners were drowned."

Carson Brand paled. The tow-haired superintendent turned to Curt, his brown face wild.

"Good God, Captain Future — that makes two of our mines destroyed!"

"Two?" echoed Julius Gunn. "You mean Mine One—"

"Was destroyed utterly," Brand answered hoarsely. "We got the men out in time, though Captain Future was

nearly trapped and barely escaped."

Brand swung fiercely on Orr Libro. "Your divers did this—wrecked both of those mines tonight!" he accused the Martian. "The two mines aren't far apart. Your men were ordered to destroy them both."

Orr Libro answered with unruffled calm.

"I fear you are over-excited, Mr. Brand," he purred. "I've already said I had nothing to do with it. But let me point out that Quarus Qull was out in the vicinity of Mines One and Two tonight, with his crew."

"Trying to incriminate me, eh?" cried the blue-Saturnian harshly to Orr Libro. "You lying sneak—"

"I think you're both mixed up in this!" Julius Gunn accused furiously. "You've come out here to Neptune to cut in on my industry here—ruin my company and build up your own—"

"That's enough quarrelling!" Captain Future's voice rang, lashing them to silence.

The red-headed wizard of science was eyeing them frostily, his tanned, handsome face hard with dislike. One of these four quarrelling men, Curt knew, was the Wrecker! But which one?

"The situation is too desperate now for idle bickering," Curt crackled. "There is now only one gravium source left in the whole System—Mine Three. And Mine Three must not be destroyed! It's all-important that last source of gravium be preserved, until new mines can be opened up here. For if Mine Three should be wrecked now, the panic that is rising in the System would explode into a crazy chaos! If people learn that the last source of gravium is gone, interplanetary traffic and civilization will collapse almost overnight!"

"But what can we do to guard Mine Three?" faltered Julius Gunn.

"Televiser your mine-boss there to set guards around the outside of that mine—men in sea-suits, armed with atom-guns!" Captain Future ordered. "They're to maintain constant watch against anyone who tries to destroy the dome of Mine Three from outside."

"I'll call him, Captain Future!" cried Carson Brand, a ray of hope on his haggard face.

AS Brand was making the call on the televiser beside them, Curt Newton shot a terse question at Julius Gunn.

"I've been told that four gravium space ships disappeared in the last months," he said. "Know anything about that?"

Gunn nodded his powerful head. "Yes. They were ships on the gravium run—that picked up gravium here at Neptune, at Oberon, Saturn, Mars and Mercury, and took it to Earth."

"Where were those ships when they disappeared?" Captain Future demanded.

Curt had a purpose in the question. He knew, from what Zuvalo had told him on Oberon, that the Wrecker's organization had stolen those four space ships and used them for its forays of destruction. If he knew where the ships had been stolen, it might point another arrow toward the identity of the Wrecker.

Gunn answered.

"As I remember it, two of the ships disappeared strangely while stopping at Saturn. One of them vanished between Saturn and Mars, and another while at Mars."

Curt felt baffled on this point. If the gravium ships had habitually stopped at every one of the five worlds, Neptune, Oberon, Saturn, Mars and Mercury, then it would be hard to discover which of the men before him had been concerned with their theft.

Carson Brand, who had been giving rapid orders over the televiser to the mine-boss on distant Mine Three, now turned.

"They're going to put our guards in sea-suits around Mine Three as you directed, Captain Future!" the haggard young superintendent reported. "Do you think that will assure—"

There came a sudden interruption. As an unusually loud crash of thunder sounded, the office door banged open and a wet, flying white figure darted in. It was Otho the android, his rubbery white figure glistening with rain, his green slit-eye lighting at sight of Curt.

"The Brain sent me for you, chief!" he cried to Captain Future. "Simon has made an unbelievable discovery!"

CHAPTER XII

Scientific Magic

CRASHING rain battered the streets as Captain Future and Otho hurried out of the nighted, storm-swept Neptunian city. The electric tempest that had swept in from the south had reached full fury. The flares of lightning were almost continuous, and the hubbub of thunder deafening.

"What's Simon's discovery, Otho?" Captain Future asked as he hurried beside the android.

Otho told of the attack by the Wrecker's men on the *Comet*, and of how he and Grag had captured one of those men, whom the Brain believed to have an alien mind.

"Sounds a little crazy," Curt muttered. "But everything about this darned mystery is a little crazy."

They were out of Amphitrite city by now. A prolonged flare of violet lightning showed them the rain-swept, rocky shore, against which wild waves were battering from the uneasy black sea. Neptune, wild world of sea and storm, was living up to its reputation. Then Curt glimpsed the lights of the *Comet*.

Rain streamed off Captain Future's red hair and tan zipper-suit, glistened on Otho's rubbery white body and harnesslike belt, as the two hastily entered the little ship.

Curt's eyes flashed to the unconscious Venusian who lay on the table at the side of the laboratory, muttering deliriously. The Brain, with Grag assisting, was examining the stunned man. Ezra Gurney and Joan Randall watched intently from nearby.

"Captain Future!" exclaimed Joan, pale face flashing relief at sight of Curt. "I was afraid you'd meet trouble out in that submarine mine—"

"I met trouble and plenty of it," Curt said, with a short, mirthless laugh. "Mines One and Two are completely destroyed. The Wrecker is going right ahead with his neat work."

"Two mines wrecked?" gasped Ezra. His faded eyes narrowed. "That's bad

—that's mighty bad. If the third mine is smashed, hell'll let out for recess across the whole System!"

"Lad, look at this man," called the Brain's metallic voice. "I want you to hear his speech."

Captain Future went over to the Brain, and bent over the unconscious Venusian. The man was still babbling deliriously in thick, queerly slurred speech, making weak, vague movements.

"Ever hear any language like that before?" Simon Wright asked Curt Newton. "There's none like it in our file."

Curt slowly shook his head.

"It's new to me," he muttered. "And Simon, the slurred, distorted sound of it makes me think that language was never even originated by human voice-organs!"

THE Brain's lens-eyes swung toward the red-haired young scientific wizard quickly. "I came to the same conclusion, Curtis. And that implies that this Venusian has an alien mind in his body."

Captain Future eyed the unconscious figure narrowly, his mind racing. This Venusian was one of the Wrecker's men, and hence a possible lead straight to the Wrecker. And such a lead must be found if the mysterious plotter was to be found and stopped before he brought on a final disaster to the System's vital gravium supply.

"We checked this fellow's identity-disc with the Planet Police records at Amphitrite Headquarters," Ezra Gurney was drawing. "His name is Ki Iri and he's a Venusian fisherman who came here to Neptune a year ago. Six weeks ago, he disappeared with some other fishermen on a cruise northwest of here. Before that time, he was just an ordinary fisherman."

"And since then," Curt muttered, "he's been one of the Wrecker's men—with an alien mind in his body. It's damned queer."

He spoke suddenly.

"Ezra, call Amphitrite Headquarters and find out how many other fishermen have disappeared in the last couple of months."

Otho was staring dubiously at the

unconscious Venusian. "I still don't see how he could have an alien mind in him."

Curt looked at the Brain.

"Maybe the old Martian brain-exchanging process, Simon?"

"Possibly," rasped the Brain, "though there's no surgical scar on his skull. We can check with the X-ray, though."

"Hook up the X-ray tubes, Grag," Captain Future ordered. "We're going to check this fellow's body."

The robot swung out the powerful cylindrical glass tubes over the Venusian, and started them sputtering and glowing, drenching the unconscious man with their penetrating "tuned" X-rays.

Curt had donned a pair of fluoroscopic spectacles. He slipped similar lenses over the Brain's glass eyes. The red-haired master of science and the bodiless Brain began their inspection.

Joan Randall watched them tensely. The only sound was the sputtering of the glowing tubes. Grag and Otho were bending eagerly forward behind the two searchers.

"His brain has been untouched, Simon," Curt muttered. "The operation would be sure to leave scars, and there's no evidence of the cranium having been trephined as would be necessary."

"Aye, lad—there's been no exchange of brains here," rasped Simon Wright's voice. "Spinal cord and blood are normal?"

"Yes, and everything else about him," Captain Future declared. He straightened, took off the fluoroscopic spectacles, his tanned face deep in thought. "Physically, this man is still just an ordinary Venusian fisherman. But mentally, he's strange and alien. That adds up to just one possible conclusion."

The brain stared at him.

"You mean — that this Venusian's *mind* has been replaced by another mind without changing his physical body?"

"It's the only answer to this riddle," Curt declared. "Remember our own experiments two years ago with transferring the synaptic pattern of small animals? It could be done with hu-

mans." Captain Future paused.

"I don't understand!" Otho complained. "How the devil could the Venusian's mind be replaced by a different mind?"

Captain Future spoke thoughtfully. "The mind, Otho, is essentially an electric network of force connecting the neurones of the brain. Each webwork of electric currents, each human mind, is different in pattern."

"Sure, I know that," said Otho impatiently.

"Well," Curt continued, "it's theoretically possible that the unique electric webwork which constitutes a man's mind could be *lifted* from his brain by suitable forces, and transferred to another brain, and vice-versa. Physically, the two men would remain the same. But actually, their non-material electric mind-patterns would be exchanged."

JOAN looked at the unconscious Venusian in horror.

"You think something like that's been done to this man?"

"I feel sure of it," Captain Future replied. "But what kind of mind was put into the body of this man Ki Iri? That alien mind he now has isn't the mind of any kind of man we know."

Ezra Gurney had finished his televisor call to Amphitrite Headquarters, and had been listening to Curt's explanation. Now the old marshal interrupted.

"Headquarters records show that more than a hundred fishermen have disappeared in the last couple of months, Captain Future! They were all men who went out on fishing-cruises, and never came back."

"And this man Ki Iri was one of them," Curt muttered. His gray eyes flashed. "I'm beginning to understand now. Those vanished fishermen are the men with whom the Wrecker formed his band. He somehow put different, alien minds into the bodies of those men—minds loyal to him, who used the fishermen's bodies to obey his orders!"

"That explains something that puzzled me, too," he went on. "Among all the Wrecker's men I saw, were no Mercurians, Martians or Saturnians."

The reason is plain—there are no fishermen here of those races, for the simple reason that those three worlds have no oceans and so don't breed any fishermen that would be likely to come here. Get it?"

Captain Future strode restlessly to and fro. Excitement was rising in him as he saw a path into this planetary mystery finally opening.

HE turned, his tanned face eager and keen.

"Here's the way things stand as I see it," he said.

"The Wrecker is somebody who resolved to destroy the System's gravium sources and bring on a paralysis of interplanetary travel. What his motive is, we don't know. His organization is formed of kidnaped fishermen here, into whose bodies were somehow transferred alien minds of an unknown race loyal to the Wrecker. What race—again we don't know. Finally, the Wrecker is unquestionably one of the four remaining gravium officials—Quarus Qull, Orr Libro, Julius Gunn and Carson Brand. But which one is it?"

"It couldn't be Brand," muttered Ezra Gurney, "for he's only an employee of Gunn. And, anyway, if he were the Wrecker he wouldn't have been out in Mine One with you when it was scheduled to be completely destroyed."

Joan nodded agreement. "And I don't see how it could be Julius Gunn, Captain Future. If Gunn wanted a monopoly on gravium, he'd have destroyed all the other planetary mines. But he wouldn't have gone on and destroyed his own, too."

"Orr Libro's the Wrecker, I'll bet a planet, Chief!" exclaimed Otho. His green eyes flashed. "That sneaky, elegant Martian had his own mine on Mars destroyed because it wasn't profitable any more, as Gunn said. He was able to get a concession out here on Neptune, and he's going to rub out all competition and develop new mines here that'll give him a gravium monopoly."

Grag shook his metal head ponderously.

"You're away off the orbit, Otho," de-

clared the robot. "It's that Saturnian, Quarus Qull. He's had as much reason and opportunity as Orr Libro."

"Your brain must need oil, Grag!" cried the android. "You think the same as I do, don't you, Simon?"

"No, I do not," replied the Brain witheringly. "It could be any one of the four, as Curtis says. But it seems to me that Julius Gunn is the type of man capable of such a really gigantic plot."

Joan appealed to Curt Newton.

"What do you think, Captain Future? Haven't you any idea which of the four it may be?"

"I have an idea, yes," Curt answered, frowning. "But an idea based on a mere single clue isn't enough in this thing. We've got to find the Wrecker's base here on Neptune in order to smash him."

He turned to the grizzled old interplanetary marshal.

"Ezra, the Wrecker's organization must have a secret base on some island here, one used by their space ships and surface boats. Where could it be?"

EZRA GURNEY shook his head.

"Can't hardly say, Captain Future," he drawled. "Wouldn't likely be here in the Rock Isles—too near Amphitrite. Might be in one of the other archipelagoes—the Boreal Isles, or the Bird Islands, or maybe even the Black Isles that lie west of the Great Maelstrom."

Captain Future considered quickly. Time was precious, he knew. They must strike at the heart of the Wrecker's plot before it destroyed the last remaining gravium mine.

His keen mind saw two possibilities. Either one might lead to the mysterious plotter. Curt decided to try both.

"Otho, can you make yourself up as a fisherman from some other planet and play the part well?" he demanded of the android.

"Sure, chief!" exclaimed Otho, scenting adventure. "You ought to know I can pass myself off as anybody in the System."

Captain Future gave his orders.

"Then you disguise yourself as an Earth fisherman just arrived on Neptune. Go over to that rowdy fisher-

man's quarter in Amphitrite. Mix with the others there and try to find out about all those fishermen who vanished. Especially, find out where on Neptune they disappeared."

"I get it, chief!" exclaimed Otho eagerly, snatching out his make-up pouch. "The Wrecker's secret base must be in the approximate region where all those fishermen vanished, eh?"

"Before you go," Curt continued to the android, "you can check my disguise. I'm going to try a little imposture myself. I'm going to pass myself off as this Venusian, Ki Iri."

Joan Randall looked wonderingly from Captain Future to the unconscious, delirious Venusian prisoner.

"You're going to impersonate this man, one of the Wrecker's men?" the girl exclaimed. "Then you're planning to—"

"To see if I can't in that way penetrate the Wrecker's organization," Curt finished for her. His tanned, handsome face was eager as he explained. "Impersonating Ki Iri, I'll go and confront Quarus Qull and Orr Libro and our other two suspects, one by one. Whichever of them is the Wrecker will recognize me as one of his own followers, and will give himself away to me. With his identity known, we can seize the Wrecker at once and if Otho's mission helps locate the secret base, we can get all the plotter's followers, too!"

"But, lad," warned the Brain worriedly, "it won't be easy for you to impersonate this man Ki Iri. He's not just an ordinary Venusian, but a Venusian with an alien mind in his body!"

"I know, it'll be tough going to pass myself off as him," Curt admitted. "But I'll have to chance it."

Otho had been working speedily, and had finished his own disguise. The android, whose synthetic flesh could be softened and molded into any desired shape, was the greatest master of make-up in the System. He had now changed into a typical swaggering, bronzed Earthman fisherman, dark-haired, hard-faced, pugnacious. He had put on a soiled, stained zipper-suit.

Captain Future, under Otho's critical

eyes, began making up as the unconscious Venusian. Except for Otho, supreme in the field, few people in the System could match Curt in the art of disguise. And the android who had taught him that art now supervised.

Curt's red hair was darkened and straightened by a quick wash of stain. Waxite pads inside his nostrils and cheeks made his features a replica of the Venusian's. His bronzed skin was whitened to the milky hue of the other man by a smooth pigment. Finally, he donned Ki Iri's clothing, putting his emblem-ring in his belt and concealing the belt and proton-pistol under his zipper-jacket.

"All right?" Curt asked the android. He spoke in a thick, slurred, hesitant voice like that the Wrecker's man had used.

"Good, chief," approved Otho. "But be sure you move a little stiffly and jerkily, as all the Wrecker's men do."

"You can get going for the fishermen's quarter now," Curt Newton told him. "We mustn't be seen together."

OTHO slipped out of the *Comet*. Captain Future gave rapid last orders.

"Simon, while I'm gone I want you to bring this Ki Iri back to consciousness if you can, and try hypnotizing him to make him tell what he knows. Grag will be here to help you."

Curt turned to Ezra Gurney.

"Ezra, will you go back to the city soon and check something for me about those four gravium space ships that disappeared from their run weeks ago? Find out if those ships had any trouble of any kind when they were here on Neptune. Understand?"

"Don't understand but I'll do it," drawled Ezra.

"Joan, better stay here with Grag and Simon," Captain Future said to the girl. "I may need you when I return."

Then Curt strode out of the *Comet*, and hurried through the night back toward the city Amphitrite. He took care to walk with a stiff jerkiness such as was characteristic of all the Wrecker's men. Curt played his part with utter care. He well knew the hazards involved in this dangerous impersonation—but it might lead to the Wrecker.

People were coming back into Amphitrite's drenched streets now that the storm was diminishing. Nobody noticed the Venusian fisherman striding along toward the docks. And when Captain Future reached the docks used by the gravium companies, he peered keenly along them.

Julius Gunn and Brand would be together in their offices, he knew. He must wait for a chance to approach them separately. In the meantime there were his other two suspects, Orr Libro and Quarus Qull.

Light shone from the window of the small office-building on Quarus Qull's rented dock. Curt went to the structure and pushed boldly inside. If Quarus Qull were the Wrecker, he'd surely betray himself when he saw one of his own followers entering.

Captain Future stopped short inside the door. For Quarus Qull lay prone on the floor, dead. His breast was scorched and torn.

"Why, it's Ki Iri!" said a thick voice behind Curt.

Curt whirled. Behind the door were two hollow-eyed Jovians and a Neptunian. They were the Wrecker's men and had just murdered Quarus Qull!

The Jovian came forward, in his hand the atom-pistol that had just slain the blue-skinned magnate.

"What are you doing here, Ki Iri?" he demanded of Curt in his slurred voice. "It was reported that you had been captured earlier tonight by Captain Future's men!"

Captain Future's mind raced. The Wrecker had ordered these men to murder Quarus Qull, and they had just done it.

His disguise had deceived these men into thinking he was their comrade, Ki Iri. But they had been made suspicious by his appearance here. If their suspicions deepened, he was lost!

CHAPTER XIII

Otho Goes Fishing

OTHO the android, perfectly disguised as a hard-bitten Earthman, swaggered through the dark,

noisy streets of the far-famed Fishermen's Quarter. The mission Captain Future had given him—to find out just where had disappeared the scores of fishermen who had become the alien-minded followers of the Wrecker—was in the back of Otho's mind. He meant to carry out that mission, but he fervently hoped there'd be some excitement while doing it. For he was bored!

"Where do most of the fishermen here hang out?" Otho asked a passing Neptunian.

The gray-faced, peaked-headed planetary native pointed toward the waterfront.

"You'll find most of the fishing-captains at Zin Ziro's drinking-shop. There's always some of them there."

Otho strode on, in the lordly manner always assumed by Earthmen, proudest of the planetary races, when on another world. He soon reached the dingy street that bordered the waterfront. Loud voices and raucous music spilled from tawdry establishments. In front of the noisiest place, Otho glimpsed a swinging metal sign that bore in several planetary languages the legend, "*Fishermen's Haven — Zin Ziro, Prop.*"

The disguised android pushed into a dim cave of a place, hazy with smoke of *rial* and tobacco, and crowded with tables at which set the motley throngs of fishermen drawn from five other planets to Neptune by the watery world's great sea of teeming life.

Otho saw that the captains sat at a long central table apart, as befitted their dignity. The android walked boldly up to that table and met the dour, unfriendly gaze of the men at it.

"I'm Jan Ullman of Earth," Otho announce brashly, coolly taking a seat at the table. "Don't mind if I join you, do you?"

A yellow-faced Uranian across the table stared at him.

"You're a stranger to us," he said angrily. "You Earthmen seem to think you own every planet, just because you opened up interplanetary travel."

Otho sneered.

"At least we Earthmen don't ask leave of any saffron-skinned Uranians to do anything."

The Uranian jumped up, his hand going to his belt.

"No stranger can come in here and talk to me that way!" he hissed.

"You draw that atom-gun," said Otho levelly without rising, "and I'll blast you down before it's half out of your belt."

Otho was playing the part of a swaggering, domineering Earthman to the hilt. And the android was thoroughly enjoying himself—he itched for a fight.

But a half-drunken, good-natured Venusian captain pulled the enraged Uranian back into his seat.

"Cool down, Akk," he said.

Akk appealed to the man who sat at the head of the fishing-captains' table, a huge, ponderous green Jovian.

"Is this Earthman to come in here and insult me, Groro?" he demanded angrily of the Jovian.

Groro, the big Jovian, regarded the two parties of the dispute with a gravity befitting an interplanetary judge.

"You'll both sit down," he rumbled, "and stop bickering. By the demons of the Fire Sea, there'll be no blood shed at any table I sit at—unless I shed it myself."

Grinning, Otho sank back into his chair, and the angry Uranian subsided. A hurrying gray Neptunian waiter was at Otho's side. "Some real Earth whisky, sir?" he suggested.

Otho nodded.

"Drinks for everybody here," he added grandiloquently. Otho smiled. "It's on me, gentlemen."

A MUTTER of approval sounded. Otho took the opportunity to glance at his new acquaintances. Around the table, in addition to Groro, the big Jovian, and the Uranian and Venusian, were two Neptunian captains, and a hairy, solemn-eyed Plutonian.

Groro quaffed down a big bumper of marsh-apple brandy from his native world, wiped his mouth with his flipperlike hand, and then looked at Otho with more friendliness.

"Just get in from Earth, Jan Ullman?" he asked.

"From Pluto," Otho corrected. "I was out there fishing in the Sea of

Avernus. We got caught in the equinoctial blizzard, ran into an ice-pack, and I barely got out alive. I came here to Neptune to see if I could get started again. I've heard a long time of the great fisheries here."

"It's the best fishing in the System," rumbled Groro.

"Ah, but the great days are over now," mournfully said the Venusian captain. "What's the good of catching fish if there's no market for them, no ships to take them to other worlds? And this gravium business that has paralyzed interplanetary traffic will soon do away with our market altogether."

"It is true," said the hairy Plutonian solemnly. "I am going back to Pluto, before I get caught on this world with my equalizer worn out and no way to get a new one. The days of interplanetary travel are over, when the gravium supply disappears."

"Nonsense!" rumbled Groro scornfully. "You're like a lot of other people getting scared by these gravium disasters, and going panicky. Me, I'm going right on fishing—I'm not letting a lot of scared sheep all over the System frighten me."

Otho addressed a quick question to the big Jovian. "But they say fishing here on Neptune's pretty perilous lately. I've heard that a lot of fishermen disappeared a few weeks ago."

Groro nodded his bulbous green head.

"That's the truth, Earthman. Some of my best friends were among 'em, and nobody knows what happened to 'em."

One of the Neptunians contradicted him.

"We know what happened to those men," the gray planetary native declared. "The sea-devils got them."

"Sea-devils? Ho-ho!" guffawed Groro. "Are you still stickin' to that crazy yarn?"

"It's not crazy," replied the Neptunian earnestly. His eyes flashed. "You strangers who come here from other planets think that we Neptunians are babbling superstitious nonsense when we tell of the sea-devils. Just because you've never seen them, you say they don't exist. But we know they do exist, in the remoter depths of

the sea, cunningly keeping out of sight always.

"They are manlike but they are not men," the Neptunian continued solemnly, "for they breathe the water, not the air. They have powers and weapons beyond anything we have. Legends of our fathers say, indeed, that the sea-devils have great cities far down in the dim green depths, and ways of life we cannot guess. And they hate all intruders into their ocean, which is why they seized all those fishermen who vanished so strangely."

Groro winked at Otho.

"Ever hear such crazy talk? And these Neptunians actually believe it—all of 'em."

"Where did all those fishermen disappear—in what part of the ocean?" Otho asked him keenly.

Groro waved a flipper hand north-westward.

"Up there beyond the Great Maelstrom and the Spider Islands—somewhere near the Black Isles. Leastways, that's the way they were heading. I'm sailing back there at dawn for some fishing, and no sea-devils will bother me!"

OTHO'S brain worked rapidly. The audacious android rapidly made a decision. If the fishermen had disappeared near the Black Isles, the Wrecker's secret base might be somewhere there. So he, Otho, would go there and find out!

Otho knew very well that by doing so he would be exceeding the orders Captain Future had given him. But the android could never resist the temptation to find adventure.

"How about taking me into your crew, Groro?" he asked. "I'm at a loose end, and I've got to do something."

"If you can handle nets and dories, I'll sign you on," Groro replied promptly. "I've had trouble getting men."

"No wonder—no fisherman in his right mind would go up there beyond the Great Maelstrom," muttered the Neptunian.

Groro guffawed, and called for more liquor.

"Here's luck to our cruise, Earthman," the Jovian toasted.

An hour later, a little the worse for drink, Groro rose ponderously to his feet.

"Nearly dawn," he told Otho. "And it'll take me a little time to round up my crew."

Otho had drunk as much as the Jovian, but liquor never affected the android. He steadied Groro as they left the place. They started along the row of tawdry taverns on the waterfront. Groro peered into each one, and whenever he spied any of his crew, he strode in and pulled the men out bodily. Soon these rough methods had assembled his full crew of twenty mixed Neptunians, Jovians, Venusians and others.

The *Spray*, Groro's craft, was a ninety-foot aluminum hull, with steelite masts, an auxiliary rocket motor, and a mess of piled nets and metal dories crowding its decks.

"Cast loose those lines! Up fore-sail!" Groro bellowed at his men. "Step, you scum of space!"

The black sail rose quickly. A Plutonian steersman had taken the tiller, and now the fishing-boat began sliding out into the darkness of the harbor, away from the lights of Amphitrite. Otho saw that the eastern sky was paling as dawn approached. By the time they were clear of the harbor, and sliding over the great tidal waves of the open ocean toward the northwest, the morning mists were already lifting as the small, bright sun rose.

Otho saw the small brown dots of the Rock Isles, on one of which was Amphitrite City, receding on their right. The islands, mere slender peaks of land projecting up from the deep sea-bottom, were soon out of sight behind them.

"Better test our motor," Groro grunted, bending to the controls. "We always need it, to run past the Maelstrom."

The roar of its under-water rocket-tubes satisfied the big Jovian captain and he shut it off. Then, straightening, he clapped Otho on the back in a blow that nearly knocked him down.

"Well, how do you like Neptune, Jan Ullman?" he rumbled heartily. "No oceans like this on little Earth, eh?"

"Nor on Jupiter," Otho retorted.

Groro laughed. "You've been on Jupiter, eh? Do you know South Equatoria? I was born and raised on that jungle coast."

The big Jovian suddenly growled and reached for an atom-gun standing handy in a rack.

"Damned 'swallower' over there," he warned.

Otho glimpsed one of the monstrous, dislike, white creatures gliding along under the waves nearby. The Jovian fired, but the streak of atom-flame missed the monster, and it disappeared swiftly into the depths.

THEY saw other grotesque forms of the teeming Neptunian sea-life as they sped on. A great sea-snake coiled in battle around one of the giant, dinosaurlike *ursals*; a group of "breathers," sluggish black whalelike creatures that spent half their time on the sea-bottom and half on the surface, gulping the air they needed; and a big school of the so-called "solar-fish" that stay always on the sunlit side of Neptune, swimming round and round the rotating planet.

From far ahead a dull sound like distant thunder came to Otho's ears above the surging roar of the waves.

"Maelstrom ahead—twelve points to port!" called a Neptunian lookout in the bows.

