

THE TRILOBITE

#4

Editor: M. McNeil
2010 McClendon
Houston 25
Texas

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(Not that I'm proud of my name. I just don't trust mimeos.)

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THE BIG FUN FUND

by

Paul D. Cox

When Boris J. Hatcher was found dead in his hotel room at Cowpastures, Nebraska, the fan world was thrown into a virtual frenzy. Boris was number one fan of Cowpastures and his sudden demise at the hands of unknown parties was a thing to strike fear into the heart of all fankind. Who knew when the unknown stalker would strike next? Every fan, from number one to number 397, went about his daily tasks with a cold fear knawing at his vitals. There was an expectant look on their faces. Who would be next?

The news that had been flashed around the world, into every city and village of five continents, described the eerie details of how Boris Hatcher had met his end. No one doubted that another fan had done the job. The method used was beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. Boris had been twisted through a thirty-seventh dimension hyper warp. He lay silent on the hotel bed, grotesquely crumpled. One leg of the corpse remained in another dimension, the eye refusing to follow into that strange tangle of glowing geometrical shapes. Investigators quickly abandoned hope of discovering who the murderer might be. Police and even newspaper reporters confessed that they had no ideas and, in fact, couldn't bear to stay in the same room with the dead man as weirdly alien music floated from the tiny segment of another dimension and set the teeth on edge, clouded the mind of all who heard.

Boris J. Hatcher's life long ambition was realized when it was too late. His desire to be shot into space, there to drift through the void an endless eternity, was fulfilled. In his summer home, a tastefully decorated clapboard shack on the outskirts of Cowpastures, Boris had spent countless years perfecting the design and building the rocket ship that was to be his coffin. Early on the morning of July 15th, 1967, the rocket mounted on a blazing cushion of fire and shot into the infinite blackness of the void, Professor Jameson style.

The small group of admirers walked slowly away, grimly holding back the tears. That day within each heart was a determination to avenge his murder.

Sam Fann typed the last few lines and zipped the paper from the machine. He smiled diabolically and muttered under his breath, "That'll hold the bastard!" He spoke of his long standing feud with Albert Smith; a feud which had raged for the past twelve years through the columns of FANTASY FANZINE. "This article for FF will burn him a new one!" He leaned back in the swivel chair and admired his work, re-reading it several times to be sure there were no serious flaws in the logic that would give Smith a good comeback.

He had just finished reading the article the third time when the telephone jangled loudly. Annoyed that anything should disturb his perusal of the fascinating article he snatched the phone from its cradle and snapped, "Fann Detective Agency. Sam Fann speaking."

The voice from the other end of the wire was that of a tearful young girl, at least it sounded like that of a tearful young girl. Sam made a mental note to put a view screen on the phone so he could be sure about the identity of his callers in the future.

"Mr. Fann," she began, her voice catching for a moment from the emotional disturbance. Before he could say anything to calm her she made an obvious effort at self-control and continued, "I understand that you are the greatest private detective of the fan world..... Some of Boris' friends advised me to call you."

"Boris' friends?" he asked. "You mean that great humanitarian fan who even now circles in the void?" Sam Fann had been one of Boris J. Hatcher's secret admirers.

"Oh.....you do understand!" she said simply. "I knew you would. You must have loved Boris even as I did?"

"Well hardly the same," Sam Fann answered and wiped a tear from his eye. He was thinking that Burble and Lansing might misunderstand.

"I mean.....you liked Boris. Anyway, Mr. Fann, we'd like to hire you to track down his killer and bring him to justice."

"Who's we?" he enquired.

"A group of us who admired and loved Boris. We've sworn to avenge his death. We want your help."

"All right, where can I see you? And by the way, what's your name?"

"Louise Ainsworth," she answered the questions in reverse order. "My apartment is at the Gorgon Arms.....apartment number 7."

Sam Fann decided to walk up the two flights to Louise Ainsworth's apartment, instead of bothering the elevator operator, who busily perused a copy of Weird Science Comics.

The tall blonde who opened the apartment door seemed to have recovered from the grief that she'd displayed while talking on the telephone. Slightly reddened eyes were the only indication that she had ever cried for anyone.

She led the way into her apartment.

"Now let's get all the facts straight. Tell me all you know about Boris; his enemies. Any know motive for murder?" Fann said, seating himself on the leatherette-upholstered couch. His eyes followed her every move as she poured a shot of bourbon.

"Motive? Well, there is one possible motive besides the obvious one.....he had many enemies in fandom." She paused a moment as Sam put the bourbon away. ".....And there was the insurance."