"Put over five more points to starboard," Groro ordered the Plutonian helmsman, and to the crew he shouted, "Break out more sail! Jan Ullman, start the rocket-motor."

Otho started the auxiliary motor, whose underwater rocket-tubes began churning the green water astern to foam. The dull thunder from ahead had become ever louder and the racing *Spray* fought northward against strong westing currents.

"There she is, Jan Ullman," growled Groro, pointing off to port. "You'll never see anything like *that* on Earth."

Otho stared. He had been on Neptune more than once but he had never been this close to the Great Maelstrom, the terrific whirlpool in the planetary sea that was known all over the System.

It was an appalling spectacle. Far out there on the sea, tremendous cur-

rents swept in spirals toward a vast hole in the ocean. With deafening reverberation as of a thousand roaring cataracts, the currents swept into that titanic whirlpool.

"Nobody knows where all that water falls to!" the Jovian captain was shouting to Otho over the thunderous roar. "They think maybe it's sucked right through the planet. It's dragged many a good boat into its maw, has that thing."

Then Groro yelled to the helmsman, "Bear more to starboard, you hairy idiot! Can't you see we're losing distance?"

The currents, even at this distance, were insidiously sweeping the *Spray* closer to the ranging maelstrom. With sails strained by the wind, with rocket-motor throbbing, the fishing-boat fought away from the perilous currents. The thunderous roar dimmed, the Great Maelstrom receded, and the currents gradually lost their strength.

Groro grunted in relief.

"Always glad to get past that spot safely," he sighed.

"Are those islands ahead the Black Isles you were telling me about?" Otho asked eagerly.

"No, those are the Spider Islands," the Jovian told him. "The Black Isles are beyond."

The fishing-boat sailed close past the small archipelago of rock islands, and Otho saw how they had gained their name. Over the islets swarmed hordes of giant black spiders of a size incredible. Fully eight feet in diameter were the horrific arachnids, and they raced to the shore on great horny limbs and gazed with glowing, avid eyes at the passing boat.

"Good thing they can't swim or we wouldn't last long!" declared Groro. "The gods help the man who lands on those isles."

A moment later he added, "There's the Black Isles yonder. Our fishing-banks aren't far to the north of them."

Otho gazed intently ahead. The small group of islands now coming into sight were of a distinctive jet-black rock that made them stand out sharply on the green ocean. Largest of them was one towering mass with steep, precipitous walls and a flat top.

"That biggest and highest one is Black Peak," Groro volunteered. "Funny thing about that island—a couple of fishing-boats have claimed they saw space ships landing there at night lately. They must have been dreaming! There's nothing there to bring space ships."

Otho's eyes narrowed.

"And it's near here that all those fishermen disappeared, eh?" he muttered.

GRORO nodded his head. "Yes, somewhere around here. Storms wrecked 'em, I suppose, and the 'swallowers' got the crews."

Otho's mind was throbbing with excitement. He felt certain that on that high, lonely black island must be the mysterious base of the Wrecker's organization. He must get on that island, somehow.

Groro had gone forward to scold his crew for not reefing sail after passing the Great Maelstrom. And the Plutonian helmsman was looking the other way.

Otho acted without a moment's hesitation. He slid over the rail into the rushing waves, and struck out for the island a half mile to the west. He swam underwater, coming up only to breathe. The third time he came up, he saw the *Spray* circling around, a mile northward, and beating back and forth.

"Looking for me—they think I fell overboard," chuckled Otho to himself. "Well, it's nice of Groro to take the trouble."

He dived again and next time he came up, the distant fishing-boat was sailing on, apparently giving up Otho for lost.

With powerful strokes, the lithe android clove the green waters toward the high black mass of Black Peak, now only a quarter-mile away.

Then, off to his left in the water, Otho glimpsed two smooth ripples coming rapidly toward him—two enormous creatures swimming toward him beneath the waves. And even the audacious, reckless android felt a chill as he recognized them.

"Devils of space—two 'swallowers'!" he exclaimed.

The two great white monsters, the most feared of all creatures in the Neptunian sea, were bearing down on the android with deadly intention, opening wide the hideous maws that gave them their name.

CHAPTER XIV

Dangerous Imposture

AS Captain Future faced the three of the Wrecker's men who had just murdered Quarus Qull, here in the Saturnian magnate's office in the city Aphitrite, the wizard of science was thinking at high speed.

These three men thought he was one of their comrades, one of the Wrecker's men. His disguise as Ki Iri, the captured Venusian, had deceived them so far. But Curt Newton realized that they were suspicious of him because of his sudden appearance here.

"What are you doing here, Ki Iri?" demanded again the hollow-eyed Jovian who held the atom-pistol. "Weren't you captured by Captain Future's men?"

Curt answered, taking care to make his voice jerky and hesitant in accent like these other men of the Wrecker.

"I was captured by the Futuremen, yes!" he said. "But I got away from them, and hurried to rejoin the band."

"But how could you know we'd be here?" the other demanded. "We just came here from the Base—it was only an hour ago that the Wrecker ordered us by television to come and kill this Saturnian."

"I didn't know you'd be here," Curt explained quickly. "I was hanging around the docks trying to find some way to get back to the Base, when I glimpsed you coming here and followed."

Captain Future was gambling on the supposition that the Base of the Wrecker's organization was in some other island than Amphitrite. The correctness of his assumption was soon proven, for the other Wrecker-men seemed to lose their suspicion at once.

"Good! You can come back to Base with us now," their leader said. "The

Wrecker will want to hear of your escape from the Futuremen."

Curt risked a question. "Is the Wrecker at Base now?"

"No, but he is to be there at dawn to meet and confer with the kings of our people," answered the other, "so that they can prepare the last great stroke of the plan."

The man went on in his jerky voice. "Out of here quickly, now! That devil Captain Future must not find us here."

Curt Newton grinned inwardly as he hurried out of the murdered Saturnian magnate's small office. He followed the two Jovians and the Neptunian along the dark docks to an unused, unlighted quay. Here was moored a small, tubular submersible speed-boat of the type much used on Neptune's stormy sea.

They piled into the craft. The Jovian took the controls. He ran the craft down under the surface at once, and, keeping beneath the nighted waters, headed out of the harbor north-westward.

Captain Future's pulse was racing with grim anticipation. The whole situation had changed. Quarus Qull, one of his four suspects, had been definitely removed from the list. And a highly promising chance to get to the Wrecker had now presented itself. At dawn, in his hidden Base, the Wrecker was to meet the rulers of his mysterious allies, and plan the last stroke against the gravium industry. That last stroke, Captain Future knew, must be the destruction of Mine Three!

Curt vowed inwardly that that destruction would never be carried out. So far, the Wrecker had taken most of the tricks in this deadly interplanetary game. But now he was going to learn that Captain Future could play that game. Disguised and accepted as one of the master-plotter's own strange followers, Curt was on his way to the heart of the gigantic conspiracy!

"We can run on the surface now," the Neptunian was saying thickly to the Jovian steersman beside Curt. "The Maelstrom isn't far ahead."

The Jovian's handling of the speeding boat was awkward and clumsy, Curt noticed. Like their speech, every movement of these men betrayed some-

thing deeply alien and ill-at-ease about them.

"I will be glad to get back into my own body, when the great plan has succeeded," muttered the steersman thickly. "These clumsy bodies we now inhabit are fit for nothing—we can't even speak our own language in them."

"It is the truth—they are uncomfortable, incapable bodies," Curt replied in the same slurred accents.

CAPTAIN FUTURE'S heart had jumped. So he and the Brain were right—the Wrecker's followers were really alien minds transferred somehow into the bodies of kidnaped men. That was why they spoke only in Earthspeech, the *lingua franca* of the System. Their present human bodies couldn't physically form the sounds used by them in their own native speech!

"But if that's so," Captain Future wondered, "where in the name of ten thousand comets' tails did they come from? What kind of a race are these allies of the Wreckers?"

Curt's lips tightened. "There's only one possible answer to that, only one place the Wrecker could have found a race of secret allies. It all joins up together. The minds of some of that secret race, transferred into the bodies of kidnaped humans—"

To others, such a transference of minds would have seemed incredible, but not to the red-haired wizard of science. For Captain Future had himself, in the laboratory of Earth's moon, succeeded in such an experiment. He and Simon Wright, delving deeply into the nature of mind and discovering that a mind was really an immaterial web of electric currents, had tried the thing.

They had found that with suitable forces they could lift the electric mind-web out of the living brain, and implant in that blank brain the electric web of a *different* mind. Curt had performed this experiment with small animals, exchanging their minds from body to body, and then re-exchanging them without harm.

Captain Future had never thought of trying the experiment on humans, of course. But he had been sure that

it could be repeated with them too—that the minds of any two beings of the same species or closely allied species, could be completely exchanged.

"God, what a ghastly thing to use on humans!" Curt thought with repulsion. His jaw hardened. "The Wrecker has a lot to answer for when the reckoning comes—"

"There's the Great Maelstrom," declared the alien-minded Jovian beside him, at that moment. "It's not far now to the Black Isles."

Curt heard the dim, far-off roar of the mighty whirlpool. It lay miles to the west, a hanging cloud of seething mist and spray marking the boiling center. Captain Future had seen it from a distance on previous visits to Neptune. Yet he looked at it as intently as Otho was to look at it when he passed it hours later.

The night was still dark, but the flying storm-clouds had disappeared and Curt estimated that it was not long before dawn. Their throbbing craft passed a series of small dots of land he recognized as the Spider Islands. Then the Black Isles loomed ahead.

Straight toward the high mass of Black Peak, the steersman drove. The precipitous rock cliffs loomed up in front of the speeding boat. Captain Future stiffened. The man beside him seemed about to commit suicide by driving the speed-submersible straight into the cliffs. Curt tensed himself for the shock of impact—

There was no shock. Like magic, a hidden cleft in the black precipice suddenly became visible. Through its narrow entrance shot the racing craft. Curt Newton saw that they had entered a hidden, narrow fjord in the cliffs. They were in almost complete darkness, in a silence that seemed oppressive after the roaring sea outside.

THE Jovian snicked on a searchlight at the prow. Captain Future glimpsed black rock walls towering up awesomely into the gloom. The throbbing of the rocket-motor woke muffled, echoing reverberations. The waterway wound to the right, and debouched abruptly into a buried water-cavern of considerable size.

"Back at Base at last," muttered the

Jovian thickly. "And you are lucky to see it again, Ki Iri."

"I know it," Curt replied in equally hollow accents. "Those Futuremen who captured me were devils."

As he spoke, his eyes were keenly taking in every detail of this hidden base of the Wrecker.

Fluoric lamps suspended from the rock walls cast an eerie crimson glow over everything. By that illumination, Captain Future perceived that at one side of the buried water-cavern was a broad rock ledge, toward which their craft was gliding. Moored to rings in this ledge were three other submersible speed-boats of familiar type. Upon the very edge of the ledge, half in the water, stood a small square metal structure. And beyond it were some scores of men lounging. They got jerkily to their feet and came down to meet the arriving boat.

Captain Future's eyes swept the queerly silent throng. There were almost a hundred of them, Venusians, Neptunians, Uranians, Earthmen, and others. But all had the same strangely hollow eyes and stiff, expressionless faces. All, he knew, had alien minds in them.

"Has the Wrecker come yet?" asked the Jovian beside Curt Newton, as they stepped ashore.

A hairy Plutonian in the throng answered.

"Not yet, and neither have our kings come."

"They will be here soon," Curt's companion assured. He pointed toward Captain Future. "Here is Ki Iri, who escaped from the Futuremen and whom we brought back with us."

The Plutonian showed some excitement at sight of Curt.

"You escaped, Ki Iri?" he exclaimed. "We did not like to leave you behind, but the Futuremen were too much for us."

Curt gathered that this Plutonian was one of the party of the Wrecker's men to which the real Ki Iri had belonged.

"It was not your fault they captured me," Captain Future said hollowly. "I was lucky enough to get away from them later."

"Our kings and the Wrecker will be

here very soon," the Jovian declared. "Until then, we can rest."

Curt Newton, under pretense of sauntering idly, inspected the strange place. The rock ledge ran back along the side of the water-cavern for a hundred yards, and ended in a steep path winding upward through a crevice in the solid rock of the island.

"I'll bet that path leads up to some place where the Wrecker's space ships are kept," Curt muttered to himself.

He turned and sauntered back along the red-lit ledge, toward the small, square metal structure by the water's edge. Curt peered into it. In there he saw a big, complicated, mysterious-looking apparatus. The machine consisted mainly of two coffinlike metal chambers. Each chamber had a bulky, big helmet connected by heavy cables to a mass of electrical apparatus and switchboard.

Captain Future's scientifically trained eye immediately fathomed the design and purpose of the weird mechanism.

"An apparatus for mind-transposition!" he whispered. "This is where they've done it—"

Though larger, the mechanism was basically similar to the one he had used in his own lunar laboratory for exchanging the electric mind-webs of two animal subjects. The subjects were put into the two chambers, the helmets put on their heads and connected to their nerve-system. Then the subtle forces operated, the minds exchanged.

BUT in this mechanism, one of the two coffinlike chambers was under the surface of the water on whose edge the machine had been erected. That chamber was completely under water, while the other chamber was on the dry floor of the inward side of the structure.

Captain Future realized the appalling significance of that fact.

"My guess about the Wrecker's secret allies was right! This proves it!"

He turned sharply as a loud cry came from one of the alien-minded throng on the ledge.

"They come! The kings of our people come!"

All the strange throng were crowd-

ing now toward the water's edge, gazing eagerly with hollow eyes at the black water. Curt Newton joined them, his heart pounding as he too stared. Yet he knew now what he was about to see—the secret race who were the allies of the Wrecker in his tremendous plot.

Into the water-cavern from the ocean outside, a half dozen creatures were swimming. They swam below the surface, dimly visible underwater in the red glow of the fluoric lamps. Those underwater swimmers looked vaguely human. But the two legs of their white bodies seemed to have grown together into a powerful, tail-like limb that ended in fins instead of feet. And their short, powerful arms were finned at wrists and elbows.

Their heads were hairless, their faces quite human-featured. But at the base of their throats were open gills, pulsing rhythmically as they breathed the water. All of these sea-men wore short tunics of woven metal, and two of them carried metal rods.

An underwater race of near-human sea-folk, coming from the hidden recesses of the vast planetary ocean! The legendary super-civilized and super-cunning sea-devils about whom there were so many shadowy tales! They were the secret allies of the Wrecker!

CHAPTER XV

Dwellers from the Deep

FROM all the hollow-eyed men around Captain Future, an excited shout arose.

"Our kings have come!"

Curt Newton saw the sea-men down there in the water swim to the edge of the rock ledge.

"Kings of the hidden sea-folk!" Curt muttered to himself. "And it's the minds of sea-men like those that have been put into the bodies of the kidnapped fishermen."

The wizard of science had previously guessed from consideration of the evidence that something like this was the explanation. But now he had been given proof.

Somehow, Curt knew, the Wrecker had made contact with this hidden race of sea-folk, and had induced them to become his allies in the great plot to destroy the System's vital gravium supply. But the Wrecker had needed followers who could go across the System to other worlds, and these sea-men couldn't leave the water.

So, Captain Future reasoned, the mind-exchange process which the super-scientific sea-men must have discovered had been brought into play. The minds of sea-men had been transferred into the bodies of scores of kidnaped fishermen, here in this cavern. The thing was wholly practicable—the sea-men were basically human, and their minds would approximate the human. And that was where the alien minds of the Wrecker's possessed followers had come from!

"A hell-born, cunning plot!" Captain Future thought grimly. "But why should these sea-folk help the Wrecker strike at the gravium industry?"

One of the men beside him was calling.

"Bring the 'talker' so that our kings can speak to us."

A small instrument was hastily brought. It consisted of a boxlike electrospeaker, with a small microphone attached to it by a long cord. The microphone was put down into the water.

The sea-men down there swam toward it, with smooth, graceful strokes of finned arms and tail. Then, with their intelligent eyes looking up through the water, the sea-men moved their lips in speech. The speech came loudly out of the electrospeaker. It was an almost unrecognizably distorted, thick Earthspeech that the sea-men were using.

"Where is the Wrecker? He was to meet us here at this hour," demanded the sea-man speaking.

"The Wrecker comes now!" sounded a cry from one of the men beside Curt.

Captain Future stiffened, gazing with the others toward the water-tunnel that was entrance to this cavern. The faint light of dawn was seeping from outside along that tunnel now. And Curt saw the ripple of a small submersible speedboat that was throbbing into the

strange and sinister cavern.

The craft rose, breaking surface and heading toward the ledge. Its cover was slid back, and out of it rose a figure.

The Wrecker! The mysterious plotter whose unearthly conspiracy against gravium supply was fast paralyzing interplanetary civilization!

"So he's keeping his disguise on, even here?" Curt Newton muttered to himself. "Nevertheless, I'm pretty sure I know who's inside that suit—"

The Wrecker was garbed in a black space-suit, whose glassite helmet had been painted black except for two small eyeholes. The man inside that suit might be of any planetary race.

CAPTAIN FUTURE yearned for a chance to call the Futuremen on his pocket-televisor, and bring them with the full force of the Planet Police to crush this hell-nest of plotters. But he dared not risk it. Not since he had left Amphitrite had he been out of sight of the Wrecker's men for a moment.

The Wrecker was speaking, his voice coming muffledly from the resonator in the front of his black helmet.

"The sea-kings are here?" said the master-plotter. "Good!"

Curt saw the Wrecker approach the water-edge. The black conspirator and the weird sea-men down in the water faced each other, speaking through the boxlike electric "talker."

"Your people have done well!" the Wrecker told the sea-kings. "Mines One and Two were wrecked exactly at the scheduled time."

"And shall we go ahead at once with the destruction of Mine Three?" came the sea-king's thick-voiced question.

Captain Future felt an inner tension as he heard that exchange. Curt had been sure, since he first deduced that a hidden sea-dwelling race were the Wrecker's allies, that it was the sea-men who had wrecked the submarines domes of Mines One and Two. For he had seen, when he was almost trapped in Mine One, that the thing had been done from outside. But this revelation that the mine-domes were destroyed at an exactly scheduled moment gave final corroboration to the clue Curt had gained to the Wrecker's identity. He

was sure now that the Wrecker could be only one man!

"Yes, you will proceed now to destroy Mine Three, the last gravium mine on Neptune!" the Wrecker was saying to the sea-rulers. "But the Earthmen have posted guards in sea-suits around the outside of Mine Three."

"We can easily overpower those guards, and then weaken the dome wall with atomic flame-torches as we did the others," the sea-king replied.

"You will strike at exactly noon tomorrow. Then we will proceed, as we planned, to destroy Amphitrite island completely and rid Neptune forever of the intruders here."

"Good!" exclaimed the sea-man ruler. "All my people are eager for the hour when the Earthman city shall be destroyed."

Captain Future felt an incredulous amazement. The Wrecker, renegade to his own human race was planning to help the sea-folk utterly destroy Amphitrite? That would wipe out all interplanetary industry on Neptune, for that city was the center that contained almost all the interplanetary colonists who had come here.

Cold, furious anger gripped Curt. Anger not so much at the hostile sea-folk as at the Wrecker. What could be the motive of the mysterious plotter in thus seeking to destroy all interplanetary industry and colonization on Neptune? What would he be likely to gain by it?

"We shall have to be careful," the Wrecker was saying. "The Earthman of whom I told you—that devil Captain Future—is still alive and working against us. He must be eliminated somehow before we make the final great stroke tomorrow."

The Wrecker turned and spoke sharply to the hairy Plutonian who stood beside Captain Future.

"Hab Haro, you and your men failed to do as I ordered—to capture Captain Future's ship. That would have crippled him!"

"We tried to do it," The Plutonian replied. "But the Futuremen were on guard. They killed two of us and captured Ki Iri. But Ki Iri escaped later from them."

THE Wrecker swung toward Captain Future, and the disguised scientific wizard stiffened slightly as the eyeholes in that black helmet stared at him.

"You escaped from the Futuremen, Ki Iri?" exclaimed the Wrecker. "How did you do that?"

"It was easy," said Curt Newton, taking care to keep his voice hollow and slurred. "They thought me unconscious and didn't secure me—I shammed until their backs were turned, then dodged out."

"Then the Futuremen and Captain Future are probably looking for you now," muttered the Wrecker. His dark form became rigid. "I've an idea! A way to get rid of that cursed redhead!"

He went on quickly, to Curt.

"Ki Iri, I am going to send you back to Amphitrite—to kill Captain Future!"

"What?" said Curt, in amazement. Then he recovered himself. "I mean, how can I do that?"

"It will be easy," declared the Wrecker. From an outer pocket of his concealing black suit he extracted a tiny glass tube.

"This tube contains spores of the terrible Saturnian 'death-fungus'," he declared. "If one spore touches a living creature, it germinates and proliferates with incredible swiftness and the victim becomes almost instantly a mass of bursting, dying fungoid flesh."

"You will conceal this tube in your hair, and go back to Amphitrite, Ki Iri," continued the Wrecker. "Captain Future and the Futuremen are undoubtedly seeking you. Let them find you. And when they are around you, crush the tube in your hair and Captain Future will die one of the most horrible deaths in the System."

"But I will die that death, too!" objected Curt Newton.

The Wrecker stiffened.

"Are you not willing to give your life for the great cause that means so much to your sea-people?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is your duty to do this," one of the sea-men in the water admonished Curt through the "talker."

"Very well, I will do it," Curt Newton agreed, with apparent reluctance.

Inwardly, Curt sensed the grim hu-

mor of it. He was being sent to kill Captain Future! Curt resolved swiftly upon a course of action. He couldn't hope to do much here, one against a hundred. He had thought for a moment of smashing the fungus-tube when he got it, but it wouldn't affect the Wrecker, inside his space-suit, nor the sea-men in the water.

So Curt Newton had decided to return to Amphitrite, ostensibly to kill himself. Once back in the city, he would seize the Wrecker when he returned. For the corroboration of the clue he had nursed had given Curt direct proof of the Wrecker's identity. He and the Futuremen would seize the Wrecker, and then deal with the sea-folk.

"I had hoped at first to capture Captain Future, for that would have vastly aided our plans," the Wrecker was saying. "But that's impossible now, and it's safest to kill him."

"I will see that he does not live long," promised Curt, reaching for the fungus-tube.

At that moment came an interruption. From one of the sea-men in the water came a startled warning.

"A boat is coming!"

The Wrecker, on the point of handing Captain Future the fungus-tube, swung around alarmedly.

"But it can't be one of us coming!" he exclaimed. "All of us are here now! It must be an enemy—maybe Future himself! Stand ready!"

ATOM-GUNS flashed out in the hands of the possessed men who crowded the ledge. And down in the water, the sea-men waited with their curious metal rods raised and ready.

Curt was tense. His first thought was that Grag or Ortho had found the location of this secret Base and was blindly barging in.

The boat appeared, a small submersible rocketing into the red-lit water cavern at crazy speed. It bumped the dock, and the atom-guns of the Wrecker and all his throng covered the man who leaped up out of the craft.

"Why, it's Ki Iri!" cried the Wrecker incredulously. "Another Ki Iri!"

Curt's heart jumped at sight of the man leaping out of the boat. It was

Ki Iri—the real Ki Iri whom he had left a prisoner in the *Comet*!

The possessed Venusian's hollow eyes were flaming with excitement, his clothing was a mere harness, his body was scratched and bleeding. Somehow, he had escaped from the Futuremen, Curt realized.

Captain Future's brain raced. No chance to draw his hidden-proton-pistol and fight his way out of here! The eyes of all the scores of armed men around him had turned toward him, gazing incredulously at the two Ki Iri's who exactly duplicated each other.

"Devils of Neptune!" swore the Wrecker's muffled voice. "What is this? Which of them is the real Ki Iri?"

Captain Future tried to bluff his way out of it. He pointed accusingly at the panting, bleeding real Ki Iri.

"That man's a fake—an impostor!" Curt charged. "Everyone knows Captain Future and that android follower of his are experts at disguise. One of them has made up to look like me!"

"It's a lie!" yelled the real Ki Iri in his thick, hoarse voice. "It's he that's the impostor—it's he that's Captain Future!"

"Cover them both!" rang the Wrecker's voice ominously. "One of them is lying. We'll soon find out which."

Curt inwardly cursed the turn of events that had brought the Venusian here. But he kept up his audacious bluff.

"It's he that's trying to deceive you," Curt asserted loudly. As he talked, he was working his hand slowly into his jacket toward his proton-gun.

"There's one sure way to tell immediately which of them is Ki Iri and which is Captain Future," snapped the Wrecker. "Ki Iri is a Venusian and Captain Future is an Earthman. Look at their gravitation-equalizers. The man who has his equalizer set to the gravity strength of Venus is Ki Iri, and the man who has his equalizer set to Earth gravity is Captain Future."

Curt Newton realized instantly that his bluff was finished. There was no escape for him—but he'd take the Wrecker with him!

He drew the proton-pistol from inside his jacket with blurring speed and

leveled it at the Wrecker. But the dark plotter had been on the alert for just such an action.

"That's Future—get him!" yelled the Wrecker, and at the same time threw himself down.

Curt's pale proton-beam blasted over the Wrecker's head and missed. Before Captain Future could fire again, men were piling on him from all sides. The rage he felt at being trapped drove Curt's fists in furious blows. The proton-pistol had been snatched from him and tossed aside, but the big disguised Earthman fought like a trapped Plutonian *korlat*.

HIS fists beat a devil's tattoo on the faces of men trying to pull him down. He felt his knuckles crunch flesh and bone and heard the yells of pain and anger of those he got home to. But they pulled him down, finally, and held him by force of numbers.

"We'll make sure this is Captain Future," the Wrecker snapped. "Bring water and oil—clean off that disguise."

Helplessly, Curt felt them wiping away the white pigment on his face, the black dye that stained his hair. His own tanned face and red hair reappeared.

"It's Future, all right," gloated the Wrecker. "Cunning devil—and I was going to send him to kill himself!"

"You'll wish you had killed yourself before I get through with you!" gritted Curt Newton, gray eyes flaring his hatred at the disguised figure bending over him. "Do you think you can get away with this black plan of yours? You can't—I've seen schemes just as clever as yours thwarted."

"I know you've spoiled more than one man's ambitions, Future," throbbed the Wrecker's voice. "But you won't ruin mine! I've been one step ahead of you from the first. And capturing you here makes my success certain. For from now on, you are going to help me. You are going to be my ally, Captain Future!"

"You're talking nonsense," Curt retorted icily. "There's about as much chance of me helping you as there is of the planets running backward."

"Yet you're going to help me," repeated the Wrecker. He laughed

harshly. "That's why I wanted my men to capture you at the very first—so I would have you for an ally. With Captain Future, the great, revered champion of law on my side, how can I lose? Of course," added the Wrecker ironically, "it won't be really you who helps me—only your body, with another mind in it!"

Curt Newton felt the hair bristle on his neck as he fathomed the dark, appalling significance of the plotter's words.

"You begin to understand, do you?" laughed the Wrecker. "Yes, you've guessed it, Captain Future. The secret of mind-exchange—the secret developed by the scientists of these super-civilized sea-folk in their hidden cities—is going to be used on you, here and now. A sea-man's mind is going to be put into your body, and your mind will be transferred into that sea-man's body!"

"Do you see the beauty of it, Captain Future? One of my loyal allies inside your body, doing my bidding, helping my scheme to success! The renowned champion of the System peoples, whom everyone in the System respects and obeys, my henchman! Why, I can't lose with that set-up!"

Curt Newton felt freezing horror. It was not of his own fate that he was thinking, not of the terrible idea of having his mind transferred into the body of a water-dwelling seaman.

The thing that left Curt aghast was the prospect of having his physical body, his reputation, made a tool of this arch-criminal and used for evil purposes. Why, even the Futuremen would accept the pseudo-Future as their chief, not knowing that only physically was he the same, that mentally he was an alien enemy!

"Take him into the exchange-chamber!" rang the Wrecker's voice. "One of the sea-kings' guards will undergo the exchange with him."

STRUGGLING futilely, Curt Newton felt himself carried into the small, square metal structure at the water's edge. He was forced down into one of the two metal coffinlike chambers. Straps across his body buckled him down. Then the big, bulky

electrical helmet was fastened on his head, its wires connecting directly to his nerve-system by a tiny incision made in his neck by the Wrecker.

The second coffin-chamber of the machine, the one filled with water, was directly connected with the water outside. Into that chamber swam one of the finned white seamen. The other helmet was put upon the sea-man's head by the Wrecker, and its wiring connected to his nerves. Captain Future could see the sea-man's large, intelligent dark eyes staring at him out of his water-filled coffin.

The Wrecker had gone to the panel switchboard of the mind-exchange machine, and was setting its controls with feverish eagerness in his concealed figure's posture.

"A few more moments, and Captain Future will be my obedient servant!" he mocked, over his shoulder.

Curt strained his muscles to crackling point to burst the metal straps that held him down. Impossible! He must do something, think of something, or in a moment he'd be prisoned in an alien body! But what—

Click! The Wrecker had turned a switch. Generators whined on a crescendo scale of sound. The Wrecker touched another switch. And Curt Newton felt a strange, rushing force sweeping through his brain, a tingling flood of energy that seemed tearing him away into darkness.

The electric web of his mind, his personality, was being torn away from his own body! Curt Newton's consciousness was hurled into complete oblivion.

CHAPTER XVI

Futuremen on the Trail

THE real Ki Iri was the first outlaw who had ever managed to escape from the *Comet*. After Captain Future and Otho had departed in disguise upon their respective missions, old Ezra Gurney had left for the spaceport to get the information Curt wanted. The Brain, Grag and Joan Randall were left alone in the little tear-drop ship with the unconscious prisoner.

Joan stared out of the window into the darkness, as though to follow Captain Future with her eyes upon his dangerous mission to the nearby city. When the girl turned finally, she found the Brain examining the unconscious Venusian.

"He's coming back to consciousness," Simon Wright rasped. "When he does, we've got to make him talk. We'll use hypnotic suggestion to find out what he knows," the Brain continued. "Get me the hypnosis-inducer."

From a cabinet Grag brought out a small mechanism consisting of striped spiral discs mounted on a tiny atomic motor. The Brain had him set these up in front of the Venusian, who now was stirring and opening his eyes. The prisoner looked about with bewildered, hollow-looking eyes, and then his gaze was fascinated by the whirling, spiral discs.

Joan watched with vague horror as the process of hypnotizing the prisoner continued. Grag constantly altered the speed and direction of spin of the rotating discs, whose stripes seemed now to flow together and now to separate. Finally, when the Venusian's whole body was rigid and his eyes staring straight ahead at the spinning discs, the Brain spoke to him in his metallic, penetrating voice.

"Who are you?"

"I am Ki Iri, fisherman of Venus," answered a thick, slurred whisper.

"You have Ki Iri's body, but your mind—you—are a stranger," the Brain persisted. "Of what race are you?"

The staring prisoner spoke slowly.

"I am of a race that—"

He stopped, his dilated eyes changing slightly, his voice edged with a weird, hypnotized elation when he again spoke.

"My comrades are here! Outside this ship—my mind senses them approaching—"

"Grag! Look outside!" ordered the Brain sharply.

The great robot tore open the door of the *Comet* and rushed out into the darkness to search around the ship.

The Brain and Joan Randall looked after him, tense with the suspense of new menace. Then a flying shape flashed from behind them and vanished

out the door. It was Ki Iri—escaping!

"Get him!" rasped the Brain in a shrill, raging voice. "He tricked us—he wasn't hypnotized at all!"

Joan sprang out into the darkness. She heard Grag running clankingly, heard the robot's furious booming shout. But after a few minutes, Grag came striding back.

"He got away!" boomed the robot. "He slipped into the dark and I was not fast enough to catch him."

"Tricked like a schoolboy!" cried the Brain furiously. "To think that I let that happen. I underestimated him, and he fooled me neatly. He pretended to be hypnotized, and seized the chance to turn our attention and then escape," rasped the angry Brain. "I should have known I was facing a mind of great cunning."

But Joan's thoughts were all of Captain Future. The girl agent's mind was never far from the wizard of science, and she paled now as she realized his peril.

"Simon, this puts Captain Future in danger!" she exclaimed. "Curt is disguised as Ki Iri, trying to find the Wrecker. If the real Ki Iri appears, and Curt's imposture is exposed—"

"You are right," said the Brain sharply. "Curtis must be warned at once."

"By his pocket television?" Grag asked anxiously.

"No, we dare not call him on that," Simon rasped. "If he's with the Wrecker, the call would give him away. But we've got to find him at once."

At this tense moment, Ezra Gurney appeared in the doorway of the *Comet*. The old interplanetary marshal's faded blue eyes narrowed shrewdly as he perceived their excitement.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

Joan explained urgently.

"That's bad!" Gurney commented. "Captain Future ought to know about that devil's escape, quick."

HE turned swiftly. "I'll go back to Amphitrite and try to find him and warn him. You better wait here, Joan."

Joan felt a little more hope, as Ezra hastily departed. She looked tautly

out into the dawn-mists after him.

"I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to Curtis because of my stupidity," the Brain was muttering.

"Nothing will happen to master!" Grag boomed confidently. The robot's photoelectric eyes looked to Joan, though, for reassurance.

Time passed, each minute dragging. Full day had come, the misty day and thin sunlight of Neptune. Still the *Comet* lay through the passing hours concealed in the rocks of the shore. Still no word came. Finally, at dusk, there came a sharp buzz from the television.

"That may be Captain Future now!" Joan cried eagerly.

But it was Ezra Gurney. "I'm still hunting for Captain Future in Amphitrite," the old marshal reported worriedly. "He hasn't returned yet?"

"No, and we're more worried!" Joan exclaimed.

"Well, I'll keep on lookin' for him," Ezra declared, his weatherbeaten face serious. "I'll call again."

Joan turned to the Brain. "Simon, we've got to do something! We can't just wait and wait."

"Impatience won't help us," Simon rasped.

"But I can't wait longer!" Joan burst out. "I'm not like you and Grag. I'm human and—"

She stopped, afraid of having wounded his feelings. But there was a frosty glimmer in the Brain's glassy eyes.

"I was human too, once, long before you were born, girl," said Simon's metallic voice. "I still remember what it was like, the hot emotions that choked and distorted my thinking."

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean anything," Joan said penitently. "No one could be more wonderful than you and Grag and Otho!"

The television buzzer again. "Maybe Ezra has some news this time!" Grag boomed eagerly, as he turned the mechanism on.

But to their amazement, it was Otho's face that appeared on the screen. The android still wore his disguise of an Earthman fisherman, but was panting, dripping wet, his face scratched.

"Simon! Grag! Listen!" snapped the

android. "I've found the Wrecker's base! I'm there now—it's on Black Peak, biggest of the Black Isles."

In swift, tumbling sentences, the android told them how he had accompanied the fishing-boat northwestward, and had swam from it toward Black Peak.

"Couple of swallows nearly got me in the water," Otho hissed, "but I killed one with my proton-gun and the other cursed beast stopped to eat its body. So I got to the island safe, and managed to climb up onto the plateau atop it. And I found two unguarded spaceships here—the Wrecker's two remaining ships!"

Otho continued breathlessly. "The Wrecker's base is somewhere on this island, therefore. It shouldn't be hard to find it. Get the chief and come here full speed."

"But we don't know where Curtis is!" crackled the Brain. "He's gone off after the Wrecker, and the real Ki Iri escaped."

"Devils of space!" swore the android. "Why did you let that prisoner escape? It puts the chief in danger—"

"I know, I know," rasped the Brain. "Listen, Otho, if the Wrecker's base is on that island, Curtis may be there—he went after the Wrecker, remember. We're going to come to you at once."

"Good!" hissed Otho. "Land silently atop the island. I'll be waiting. And hurry!"

GRAG was already striding clankingly to the controls. The *Comet* zoomed up suddenly through the gathering darkness and rocketed low across Amphitrite Island and the city lights, and then over the black sea beyond. The speed with which they tore through the night above the vast ocean was indication of Grag's anxiety. They flew northwestward through obscurity until Triton suddenly rose up from the western horizon, cast its silvery light across the heaving sea.

"There's the Maelstrom down there to the left," Simon declared. "The Spider Islands and Black Isles are not far beyond."

The Black Isles showed as dark little masses standing out upon the sil-

ver planetary sea. Highest among them towered one flat-topped island plateau of rock.

"That's Black Peak—head for it, Grag," Simon said. "Cut most of the rockets and go in as quietly as possible."

With only a dim, murmuring drone from its muffled rocket-tubes, the *Comet* circled toward the flat top of the high island. The silver light of Triton showed the island top as a rocky black plateau, upon which glinted the dark metal bulks of two small, swift-lined spaceships that were parked there.

Grag brought the tear-drop craft down like a ghost-ship upon the rock nearby. Then the robot opened the door and, picking up the Brain, strode outside with Joan Randall following.

They stood in silvery moonlight. Suddenly, a flying shape came through the night toward them. Grag grabbed out his proton-pistol, but the newcomer was Otho.

"Did you stop on the way to play with Eek?" Otho inquired angrily of the robot. "I thought you were never coming."

"I drove the *Comet* full speed!" Grag protested angrily. "I'd like to have seen you make as good time."

"A fine mess you made of things, letting that prisoner escape," Otho accused. "Seems like the chief can't trust anybody but myself to do things right."

Grag would have made angry retort but Simon's metallic voice interrupted their quarrel.

"None of that bickering now!" lashed the Brain. "Otho, have you any idea where the Wrecker's base is on this island?"

"I think I've found the way to it!" Otho replied eagerly. "It's a path that leads down from the summit of this cliff, through crevices and caverns, to some lower part of the island. I would have explored it before now but wanted to wait until you had come."

"Good, I will follow that path with you," Grag boomed. "We will find master and kill those who would harm him."

"You big iron lummo, I don't want your help!" hissed the android.

"Listen, you two!" the Brain commanded. "You will follow that path and see if it actually leads to the Wrecker's base. If it does, ascertain first whether Curtis is there, then act if he seems in danger. Otherwise, don't show yourselves."

"All right, come along then, Grag," growled Otho, starting off. "But try to keep those big metal feet of yours quiet."

The robot and android left Joan and the Brain at the *Comet*, and hastened across the moonlit plateau. Otho led to a crevice in the rock near the parked spaceships. A worn path led down into this crack. The android started down the path and the great robot hastily followed.

They found themselves in an almost absolute darkness. Only a faint ray of light from above seeped into the place. But that was enough light for the cat-pupiled eyes of Otho and Grag's photo-electric vision. Gloomy chasms and labyrinthine connecting caverns in the heart of the rock island opened before them. Their path led past yawning abysses whose black depths were impenetrable even to their eyes. Ever the way wound downward.

"I don't like this place much," Grag grunted. "Reminds me of the great caves of Uranus, where we—"

"Listen!" Otho hissed suddenly. "I hear voices—and the sea!"

THEY moved more cautiously, their proton-guns ready in their grasp. Then they glimpsed light ahead. The path debouched into a great hollow space dimly lit by suspended red fluoric lamps.

"The Wrecker's secret base!" Otho hissed. "See!"

They looked into the buried water-cavern in which, hours before, Captain Future had faced the Wrecker. Now the only persons in the cavern were some scores of the Wrecker's hollow-eyed planetary followers, who were lounging about the broad rock ledge at the side of the water.

"Imps of the sun, there's the chief!" exclaimed Otho incredulously. "And he isn't wearing his Venusian fisherman disguise!"

Among those men on the ledge

strolled the unmistakable figure of Captain Future. His red hair, tanned face and lithe form were easily recognizable.

"I can't understand it!" Otho murmured bewilderedly. "He isn't a prisoner—he even has his proton-gun. Why would the Wrecker's men let him stay free like that?"

"Master must be playing some trick on them that we can't understand," Grag whispered, with perfect confidence in Curt.

"It must be so, though devil take me if I can comprehend how he's done it," Otho muttered. "Anyway, we've got to attract his attention without the others seeing us. Wait till he comes this way."

Captain Future was sauntering back and forth. He seemed to be waiting for something. Then, as they saw Curt turn and stroll in their direction, Otho tensed. He waited until the red-headed scientific wizard was near the dark cleft in which he and Grag crouched concealed.

"Chief!" Otho hissed in a low whisper. "This way—it's us!"

The android saw Captain Future stiffen, and look sharply. Curt took a few steps forward and stood staring at them.

And Otho was vaguely uneasy as he saw that Captain Future's appearance was somehow subtly different. It was Curt who stood there—there could be no doubt about that.

But his gray eyes had a hollow, fixed look in them, his handsome face was queerly stiff.

"Chief, what's the matter with you—don't you know us?" Otho whispered anxiously. "You look at your comrades so queer—"

At that moment a thing happened that staggered the android. Captain Future turned and yelled to the Wrecker's men.

"It's the Futuremen!" Curt shouted. "Come running here and capture them, quick!"

The Wrecker's followers rushed forward instantly.

"The chief has betrayed us—he's helping the Wrecker!" Otho cried dazedly, stupefiedly. "We must be dreaming!"

CHAPTER XVII

City of the Sea-Folk

CAPTAIN FUTURE, when he was hurled into unconsciousness in the mind-exchange chamber, seemed floating in unrelieved blackness. Then gradually his consciousness returned. He opened his eyes. At first he thought he was still in the same chamber, that nothing had happened. Then he noticed that the coffinlike receptacle in which he lay was filled with green water.

He was living under that water, breathing it! And everything about his own body seemed strange and new to him. Bewilderedly, he looked down at himself. Curt felt his reason stagger as he regarded his body. For it was not *his* body that he now possessed.

It was a white, semi-human body whose upper legs were grown together in a powerful tail that ended in fins instead of feet. His arms, too, were finned, his fingers webbed. Wildly, Curt felt his head and face and neck. His head was hairless, bulbous in shape. Instead of a nose there was only a small nasal opening. And at the sides of his throat were gills, closing and unclosing rhythmically, extracting oxygen from the water.

"A sea-man!" Curt thought wildly. "They've transferred my mind into a sea-man's body!"

He thrashed around in the water of his chamber, raising his head above surface to try to see out. There was another chamber beside him—an air-filled one. In it lay an Earthman with tanned face, red hair and a long, rangy figure. That, Curt knew, was his own body, out of which his mind had been lifted by hell-born magic of unearthly science!

Curt Newton saw this much, and then he became aware that he was choking and strangling. He could not live with his head out of water like this. His gills were closing, starved for the water that now meant life. Dazedly, Captain Future drew his head back down under the water of his tank. As the life-giving water rushed again

through his body, Curt tried to orient himself to this amazing situation.

The Wrecker came over and looked down into the chamber at him. The dark, space-suited figure uttered a muffled laugh.

"How do you like your new body, Captain Future?" mocked the arch-plotter.

Captain Future had been in terrible situations before. But never had he faced such an appalling thing as this. Always before, no matter how terrible the menace, at least he had been himself, free to act and fight. But now he was prisoned in an alien body—a body that could not live for a minute out of the water.

Hands reached into the chamber from the outside waters and seized him—webbed hands of the sea-men out there. Curt was dragged out, and metal chains clasped swiftly upon his wrists as he struggled clumsily and futilely. Each of the chains was held by a sea-man.

The Wrecker was now speaking to the sea-men through the "talker" apparatus that converted sonic vibrations in the water to air vibrations, and vice versa.

"Better take him back to your city and prison him with the others," the Wrecker was telling the sea-men.

The leader of the sea-men agreed.

"We will do that. And at exactly noon tomorrow a party of us will strike to destroy Mine Three."

"And while Mine Three is being destroyed," reminded the Wrecker, "you must gather all your forces to annihilate Amphitrite island."

"It shall be done," was the sea-man's answer. "By tomorrow night, the intruders from other worlds will be swept from Neptune forever."

THEN the sea-folk leader turned his attention to Captain Future.

"You will come with us and not try to escape," the sea-man stated. "If you do try to break away, we can slay you instantly with our force-rods."

Curt Newton understood. The metal rods carried by the sea-men contained charges of atomic force. Chained as he was there was no hope of his being able to evade the deadly weapons. So

Curt swam with the sea-men as they started to glide out of the water-cavern toward the open sea. The light chains attached to Curt's wrists were allowed to hang loosely so that he could use his arms for swimming.

Swimming just under the surface of the water with the sea-men, Curt felt clumsy and awkward. He could not glide forward with the same smooth, powerful strokes of arms and tail as the others.

But this new body he occupied had the long physical habit of swimming to aid it. Its muscles fell into accustomed routines. With surprising rapidity, Curt found the way to swim like the others, his arms back against his body and beating in a narrow radius, his tail-like limb pushing him forward in great strokes. Like a human projectile he felt himself shooting forward through the green waters, companioned by the other sea-men.

Curt felt miserably depressed. Not alone because he was prisoned in an alien body. It was the thought that now in his own body was an alien, enemy mind—a mind that would use Captain Future's prestige to help the Wrecker in his dark, sweeping schemes.

"The Futuremen, and Joan and Ezra, and everybody else—they'll all think it's really *me*!" Curt groaned inwardly. "They won't know that Captain Future is now their enemy!"

He forced that agonizing thought from his mind. No use torturing himself with it now! His job was somehow to escape from this horrible situation and undo the ghastly thing done to him.

Now Curt and his guards were emerging from the water-cavern into the open ocean. The sunlight illumined the green waters in which they swam with warm radiance. The sea-men conducting him headed southwestward, swimming with tireless energy and speed at a depth some dozen feet beneath the surface.

Curt found that he could see for great distances through the water. His eyes were now a sea-man's eyes, evolved and adapted to the sea. And as he and his captors arrowed southeastward under the waters, Curt Newton was seeing

a world no man had ever seen before from such a viewpoint.

Looking down through the waters as he swam, Curt could see in the dusky depths great forests of submarine vegetation. Big groves of polyp-trees, pink and white and green, interlaced fantastic branches. Giant sea-weeds like great green underwater prairies rippled and waved in the currents.

IN and on southwestward they swam. Presently Curt Newton perceived that his captors were beginning to slant down to a lower level. The waters changed from a brilliant green to a duskier hue. And far ahead beyond the fairy glades of submarine trees, Curt Newton glimpsed dark stone spires and towers.

"The city of the sea-folk!" he realized, awed. "Cities, people, civilization—hidden all this time under Neptune's waters!"

His thoughts were wrenched sharply from the distant spires to a thing close ahead—a huge, dinosaurlike creature with enormous scaled body and small head, swimming toward them.

It was an *ursal*, biggest and most feared of all monsters of the Neptunian ocean. Few people had ever glimpsed one, but all who lived on Neptune dreaded the creatures. Curt's guards were swimming straight toward the monster as though careless of its approach.

"What's the matter with them?" Curt wondered. "Don't they see it?"

Then in a moment he saw the reason for their unconcern. The *ursal* was a tame one—tamed by the sea-folk! On the back of the scaled monster crouched a sea-man who urged it forward with a short, spearlike goad. And the *ursal* was pulling a great metal scow loaded with metallic ores.

It gave Curt Newton a new insight into the amazing life of these undersea people. He had known that they were necessarily high in scientific progress to have attained such a secret as that of the mind-exchange process. But to have succeeded in taming the fierce *ursals*!

The black submarine city ahead grew larger as Curt and his guards approached. Amazedly, Curt looked upon

this weird metropolis at the bottom of the sea. It was built of black stone quarried from the sea-bottom. The buildings were cubical, with barred windows and roofs to keep out wandering beasts of prey. Many of the structures were of considerable size, and near the heart of the city was a massive pyramidal building that seemed the center of its strange life.

As Curt Newton was taken across the roofs of the black metropolis, he looked in wonder at the thronging population that swam in flocks and swarms above the roofs. Men, women and children — all were supple and finned of body, all wore metal-mesh tunics, and all seemed to have their own occupations or professions just as in any city of the land.

Curt glimpsed buildings that might have contained factories, metal-working shops where unquenchable atomic-flames were used for underwater foundry work, other structures that seemed scientific laboratories. He marvelled at the astounding webwork of an alien civilization beneath the waters!

"And nobody in the System ever guessed it," he thought, staggered. "Nobody but the Neptunians with their age-old legend of the sea-devils—"

HE was being conducted, he now saw, toward the massive central pyramidal structure. Behind that building was a big open court in which were large, barred metal cages. A moment later, and he was yanked right down toward those metal cages by his guards. He saw now that some of the cages contained *ursals*. That apparently was the reason for these enclosures' existence.

One barred cage of the series held within it scores of sea-men, who were swimming idly around their prison or lounging dully on the bottom. Curt Newton was taken to the door of that prison. It was unlocked by one of his guards. His wrist-chains were unloosed, and he was pushed into the cage.

The guards swam away. And from behind the bars of his weird prison, Curt Newton looked after them.

"This is one place that nobody could

get out of," he told himself with sinking heart. "For even if I did get out, I'd be still prisoned in this alien body."

Then Captain Future's unquenchable courage reasserted itself in the face of the appalling situation.

"No, there never was a captivity that couldn't be escaped from! But how, in the name of a thousand space-devils?"

Curt turned to inspect his new prison. It was a cubical enclosure of strong, close-set metal bars, a hundred feet square. It was one of a row of such great cages, only the one barrier of metal bars dividing it from the next in line. In that next cage, one of the great *ursals* was penned, and in cages beyond, other *ursals*.

Curt looked at the sea-men imprisoned with him. There were more than a hundred of them, and they had shown some sign of excitement at his entrance.

"They think I'm really a sea-man like themselves," Curt told himself with grim amusement. "Wait till they find out that I can't even speak their language."

One of the sea-men addressed him in a thick, distorted speech. But, to Curt's utter amazement, the sea-man was using *Earthspeech*!

"Who are you?" he was asking Curt eagerly. "Are you a land-man too?"

Curt gasped, then found his voice and tried to speak in answer. But it was some moments before he could make his new and different vocal organs utter the sounds of *Earthspeech*.

"Yes, I'm an Earthman!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that you prisoners are men like myself—land-men whose minds have been put in sea-men's bodies?"

"Yes, that's what happened!" cried the other. "I was Dhul Uvan, a Uranian fisherman working with a boat out of Amphitrite. I and my crew were attacked near the Black Isles by sea-men who capsized our craft and dragged us away to a cavern in one of those black islands. In that cavern was a land-man in a space-suit they called the Wrecker, and a queer machine. He transferred our minds into the bodies of these cursed sea-men and kept us prisoners ever since."

"That's what happened to me, too,"

Curt answered grimly. "I'm an Earthman they got."

He realized that these were really the kidnaped fishermen, whose bodies were now being used by sea-men minds to carry out the Wrecker's orders. But why were they being kept prisoners here?

Dhul Uvan answered that.

"It's because, when those sea-men are through with our bodies, they'll want their own bodies back. And a body can't live without a mind in it, so our minds keep their bodies living till they need them, curse them! Then, when they have them back, we will all be killed. Until then, they hold us here."

"And escape from this place is impossible," Curt said bitterly. "Is the Wrecker to triumph?"

CHAPTER XVIII

Battle Beneath Ocean

NIGHT came down on the undersea city, as the Neptunian day waned above. The waters grew dusky, and then dark. And from windowed towers and buildings of the submarine metropolis, yellow atomic bulbs cast their illumination throughout the sea.

Curt Newton, in his weird new body, swam back and forth in the big metal cage. A fierce unrest possessed him. He must do something, anything to escape from here and save Mine Three and Amphitrite. But what *could* he do?

"I'll find a way!" he vowed fiercely. "This isn't my body, but my mind is still my own to work with!"

Sea-men came swimming through the dusky gloom toward the cages, with flat containers of metal which they thrust between the bars. Curt saw the containers held white mushy substance.

"Our food," Dhul Uvan informed him. "Better eat, for we won't get more until tomorrow."

Curt forced himself to eat, for all his strength might soon be needed. The food was a mixture of grated, uncooked vegetables grown in the sea-gardens outside the submarine city.

"What is your name, Earthman?" Dhul Uvan asked.

"They call me Captain Future," Curt replied.

"Captain Future!" The exclamation came from all the other prisoners. They looked at him in awe. "You a prisoner, too?"

"But not for long," Curt said grimly. "We're going to get out of here somehow."

"I fear it's hopeless," Dhul Uvan said sadly. "Even you can't do anything here, Captain Future."

Curt almost agreed with that discouraging estimate as the night hours passed. He had examined the metal bars on all four sides and roof of their cage. They could not be bent by any ordinary strength. They had been made to confine the great reptilian *ursals* like the one that drowed in the adjoining cage.

As morning neared, Curt noticed a party of a score of sea-men issue from the pyramidal building and swim away swiftly toward the southeast. They carried heavy metal tools that he recognized as atomic cutting-torches.

"They're going to wreck Mine Three at noon today as they promised!" Curt told himself, appalled. "They've got to be stopped."

Curt, watching the party depart, noticed now a large cylindrical metal mechanism which stood outside the pyramidal building, on a scow intended to be drawn by *ursals*.

"What's that thing?" he asked Dhul Uvan sharply.

"I don't know—some machine the sea-men have been working on for days," the other said dully.

Curt thought he recognized vaguely the design of the mechanism. It looked to him like the type of machine used to generate seismic waves for sounding the interior of a planet. Suddenly the purpose of the thing flashed over him. That was the way the sea-men and the Wrecker meant to destroy Amphitrite! The horror of the threatened disaster appalled him.

All at once an inspiration, the hope for which he had been searching, came to Curt. His eyes swung to inspect their cage. Yes, it *might* be done—

He called the prisoners around him.

"We may be able to get out of here," he told them rapidly. "Will you follow me and help prevent those sea-men from wrecking Mine Three? If they succeed in that, the whole System will be stricken, remember!"

"We would help," Dhul Uvan replied, "but how can you get out of here? There's no way."

"Take off your tunics," Curt Newton replied. "Bring them all to me."

He took off the tunic of woven metal-mesh that he, like all the other alien-bodied prisoners, was wearing. The other did the same. Curt at once began unraveling the strong, flexible metal cords of the mesh weave, and set them to following his example. In a short time, they had a large mass of the metal threads. Now Curt set them to twisting the tough threads together into a heavy rope.

WHEN they had finished, they had a heavy, flexible metal rope of immense strength, almost eighty feet long. Curt took the rope and tied one end of it securely to the locked, barred door of their cage. Then, with the other end of the rope, Captain Future approached the side of the barred cage which adjoined the neighboring cage in which a great *ursal* drowsed.

Curt quickly fashioned the end of his rope into a running noose which would just reach into the *ursal's* cage. Then he had the men bring him what was left of the food given them.

"Hope the beast likes this stuff," he muttered, putting it just inside the *ursal's* cage. He made a sharp sound.

The *ursal* awoke, looked at Curt with sleepy reptilian eyes, then noticed the food on the floor. The monster at once stirred its vast, scaly bulk, and with a gliding movement swam around and thrust its long neck and snaky head down to the food.

Captain Future was ready, and instantly he had reached through the bars and thrust his metal noose around the neck of the great beast. The *ursal*, alarmed, recoiled quickly. But the movement caused the noose to tighten on its neck.

Thoroughly enraged and frightened by the constricting pressure around its neck, the *ursal* pulled backward with

all the enormous brute strength of its mighty body, upon the rope. That metal rope, fastened at its other end to the door of Curt's prison, threatened to break. But the tough twisted metal strands were thick. Instead of the rope, the barred door of the prison gave way—ripped off its hinges by the *ursal's* mad pull.

"By the four moons of Uranus, you've done it!" cried Dhul Uvan excitedly to Curt. "Captain Future, we can escape now!"

"What good will it do us, when we can't ever regain our own bodies, and must stay in the sea?" another demanded.

"Stay with me and maybe you will get your own bodies back," Curt promised. "Now out of here, quickly. We've got to get to Mine Three by noon!"

The submarine city was still dark and slumbering. Without detection, Curt and his comrades rocketed up through the dark waters and headed southeast. Curt knew the location of Mine Three, and steered their course by the sun, whose rays struck down through the green waters. Through teeming sea-life, over submarine forests, they swam.

An hour passed, and another and still another as he and his hundred sea-man comrades with human minds swam on beneath the surface. It would soon be noon. And Mine Three was still a long way off, and they were tiring.

"Faster!" Captain Future urged the others fiercely.

An hour later they glimpsed a great metal tube far ahead that dropped downward from the floating depot on the surface.

"There's Mine Three—and there are the sea-men starting to destroy it!" Captain Future cried.

The tubeway led down into one of the great metal submarine-mine domes. And outside that dome, down in the dusky depths, sea-men were turning their atomic cutting-torches on the curved walls. A dozen land-men in sea-suits who had stood guard lay dead, blasted.

"At them!" Curt yelled through the water to his weird company. "They've killed the guards posted outside the dome!"

DOWN through the sea Curt's band shot, like projectiles toward the crew of sea-men attacking the dome. The sea-men, seeing them coming, startledly dropped their work of destruction and drew their atomic force-rods. Streaks of fire flashed and blasted a half-dozen of Curt's comrades.

Curt and his band had no weapons but their hands. But they outnumbered the sea-men five to one. They locked with the sea-men in weird battle, giving no quarter, asking for none.

Captain Future had rocketed down at a sea-man who was raising his force-rod to aim at him. The blasting streak of fire grazed Curt—and then he grabbed his opponent. The two whirled and wrestled in the water, the sea-man seeking to use his weapon, Curt seeking to wrest it from him. And the sea-man had the advantage in this struggle, for this was his element, and his body was not alien to him as Curt Newton's was.

Over and over they turned in the green gloom, locked in death-combat. Curt made a fierce final effort, and tore away the creature's weapon. He used the metal rod as a mace with which to crush his enemy's bulbous head. Then, half-dazed by that fierce fight, Captain Future looked around. The battle was already almost over. The sea-men had had no chance against their outnumbering, furious attackers.

"Got them all!" cried Dhul Uvan, swimming up to Curt. "What now, Captain Future?"

Curt answered swiftly.

"The main force of the sea-folk will already have left their city, going with their seismic machine to destroy Amphitrite. But we can't stop them with this little force. We've got to get our bodies back, if possible."

"Gods of Uranus, can we do that?" cried the other. "I'd go through hell to get back into my own body!"

"And I! And I!" cried the others.

"We'll head north for the Black Isles," Captain Future told them. "If the mind-exchange apparatus is still at the Base there, and if we can overcome the guards somehow, we'll have a chance to get our own bodies back."

They left the dome of Mine Three. Straight northward they swam through

the sunlit waters. But now their progress was slower—all of them were almost exhausted by the long swim from the city, and the struggle. Even their new sea-man bodies, adapted to such superhuman efforts, were tiring.

At last the Black Isles came into view, like giant black stalagmites rising from the sea-floor. They swam toward the mass of Black Peak, and presently Captain Future was leading his strange band in beneath the water to the buried water-cavern.

FROM beneath the water, Captain Future inspected the scene. The red fluoric lamps that lit the cavern showed that only a few dozen of the Wrecker's men were here.

Curt's hopes soared as he saw among those men a tall, red-haired figure. Himself! His own body, possessed now by the sea-man whose body he had!

"The Wrecker isn't here," he muttered. "And some of his men must have been sent elsewhere."

Curt looked hungrily at the square structure that contained the mind-exchange apparatus. He knew enough from his own past experiments to operate that apparatus. But how could he, when he couldn't live a minute out of water?

"Who are those two who are chained up at the edge of the ledge?" Dhul Uvan was asking. "They don't even look human."

Curt looked, and his hopes rose excitedly. The two chained prisoners to whom the other referred were Grag and Otho!

"If I can get Grag and Otho free!" Curt whispered excitedly. "They could help us."

"How can you free them when you can't leave the water?" the other demanded.

"There's a chance," Curt declared. "Keep down—I'm going to try."

He swam deep under the surface, toward that farther end of the ledge. Then he approached the shore, rising to the surface. He saw Otho and Grag glimpse him, and stare at him without interest. They couldn't recognize him in this alien body, of course. But Curt acted now.

He raised the force-rod he had taken

from his recent opponent, aimed it carefully at the bound, prostrate robot, then pressed the trigger. The streak of fire hissed up out of the water and struck where Curt had aimed—the big chain that bound the robot. The hissing little streak of fire blasted the chain in half.

Captain Future looked tensely back along the cavern to the Wrecker-men on the ledge. They had not noticed. Grag looked down amazedly at his severed chain, unwrapped it from him. In a moment he had released Otho.

Curt motioned with his finned hand for them to approach. Wonderingly, with a stealthy glance at the unsuspecting guards in the distance, the robot and android did so. Curt reached his hand out of water and grasped Grag's metal arm. Then he spoke, his voice reaching Grag by conduction.

"Grag, it's me—your master!" Captain Future exclaimed. "My mind is in this body."

"Master—in that body?" repeated Grag incredulously. Then the robot's eyes gleamed with joy. "We *knew* that that was not really you, in your own body, master! For you betrayed us to those men who captured us, and you'd never have done that."

"Listen, I and my companions have got to get back into our own bodies quick!" Curt told them. "First, you two will have to overpower those guards."

"But you mustn't harm them," Captain Future went on. "For those bodies, including my own body, are ours and we want to get back into them. Use this force-rod to capture them."

He handed the atomic weapon to Otho.

"I get it, chief!" hissed the android. "Come on, Grag!"

The two Futuremen stole back along the ledge to the unsuspecting guards. Then Otho's voice rang loudly.

"Stand up! And the first one of you that tries to draw a weapon will get blasted!"

Stunned by the surprise, the Wrecker's men stood still under the menace of Otho's weapon. Swiftly, Grag took their weapons from them, and then bound them, one by one. Otho, eyes blazing with excitement, came racing

to the edge of the water where Curt and his comrades waited.

"Now what, chief?" the android asked.

"Put my body—my *own* body—into the one chamber of that mind-exchange mechanism," Captain Future ordered.

Otho obeyed. And Curt swam around and entered the other, water-filled chamber of the apparatus.

Then, for minutes, he gave Otho the explicit directions necessary to enable the android to operate the apparatus.

"I've got it, chief!" Otho said finally. He put one helmet on the red head of Captain Future's possessed body, and the other helmet on the bulbous head of the body Curt now held. Then, as Curt had directed, Otho turned the switches of the weird machine, and the generators whined, the tall vacuum tubes sputtered. Abruptly, Curt was plunged into blackness.

He awoke from that blackness. He was in the air-chamber of the mechanism now. With a great throb of relief, Curt looked down at his rangy Earthman body, his brown, capable hands. He was back in his own body once more!

CHAPTER XIX

Quaking Doom

OTHO loosened the bonds around Captain Future's body, and Curt stumbled out of the chamber. He felt equal to anything now, back in his own body once more.

"Where is the Brain?" he demanded quickly of the Futuremen. "And the *Comet*?"

Otho explained how he and Grag had left Simon Wright and Joan Randall in the *Comet*, at the summit of this island.

"But after we were captured, the Wrecker sent men up there to capture and question any others who had come with us," the android concluded. "They must hold Simon and Joan there now."

"I'm going up there!" Captain Future exclaimed. "Grag, come along with me. Otho, you stay here and re-exchange the minds of all these Wreck-

er-men with my comrades down there in the water. As many of them, of course, as you have bodies."

Then Curt and Grag started, the big robot hastily leading the way toward the path that wound upward through the cavernous spaces of the island to its summit. When Captain Future emerged into the thin sunlight of day on the flat top of the island, he stared in frozen horror at the scene that confronted him.

The *Comet* was there, beyond the two spaceships of the Wrecker. And a dozen of the Wrecker's men were there, too. One of the hollow-eyed men was bending menacingly over the Brain, whose square transparent case rested on the rock.

But it was sight of Joan Randall that chilled Curt's blood. The Wrecker's henchmen had shackled the girl agent to a big rocket—one of the rockets used by spaceships as distress-signals in the void. It was set up, ready to be fired into the sky with the girl bound to it, its fuse sputtering angrily.

"Are you going to tell us now?" the man bending over the Brain demanded. "Or shall we shoot that girl off on a nice ride?"

Don't tell them anything, Simon!" flashed Joan from her helpless position.

"No, don't, Simon!" rang Captain Future's voice with deadly emphasis.

The Wrecker's men spun around, startled. For a moment, seeing Curt Newton's tall, red-headed figure, they showed no fear. They thought that body still held an alien mind!

But Curt revealed his true identity, by plunging forward with his proton-gun in his hand.

"It's Future—back in his body again somehow!" yelled one of the Wrecker-men. "Get him!"

Curt's proton-beam flared and struck, but his charge only stunned them. He couldn't kill these men, whose bodies belonged rightfully to others!

WITH a booming shout, Grag, the robot, entered the battle. First he split the girl's metal bonds with his steel fingers. Then, Joan released, Grag grabbed the Wrecker's men by pairs and bumped their heads together. The atom-guns they tried to use on the robot simply scorched his metal body

without harming it in the slightest.

Now up from the cavern-path came charging Otho and a score of raging, crazy men—men who had just regained their own bodies and were lusting for vengeance. The struggle was quickly over. Curt ordered Otho and the others to take the overpowered men down to the cavern and restore the rightful minds to their bodies.

"Captain Future, I knew you'd come!" Joan said happily. "They were trying to make Simon yield all your scientific secrets, by threatening to kill me in that horrible way."

"We've got to work fast," Curt told the girl and the Brain. "Those sea-folk are on their way with a seismic-wave outfit to destroy Amphitrite Island, Simon!"

"But the Wrecker's at Amphitrite!" exclaimed the Brain. "He went back there from here."

"The Wrecker won't be at Amphitrite when the city is destroyed," Curt retorted. "He knows what's coming and he'll have left the city—unless we're in time to stop him."

Otho came running back up with Grag. Curt spoke swiftly to the men who had just regained their bodies: "Remain here and guard that apparatus below. If we can later round up all the Wrecker's men, those who have not yet regained their bodies will do so then."

THE *Comet* rose from Black Peak a minute later, bearing Curt Newton, Joan, and the Futuremen. It screamed southwest across the vast Neptunian ocean toward Amphitrite. The city by the shore seemed normal when they sighted it first. Curt ordered Grag to land by the docks of the Neptunian Gravium Company.

As they landed, a snow-haired, grizzled man came running from a distance toward them. It was Ezra Gurney.

"Where did you go, Captain Future?" the old marshal cried wonderingly. "I've been hunting you—"

"No time to tell you everything now, Ezra," Curt said. "First, though—did you check at the spaceport on those gravium spaceships as I asked you?"

Ezra bobbed his head.

"Sure did. And I found that while

those ships had disappeared near Saturn and Mars, they had all had some trouble here on Neptune previous to their vanishing. Some of their crews had disappeared here and had to be replaced."

"I thought so," Captain Future declared, his gray eyes flashing. "The whole thing ties into place—every clue to the Wrecker points to one man."

"You mean, you know who the Wrecker is?" Ezra gasped.

"I've suspected from my first day here, and now I'm sure," Curt answered.

"It's Julius Gunn, isn't it?" Otho cried.

"Gunn's gone—he and Carson Brand left for Earth an hour ago in his space-yacht!" Ezra announced. "And Orr Libro, that Martian magnate, left in his own yacht right after Gunn."

"What?" Curt Newton cried, and Ezra nodded earnestly.

"It's so, Captain Future! Gunn said he was going to Earth to get the System Government to cancel Orr Libro's concession. And Orr Libro said he was following to keep that from happening."

"I knew the Wrecker would take care not to be here at Amphitrite when the sea-folk attacked!" Curt exclaimed. "And this—"

At that moment came a startling interruption. The rock under them shook violently for a moment, the whole island quivering sharply. Then the vibration passed away.

"It's the sea-folk beginning their attack to destroy this island!" Captain Future cried. "They've built a big seismic-wave machine that will set up vibrations of increasing intensity in the column of rock that bears this island above the sea. If the vibration reaches high enough pitch, the rock column will be shattered and split and this whole island will sink under the sea."

"Devils of space!" yelled Otho. "That would mean—"

A sharper quake shook the island, and they staggered. The sea in the harbor was boiling uneasily, and a stone wall collapsed somewhere with a loud crash. People came pouring into the streets with frightened cries. Still another shuddering quake came and went.

"Otho, you take Joan in the *Comet* and go after Gunn and Brand and Orr Libro!" Curt ordered. "You can overhaul them and bring them back."

"But what about you, chief?" the android cried.

"I've got to rally enough force here to stop the sea-men from their attack on this island," Captain Future exclaimed.

"How can we stop them when they're down there in the sea under us?" Ezra Gurney asked wildly.

CURT pointed to the scores of tubular boats moored along the harbor, tossing now on the boiling, uneasy sea.

"There're a lot of those submersible speedsters that can go right down into the depths!" Captain Future exclaimed. "We'll mount atom-guns on them and go down and fight it out to a finish with the sea-men."

The *Comet* screamed up into the sky a few minutes later, bearing Otho and the Brain and Joan Randall on their way to overtake the gravium officials and bring them back to Neptune. Curt Newton and Ezra, with Grag striding behind them, hurried to gather a force of men to carry out their daring plan.

Amphitrite Island was rocking now to quakes of ever-increasing intensity and frequency. More than one of the stone buildings had been shaken into ruins, and wild panic was seething through the motley planetary inhabitants.

The men whom Curt and Ezra gathered were representatives of almost all worlds—fishermen, gravium miners, and others. Pale, oppressed by the terror that now reigned over the quaking city, they listened incredulously to Captain Future's rapid explanation of the peril and his plan.

A big Plutonian shouted approval.

"Captain Future's right! Our only chance is to fight!"

Ezra Gurney hastily brought from the Planet Police Headquarters, in rocket-trucks driven by Police officers, a mass of medium heavy atom-guns of the type mounted on small space-cruisers.

"These are intended for Police cruisers," panted the old marshal. "But it'll take time to mount 'em!"

"Hurry, men!" Captain Future yelled. "The island can't last long at this rate."

Men toiled madly along the docks to install the atom-guns on the submersibles. The guns had to be mounted on the outer hull, and a fire-control switch for them installed inside.

Far below, the seismic-wave machine of the sea-men was setting up ever stronger vibrations in the towering column of the island. The whole island seemed about to shake loose from its foundations.

"Ready, Captain Future!" Ezra yelled, his weather-beaten face grim as he came running along the dock.

"Come on, then—all of you!" Curt Newton cried. "Dive straight down after me!"

Curt leaped into the craft on which he had been mounting one of the guns. Ezra followed, while Grag slid back the water-tight upper hull, and then took the fire-control of the gun. Captain Future started the rocket-motors throbbing. He sent the speedster hurtling down into the depths—and a score of armed submersibles like it followed it in that reckless dive.

The green sunlit water grew dusky as they hurtled downward, keeping alongside the vast stalagmite-column of the island. Down, down—and then in the dark waters below, Captain Future saw moving shapes.

"There's the thing that's doing it—the seismic-wave generator!" he yelled. "Try to get it with the atom-gun, Grag!"

He had glimpsed the big cylindrical machine attached to the rock at the base of the towering rock island.

"Sea-men coming up to meet us!" warned Ezra.

CURT saw them. There were hordes of the swimming sea-men down there around their machine. And many of them were mounted upon the huge reptilian *ursals*. Now up through the water to meet the diving submersibles came the sea-men on their fierce, mighty mounts. Their force-rods streaked fire at the plunging boats.

Curt Newton swept his craft aside to avoid that blasting fire. With a booming yell, Grag was firing the atom-gun.

Atom-flares from all the attacking submersibles criss-crossed in the dusky waters with the fire-streaks of the sea-men.

Curt saw two and then three of the submersibles around him hit by the defenders. Their hulls pierced, water rushed into them, drowning their occupants instantly! But sea-men had been hit, too! Atom-flares had mowed a deadly swathe through the hordes of the sea-men and their giant mounts.

"Grag, I'm going down through them this time!" Captain Future cried. "Stand ready to gun that generator!"

The battle was a crazy confusion of snarling *ursals*, darting sea-men loosing leaping fires, and plunging rocket-flaming submersible boats whose guns belched atomic flame.

Down through that perilous chaos of battle, Captain Future sent their craft recklessly diving. Fire-streaks flared before his eyes, weaving a deadly pattern that he eluded only by superhuman swiftness at the controls. The base of the island—the great cylindrical mechanism throbbing there—rushed up toward him.

"Now, Grag!" he yelled.

The robot acted. Their atom-gun belched a hail of deadly flares, that struck the throbbing mechanism and blasted through it in a half-dozen places. The big cylinder flashed into exploding flame, completely wrecked.

"You got it!" Ezra Gurney yelled excitedly.

The sea-men who had swarmed wildly to protect the seismic-wave generator seemed disheartened by its destruction. They began to retreat through the dusky waters.

"After 'em!" Ezra shouted fiercely. "Kill every one of the finny devils!"

"No—no unnecessary slaughter," Captain Future contradicted firmly. "They've had their lesson."

The sea-men, indeed, were streaming away panically in full flight toward their own submarine city far west. Curt Newton, feeling the strain of the weird and deadly struggle, watched them go. Then he led his depleted fleet back up toward the surface.

"Those sea-folk know now that they can't hope to drive our peoples from Neptune," he said. "And we can nego-

tiate with them in the future and show them they've nothing to fear from us. I think there'll be peace on this planet after this."

"But what about the devil who used them as allies to do all this?" Ezra demanded. "What about the Wrecker?"

"His turn is next," Curt promised grimly.

When they reached the surface and swept in toward the docks, they saw that the quaking of Amphitrite island had ceased. Small damage had been done. The panic of the inhabitants was passing.

The men from Captain Future's boats cheered wildly as they disembarked at the docks. And the tall, red-haired scientific wizard spoke to them in a ringing, confidence-inspiring voice.

"There's nothing more to fear, men! The danger to Amphitrite is over—and so is the danger to the System's gravium supply. There'll be no stoppage of gravium—no paralysis of interplanetary life now!"

"But the Wrecker?" Ezra Gurney repeated.

Curt was looking up into the sky, from which a small dot was dropping.

"The Wrecker is coming now—in the *Comet*," he answered sternly.

It was indeed the *Comet* that was dropping out of the sky, swooping to a reckless landing on the docks with rocket-tubes blasting flame. Otho emerged hastily, and Joan with the Brain. They hurried toward Captain Future and Grag and Ezra.

"It's all over," Curt answered their alarmed questions. "The island's safe now. You brought back Gunn and Brand and the Martian?"

"Sure, the *Comet* overhauled both their yachts before they were a million miles from Neptune," boasted Otho. "There they come."

JULIUS GUNN and Carson Brand were emerging from the tear-drop ship, and after them Orr Libro of Mars.

"This is an outrage!" barked Gunn to Captain Future. "Having me brought back like a common criminal!"

"Why did you take Brand with you instead of letting him stay here to run the company?" Curt demanded.

"Brand offered to testify about Orr

Libro's sneaking actions," rasped Gunn. "I'll cook that Martian's goose!"

"The time for accusations and denials is past, Mr. Gunn," Curt Newton said sternly. "I know which of you men is the Wrecker!"

There was a little silence. And then Curt spoke slowly.

"The whole plot has grown pretty clear since I've been on Neptune. And a daring plot it was—an amazing conspiracy to gain power over the whole System by getting a strangling monopoly on the gravium supply.

"That is what the Wrecker has been after—a gravium monopoly. For the Wrecker is someone familiar with the gravium industry, who saw how much power such a monopoly would give. He saw that with all gravium in his hands to sell or to withhold, he could dominate the life of the System. He could ask anything, any price, for gravium, since he alone would be able to supply it. It was this vista of possible power that stirred an ambitious man to plot to become the Wrecker."

"I knew it!" Orr Libro cried. "I told you that Gunn was trying to get a monopoly on gravium—"

Captain Future silenced him with a glance. "The Wrecker," Curt continued, "had been here on Neptune and knew the planet well. He had, during explorations for underwater gravium beds, encountered the hidden sea-people. And he saw how that strange race, with its super-scientific powers, could be made allies in his great plot.

"The sea-folk have always hated the intruders into their ocean—all the Neptunian legends told that. So the Wrecker made alliance with them on the following terms: he would help them drive the planetary races away from Neptune forever, and in return the sea-folk would supply him with as much gravium as he required. That, I'm certain, was the foundation of the Wrecker's conspiracy!"

Curt Newton continued searchingly.

"You see what success of that plot would have meant? The Wrecker would be able to get gravium from the sea-folk in the Neptunian ocean. No one else would be able to get it. The Wrecker would thus have his gravium monopoly!"

"But to make it a monopoly, the other gravium sources in the System must be destroyed, those on Mercury, Mars, Saturn and Oberon. And to destroy them, the Wrecker needed ships and followers. The sea-folk would follow and obey him, but couldn't live out of water. However, they knew the scientific secret of mind-exchange and this was brought into play. Scores of fishermen were kidnaped, sea-men's minds were transferred into their bodies, and those alien-minded men became the Wrecker's band.

"To get spaceships for his forays, the Wrecker planted some of his men on four of the gravium-run ships that stopped here at Neptune—he caused some of the crews to be kidnaped and replaced them by his own men. Those four ships struck simultaneously at the Mercury, Mars and Saturn mines, destroying them utterly. The fourth ship was detailed to capture me, to make sure Captain Future didn't interfere with this great conspiracy. It failed to keep me a captive, but it or one of the Wrecker's ships did destroy the Oberon mines.

"That left only the mines on Neptune here. Mine One and Mine Two were destroyed by the sea-men exactly on schedule as agreed by them with the Wrecker. They were then to destroy Mine Three and wreck this island and city. There would be no gravium mines and no colonists left on Neptune. The sea-folk would prevent them from being re-established. And the sea-folk would give the Wrecker, in return for his aid, a certain amount of gravium each year, no doubt, which would make him gravium-master of the System!"

CAPTAIN FUTURE concluded. "And that plot almost won success. The Wrecker almost got a strangle-hold on interplanetary life."

"But you haven't said *who* he is!" Ezra Gurney exclaimed.

"Gentlemen," Captain Future said softly, "the Wrecker is — Carson Brand!"

"Yes," said Brand quietly. "I am the Wrecker."

Carson Brand's pleasant, brown young face was a stony mask, his eyes

bitter with throbbing emotion. His gaze swept the thunderstruck faces of the others, and rested on Curt's stern features. Then Brand opened his hand. In his palm he disclosed a small glass tube filled with blue fluff.

Captain Future recognized that tube. It was the vial of the deadly Saturnian "death-fungus."

"Make one move toward me, any of you," throbbed Brand's voice, "and I crush this tube. We'll all be masses of fungus-spores in a split-second."

Appalled, the others stood frozen. All knew that the threat was no idle bluff. The terrible fungoid death would destroy them all if Brand broke that tube's contents among them.

Curt stalled desperately for time, racking his brain for some way of keeping that death from the others.

"Would you like to know *why* I suspected all along that you were the Wrecker?" he asked grimly.

"Yes, I would—before you die, Future," Brand said harshly.

Curt smiled.

"You gave yourself away out in Mine One, Brand. You remember, you went down into the submarine dome with me. You saw the little bulge in the wall. You cried that the whole dome was going to give way, and got yourself and the men out of there. And the dome did give way soon after and almost trapped me in it.

"But, as your mine-boss had said, that bulged wall in itself wasn't dangerous, Brand. There didn't seem a chance of its collapsing. Yet, as I realized later, you had been *sure* it would be destroyed in a few minutes. You were forewarned, therefore, that the dome would be destroyed at an exactly scheduled time. Which meant that you were in alliance with those outside the dome who would destroy it! You only went down in the dome for a minute to avert all suspicion falling on yourself."

"You're right, Captain Future," Brand rasped. "And you were right about the rest of my plan. You were only guessing about my treaty with the sea-folk, I know, but your guess is correct. I did discover that hidden people in my submarine mine-explorations, and I did see the chance to win a gra-

vium monopoly of the System with their help. I killed Kerk El and Quar-us Qull to keep them from developing new mines. I'd have won, too—except for you."

BRAND'S voice thickened with hate.

"From the first, you were the one man in the System I feared. That's why I tried to make sure you wouldn't interfere. But you did. You've won the game. But you're losing your life—"

Suddenly Grag acted! The robot had been bunching his metal limbs and now he sprang like a great projectile at Brand. Brand, with a yell of hate, smashed the deadly tube in his hand as the robot and he lunged backward.

Out of the smashed tube puffed an expanding cloud of blue fluff, ballooning with awful rapidity. Fungus spores that blossomed with such speed that as they hit the ground, both Carson Brand and Grag were covered with the deadly fluff.

Brand cried out horribly, waved fungus-covered arms in agonized convulsions—then was still. Curt had swept Joan and Ezra and the others back, away from the terrible blight.

"Grag!" he yelled.

Grag was rising to his feet. Calmly, the robot drew his proton-gun and began searing the fluff off his metal body by a weak beam.

"It's all right, master—his blight had no effect on me," boomed the robot. "He should have realized that fungus can't harm metal!"

CHAPTER XX

Rockets in the Night

CURT NEWTON breathed gratefully the warm, balmy night air of old Earth, as he emerged from the looming Government Tower. He walked with slow strides in the direction of the spaceport where the Futuremen awaited him in the *Comet*.

Before Curt, all New York seemed blazing with light tonight. The moonlit metropolis of stupendous pinnacles

pulsed with an almost frantic revelry of celebrations. For this city, like every city on every world in the System, was celebrating the lifting of that dark pall of terror which had threatened to paralyze the nine worlds.

Curt's ears still rang with the tremulous praise just given him by James Carthew, System President, to whom he had made report.

"Captain Future, you don't realize how much you've done for the System by exposing that ambitious plotter in time. Isn't there any way we can show you the gratitude we feel?"

"Just let me get going to the *Comet*," Captain Future had smiled. "The others will be getting tired waiting for me."

Curt felt tired himself as he strode through the parks and streets of the joy-mad metropolis, toward the spaceport. He felt the terrific strain of that deadly struggle out on far Neptune.

Throbbing, lilting music from a gayly lit pleasure palace he was passing, reached his ears. He stopped, looking in through its broad windows. In there, men and women were dancing joyously, under soft lights, celebrating the passing of the terror.

A queerly wistful expression came onto Captain Future's tanned, handsome face as he watched them. He was as young as they, really. Yet never had any such gayety been his.

Even in boyhood, when other lads his age had been growing up with friends and family he had been already roving the spaceways with the Futuremen, meeting the dangers of far worlds. And since manhood, as Captain Future, he had never known at what time he might meet disaster on some mission in distant, perilous solar spaces.

THEN Curt Newton's shoulders straightened, and the bright gleam came back into his gray eyes. Though he had missed much that other men had, he had had much that they could never even dream of. The wild thrill of battling with the loyal Futuremen through hazardous battles in the void; the thrill of discovery at penetrating weird, hidden lands of strange, far worlds!

"It's enough—it's more than enough,

for me," Curt Newton whispered to himself. He looked up at the bright full moon. "Time we were getting home!"

He strode on. And the gay dancing crowd inside that place never dreamed that Captain Future had stood looking in on them. But, minutes later, as a small, streamlined ship rocketed up across the city's pinnacles, the crowd streamed out excitedly.

"It's Captain Future's ship!" one of the merry-makers was crying. "He's been here on Earth!"

They looked up tensely at the little

ship as it screamed across the city in a rising slant, its rockets thundering in a drumming drone. Rockets in the night, pluming tails of fire as the rising ship curved up and up toward the great, mellow disc of the full moon!

Curt Newton and the Futuremen were going home. But only until the signal-light at the North Pole blazed again to call them forth to battle solar dangers.

Always, Captain Future had answered that call. Always, he would answer.

Earth could dance in peace.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

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No. 2—THE SYNTHETIC MAN

OTHO, the android or synthetic man, is the only being of his kind in the Solar System. He is a man who was never born, but was artificially made!

In his natural form no one would mistake him for a human being. For the android's arms and legs have a rubbery, boneless look. His artificially created flesh is pure white, not pink like human flesh. Otho's dead-white face has no eyebrows or eyelashes, and there is no hair whatever upon his well-shaped white head. In a beltlike harness he carries his ray-pistols, make-up pouch and other belongings.

Otho's face was carefully molded by his maker, Captain Future's father, before the final "setting" of his flesh. The man-made features are regular, yet there is something unusual about Otho's expression.

Like a cat's eyes, his jade-green orbs can see in darkness. And there is a queer, alien humor, a gay, mocking devilry in the cool way in which they stare.

THE WORLD'S FASTEST BEING

When Roger Newton and the Brain planned Otho's creation, they modeled the synthetic man after the human body, but simplified the pattern. Otho has no appendix or other such superfluous organs which in the human body are atrophied and useless. The android's physical make-up is streamlined for efficiency. To more than one Earthman, he has seemed almost diabolic—for his ironic, twisted mental outlook occasionally leads to strange results.

The skeleton around which the synthetic man's flesh was molded is composed, not of

rigid bones, but of artificial bones that are many times stronger and so flexible that they can be bent double without breaking. This fact, and the great strength of his artificial muscle-tissues, gives Otho his wonderful agility and speed. The fact that he is a superman has alienated him from normal beings, and at times, through sheer loneliness, the android will assume a human disguise and visit Earth incognito.

The android can run faster, jump higher, and move more quickly in an emergency than almost any other creature in the System. It was Otho who taught Captain Future speed and skill in the days when Curt Newton was a boy upon the moon.

It was he who taught Curt the method of super ju-jitsu which he had evolved, and which enables him to overpower an ordinary man in a twinkling. But, though Captain Future is capable of faster action than any other human in the System, he can't quite match the unhuman Otho.

Otho's body requires both air and food to maintain its metabolism. He must breathe—but his lungs are capable of breathing air that is so poisonous it would kill the average human.

While he can eat ordinary human food, the android prefers to take his nutrition in the elementary form of simple chemical elements. It saves time, and Otho is always in a hurry about something.

POWERS OF DISGUISE

Most famous of Otho's accomplishments is his power of disguise. By softening and re-setting his synthetic flesh, and changing the stature and posture of his flexible-skeletoned body, Otho can make himself up to be an exact double of anyone in the System, no matter what planetary race he belongs to.

Otho's power of assuming disguises has been of vital aid to Captain Future many times. Perhaps Otho's greatest feat of make-up was disguising himself as one of the Mind Men of Saturn.

That strange race who inhabit a legendary land hidden far in the endless Great Plains of Saturn are mere immobile and featureless

MEET THE FUTURE MEN!

In this department, which is a regular feature of CAPTAIN FUTURE, we acquaint you further with the companions of CAPTAIN FUTURE whom you have met in our complete book-length novel. Here you are told the off-the-record stories of their lives and anecdotes plucked from their careers. Follow this department closely, for it contains many interesting and fascinating facts to supplement those you read in our featured novels.

balls of flesh outwardly, though they possess minds of incalculable power and can use mental force as a powerful weapon.

Otho, by his wizardry of make-up, succeeded in the incredible feat of passing himself off as one of the Mind Men for a whole day, in a desperate emergency.

The unhuman Otho loves danger for its own sake. He is soon bored when there is a lack of excitement. For the android has neither the superhuman patience of Grag, the robot, nor the cold, austere detachment of the Brain.

LOYALTY TO CAPTAIN FUTURE

Otho would go through fire and water for Captain Future. To him, as to the other two Futuremen, the chief purpose of life is loyalty to the young wizard of science whom they three reared from a helpless infant.

But while he would carry out any mission that Curt Newton ordered, Otho will generally, through sheer boredom and recklessness try to stir up a little excitement on the way, and that often gets him into trouble.

Once, while on a mission for Captain Future, Otho went too far off his course to pursue a fleeing enemy, and got himself wrecked and marooned on an asteroid with a poisonous atmosphere. A human would have been asphyxiated there, but Otho's impervious lungs breathed the lethal air without great harm. But he had tramped the little world for a month before Grag finally found him. Otho had passed the time by constructing an underground hide-out which later proved invaluable.

The unhuman android's queer, mocking humor is one of his strongest characteristics. He never tries chaffing the Brain—Otho has too vast a respect for that brooding, icy-minded being. But Grag is the great butt of his gibes. He long ago found out that Grag has no sense of humor, and he has been deviling the great, simple-minded robot ever since.

OTHO'S FEUD WITH GRAG

The chief subject of his taunts is Grag's unhumanness. The big, naive robot would like more than anything else to be thought human. Nothing so pleases Grag as the idea that he is almost as human as other people.

But Otho denies that Grag is human with sly, deceptive casualness, he keeps pointing

out that humans breathe, and eat, and have flesh instead of metal bodies, and that Grag has none of these abilities. This invariably excites the indignation of the robot, and makes him deny vociferously that Otho is human, either.

And that always provokes an argument, for Otho loses his temper easily. Grag's customary retort is that humans can't remold their bodies and faces as Otho does, and that therefore Otho isn't human. The two have disputed the question all over the System from Mercury to Pluto—usually they get so bitter about it that Captain Future or the Brain has to interfere.

Yet neither Grag nor Otho are as serious in their quarreling as they seem. They may be shouting at the tops of their voices, but let any danger suddenly come up, and robot and android will instantly stop their dispute and work side by side in perfect co-operation. Each knows that the other has special abilities which cannot be matched, and that are often needed in the dangerous adventures into which Captain Future leads them.

SEEKS EXCITEMENT AND DANGER

It is when they are outward bound in space with peril and new scenes ahead that Otho is happiest. On the other hand, when they spend a long period in Captain Future's laboratory-home on the moon, Otho finds it boring. While Curt and the Brain are engaged in their abstruse scientific researches, and while Grag busies himself in the simpler work of the cavern-dwelling, Otho will saunter discontentedly among the lunar craters in his space-suit, and look up disconsolately at the starry spaces and wish something would happen.

High-tempered and impatient, fierce and gay by turns, excitement-craving and utterly fearless and absolutely loyal, Otho the android is one of the most striking of the three Futuremen who companion Captain Future in his perilous quests through the solar spaces.

One very human attribute of the android is that he can dream, and in his dreams he is always on Earth, for which he has a fierce loyalty, outwardly he can scorn or mock anything in the Universe—but inside his shell of impervious irony is a mind more sensitive and sometimes more unhappy than any Earthman could possess.

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Lunar Parasites

By **RAYMOND Z. GALLUN**

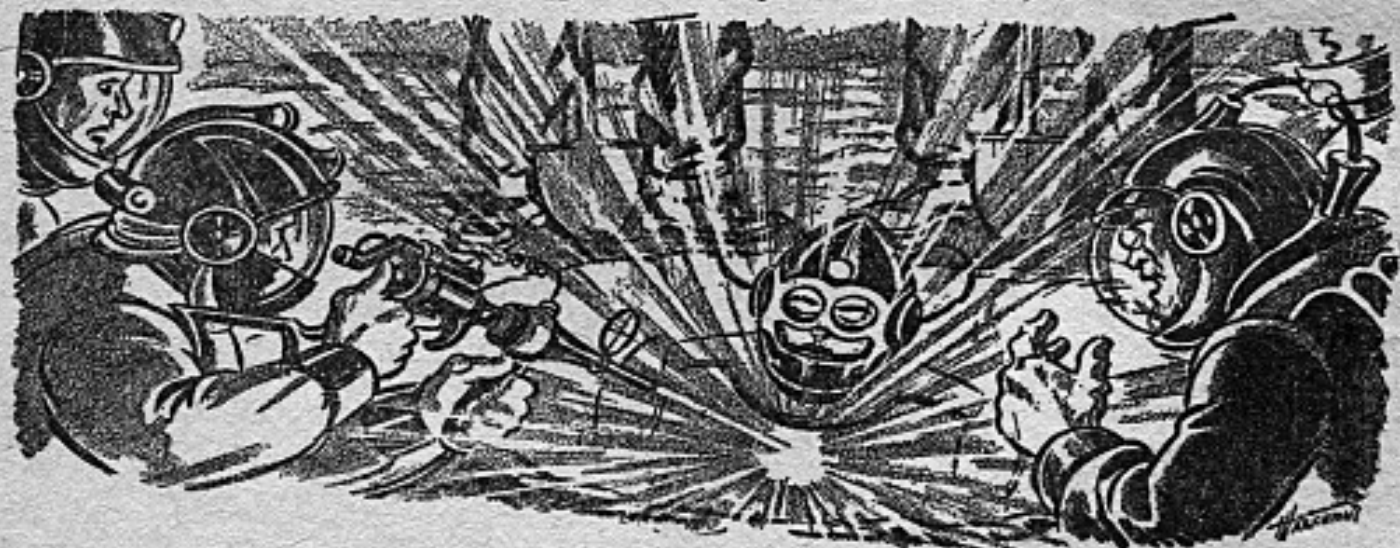
Author of "Renegade from Saturn," "Dark Sun," etc.

There Was Only One Way to Save the Doomed Men on the Moon—by Killing Them!

RED-HEADED Dan Radland bit his lip, nodded grimly. "All right, Chief," he said softly. "I'll say it was me that got all those men killed, then. But here's just one last request—no, three. Number one—let me dig my own grave, wherever I choose, within a radius of half a mile of here. Under guard, of course. Secondly—carry out my execution as soon as possible. Third—use a full strength welder-blast to bump me off with. Good enough?"

There, in the volcanic ash, was a long row of six-foot mounds—graves marked with crude metal crosses. They were the graves of men who had suffocated in the lunar airlessness, when Danny Radland had deliberately exploded that air-dome. With his own eyes old Stan had seen Radland murder those men by puncturing the air-dome.

The aged leader of the Lunar Rehabilitation Company wondered what lay behind Danny's odd request about



The blast welder made Danny lose all sense of being

Hardbitten old Stan Suchard looked at the young culprit with a puzzled frown. He'd always liked Danny Radland. Danny was reckless and gay. Clever, too. And deep. Deep as the mystery of the lunar deserts, with which they had all played company for so long. Nothing in the world could have pleased old Stan more than to see Danny proved innocent. But it just wasn't in the books.

There was that punctured crystal dome, the first of what was going to compose a city here in ancient Copernicus, the largest crater on the Moon.

doing his own grave-digging, and about being killed with the positively charged welder blast, instead of the usual intravenous anesthesia shot. Was his motive treachery, or some queer romanticism? Old Stan didn't ask, because he didn't care to listen to any more fantastic lies. There wasn't much chance for treachery to be effective. He pitied Danny's tired, worried, ill look. But the youth was sane. His calm, quiet tone proved that.

"Please yourself, Radland," Suchard said grimly. "I'll send you out to do your grubbing now. As soon as

you're finished, we can do the rest."

Beyond the encampment of great air-tight rocket ships, near a high mass of volcanic rock on the crater floor, Danny Radland began digging his own grave with a pick and shovel. He was clad in an old-fashioned leaded space suit. Over him was a grimly armed guard of six men.

Radland wasn't nearly as cool or devil-may-care as he seemed outwardly. He alone knew part of the truth! He'd shattered that air-drome with explosive, all right! But he'd done it for a reason! He'd had to kill those men. Had to kill them because they were already doomed by something ghastly and tenuous, even as he was now, himself—discounting the sentence of death! To have them walking around was dangerous to the entire crew! Having them buried deep in the lunar dust was far safer for their companions!

AND now Radland meant to prove his point even at the cost of his life! He was as good as dead anyway, even without the courtmartial's swift sentence!

For there were strange aches in his body, fireballs bursting painfully in his brain, and a chill in his blood. He had a fair idea of what was wrong with him, though mere words to Stan Suchard and the others weren't enough. Those buzzards wouldn't believe anything so weird and strange, unless they were shown!

No, it wasn't disease germs that had attacked him and those men he had killed. Such bacteria could never have lived under the bombardment of ultra-violet rays from the sun that came down to the lunar surface, barren of any protecting atmosphere. It was another form of life—electrical life, primitive, savage, senseless, and inexorable. Being pure, almost invisible energy itself, its sole food was energy—energy which the body of a man or animal could supply as effectively as anything else.

Danny Radland had wandered far over the surface of the Moon during his time. He was probably the only living man who had ever seen that

weird affliction, produced by a fantastic parasitism, follow its course from beginning to end.

It was his pal, Art Dantry, who had been the victim. A hundred hours after it had hit him, and it had been all over. Art had been a withered, cold corpse by then. And Danny Radland read a new significance in the ruins left in scattered places on the Moon. Those old Selenites, who had carved grotesque images and bas-reliefs in their underground temples and habitations, perhaps hadn't become extinct merely because their world had grown old and unfit to support them. Maybe this alien life, that had somehow found its way through a leak in Art Dantry's leaded space suit, had got them, too!

Such was the knowledge and suspicion that Danny Radland had carried around with him for half a year, before he came back to the Moon again with Suchard's outfit. And when he'd seen a peculiar lavender glow around the leaky insulation of a generator beneath the dome, his fears had grown a hundred-fold. This was the lunar parasitism in activity—it was lapping up its food. It absorbed heat, electrical power, anything to sustain its ghoulish vitality!

Those men working beneath the dome had complained of illness. All had been wearing, in their sorties afield from the encampment, not the old-fashioned leaded armor, but the newer aluminum suits, lined with an energized fabric that was supposed to be more effective than lead to screen dangerous cosmic rays.

But there was something wrong with that new armor, just the same. Radland had killed those men, with far more than regret in his heart. He'd killed them because it was necessary. And then he'd discovered that the affliction had bored into his own body too—maybe when he'd been near that generator!

The grave he was digging for himself now was of peculiar form. In the hardened volcanic ash he made it like the inside of a jar—a narrow opening at the top, and a wide bottom. He wanted to protect his executioners

from what he thought was going to happen, and so he was careful.

Radland hurried as best he could. He'd had the affliction, now, for about twenty hours. He wondered if any more of his fellows had been infected. He couldn't be sure but maybe he could show them what it was all about, at least.

For one thing, he'd tested himself with a pith ball, charged with positive electricity. It had been strongly attracted to his fingers. That was what had given him an idea. So now, when the grave was finished, Radland sent one of his sullen guards to fetch Stan Suchard, and Clive Harmon, who was going to act as executioner.

Danny Radland didn't climb out of the pit. He merely handed a letter he'd written up to old Stan.

"Read this after my execution, Chief," he explained quietly through his communicator phones. "Especially if anything goes wrong or looks funny. Harmon can blast me while I stand down here. . . ."

That was all anybody said. Radland saw a circle of faces looking down upon him. Faces that showed contempt, hate, and pity for a wholesale murderer. He wondered suddenly, with a dull hope, if his martyrdom would do any good. Almost with curiosity he watched Harmon point the barrel-like muzzle of the blast-welder down toward his head. When the trigger was depressed, Danny Radland lost all sense of being.

BUT to those who watched, things were very strange. The weapon gave a sharp hiss as usual. Then there was a powerful puff of energy from the pitlike grave. Electrical discharges lanced through it. Their muscles tingling, the men stepped back. When things had quieted again, they looked down once more into the grave.

Miraculously, Danny Radland's body and equipment weren't reduced to ash and fused metal as they should have been. He just lay crumpled at the bottom of the pit, not a visible mark on him. As far as appearances went, he might not even be dead—he

might be only unconscious! And yet the most fearful force of destruction known to man had been directed against him. It was uncanny!

While two of his aides proceeded to lift the body out of the pit, Suchard tore open the envelope that contained Danny's brief message. Men crowded to look over the old scientist's shoulder as he read:

Well, what happened, Chief? The disease, or whatever name you want to give the thing that clamped itself on me, and those boys in the dome, bears a terrific negative charge, as near as I can figure. Electrical, in at least one of its aspects. I tested myself with a pith ball on a string, positively charged. The pith ball was violently attracted toward my fingertips, showing that I was negatively charged. Because the blast welder is strongly positive, electrically, you should see neutralizing effects of some sort.

Yep, it's alive, Chief. Dangerous as hell. Maybe you'll understand now. Better use the blast on those bodies, too. Safer for everybody. And throw away those new aluminum space suits. They're no good at screening off this thing at all. But lead does the trick, somehow. . . .

Old Stan Suchard's heavy brows quivered, as fearfully and awedly he began to catch on.

"The negative electrical energy of—of this—life! It must have neutralized the positive energy of the blast welder!" he stammered. "That's why Danny wasn't destroyed by the blast!"

In another couple of minutes men were digging up that row of graves, a hundred yards distant. Each body, interned for twenty hours, was removed, still in its space suit, which acted in lieu of a coffin. Blasts were applied to each, with the same result as in the case of Danny Radland himself. Electrical crackles, betraying the death of something unseen—yet the bodies themselves remained entirely undamaged!

Meanwhile, Danny Radland came to. His muscles and nerves were plenty sore as though something deadly had been scorched out of them, but the sullen dizzy ache of that ghastly lunar parasitism was gone—neutralized by positive electricity, and smothered by an overdose of the energy that was its food.

Old Stan was running toward Rad-

land from the direction of the graves. "They're coming to life, Danny!" he was yelling excitedly. "All those men who died in the dome, when you let the air out!"

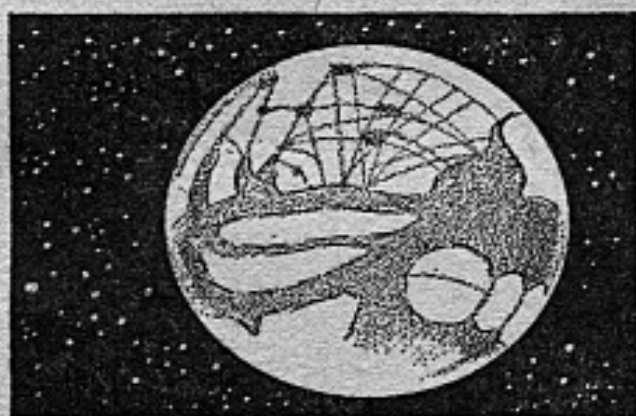
Young Radland raised himself weakly to his knees. It was his turn to be startled now, too. But after he'd thought a moment, he realized it was all logical.

"So, Chief?" he said to the flabbergasted old man. "Well—this thing must be something like catalepsy. Those fellows were just smothered—not damaged in any way. Their space suits protected them from lunar conditions. And the parasitism was electrical. It must have kept a little spark going in those men, making it not death but suspended animation. It

must have kept away all tissue decay, too—even the slightest. After all, our own lives are partly electrical too, in a small way. Anyhow, I'm damned glad, Chief, how things turned out for the best. . . ."

Stan Suchard helped his young companion to his feet. It was an apology. They both looked at the sullen wall of Copernicus around them, brooding in the sunshine. They both knew the Moon better, now—her ancient, cryptic history, her dangers, and her future, which they were trying to build. Rich mines and a city. . . .

But they were gladdest of all, this reckless youth, and this grim old scientist, because they understood and appreciated each other far better, now.



SEE CAPTAIN FUTURE LOST IN THE DREADED MACHINE CITY IN A LONELY DESERT ON MARS! WITNESS ACTION IN THE HIDDEN MISTLANDS OF SATURN!

THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL



DO YOU BELIEVE

BY JACK BINDER

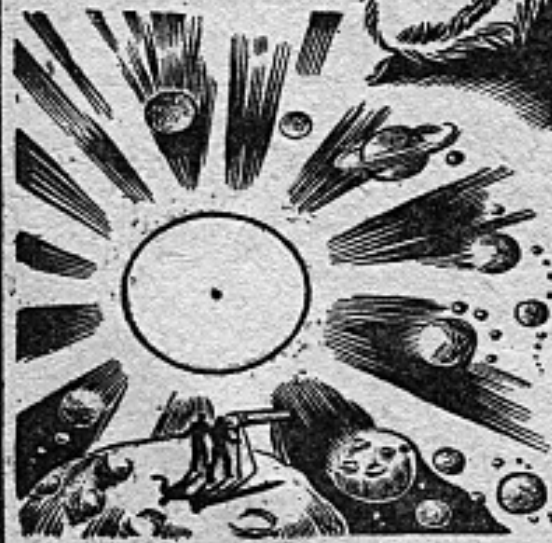
THAT LIGHTNING NEVER STRIKES TWICE IN THE SAME PLACE?



THE TIP OF THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING IS STRUCK AS MANY AS 30 TIMES A YEAR BY LIGHTNING! LIGHTNING FOLLOWS THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE-AGAIN AND AGAIN! AN AVERAGE LIGHTNING STORM RELEASES ONLY A DIME'S WORTH OF ELECTRICITY, ALTOGETHER!

FISH IS A BRAIN FOOD?

ESKIMOS, WHO LIVE ALMOST SOLELY ON FISH, ARE NOT REMARKABLE FOR THEIR IQ'S. SCIENTISTS, AS A CLASS, EAT LITTLE FISH, ALTHOUGH FISH-FOOD IS HIGH IN PHOSPHATES, WHICH OUR BRAIN NEEDS, NO AMOUNT OF INCREASED FISH DIET SENDS MORE PHOSPHATES TO OUR HEADS. GLANDS CONTROL THAT!




THAT MATTER IS SOLID?

THERE IS MORE SPACE BETWEEN THE ELECTRONS AND PROTONS OF THE ATOMS WHICH COMPOSE MATTER, IN PROPORTION, THAN BETWEEN THE SUN AND THE PLANETS. IF LITTLE BEINGS LIVED ON PROTONS, THEIR BEST TELESCOPES WOULD NOT SHOW THEM THE NEAREST ELECTRON!



THAT A COMET'S TAIL GASES WOULD DESTROY LIFE ON EARTH?

IN 1927, EARTH PASSED THROUGH THE TAIL OF THE PONS-WINNECKE COMET, WHICH APPROACHED WITHIN $3\frac{1}{2}$ MILLION MILES...THE GENERAL DEATH RATE ON EARTH DID NOT INCREASE ONE IOTA. A COMET TAIL GASES, THOUGH POISONOUS, ARE MORE TENUOUS THAN THE BEST VACUUM EVER MADE IN A LABORATORY!



THAT RADIUM IS RARE?

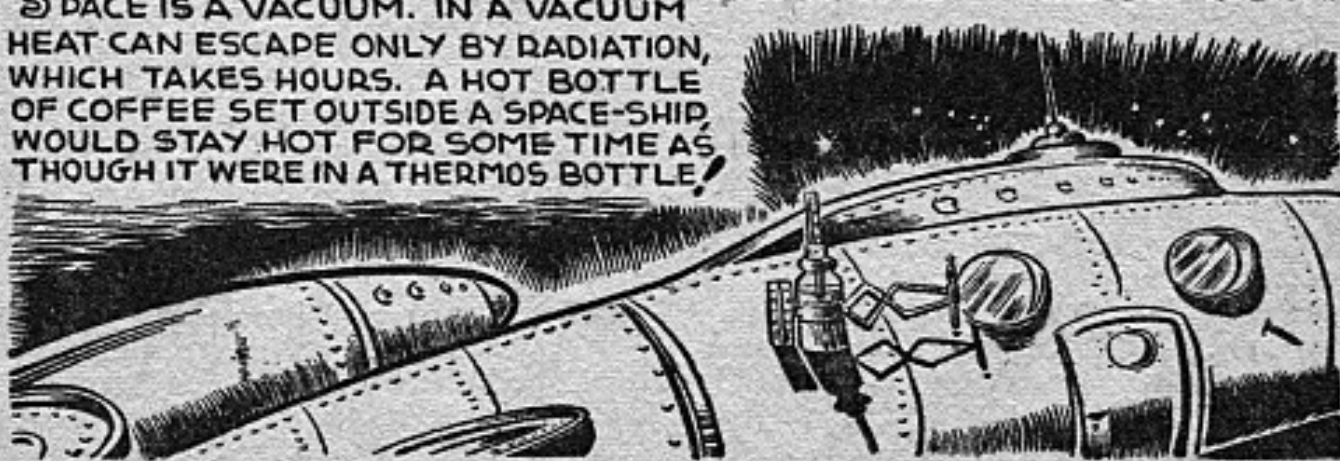
EACH CUBIC MILE OF OCEAN WATER CONTAINS 4 OUNCES OF RADIUM IN SOLUTION-IF IT COULD BE EXTRACTED. THROUGHOUT ALL THE SEAS, THERE ARE A TOTAL OF 20,000 TONS DISSOLVED!



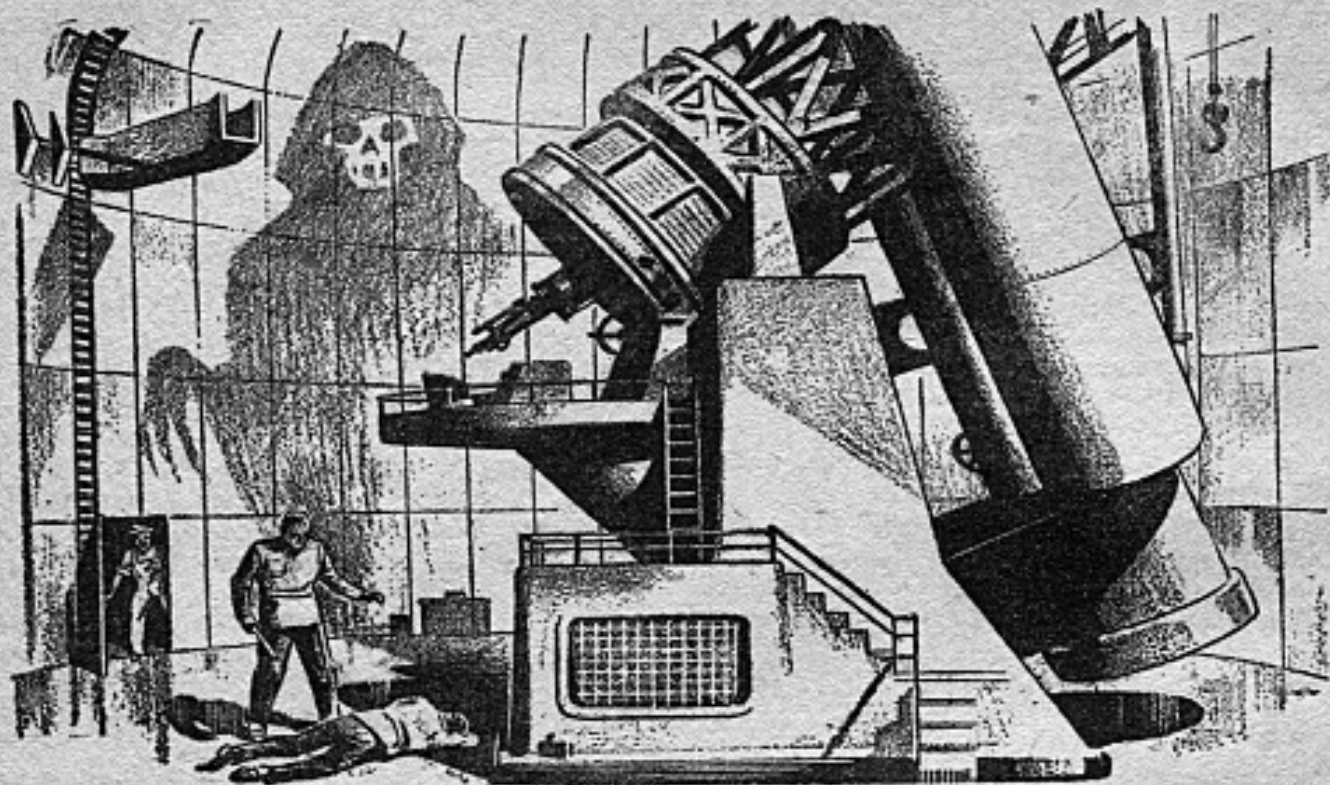
THAT SPACE IS COLD?

SPACE IS A VACUUM. IN A VACUUM HEAT CAN ESCAPE ONLY BY RADIATION, WHICH TAKES HOURS. A HOT BOTTLE OF COFFEE SET OUTSIDE A SPACE-SHIP, WOULD STAY HOT FOR SOME TIME AS THOUGH IT WERE IN A THERMOS BOTTLE!

1 CUBIC MILE = 4 OUNCES OF RADIUM.



**A Monster Telescope Reveals Terrors of the Outer Universe
That No Man Can See—and Live!**



Dr. Grayson lay huddled on the floor

DEATH AT THE OBSERVATORY

By **JOHN RUSSELL FEARN**

Author of "The Wailing Hybrid," "Beast of the Tarn," etc.

JACKSON, janitor of the new Richmond Observatory, heard it first—a hoarse scream from down the passage leading to the main astronomical observatory. A scream, and then a babbling stream of words in which he recognized the voice of Dr. James Crayson, chief of the astronomical staff. Then, silence.

Jackson blinked, then dropped his mop with a wet thud on the linoleum and raced up the corridor at top speed, bursting in through the great green baize doors at the end.

An astounding sight met his eyes.

Dr. Crayson lay huddled on the floor,

sprawled below the platform of the mighty new 400-inch reflector. Standing over him, a slender bright bar in his hand, was young Charles Bradmore, Crayson's assistant.

"Mr. Bradmore, sir, what's happened?"

As he gasped out the words Jackson slowly went forward, his eyes wide, fixed in horror on the motionless figure of the astronomer. With a sudden start he noticed the smear of blood from the doctor's dark head.

"You—you killed him!" he shrieked suddenly. "Mr. Bradmore, you've gone and—"

"Oh, shut up!" Bradmore snapped. His young face was white, his fair hair disheveled. "Don't jump to such idiotic conclusions, man! Dr. Crayson fell from the platform, struck his head on this bar and it snapped off. He—" He broke off. "Where are you going?" he demanded, as Jackson swung around.

"Police!" the janitor howled, tearing out of the observatory. "Police! Help! There's been a murder!"

His shouts brought other technicians from their night work in the great building. They crowded into the observatory, each adding his own opinion, each infuriating the haggard Bradmore all the more.

"You and Crayson never were on friendly terms, were you?" asked Dalroyd, the chief spectrographist in his cold, cynical voice. "This looks pretty ugly for you, Bradmore."

"Oh, shut up—all of you!" Bradmore blazed, his blue eyes flaming. "I tell you he fell! He—"

"Nonetheless," said Dalroyd steadily, "this is a matter for the police." And he strode through the assembly to the telephone.

The confused Bradmore hardly remembered what happened after that. He recollected the doctor saying that Crayson had died from a violent blow on the temple; he remembered, too, that he was asked a barrage of questions when the police arrived. Then, with relentless inevitability, the law took its course.

BRADMORE, totally confused by the speed with which matters moved, had only a weak defense, and certainly no alibi. Circumstantial evidence piled up against him.

The observatory staff was bound to testify that it was well known Bradmore had little love for his superior, Crayson. Their work had always been done in a certain atmosphere of tension.

Bradmore knew full well that Crayson's job would have been his, except for influence in the background. Wordy arguments between them had ensued many a time. And on this particular night. . . .

The prosecuting counsel was certain

of Bradmore's guilt. In a fit of anger Bradmore had smashed off the slender guide bar of the great telescope and dealt the astronomer a mortal, cowardly blow.

The only fingerprints on the bar were those of Bradmore. Crayson had not even touched it that evening. In vain Bradmore protested that Crayson had had no need to touch it; that he had picked it up when Crayson had smashed it off in his fall.

All too flimsy. The jury was only away twelve minutes and returned with the verdict of "Guilty!"

The newspapers carried the story under the headline of "Observatory Mystery." But not a soul in the land, save one, believed that Bradmore was innocent. That one was his closest friend, Dick Warland.

Warland heard the whole case through, was even a witness to his friend's unimpeachable character. The jury's verdict was a terrific blow to him.

Then gradually out of the maze of his despair there came the slow beginnings of an idea. Was it possible that . . .

He reached for his hat and left his modest apartments in Golden Green at something closely approaching a run, on his way to see the one man who could help him—Scott Marlo, who had an enviable reputation for solving mysteries through scientific deductions.

Many in the scientific world said that Scott Marlo was crazy when he had forsaken an undoubtedly brilliant scientific career for the further pursuance of his hobby, criminology. Few credited his assertion that there was more scientific discovery in the unearthing of modern crime than there was in straight laboratory science.

The modern criminal, he averred, used scientific methods. He, Marlo, had set himself up against this vicious element, with remarkable success so far, even if Scotland Yard was at times prone to regard him as something of a dabbler.

His apartments over an Oxford Street store were large and well fur-

nished, and carried a peculiar reek of chemicals. To the rear he had a complicated laboratory. Most of his time was spent in intricate analysis, using his masterful scientific mind for the extension of known theories into quite new channels, usually to the undoing of some criminal.

On the evening of Bradmore's conviction, Dick Warland was shown into the presence of this thirty-five-year-old scientist. The manservant left him alone in a quiet room in which the London traffic roar was muted, then Marlo appeared in a white smock.

Short, big-headed, square-jawed, with closely cropped black hair, he was unquestionably a man of action and swift decisions. As the scientist shook hands with him, Warland had a curious impression of rocklike strength and imperturbability, founded on definite knowledge.

MARLO'S keen gray eyes were asking questions all the time Warland stated his business.

"The Bradmore case?" Marlo repeated at last, after pondering a moment. "Oh, yes. I have the facts tabulated. Very interesting, too. It was especially interesting to me as a scientific matter—astronomical, I mean. . . . But why do you come to me?"

"Because I believe Bradmore is no more guilty than you or I—and I want you to use your knowledge in proving it," Warland smiled a little apologetically. "Unfortunately, I'm not a moneyed man. I can only pay modestly for your services. I've come to you because you are definitely the last hope. I believe something happened in that observatory of which nobody—not even Bradmore—had any knowledge. I believe that whatever it was accounted for Crayson's death."

Marlo stroked his square chin with acid-stained fingers.

"Well, maybe," he admitted finally. "But that hardly justifies my butting in. I'm not a professional criminologist—only an amateur."

"But you're a scientist!" Warland cried earnestly. "This needs a man of science—not a detective. Nothing

but a scientific cause could have killed Crayson. I'm convinced of it."

"Ummm," Marlo grunted, and pondered again. Then he started to walk round the room, thumping his fist in his palm. "You know," he said slowly, "the more you recall the facts of the trial to my mind the more I begin to see your viewpoint. I thought at the time that there seemed to be certain weaknesses. A four-hundred-inch telescope, for instance, only newly installed—the greatest telescope ever made. Come to think of it, it might be worthwhile looking into the case if only to get a close look at that monster."

"Whatever your reason," urged Warland, "I beg of you to look into it. But again, in all fairness, I must remind you that the money—"

"Money?" Marlo laughed shortly. "What is it, anyway? Paper currency based on Element Seventy-nine—gold. I've no time for money. Got loads of it." Again he hesitated, then his big dark head nodded slowly. "Very well, I will look into it," he promised quietly. "But first of all there are one or two details I must arrange. My friend, Detective-inspector Hartley, of Scotland Yard arranges official details for me, which allows me a permit as a free operator. In the meantime I shall study the situation."

"And what must I do?" Warland demanded quickly.

"You? Nothing at all. Be at the Richmond Observatory, main entrance tomorrow night at eight. It will be dark then, and maybe that four-hundred-inch reflector will tell us something."

Warland snatched his hat. "Okay! Count of me! And thanks again and again. I'm going to get into touch with Bradmore and tell him all about it. Good night."

Marlo didn't answer. He was already lost in thought, stabbing the air with his long index finger to emphasize certain points in his mind.

Scott Marlo kept his word. Warland, waiting on the observatory steps an hour before time, became aware of the scientist's stocky, powerful form striding through the misty darkness

on the stroke of eight. He merely gave the briefest of nods, then strode purposefully into the main corridor, handed in his card, and moved on to the great, lighted observatory.

WARLAND found himself introduced to the bluff, plain-clothed figure of Inspector Hartley, and then to the technicians who had been summoned to attend.

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Hartley, to get things into shape," Marlo commented, taking off his shaggy overcoat.

He rubbed and flexed his hands like a pianist about to play a concerto, then turned toward the mighty mass of the 400-inch reflector, stared thoughtfully on to the mirror screen immediately below it.

Most of it was covered with eiderdown. After a moment or two he mounted to the eight-foot-high platform from which Crayson had fallen, and sat down before the guiding eyepiece of the giant.

"Tell me," he said, turning suddenly, "what exactly was Dr. Crayson studying on the night he met his death? If any of you here know, please be absolutely exact."

"I can tell you," answered Dalroyd, coming forward. "He was making an analysis of Sirius. There was some slight alteration in the star's magnitude and he was preparing to make a complete report. I know that because I was standing by ready to make spectroheliograph observations."

"Sirius, eh?" Marlo's eyes narrowed. "Sirius—the brightest star in the sky. . . . How do you fix this telescope on any star? Eyepieces, or what?"

"Usually it is done by mathematical prearrangement, a science of angles. Only way to shift a giant like this. Then there is a preliminary survey through pilot telescopes for centering."

"I see. Well, I'd be glad if you'd fix it on Sirius, now."

Dalroyd nodded, motioned to two other technicians beside him, then they went to work together on the operation of massive controls and switchboards. The mammoth con-

trivance moved slowly in its great gimbals, was adjusted to a hair fineness of focus, and finally was trained on to the mirroid reflector from which the eiderdown was removed.

Marlo, Warland, and Hartley stood with the others, staring down into the mirror. Sirius was dazzlingly reproduced, the mistiness of the upper atmosphere creating but little disturbance. For a long time Marlo stood frowning and making notes.

"Well, nothing unusual there," he muttered. "Except for the star's savage brightness, which may have something to do with the matter."

He debated again then, apparently struck by a sudden thought, climbed the trellis work of the reflector and examined it closely.

"And nothing there either," he said, descending again. "It had occurred to me that some device, actuated by light waves from Sirius on a selenium cell might have been attached to this reflector—some kind of apparatus designed to give Crayson a mortal blow, afterward to be cleared by the guilty party. But there's no sign of anything."

"What did you expect—a sledgehammer?" asked Dalroyd coldly.

Marlo ignored the sarcasm, stood musing.

"Don't you think you're all wrong this time, Marlo?" Hartley asked patiently. "After all, all this is quite unorthodox, with the case closed. And besides, we—"

"If we find definite evidence to prove Bradmore's innocence it doesn't matter a lot if the case is closed or not," Marlo retorted. "Keep quiet a minute."

OBLIVIOUS of everybody he started to walk round slowly, jabbing his finger in the air.

"Sirius, three weeks ago," he muttered. "Spin of the earth . . . distance covered—Hummm. . . ." He stood staring in front of him, then suddenly he swung round and snatched his hat and coat.

"That's all for now," he said shortly. "Thanks for your help. Good night!"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Warland

cried, racing after him as he made for the door. "What line are you working on? Can't you give me some idea?"

Marlo shrugged. "Don't know myself yet. Maybe hit or miss. Have to work it out in my laboratory."

"Can't I come with you?"

"Nothing stopping you, is there? Come on."

It was close on eleven by the time they got back to Oxford Street, and once within his rooms Marlo began to reveal something of the real dynamic energy in his make-up. Without even a suggestion of refreshment or idea of sleep he sat down at his desk, switched on the light directly over it and started to figure rapidly on a thick note pad.

Warland could only lounge in a chair and watch, totally in the dark as to what was going on. Here and there Marlo gave a few hints, but they were vague.

"On the night Crayson died there was something different about Sirius to what we saw tonight," he said at last, after nearly two hours of note-making. "I'm satisfied as to that. What I have to do is to work out the distance Earth has traveled since Crayson studied Sirius. According to my calculations the position now is that we would have to look at the star Zaurac in order to look through the same portion of space that Crayson looked through. You understand?"

"Yes." Warland nodded. "But what does it prove?"

"I don't know—yet."

Marlo debated a moment, then got to his feet and led the way into the adjoining laboratory. Pressing a button in the wall he sent a portion of the room sliding aside, maneuvered a small but powerful telescope into position. He only stared into the eyepiece for a moment or two, then visibly winced. It was clearly a supreme effort to tear his gaze away.

Warland stared at him in astonishment. The scientist had dropped into a chair, his face drawn and white, his hands trembling.

"Heavens!" he whispered. "Good Heavens!"

"But what—" Warland began, then strode to the instrument and seized it.

To his surprise Marlo sprang up and whirled him back, thumbed the switch that sent the roof portion back into place.

"Don't look!" he breathed, fighting for calm. "Don't look!" He took a deep breath, then said slowly, "You can take it from me, Warland, that the innocence of Bradmore can be definitely established. Now I know what killed Crayson!"

"What?" Warland demanded.

"You'll know the instant I have gathered together officials from the right quarter. You be at Richmond Observatory again, two nights from now, and then—" Marlo stopped, held out his hand. "Good night, Warland. See you Thursday at eight o'clock."

Warland took the dismissal quietly, went out into the quiet street, his hopes buoyed, though he did wonder what Marlo had seen. . . .

IT was clear that in the two-day interval Marlo had pulled several influential strings, for when Warland arrived in the observatory he found not only the scientist himself and Inspector Hartley, but—among other experts—Judge Milbank, who had sat in the Bradmore case.

After introductions, Marlo moved to the platform of the giant telescope, stood surveying his audience and gripped the hand rail in front of him.

"Gentlemen, I intend to put before you tonight certain facts, together with a demonstration, to prove indubitably that Charles Bradmore did not kill Dr. James Crayson. Let us begin at the beginning.

"In the first place, Bradmore was found with a metal bar in his hand. Evidence at the trial showed it had his fingerprints upon it. Evidence also proved that the bar was one of the many small guider rods of this gigantic reflector which could be easily smashed off by a heavy blow. Crayson's fingerprints were not on it because on the night in question he had had no reason to handle it.

"Bradmore, as assistant astronomer, set the telescope to the desired spot by

instruments. That desired spot was the star Sirius. Also, Bradmore handled the bar afterward. That accounts for his fingerprints. In the interval the telescope moved by its own machinery, of course, to keep pace with the Earth's movement through space and regular rotation upon its axis.

"I submit, gentlemen, that Bradmore's statement was true in every detail. Dr. Crayson did fall from this platform, and in so doing struck his head on the bar. The bar snapped off. Bradmore picked it up; quite a natural thing to do in the circumstances—and was thus found by the janitor. Bradmore's personal dislike of Crayson, other facts of his private life, finally led to a conviction."

The audience remained silent. Some of them were looking doubtful.

"Crayson died because of what he saw through this telescope," Marlo resumed in a steady voice. "Let me show you, gentlemen—and I warn you to keep control over yourselves."

He glanced at his notes then turned to Dalroyd. "Fix this telescope on the star Mira," he ordered quietly. "And do it without any direct observations. I have my reasons."

Dalroyd and his two assistants nodded and set to work. It took them seven minutes to fix the position by the precision instruments. Marlo finally nodded, gave a signal, and the lights were lowered.

The group sat motionless, watching the mammoth reflector. Marlo fingered the main switches carefully and the mirror came slowly into life.

But it was not the pulsing, variable light of Mira upon which the men gazed. Instead they found themselves held rigidly transfixed by a blaze of hideous, interwoven colors—blinding radiances of all hues.

The colors themselves were awful enough, but the effect they produced was even worse. They exerted a fascinating mesmerism, forced the mind from its ordinary channels into one of frozen panic, then into a growing sense of unbelievable terror.

The effect heightened. An unbearable tension began to gather. "Stop it!"

screamed Dalroyd suddenly. "Stop! In Heaven's name, stop!"

WITH an effort, Marlo switched off. The lights came up. It was several minutes before any of the party recovered, and even then they were white-faced and shaken.

"Gentlemen," Marlo breathed at last, "you saw that vision over the wide area of the mirror. For that reason its effect was not nearly so potent as on the night Crayson saw it through an eyepiece. He got the concentrated force of it, and the star he was looking at was the strongest star in the whole sky—Sirius. Infinitely brighter than the one we viewed tonight, or the one I viewed myself."

"But what does it mean?" demanded Dalroyd, mopping his brow. "What's wrong with the star? Or is it the reflector itself?"

"Neither. The trouble is in space." Marlo hesitated, as though marshaling his facts, then proceeded: "Space, so far as we can ascertain, is the carrier of electrons, which in themselves carry radiations of varied types. Space, for want of a better name, we term ether—though no scientist really knows what he means by this. The word 'medium' is more appropriate. Now, as a small example. When electrons change position in, say, the Sun, they give forth energy in the course of their displacement.

"That energy travels through space, displaces electrons in our eyes and gives rise to the sensation of sight. We say: 'I see the Sun's light.' Naturally, this electronic change is responsible for everything we see. Normally, there is nothing in space to prevent electronic change producing its customary effect of light. But a spatial warp, the slightest bending of these light waves from the normal wave length which produces white light can instead split it up into prismatic colors by alterations of wave length. It can do more.

"A human eye, tuned to accept certain colors and wave lengths, is utterly at variance when suddenly faced with a series of vibrations it has never known. What happens? The brain

revolts against these new sensations in its effort to master them, even as the body itself revolts, and dies, in the effort to assimilate poison instead of normal food. What happened then, was this: Out in space there is a warp, a slight bending or pucker in the etheric medium which, in one quarter of space, has changed visible light into a combination of colors destructive to the brain if received in full force.

"How that warp came about we cannot know. It may be the outcome of interwoven vibratory forces of which we know less than nothing—but we do know that the unfortunate Crayson viewed Sirius when that space warp was right between him and the star.

"With such a telescope as this he got the full blast of unfamiliar wave lengths. He went instantly insane. He fell, screaming, smashed his head against the telescope bar and . . . well, that was what killed Crayson.

"And my own conclusions? The details showed me that only a space warp could be possible. Astronomy is one of my many lines of thought and, as I worked, I remembered that somewhere I had read a treatise on space warps and their manifestations, together with the suggestion that the extraordinary variability of some of the fixed stars might be accounted for by such warps.

"The basis of a warp could clearly, magnified by a reflector like this, cause instant death. I began to see what had happened. But how to prove it? Presumably the warp was stationary, forming in one spot and dissolving in that spot as fresh radiations took its place. I learned what star Crayson had studied on the night of his death. From that I had to work out, by mathematics, the speed of the Earth's journey through space and the relative change in positions compared to the cosmos, and so finally arrived at the approximate point in the sky where the space warp ought still to be on view.

I FOUND IT. I studied Zaurac, a comparatively weak star,

through a likewise weak telescope, but even at that I experienced considerable mental turmoil. Young Warland here will verify that. The rest was more mathematics—the sorting out of where the warp would be tonight; namely, in front of Mira. You saw what happened. Also in the meantime I advised other astronomers, through the courtesy of the Astronomer Royal, to refrain from viewing the heavens in specialized points until we had had a consultation.

"Any of them might have met the same fate as Crayson, but Providence stayed their hand in looking through that warped space. In time, the warp will dissolve. Until then, precautions will be taken. In space, then, gentlemen, is the real culprit, entirely beyond our jurisdiction. As for me, I will stand witness at a reopening of the trial, and I have the support of the Astronomer Royal, and you gentlemen here tonight."

A silence fell on the group as Marlo stopped talking. Then at length he walked down from the platform and Judge Milbank rose to his feet.

"There's not the slightest doubt, Marlo, that you have accomplished a scientific deduction of phenomenal brilliance," he said quietly. "What's more, you proved it. I have little doubt as to the outcome."

He bowed gravely to the others and walked out. Warland swung around and gripped Marlo's hand eagerly.

"I can't begin to thank you!" he choked. "If you'll let me have your bill—"

"Bill?" Marlo frowned. "Oh, that! Be hanged to it. No use for money. Got too much of it." He stood regarding Warland thoughtfully. "Just the same," he added slowly, "I could do with somebody like you to help me now and again. My activities may extend after the publicity from this case. What about it?"

"You mean it?" Warland cried in joyful amazement.

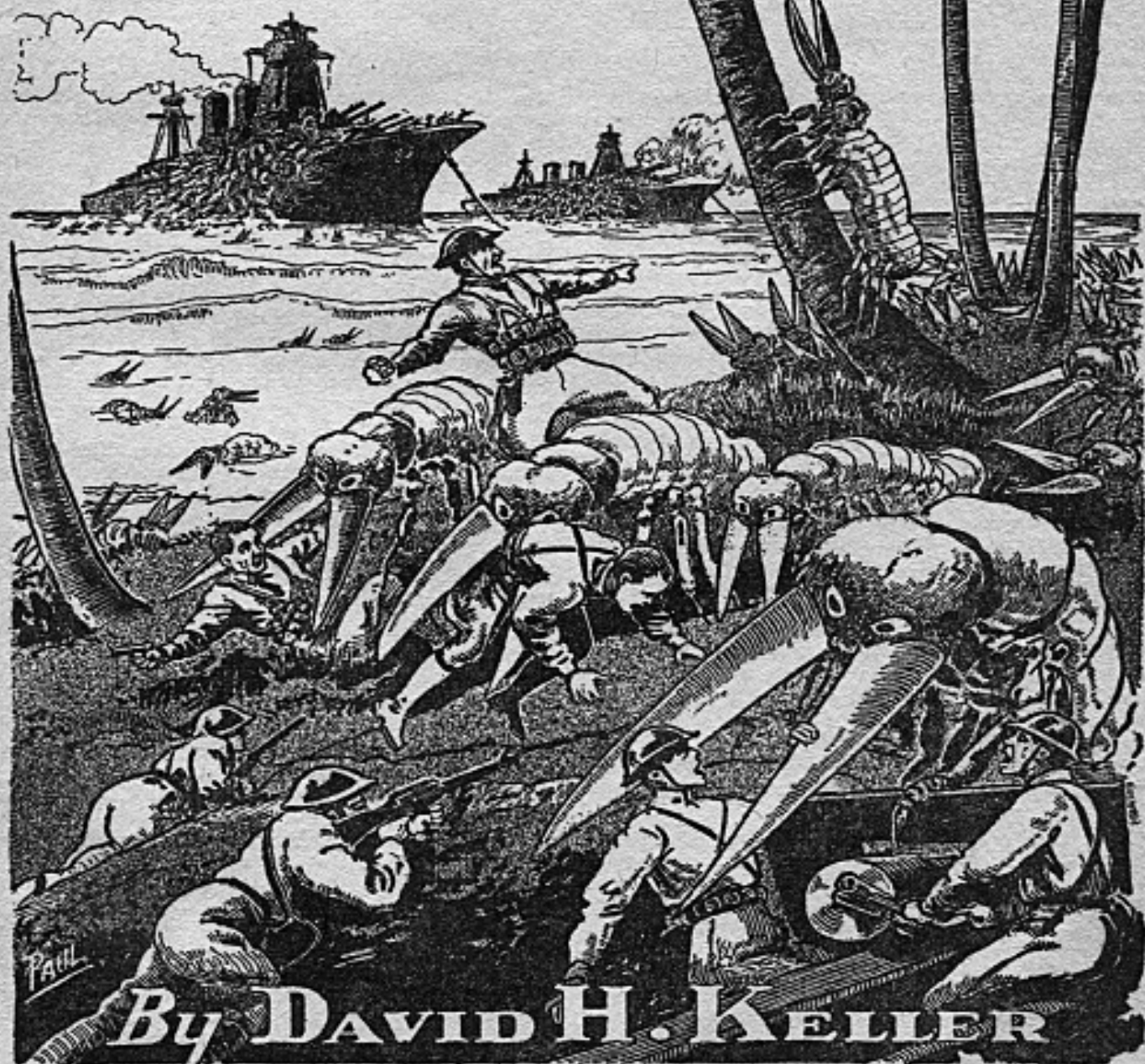
But Marlo was already at the door getting into his hat and coat.

"'Course I mean it!" he snapped. "What are we waiting for? Come on, man!"

The Human Termites

Continuing a Great
SCIENTIFICTION
NOVEL

Republished by Popular Command



By **DAVID H. KELLER**

• A HALL OF FAME SCIENTIFICTION SERIAL •



An invisible empire suddenly becomes visible as humanity combats a mighty insect race for the mastery of the world

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Hans Souderman, a scientist who has spent the greater part of his life studying the white ants, or termites, comes to America to enlist aid in a battle against them. He has learned from communication with them that they intend to eliminate man from the earth. He enlists the aid of Adam Fry, a young scientist, who in turn enlists Bailey Bankerville, a wealthy banker, and his sister, Susanne. Souderman goes to Canada to wait word from Fry.

The latter, together with Bankerville and his sister outfit a scientific expedition to study the termite. Before they leave they are nearly mobbed under the orders of the "Central Intelligence" of the United States. They reach the coast of an island near Australia, and a number of their expedition and crew who go ashore to study the termites disappear.

Susanne, determining to solve the mystery, swims ashore, and is captured by them. She meets the Central Intelligence of the termites who tells her that they have billions of twenty-foot "soldiers" especially bred to fight man. They will conquer the earth and Susanne will be his queen. He proceeds to occupy the brain of a man of the expedition who had been captured. Susanne kills him in the human body.

Now go on with the story.

CHAPTER X

The First Struggle

FROM then on life was a curious jumble to Susanne. The insect-animal with a little of the man in him obeyed. He knew nothing else. So on he went. Nothing stopped him. One soldier, gigantic and threatening, tried to cut her steed in two. Only a tip of the tail and one leg were caught.

Near the surface gigantic eyes loomed out of a dark sentry box and something caught the dazed girl's bathing suit. She pulled out her revolver and emptied it into those eyes.

"Oh! On! On!" she cried again to her crippled steed.

Her suit was ripped off her, but she held onto her obedient guide. Finally they came to the surface, and with a convulsive leap he broke through the hard cement wall. The jagged edges made long scratches in the girl's bare back. Then down through the streets of the termite city, now in the greatest confusion and at last to the water's edge.

The ship lay, a dark shadow, a hundred yards from the shore. Lights at the ends shown like evening stars in the soft moonlight. Susanne jumped off the insect's back. She patted his face.

"You can go now," she said, "and thanks.

You have been a real friend," and then she waded into the surf.

Deeper in, over her knees, up to her thighs and belt, and then sinking into the warm salt water, she started to swim slowly back to the ship. The salt water stung the deep scratches in her back, and she felt tired and hungry, yet her heart was filled with a great joy. Hours before she had started toward the accomplishment of a certain task and now she had succeeded. She had found out what she had wanted to find out.

She knew now where the missing members of the expedition were. She knew what the Central Intelligence of the Giant Termite was. She knew something about the Central Rulers of the various nations of the human race—and she realized that she loved Adam Fry.

Soon she had reached the ship. It was her hope that she could climb on board without anyone knowing, but she heard a whistling, monotonous and low, "All bound round with a woolen string, all bound round with a woolen string."

It was her brother's favorite tune when he was in deepest distress. Swimming around the ship until she was directly under him, she called out.

"Bill, Bill! Stop that confounded whistling and listen to me."

THE worried man leaned far over the side of the ship.

"Is that you, Susie?"

"It sure is," she said, shivering. "Go to my cabin and bring me a bathrobe. And throw me down a rope or something."

When Bankerville returned with the bathrobe Susanne was on the deck in a shadow which she quickly replaced with the silk gown.

"Well, Susanne Bankerville?" asked her brother grimly.

"Stop that," she answered sharply. "I have been through hell enough without listening to you. You get Adam up and dressed, and just as soon as I can I will meet the two of you in the cabin. I think that there is going to be a wild time on this island by daylight and I want you to know about it. The quicker we decide on a plan of action the better it will be for us."

"But you have been gone a whole day and part of two nights. Where have you been and what has happened?"

"You'll find out soon enough. You go and get Adam, and don't stand there arguing. Nothing I hate more than that."

Bailey Bankerville and Adam Fry waited in the cabin for over half an hour. The rich man swore. "I suppose she is dolling up. Why in the name of all that is good and holy can't she come on?"

But Susanne Bankerville knew that she was in love and she did not want to see her man until she was looking just as attractive as she could make herself. In her determination to appear to the best advantage, she forgot the scratches on her back and selected an evening dress. Finally she walked into her brother's cabin looking more as though she were dressed for a ball than for a scientific conference.

Bailey looked at her and shook his head as though he understood the situation thoroughly. Adam Fry looked at her as though he were in Heaven and she a spirit of the upper ether. For a few minutes there was a confused medley of scolding and laughter and a few tears. Finally the brother slapped Susanne on her back.

"You should have let us know, Susanne. Bad business to go off that way. Goodness gracious." And here he took her by the shoulders. "Do you know your back is all scratched? I will have to have the doctor see it at once."

"Yes, I know about it. It can wait until I tell you two men my story. I think you might be a little kind to me, Bailey, I've been through enough."

SUDDENLY she ceased to be a little girl and changed to a capable woman.

"Sit down and listen to this story," she began. "It's all true, so you need not think that I am crazy. And it all harmonizes with our fancies, only it's a thousand times more horrible than we ever pictured it. You know, of course, that I went to the island to find those missing men. They are all dead. Four of them were dissected by the termites to show them the different systems of the human body. Two of the other three were operated on and died. The third man, Smithson the photographer, is dead, too. I guess I helped kill him, though he did not have any brains to start with. Here is what happened." And she told the story of her hours on the island.

It is complimentary to both the woman and the two men to be able to say that they heard her through to the end of her story without once interrupting her. It was two o'clock when she started and it was four-thirty by the time she finished her narrative. Neither man had said a word for two hours and a half.

Both of them had made notes, scattered fragments, to recall to their attention certain portions of the tale. Except for the movement of their pencils and the occasional lighting of a cigarette they hardly moved. Finally, she ended.

"And so I came back to the ship. Time will tell whether the trip was really worth while. I feel that I really heard and saw those things and I do not think that you



Adam Fry

believe those scratches on my back are self-inflicted. The empty shells are still in my automatic. I am not going to worry about Smithson. Even if his brain had not been removed, that awful Thing took over his body and that deserved killing.

"I am not sure what the next move should be, but I believe we are going to be attacked by the Giant Termites soon. I mashed up that one Thing that crept into Smithson's skull pretty much, but I am not even sure that I actually killed it. Perhaps this is their first actual contact with firearms. They must know of the existence of powder, but this is the first time it has ever been used on them. I feel that we have learned a great many of the facts that we came to this island to learn, and the quicker we leave for a colder country the better off we will be."

BAILEY BANKERVILLE stood up and stretched his arms above his head.

"Sister," he said, "if any other woman would tell me a tale like that I would unhesitatingly call her a liar. It is impossible, and yet I believe that it is true. You left about forty hours ago. In that time hell started to break loose on this earth. The entire race of human beings on this sphere has gone insane. Russia, China and Japan have started westward to conquer the other nations. The blacks in Africa are moving northward, and their leaders have promised them the loot of Europe. South and Central America has combined with Mexico to invade the United States and Canada.

"Meantime, just when you expect the States to realize their danger, a commune has captured New York and Chicago, and are endeavoring to overthrow the Government at Washington. England is trying to control the ocean with the aid of the United States. We heard this news over our radio and it came so fast that we have not been able to digest it. Adam and I went over the history of the world as far as we were able to, and we feel that this is the first time that the entire human race has gone mad in such a short time. We cannot understand it."

Adam took up the thread of the thought. "Now according to what you heard on the island, Miss Bankerville, there are various higher forms of power which govern the different nations. You said that the Thing that talked to you told you he thought the Ruling Intellect of the Human Termite we call the United States resides in an inaccessible part of the Rocky Mountains. I suppose that there are as many of these Ruling Powers as there are nations. No doubt now and then one dies of old age, and then what little human termites are left are captured and absorbed by younger, stronger Powers. That seems to harmonize with history as we know it.

"The Thing on the island told you that these Ruling Powers of the human nations were rather dumb. They certainly have not the intelligence of the Giant Termite. Apparently they have all had the same thought at the same time, and that is to start fighting for the control of the world. They seem to be at cross purposes. For example, if Chicago and New York are part of a Giant Human Termite, why does the Central Intelligence permit this rioting? He should be making everyone of his corpuscles throughout the extent of his national body engage in an united effort to fight a common enemy.

"He seems unable to do this. Perhaps part of his body, like New York City, has developed cancerlike symptoms, and he is no longer able to control them. Perhaps, like the old nations—Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon—he is growing senile and will soon die. Of course, all this is pure hypothesis. But let us look at the matter from a point of view with which we are more familiar. The more the human nations fight and weaken each other, the easier it will be for Giant Termites to conquer the world and completely destroy the human race. Do you too feel that there is any way of warning them, Miss Bankerville?"

"I learned one thing. If you ever call me Miss Bankerville again I will never, never have anything more to do with you. I think it is perfectly horrid for you to treat me the way you do."

AND then she started to cry. Bankerville promptly went out to give some orders. When he returned he found his sister curled up in Adam's lap, evidently engaged in a sign conversation that was entirely remote from the termite problem. Susanne and Adam both smiled when they saw the banker, and the young woman lost no time in announcing the news.

"You can congratulate us, Bailey. Adam has asked me to marry him and I am going to do it—just as soon as we get out of this mess. Have some coffee and sandwiches sent in and we will have breakfast together in here."

"This is a great surprise to me, but if it suits you, it does me," said her brother. "I think Adam Fry will be a rather good man to take care of you, even if he is an insignificant little termite."

"He is nothing of the kind. He is going to be a big man some day in the affairs of the world, aren't you, Adam?"

"Sure, if that is what you want me to do. Any news from the island, Bankerville?"

"Not a thing, but rather serious news from the ship. The captain seems to be rather level-headed, but everyone else on board the ship is developing hysteria. He says that the men, and that includes the scientists, feel that we have not done our best to find the missing men, and they are going to demand that we send them ashore with supplies, weapons, including all the dynamite, and they are going to stay there until they succeed in their search. They think you know more about it than we are letting on, Sis. They know you went to the island and came back—"

Just then the captain knocked on the door and hastily entered.

"I cannot do a thing with them, Mr. Bankerville. They are determined to land on the island. The chemist says that he has enough liquid poison in his spraying apparatus to kill a million termites. They are demanding provisions and all the dynamite. What shall I do?"

"Can you get the hydroplanes ready?"

"Absolutely, but the aviators are asking to go in the boats with the rest of the men to the island."

"Can you fly one of those planes, Captain?"

"I can; and so can Miss Susanne."

"Then let them go. Tell them they can take anything to the island that they want except my personal property. Tell them that they go on their own responsibility and that we think it a dangerous and foolhardy undertaking."

THE captain left the room. Adam Fry smiled.

"Now there is an example of this Supreme Intellect. Here are twenty men from all walks of life and of all degrees of education and suddenly they are seized with the same impulse and the same thought. They have to go to the island. Do you suppose that this thought is really a command sent them by a ruling power? If it is, why are we immune?"

"I do not know," said Bankerville, "and I don't care. I do know this. I have confidence enough in my sister to believe that just as soon as they land on that island and start using that dynamite that hell will be popping. They will never come back. I think that just as soon as they leave we had better provision the hydroplanes and be ready to travel, because they are going to come out here and destroy this ship. The captain and I will take one hydroplane, and you two can have the other. I do not know where we will go, but we are not going to stay here and have those twenty-foot monsters cut us in two. We had better stay in the cabin with our guns handy till the rest of them leave. No telling what they might be ordered to do."

It was afternoon before the captain returned.

"They are gone," he said, "with enough provisions to last a week. And there is something else to tell you. The ship is leaking badly, and I fear that she will sink in a few hours. But I have an idea. The last

time the diver was down he said that the tubes under the ship seemed to be building up and fastening to the bottom of the ship. I wonder if those little termites have not been eating the bottom out of the vessel."

"That is just it, Captain. If the ship sinks, it's the termites that sink her. Suppose I go with you and help you with those hydroplanes? Adam, you and your Eve pack your personal belongings and be sure to take food and ammunition with you and load your hydroplane. Then you take telescopes and see if you can find out anything about those fools on shore."

BUT though the four on board ship searched the island carefully with their glasses, they could see no signs of any unusual activity. Now and then they could see a man walking down a termite street. At dark a fire showed that a camp had been made. The captain reported that no more water was entering the ship and after arrangements were made to share the watch in guarding the ship, all lights were put out. Susanne slept soundly through the night, bothered only by the stiffness of her back.

They were all at their breakfast, which Susanne, in the absence of the cooks, had prepared, when suddenly a dull roar was heard from the island. Then another—and another.

"Christopher Columbus!" exclaimed the captain. "They are using the dynamite."

The four rushed to the deck. A peculiar hum came from the island, and at the shore end of one of the long streets clouds of yellow showed where at least three termitaries had been blown into powder. Near the beach, in a little group, stood the men from the ship. Through the telescopes it could be determined that they all had rifles in their hands. They seemed to be awaiting something.

They did not wait long. Slowly from the hole dug out by the shattering power of the dynamite a five-foot scissor appeared in front of a twenty-foot monstrosity. Then came another and a third and a dozen more. They rushed upon the little clump of men, who began to fire on these gigantic insects with their rifles. A row of hidden dynamite exploded, blowing many of the insects to pieces. But still they came and then in a wave they advanced.

They reached and covered the screaming men like a wave. Then silence gradually fell. They stayed there for a while and then went back into the hole. On the sand the mutilated men lay dead. Now another group of giant insects came out of the same blasted hole. They formed a ring around the dead men.

CHAPTER XI

New Plans

THE captain stared through his telescope. Finally, he cried out, shuddering.

"Mr. Bankerville, do you know what they are doing? They are eating those bodies!"

"Certainly," answered Susanne calmly. "They eat everything. When they start the

conquest of the world they will need no commissary trains. As they conquer they will kill and as they kill they will eat, and when they are through with this old world it will all be nice and clean as that beach will be in a little while. Those termites are utilitarians."

Her idea was confirmed. Within a half hour the scavengers went back into the hole. On the beach there was just a space of red, wet sand which would be washed clean at the next high tide.

"That is rather horrible," commented Adam Fry. "But it's neat."

"That is just a beginning," answered Bankerville. "If there are millions of such creatures all through the tropics, imagine what will happen to human civilization when the command is given to them to advance and destroy. They will probably come up to the United States through the Gulf of Mexico. New Orleans is a deep-water harbor. The Mississippi is ninety feet deep at the city docks. Perhaps there are giant tunnels stretching from Central America right up to the city. A little work will bring those tunnels to shore, and then imagine a city of half million people suddenly attacked some morning by an equal number of such insects."

"Suppose they capture Galveston and come up the river to Memphis? In a week they would be in St. Louis and Chicago. I tell you the whole nation would rush panic-stricken into the ocean and drown just as soon as they realized what was attacking them. And back of the warriors the scavengers, eating cattle, men and women—everything that was alive or dead."

"You have a sweet imagination, Bailey," said Susanne. "Oh! Look there! What is that?" and she pointed to the side of the ship.

"They are after us," cried Fry. "We must get to the planes. I am glad that we bought the best that money could buy and had the ship arranged for a getaway. I do not believe we ought to waste a moment. Bankerville, you and the captain get in and let me start you. I want you to get out of the runway before Susanne and I start off. Bankerville, have your elephant rifle handy, because if we don't get off at once they will be on board ship."

"Where are we going to head for?" asked the captain, climbing into the pilot's seat. "Any definite objective?"

"Yes, we ought to go to Australia first. Those people are English, they are blood kin. They may treat us kinder than at other places. We have lots of gas and should have no trouble reaching land."

Adam whirled the propeller, and in a minute the first plane was off. A rifle shot added to the clamor. Running back to the second plane, Adam saw Susanne standing up in the cockpit, a large express rifle in her hand.

"One of the things started to climb aboard so I blew his head off," she said coolly.

"You watch them, Susie," yelled Adam above the roar of the second propeller.

Susanne never heard him, but before their hydroplane left the ship she had shot three more. Once started, they slowly circled

over the deserted vessel. A dozen monstrosities were rushing into every part of it searching for more victims, more to kill and more to eat.

ADAM grinned at Susanne. "This is a great life if you don't weaken," he shouted.

"I am not weakening," she shouted back, "but my back is certainly stiffening. Here, let me feed you this ham sandwich."

Ahead in the twilight the plane carrying Bankerville and the captain went into the glorious sunset. Three miles behind, Adam and Susanne flew onward, having the time of their young lives. What cared they that the civilization of the world was crumbling; what difference did it make to them if the Giant Termites ruled? They had found each other.

All that night and most of the next day they flew in a straight line due southwest. They finally struck the Australian coast at the little town of New Castle, just north of Sydney. They drove the planes up on the sand beyond high water mark and then started to talk over their future plans.

The captain wanted to get back to the United States as soon as he could. He was a member of the Naval Reserves and felt that with war actually declared that it was his place to report for active duty at once. His ship sunk, there seemed to be no special reason for his remaining in the party, so Bankerville gave him some letters of credit and enough gold to pay his passage to San Francisco. With mutual sorrow they said good-by to each other, and the shipless sailor started to walk to town with the idea that he would soon secure an automobile to take him to Sydney and would leave for the United States on the first boat.

That left only three of the original expedition. The question for them to decide was what to do next, and how to do it. They had no recent news from the world at large concerning the hysterical national reactions which seemed to threaten the whole world into war. While they felt in a way that the National Rulers were responsible for this still they had no positive proof that such Things actually existed. There was much about the whole affair that was almost too great for them to form an intelligent viewpoint. The scope of the vision was so gigantic it seemed that only a part of it could be comprehended at one time and even that part of it was forgotten when another aspect was investigated.

While there was no doubt in the minds of any of the three as to the horrible menace of the army of cross-bred soldier termites, still it was hard even in regard to that to imagine a world devoid of humanity and entirely governed and populated by the Giant Termites.

"I confess," said Bankerville as they were eating their supper, "that I am at a loss to know what to do next. If we go anywhere near civilization we are going to run into a war of some kind. Perhaps even at this moment, as we sit here so peacefully on this lonely beach, the mob of deluded citizens are looting the White House and stringing sena-

tors up on electric light posts. Who would there be to talk to? Who would listen to our story? We would be laughed at and if we were identified we might be killed as other rich people are being killed this very minute.

"Meantime the Giant Termites are waiting the time to spring. They may have wanted to transplant their Central Intelligence into human bodies, but it will be an easier thing to put themselves into the brain pans of the gigantic warriors they have made. I believe they are preparing to strike. How would it do to abandon one of the planes, put all the gas we can into our tanks and try to make the States via the Fiji Islands, Honolulu and San Francisco? If I remember the distances it is about seventeen hundred miles to Fiji, twenty-seven hundred from there to Honolulu and two thousand from there to San Francisco. Of course, we have to take a chance on not being able to secure gas at these places; but even at that I feel that it would be worth while to try it. I am not even sure what we would do once we were in San Francisco."

FRY spoke up decisively.

"I know what we ought to do. I think we ought to find Souderman and not make any definite plans till we are able to talk over the matter with him. He started this termite investigation, and it is no more than fair to place him in touch with the latest developments."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yes, approximately, and I bet that it is a hard place for the termite to reach. I want you to meet him, Susanne. He is a grand old man."

"I think that the plan is a good one," endorsed the girl. "I feel that we ought to have a good sleep and the first thing tomorrow start preparing for the trip to the States. We are in Australia, which is noted for its large number of termitaries. They may decide to capture Australia as a preliminary for the conquest of the entire earth. There is no time to be lost; we must not wait. It is going to take a little time to change things so we can make the trip in one plane. We must start tomorrow, but first we must rest. I do not know how you men feel, but personally I am dead tired."

"Let's take her advice and get some sleep," said Fry. "Are you sure, Bankerville, that one plane can carry all three of us?"

"I think so. Susanne won't take up much room. She probably will want you to hold her most of the way, anyway."

The next morning the three worked their hardest. By night the larger of the two planes was ready for the trip. They decided on another night's rest. Suddenly during the night, they were awakened by the honking of an automobile horn and, instinctively grasping their rifles, they sprang to their feet. An old-fashioned Ford was coughing its way down through the sand to give a final gasp near the planes. A slight lad jumped down from the seat and walked toward the three.

"I am so glad I have actually found someone," he said. "Father is in a bad way. He

had a hemorrhage on the way out here and I think that he is very sick. If any of you know about tuberculosis I wish you would help me look after him. We left Sydney early this morning. I guess we were the first to leave. Father had fever and he might have been upset by the shock of seeing those first things come into the city, but he insisted that we get into the Ford and get out. He said that it did not make any difference where we went just so we traveled. They nearly caught us just the other side of New Castle, but it was dark by then and we got away from them. I guess from the screams they killed a good many there."

"Bailey," commanded Susanne. "You and Adam go and see what you can do for that sick man, and I will give this boy something to eat. You come with me to the other side of this plane. These gentlemen will look after your father. And now, my dear girl, tell me your name and all about it."

"How did you know I was a girl?"

"Anyone could tell. Besides, no boy has a right to be as beautiful as you are. What happened in Sydney?"

BUT the story was not told then. Bankerville came up.

"I am afraid that your father is dead, my poor boy," he said softly.

The men dug a grave in the soft sand and there they buried the poor wanderer. Adam Fry said a few words and offered a prayer for the peace of the man's soul. Then the four went back to the shelter of the plane, and the girl told her story.

"We have traveled all over the world because Father was sure that somewhere we would find a place he could get well in. He wanted to find his health and he wanted to find someone to care for me in case he died. We just had a little money when we came to Sydney. Father tried to teach Latin, but he did not do so well at it. Still Father hoped for better days, and he was sure that some day we could move on and find a new and healthier spot.

"No matter if we went hungry he always insisted on keeping the gas tank filled. Last evening we were sitting in the Ford. He liked to sit there beside me on the front seat and pretend we were going somewhere. The Ford was just a hundred yards from the bathing beach and there were lots of women and children in bathing. Then they started to run and scream and we saw a lot of black things rising out of the water and running down through the surf cutting the women in two with long jaws that worked like scissors.

"Father said, 'Anna Ruth, start this Ford and go—just go—because if there are many of those things they are going to kill everyone in Sydney! Our batteries were down, so I had to crank the old Ford, but finally I got it running and none too soon. One of those sea things came after us, but a little baby got between us and he stopped to kill it. In the confusion we got away. I do not know how many things were in Sydney, but we could hear guns and whistles. We ran into some at New Castle. They were just starting to drag the people out of their houses

there, but we went around the town and all we could hear was the screaming. Do you know what they are?"

"We certainly do, dear. We know more about them than we want to," said Susanne, as she looked anxiously toward the beach. "But now you try to go to sleep and on the morrow we will leave this place and see what we can do."

Bankerville turned to Fry. "Adam, you and Susanne go over the plane and see if you can discard about ninety pounds of our baggage. This little Anna Ruth has come to us and we cannot leave her here. She is going with us—as a mascot. I feel that she will bring good luck."

THE early morning came. Two hours later the hydroplane was slowly gliding from the ocean waves up into the air. The party wanted to fly over Sydney and see for themselves what was happening there, but they felt they had to save every drop of gasoline for the journey. So on they sailed on the long voyage that they hoped would end at the front door of Souderman's cottage.

CHAPTER XII

In San Francisco

THE trip from Honolulu was as uneventful as the rest of the air voyage had been. A few hours out from the city they passed the Pacific fleet, steaming to the defense of the United States' possessions in the West. Bankerville sighed as he saw those mighty battleships, cruisers, and submarines going westward in what seemed an endless line.

The plane reached San Francisco in record time. They landed in an airplane field and, after making provisions for the storing of their plane, motored to a hotel. There they left the two women and started out on their search for news. First Bankerville visited his western fiscal agents. They were more than relieved to see him.

"We did the best we could for your interests, Mr. Bankerville," the president of the bank said. "Business is at a standstill. The Reserves have been called out, a draft for five million soldiers has passed both Houses and is waiting for the President's signature. We have been in constant communication with your New York representatives and have taken their advice and turned considerable of your holdings into gold, though we had to take over a fifty percent loss in some instances."

"We heard rumors of all this out where we were," said Bankerville. "The way things are going, it seems that the loss of my fortune is the smallest part of my troubles. We came here in a hydroplane. It is out at the air field. Will you phone out there and tell them to put a force of men to work on it and have it in perfect condition as soon as they can, and to get another one ready. Pack me up sixty thousand dollars in gold and send it out there to be put in the machines. Hire adequate guards. The way things are going I do not think that I want to stay here a minute longer than I have to.

We are at the Presidio Hotel. When we leave I will notify you. Send word to my New York house to carry on as usual but not to tell anyone that I am in the States. We registered under other names."

The bank president was obviously worried.

"Do you know anything about the world situation that is not public property, Mr. Bankerville?"

"At the present I have nothing to say—not even to you," was the terse reply. He walked out to the waiting room where Adam Fry was sitting glumly, looking over the morning papers.

"The more I read the worse I feel," said Fry. "Italy was captured and sacked by the Africans and now the Russians and Japs are trying to drive them out. Ten thousand starving rioters were killed in England and Ireland by the Army. All of England's possessions in Asia are captured by the Chinese troops. Central and South America are helping Mexico mass an army on the borders of the United States. Texas is desperate at the inertia and delays of the government. She has threatened to secede, form the old Texan Empire with New Mexico and Arizona to help her and invade Mexico.

"There is no news from Japan or any of the Pacific Islands except a radio from the United States fleet that they are assisting in the defense of the Hawaiian Islands—but evidently the radio must have been censored before giving it to the papers because there is not any intimation as to who the fleet is fighting. Are you through with your business? Then let's go and see that general. I am not going to feel right till I see Souderman."

COMMANDING GENERAL DORRES of the Pacific Coast Area was a busy man. Had it not been for the industrious wire-pulling of Bankerville's representatives, it is doubtful if he could have been seen. At any rate, Bankerville was granted a ten-minute interview with him.

"General Dorres," the millionaire greeted him, "my name is Bankerville and this is my friend Adam Fry, the noted scientist. We have been spending a very hard time out in the Pacific and we feel you should learn the salient facts of the incidents of the last three weeks. Do you know what has happened in Australia? Do you know what cut the cable off at Guam? Has the Government any idea why there is no news from the Philippines? We can tell you. We think that we know what is happening to the fleet at Honolulu at this very moment. We want to save this city and this nation from the same disaster that has made those Pacific Islands silent tombs. Will you listen to us?"

"What is it?" said General Dorres sharply.

"Giant termites," answered Bankerville, sharper yet.

"Speak English."

"White ants—twenty feet long, with jaws five feet long. They have conquered the Pacific and killed and eaten every living being. They are planning to take the whole world as their prey."

"How did you get here?"

"By plane via the Fiji Islands and Hon-

olulu. We started from near Sydney."

"Why didn't you say something in Honolulu?"

"I did. I talked to the Governor the way I am to you. He laughed at me."

The general turned to Adam Fry.

"Mr. Bankerville called you a scientist. Are you?"

"I guess so."

"Were you with Bankerville on this trip?"

"I was. And I personally saw some of the large insects he was talking about."

"What is your opinion of these creatures?"

"Practically the same as my friend's. I think they took Australia and I feel sure that their object is to destroy every human being on this earth. Our ten minutes are up. Want us to go?"

"Not right away. We have been receiving radio messages in code from the Pacific Fleet. We did not understand their constant reference to insects. They have landed the marines and some of the sailors and are trying to defend Honolulu against some kind of insect. But we had no messages for over six hours."

"Then the fleet is destroyed."

"What by? The Japanese fleet?"

"No. What happened was this. These giant termites came out of the earth and out of the sea. They started in to capture Honolulu. In a short time the city was captured and most of the people left alive were running to the hills for safety. The regular army units were so busy fighting for their lives that they could not offer any adequate defense. Meantime, the Pacific Fleet landed their Marines. The fighting kept on. The battleships came as near shore as they could and tried to help by shelling masses of the insects. Worker termites, the giant kind, went out and boarded every ship. The crews were killed.

"When the survivors of the crew took to the boats the giant warrior termites came up and killed them. Continued waves of the warriors continued to attack the fighting forces on shore. Of course, millions were killed but that does not mean anything to an attacking force that has literally billions of such twenty-foot fighters. I believe that the Marines died fighting. I also believe that at the present time the termites are systematically combing the island for the last living being. That is my idea of what happened there, and I told the Governor it would happen and he said, 'There ain't no such animal.'"

"I cannot believe it myself. Such a thing never happened before."

"You just think so. For all we know it may have happened a dozen times before. We are going to leave the city. As far as is necessary you know all we do. Our belief is that these termites are not going to stop until they have conquered the world."

"That is what we think," interposed Bankerville. "My idea is that they will attack the United States soon. Probably on the Gulf States, though it may be the attack will come on land via Mexico. You can tell as much or as little of this as you want to. We are going to say good-by."

(Continued on Page 124)

THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW

THE SOLAR SYSTEM'S OCEAN WORLD

NEPTUNE, the eighth planet outward from the sun, is known far and wide as the "ocean world" of the Solar System. For no other of the System's planets is blanketed by a great planetary sea as is Neptune. Land on Neptune is the rare exception, not the rule.

The reason for this is that Neptune apparently never went through long periods of diastrophism such as the other planets experienced. Hence, no great inequalities of its surface were produced. Therefore, the ocean covers the whole planet, just as would be the case with Earth and other worlds if their spheres were as smooth as Neptune's.

Astro-geologists now say that originally there was no spot of land on Neptune, not

(1994). "As far as the eye could reach rolled an illimitable wilderness of waters. We had previously during this voyage looked with awe upon the great plains of Saturn and the mighty mountains of Uranus, but this world-stretching ocean was the most stupefying sight of all."

Carew and his men finally sighted land in the form of a small group of islands. They landed upon it, but hastily discovered that they could not have chosen a worse place. For upon these islands existed ferocious spiderlike arachnids of huge size.

"We felt lucky to escape without loss of any of our number from that fearful place," Carew wrote. "Nevertheless, we were heartened to find that at least there were some islands in Neptune's sea. Naming them the Spider Islands, we cruised eastward."

Carew and his men discovered soon after the Rock Isles. And on this archipelago they found a race of semi-civilized, native Neptunians.

The Earthmen were amazed to discover this race. For the Neptunians, though their gray skins, queer-peaked skulls and other features made them a little grotesque, were undoubtedly human!

"It was too much for us," Mark Carew wrote. "When Gorham Johnson and I found near-human people on Venus and Mercury, we could not credit our eyes. Then we had found other humanlike races on Mars and Jupiter. Saturn and Uranus had people, and now even Neptune!"

Return to Earth

Carew and his crew heard the Neptunians' stories of floating islands far in the southwest, of terrible monsters and strange sea-devils in the vast ocean, of awful storms and tides.

It had been Mark Carew's hope to go on to Pluto, to swing out as far as the orbit of that farthest planet. But his ship's rocket-motors were badly strained, the hull had been battered, the men were worn and sick, from months of voyaging through these vast solar spaces. Carew had to abandon the idea of making Pluto on this trip.

In his book, Carew writes, that, as they left Neptune, he looked back out into space at the dim spark of Pluto and vowed that he would come back again and reach that world.

And indeed, Mark Carew did sail from Earth again in 1994, bound for Pluto. But he never reached it. We know now he was lost in the Saragosso Sea of Space beyond Jupiter. It was reserved for another pioneer,

NEPTUNE

DISTANCE FROM SUN
2,792,000,000 MILES.

DIAMETER - 31,250 MILES.

VOLUME - 60 TIMES
THAT OF EARTH.

LENGTH OF YEAR - ~ ~ ~
164.7 EARTH YEARS

LENGTH OF DAY - ~ ~ ~
16 EARTH HOURS

NEPTUNE HAS 1 MOON

TRITON - Neptune's Moon

DIAMETER - ~ ~ ~ 2,000 MILES

DISTANCE FROM NEPTUNE
222,000 MILES

REVOLVES AROUND NEPTUNE IN
5 DAYS - 21 HOURS - ~ ~ ~ IN
RETROGRADE DIRECTION.

even the islands which are now scattered in its planetary ocean. Those islands grew up from the sea-floor through the ages in the same way that stalagmites grow, by crystalline accretion of certain dissolved minerals in the sea.

The first interplanetary explorer to visit Neptune was the famous Mark Carew, second of the great space-pioneers, and the inventor of the gravitation-equalizers.

Neptune's First Explorers

Carew's expedition left Earth in 1991, hoping to reach Saturn, Uranus and Neptune and Pluto. On February 28, 1993, Carew succeeded in reaching Neptune.

"We feared at first that there was no land at all upon this ocean planet," wrote Carew in his book, **SPACEWARD TO GLORY**

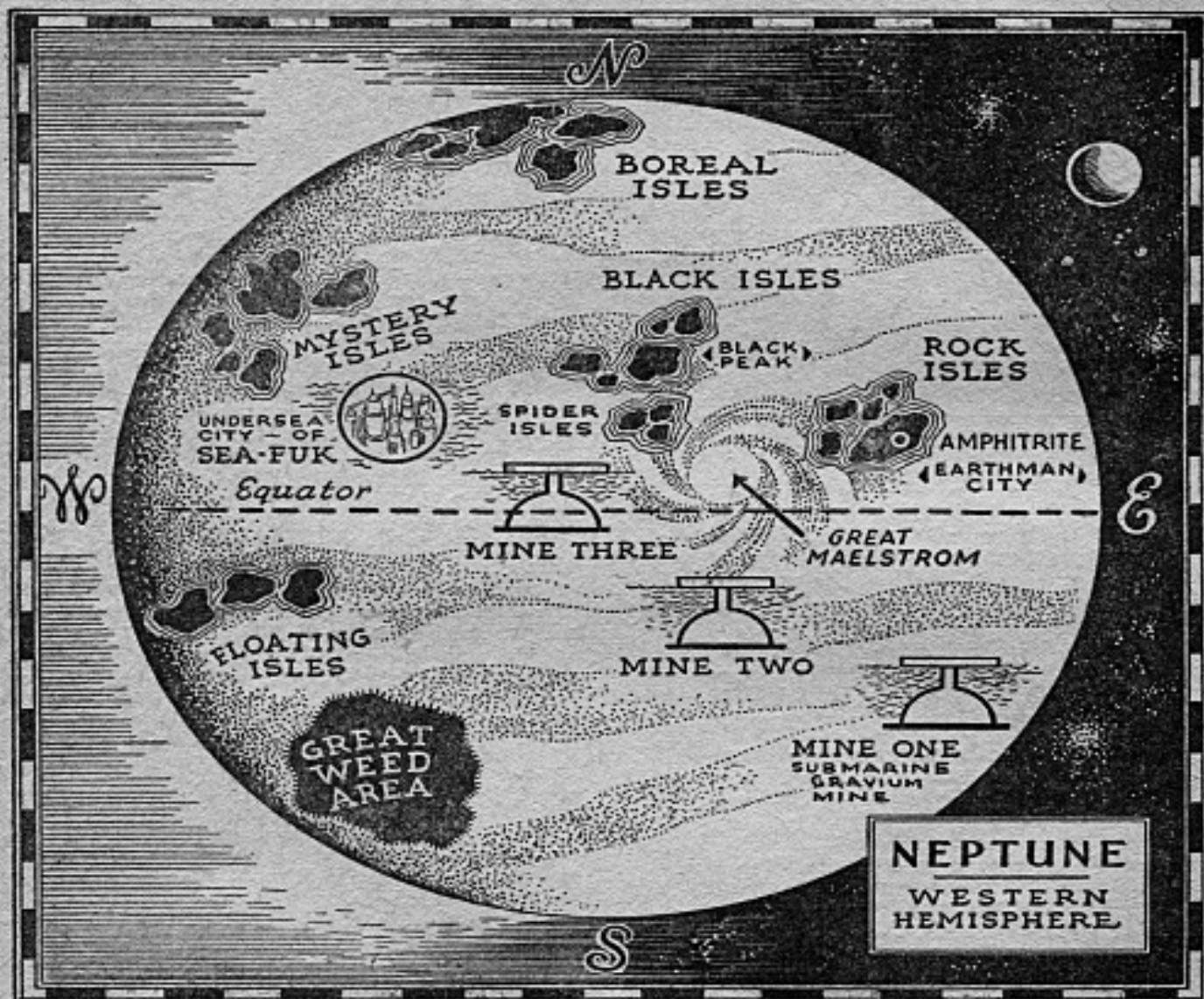
old Jan Wenzel, to be the first of all men to walk on far Pluto.

It was some time before Neptune received much attention in the rush of interplanetary travel and colonization that followed the first pioneering voyages. There seemed scant reason for other planetary people to travel to Neptune, which was almost all ocean and had only a scanty people clinging to a few rocky islands.

In the year 2005, a scientific commission of the System Government visited the planet. Using sea-suits, they conducted some submarine explorations, and discovered rich de-

posits of gold, platinum and other precious ores. More important still, they discovered heavy deposits of the rare metal gravium.

in sea-suits went out searching for gravium deposits under the sea. Many of these men, inexperienced in the dangers of Neptunian seas, fell victim to the ferocious water-creatures. Only a few located gravium deposits. In time, a single gravium corporation was formed which was given concession to conduct all mining operations on Neptune, by the System Government. The mining itself could not be done in sea-suits. So submarine mines were built—an epic of engineering daring. They consisted of great caissons which were built, floated out to the desired location, then lowered to the bottom, and the



posits of gold, platinum and other precious ores. More important still, they discovered heavy deposits of the rare metal gravium.

The Gravium Rush

There was instantly a feverish "gravium rush" to Neptune, from worlds all over the System. For gravium, a vital element in manufacture of the gravitation-equalizers, was the most valuable metal known. Miners, adventurers, criminals flocked to Neptune.

The city Amphitrite was built upon one of the Rock Isles. Submarine prospectors

water pumped out.

Besides the lure of gravium and other metals, the teeming life of the Neptunian sea attracted other planetary people. The vast ocean was crowded with edible fish. Fishermen from all over the System came and dared the storms and maelstroms and monsters of the Neptunian sea for a rich catch. The fish caught by them is shipped all over the System, in spaceships constructed so that the vacuum of the void pervades all cargo-compartments. Thus the sea-food freezes while en route.

Also, living sea-monsters are sometimes

caught and transported, though not without considerable difficulty, from Neptune to other worlds, to be shown in aquariums. There are few people today who have not seen in some such collection one of the awesome "swallowers" or giant sea-snakes from the eighth planet.

The city Amphitrite has grown rather slowly, depending on the gravium and fisheries trade mostly. Of course, Neptune has so little land that it will never be colonized very much, though there have been suggestions of metal cities floating on pontoons proposed for the future.

Neptune's Satellite

Few interplanetary travelers today, however, feel that a trip around the System is complete without a stop at the ocean world.

Neptune's moon, Triton, remains almost completely unknown. There have been many rumors of a strange, grotesque race of weird powers who dwell there. But such amazing experiences have overtaken the few venturesome souls who dared land there, that the moon is shunned.

It is worthy of note that the Neptunians themselves travel in the System perhaps less than any other planetary race. No matter to what world they go, the gray natives seem homesick for their own far, watery planet.

We have already quoted Mark Carew's amazed account of his first contact with the Neptunians, his surprise at finding there were humans on Neptune, as on the other System worlds. It is a fact that before the first space voyages were made, back in the 20th century, scientists believed that there was no chance whatever of humans being found on any other world. Conditions, they said, were too different—evolution could not take the same course on different worlds.

The surprise of those scientists when humans were discovered on every world of the System, was tremendous. It seemed inconceivable to them that all these different planetary races, all human or nearly human, could have evolved simultaneously on isolated and far-distant worlds.

The Lost Race

Only with the gradual progress of astro-archaeology did the answer to this riddle show itself. Certain ruins on Mars and on Tethys, moon of Saturn, gave the first clue. And archaeological discoveries elsewhere in the System soon corroborated it.

These discoveries showed that the presence of human races on all the System worlds was not just accident. Sometime in the dim past, millenniums of years ago, a civilized and super-scientific human people had existed who had colonized every world.

Then that great race had fallen, and disappeared—no one knows just what caused their decay, as yet. But the colonists left by them on the different worlds, though lacking the great science and civilization of their ancestors, and in time losing all memory even of those ancestors, remained human races. The differing environments of their worlds made them different, which is why Martians, Earthmen, Venusians and all the other races differ in many points from each other, though all are basically human.



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THE HUMAN TERMITES

(Continued from Page 120)

"Have you any advice to give?"

"Certainly. Place every fighting man, every male citizen on the fighting line. Provide them with every available means of destruction. Send the women and children up to the mountains. Then wait and prey. If you are able to kill the last insect before the last man is killed you have saved, for the time being, this part of the nation from destruction."

"You talk as though there was a question. You are not a soldier."

"No. I am a banker. Good-by."

"Well, there is another doubting Thomas," said Fry, as they left the building. "I felt for a while that he was going to have us arrested. Let's hurry back to the hotel. I want to get to Souderman. Here in San Francisco we are living on the edge of a volcano."

At the hotel they found Susanne and Anna Ruth awaiting them impatiently.

"The general took it mighty seriously, Susanne," Bankerville reported after he had made himself comfortable. "But we feel that his general opinion was that Adam and I were liars. We want to start off just as soon as we can on the next trip. We are going by plane instead of train. What do you think?"

Susanne stood up, eyed her brother thoughtfully. "I have an idea," she said. "A wild idea—but it might work. I think I may be able to communicate with the Central Power. That Thing in the cave said I could talk to Him if I ever wanted to. That Thing talked to me when I was miles away from him, so perhaps there is some power like that. Suppose I shut my eyes and try it; just as though it was some kind of television. The Thing in the cave said that all I had to do was to get on the right wavelength. Suppose we all sit here quietly and see what I can do."

Bankerville smiled. "Okay, Sis, try it," he said encouragingly. "Anything can happen in this mess."

The four sat in the parlor of the hotel suite. Bankerville puffed at a cigar, his feet upon the piano stool. Fry relaxed in a rocking chair. Anna Ruth was comfortable on a davenport. Susanne sat in a straight-backed chair at the center of the table, her chin in her cupped hands and her elbows on the table. Minute followed minute, each more silent and oppressive than the other before it. The whole room seemed to be filled with an electrical potentiality that almost snapped in miniature lightning.

Suddenly Susanne collapsed on the table. She breathed heavily as though her throat were being grasped by invisible clenching fingers. Fry, who for all his apparent relaxation, had never taken his eyes off her, ran and pulled her from the table.

"Give her some whiskey, Bailey," he ordered. "Let's apply artificial respiration."

In three minutes the girl was breathing and in three more she was talking though

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somewhat dazed.

"Got any money in your luggage, Bailey?" she asked.

"Some gold."

"Give it to Adam and let him buy the best high-powered used car he can get. You go down and tell the management that we will be here for a week longer. Tell him our real names. Explain to him that we are going to have supper at the hotel and then go to a show and tell him which show. Go on, give Adam at least five thousand and Adam, you get back here as soon as you can with that car. Telephone to the airport not to hurry with your planes because you won't be leaving here until next week. Telephone the general that you have decided to stay.

"Telephone to your banker to bring you a million, more or less, in gold. Even a hundred thousand will do. Tell him to bring it at once. Get busy. Anna Ruth and I will pack a few things in our bags. We will bring your things. When you get through telephoning go and buy some rifles and revolvers and loads of ammunition. Bring it back with you so we can put it in the car. Come Ruth, let's pack."

"How about an explanation, girl?" pleaded the anxious man.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't talk—now!"

They started out driving, as though the furies of hell were behind them. Finally they came to Chilliwack, where they registered at a small hotel. An excellent dinner and comfortable beds did well to relieve the nervous tension of the party. They slept like the seven sleepers of Ephesus till they

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were called at the end of twenty hours. They gathered for a conference in the hotel parlor.

"Now, Susanne, we are at last ready to hear what happened to you at the hotel in San Francisco," said her brother.

"I have had some experiences," said the young woman, "but that was the weirdest. I tried to follow out the suggestion of the Thing on the island. I closed my eyes and concentrated on the idea of a Central Intelligence which ruled its body, the United State, and all the cells in it, who were the poor helpless people. Suddenly I saw a great cave with a sandy floor. There was something on the floor—like the Thing in the cave on the island; only bigger. I projected my thoughts—I just imagined I was talking and I said, 'Do you realize that your nation, the cells of your body, are in great danger from the Giant Termites? Why not confer with the Things that rule the other nations and try to protect yourself instead of weakening each other by this silly warfare?' The Thing seemed perturbed, asked, 'Are you a Bankerville?' And I was silly enough to say that I was.

(Continued on Page 126)

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Name.....
(Please print plainly in pencil)

Address.....

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

If you wish Paste on Postcard and Mail.

(Continued from Page 125)

"Then I heard a voice repeating, 'Fry, Bankerville and his sister are in San Francisco—arrest them.' Then the Thing on the floor was drawing me closer to it. It threw pseudopods of its protoplasm around my throat—and the next thing I knew you were giving me whiskey and artificial respiration. I knew that the only way for us to escape was to move faster than that Thing in the cave and so I gave those orders. What is your opinion of the seance?"

"I think you are wonderful, Miss Bankerville," said Anna Ruth shyly, and in her eyes was the wonder of an admiring worship.

"If the things that happened to you on the island were all true, then this thing was true," admitted Adam Fry. "I feel that Susanne's experiment was worthwhile and was perhaps the means of saving our lives. Any way we look at it, we are faced with mystery. All that we are sure of is that we are alive and that there are Giant Termites. How about it, Bankerville?"

Bankerville shook his head, stared intently at Adam Fry.

"Everything that's happened has a real scientific explanation. At first I thought that Souderman might have hallucinated. Susanne might have fallen asleep on the island and dreamed her story. Her experience in the San Francisco hotel may have been nothing more or less than hysteria. But, we are certain that this menace is real. Now, I love Susanne just as much as I can and be her brother; but she has done some rather odd things in her lifetime—such as falling in love with Adam and then refusing to marry him—"

"I never did, did I, Adam?" said that woman indignantly.

"No, not exactly. But you did say that we were not to marry until we were out of this trouble. As far as I can see, we are just getting deeper into it all the time."

"That is all I have to say about it," ended Bankerville, smilingly. "There are just four of us, and I feel that we ought to go on. If you ladies feel rested let's go on in the car. We ought to be able to do about four hundred miles a day and, when we are traveling this way and staying at small hotels, we are not as conspicuous as we would be on a transcontinental train."

JUST then there was a slight noise at the door. It was caused by a newspaper being shoved under the door, part of the

A New TARZAN Novel

By

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in June

THRILLING ADVENTURES

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hotel's service. Startling headlines filled the entire front of the first page, the party saw.

CALIFORNIA CITIES MENACED BY UNHEARD-OF DANGER!!

THOUSANDS KILLED BY GIANT INSECTS

FRANTIC MOBS FILL ROADS BLOCKING AUTO TRAFFIC

Governor Calls Every Able-Bodied Man to Report for Riot Duty

There were a lot more details, but Fry had read enough to satisfy him that the termites were actually attacking the United States, at least the western coast. On the second page was an offer of rewards for Adam Fry, Bailey Bankerville and two women traveling with them, wanted for conspiracy against the Government. Ten thousand dollars was offered for their arrest and detention.

"That looks as though they were after us," he said to Susanne and Anna Ruth. "And it confirms Susanne's dream, or whatever it was. We left California just in time. I think that we are going to be safe here, provided the termites keep the Government busy enough. They won't have time to worry about us. I wish your brother would come back, Susanne. He does the most inexplicable things. How can he expect you girls to travel in a car by yourselves? I wouldn't have a minute's peace from worry about you and Anna Ruth."

"We would be better off without you men, wouldn't we, Ruth?"

"Perhaps, but it has been comforting to have your brother. He is so strong and capable and always ready to hold my hand when I am tired. I wish that there could be some way of going together."

Just then the banker came in with a stranger.

"Let me talk to you a minute, Anna Ruth," Bankerville said, and took her into an adjoining room. They came out very soon.

"Now then, folks," said Bankerville, "we are going to get married. Adam and Susanne are going to marry because they love each other. Anna Ruth and I are both in love, too. She says she is willing and this man here is a preacher."

Susanne smiled teasingly. "But, darling, I haven't got any new clothes to get married in!"

© G. P., 1929

Can the scientific wizardry of Hans Souderman and his human allies check the horror of the mighty insect invasion? Will the termite race achieve supremacy on Earth's surface? Learn the fate of all civilization in the concluding installment of *THE HUMAN TERMITES*, to be published in our next issue!

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THE FUTURE OF CAPTAIN FUTURE



AVUL KUNN was the richest Jovian in the Solar System. His estate was the most opulent in all the worlds, and he owned the satellite on which it was built.

Yet Avul Kunn, despite his riches, his many millions, was afraid. He feared no man. He feared—Death.

Yes, Avul Kunn was old, with scant years ahead of him. For the Grim Reaper does not respect the wealthy.

As Avul Kunn rested in the lavishly furnished study of his room, thoughtful, a secret knock sounded on the door. The millionaire rose from his divan, opened the door himself. A sly-looking planetary criminal stood at the entrance.

"You have it?" cried the aged Croesus.

"I've got it," the furtive stranger replied. "It will cost you two hundred thousand Earth dollars!"

"Two hundred thousand dollars—for one drink! Preposterous!" Avul Kunn fumed.

The sly-looking visitor shrugged his shoulders. "The Life-Lord charges people for the Water according to their ability to pay. You can pay well."

"Charges all they can pay, you mean," Kunn retorted. "But I've got to have it. I want to be young again, to enjoy my wealth!"

As the aged millionaire handed over the price demanded by his strange visitor, in golden ingots, the representative of the Life-Lord handed him a vial of shining water.

"Drink this now," the operative directed.

Hesitatingly, the death-fearing millionaire sipped his drink. A moment later, and he had emptied the vial.

And then an amazing transformation took place. The Jovian's wrinkled face slowly changed, became smooth and youthful. His bent form straightened, his hunched shoulders broadened out. Avul Kunn has become young again. He has tasted the elixir of the Fountain of Life!

Youth—at a Price!

That's the startling start of THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE, the feature novel for the next issue of CAPTAIN FUTURE. A mysterious Life-Lord discovers the Fountain of Life and doles out youth—but at a price!

The secret elixir, however, turns out to be an insidious drug, claiming thousands of victims all over the Solar System. Users of the

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miraculous potion discover that its effects wear off after a short period. They must buy another potion, or grow old again.

There is only one way to curb the illicit drug traffic sponsored by the mysterious Life-Lord . . . to enlist the aid of Captain Future and his gallant band of Futuremen!

Earth's Clarion Call

You'll thrill to the charge of the Futuremen as they answer Earth's clarion call. The ringed planet Saturn is the locale of **THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE**, and you will marvel at the many wonders disclosed by the Wizard of Science.

You'll see Captain Future lost in the dreaded Machine City in a lonely desert on Mars. You'll witness action in the hidden Mistlands of Saturn. And you'll meet the Qualus, the strange, winged men of Saturn.

THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE is a triumph for Edmond Hamilton. Here is an interplanetary classic crammed with the dangers and miracles of the nine worlds. Come along on Captain Future's *Comet* and brave these brand-new worlds with the Futuremen!

In addition to **THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE**, the next issue brings you the final installment of Dr. David H. Keller's scientific masterpiece, "The Human Termites." Many other short stories and special features in the next issue, including **THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW**, **THE FUTUREMEN**, **UNDER OBSERVATION**, and Jack Binder's illustrated series of scientific oddities, **DO YOU BELIEVE?** All in all, the next issue of **CAPTAIN FUTURE** is a "must" from cover to cover.

—THE EDITOR.

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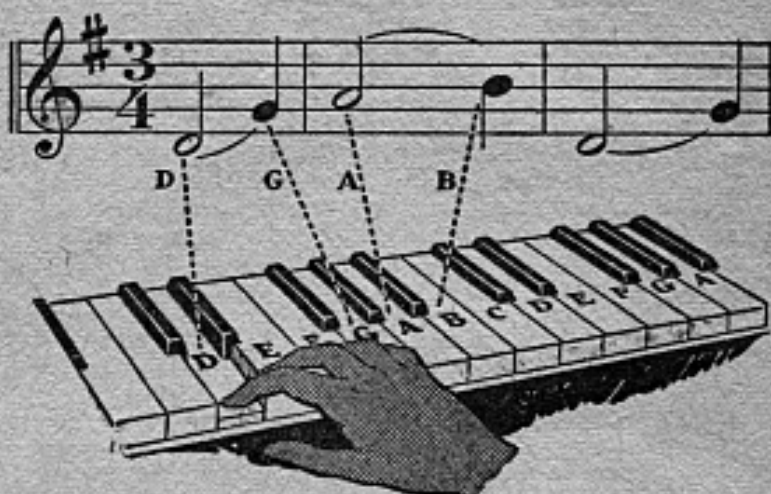
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20x4-20-22	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-22	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-22	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-22	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-23	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-23	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-23	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-23	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-24	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-24	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-24	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-24	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-25	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-25	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-25	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-25	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-26	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-26	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-26	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-26	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-27	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-27	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-27	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-27	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-28	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-28	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-28	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-28	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-29	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-29	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-29	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-29	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-30	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-30	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-30	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-30	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-31	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-31	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-31	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-31	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-32	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-32	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-32	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-32	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-33	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-33	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-33	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-33	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-34	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-34	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-34	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-34	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-35	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-35	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-35	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-35	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-36	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-36	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-36	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-36	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-37	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-37	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-37	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-37	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-38	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-38	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-38	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-38	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-39	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-39	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-39	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-39	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-40	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-40	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-40	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-40	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-41	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-41	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-41	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-41	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-42	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-42	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-42	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-42	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-43	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-43	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-43	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-43	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-44	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-44	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-44	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-44	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-45	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-45	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-45	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-45	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-46	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-46	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-46	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-46	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-47	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-47	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-47	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-47	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-48	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-48	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-48	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-48	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-49	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-49	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-49	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-49	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-50	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-50	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-50	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-50	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-51	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-51	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-51	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-51	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-52	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-52	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-52	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-52	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-53	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-53	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-53	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-53	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-54	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-54	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-54	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-54	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-55	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-55	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-55	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-55	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-56	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-56	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-56	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-56	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-57	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-57	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-57	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-57	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-58	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-58	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-58	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-58	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-59	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-59	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-59	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-59	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-60	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-60	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-60	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-60	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-61	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-61	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-61	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-61	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-62	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-62	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-62	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-62	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-63	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-63	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-63	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-63	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-64	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-64	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-64	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-64	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-65	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-65	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-65	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-65	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-66	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-66	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-66	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-66	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-67	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-67	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-67	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-67	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-68	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-68	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-68	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-68	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-69	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-69	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-69	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-69	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-70	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-70	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-70	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-70	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-71	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-71	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-71	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-71	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-72	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-72	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-72	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-72	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-73	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-73	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-73	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-73	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-74	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-74	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-74	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-74	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-75	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-75	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-75	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-75	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-76	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-76	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-76	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-76	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-77	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-77	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-77	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-77	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-78	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-78	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-78	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-78	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-79	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-79	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-79	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-79	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-80	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-80	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-80	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-80	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-81	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-81	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-81	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-81	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-82	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-82	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-82	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-82	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-83	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-83	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-83	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-83	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-84	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-84	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-84	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-84	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-85	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-85	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-85	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-85	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-86	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-86	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-86	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-86	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-87	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-87	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-87	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-87	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-88	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-88	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-88	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-88	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-89	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-89	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-89	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-89	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-90	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-90	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-90	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-90	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-91	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-91	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-91	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-91	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-92	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-92	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-92	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-92	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-93	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-93	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-93	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-93	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-94	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-94	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-94	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-94	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-95	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-95	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-95	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-95	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-96	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-96	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-96	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-96	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-97	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-97	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-97	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-97	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-98	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-98	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-98	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-98	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-99	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-99	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-99	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-99	2.00	1.25
20x4-20-100	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-100	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-100	2.00	1.25	20x4-20-100	2.00	1.25

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