"Insurance? You mean the fifty thousand dollar policy.....the beneficiary was the Cowpastures Science Fiction League?"

"Yes. Some member might have wanted to collect on that policy."

"Hmmm." Sam reflected brilliantly. "Something to think about. Those boys could have a mighty big blowout on that money."

Louise sat down on the couch, "Just what are you going to do now?"

"Get to work, of course." He answered harshly. He drew the tiny sliver of silvery metal from his pocket and, after examining it carefully, placed it squarely in the center of the glass-topped coffee table. Then he pulled a small silver flute from his coat pocket, and began to play a weirdly beautiful tune. The thin, high notes drifted around the small room. The air took on a strange

blue glow. Eyesight failed, with furniture and other objects becoming vague and shadowy forms half seen through the blue mist.

Louise screamed. The elfen spell was broken.

Sam Fann sat up sharply and cursed, "You've ruined it! I'll have to start all over." Then he smiled and his anger died out.

"Now look, Miss Ainsworth," he said calmly, "there's nothing to be scared of. It's a dimension distorter." He explained the workings of the flute and the small sliver of metal. "You see, the metal, which is a special alloy of Thermatarium, vibrates at a harmonic of the frequency of the musical sound. When it reaches resonance it distorts the dimensional barrier. When there is enough distortion, I can slip through the barrier into another dimension."

"Oh, I understand, now," she said.

Once again the haunting strains of the fairy music filled the room. The tiny silver flake of metal shifted through the rainbow colors of the spectrum. The air took on the blue glow. Then with a sliding lurch; a stomach-twisting jerk the apartment disappeared completely and they were standing on a desert of orange sand. Overhead three pale moons shed light on the emptiness, unimaginable distances away a few faint stars blinked dimly.

"Wait for dawn," Sam Fann said and sat down on the sandy ground. The girl followed suit, and they sat talking as the stars and moons moved slowly across the blackness of the sky and descended toward the horizon.

Three hours later one of the suns came up, streaking the horizon with red and orange patches of fire, painting the vastness of the desert with red light. And with it came the black ships.

They came on invisible beams of energy, dropping silently out of the desert. They settled heavily like a herd of tired elephants, resting about four feet above the sand.

The man and the girl stood side by side, silent in the cool morning wind that stirred across the sand, whipping small trails of grit from the dune tops. The ships were uniformly black, dark as the starless depths of space, strange spherical gobs of coal or polished ebony. Each ship was indication enough of the alien mind that had fashioned it. They were strangely like an unbalanced dumbbell. One large sphere connected by a short tube to another smaller sphere and from the larger, a stub of cylinder projected--- sort of like a child's toy balloon with another, smaller balloon attached by a length of tubing. No human mind could have or would have imagined such an insane design for space craft.

"What are they?" Louise asked in a strained whisper, moving closer to Sam and clutching his hand as if he could offer protection from these strange visitors from the distant parts of another galaxy.

"Don't worry," he answered, "they are my friends. They have come to protect me."

When the last of the ships had settled onto the desert, a loud toneless voice boomed from the nearest one: "Come, man from another dimension. Come to our ship and be received." The voice boomed loudly, drifting off over the dunes, rebounding from the higher dunes in the distance. A circular opening appeared in the side of the giant ball. The two humans hurried into the opening and then waited at the end of the short airlock passage.

The inner door opened and they walked hesitantly into a room that nearly filled the entire sphere, judging from its size. Its ceiling was a thousand feet from the floor; nearly hidden by the maze of catwalks and great masses of machinery and supporting beams and girders. High among the twisted pathways a score of shadowy things moved quickly amongst the thousands of control panels and instruments, efficiently doing vague things that influenced the life of the vessel.

A tall thin man with lavender skin and red, glowing eyes stepped around the corner of a huge cubed machine of obscure purpose. He spoke softly, "Welcome to the ship of Tharn, man of the flat dimensions." His scarlet cloak opened to allow a thin, fragile-looking tentacle to be extended. Under the cloak the alien wore a form-fitting garment of brilliant green plastic. He shook hands gravely with the two visitors, obviously not caring for the particular formality, but doing it out of deference to his guests.

Sam Fann got down to business at once. "I'd like to use your calculator for a while," he said. "I've got a particularly tough and important problem and it's the only thing that can figure out all the angles."

"Certainly!" the alien, Tharn, said. "I'll have Tharn prepare the calculator for your problem." While he went to an instrument attached to the wall and issued quick instructions, Sam whispered to the girl, "They are all named Tharn. By some means they understand which Tharn is which. Some sort of group mind or organization. At times they are individuals, and at other times they seem to all become one person, if you know what I mean---like a gang of ants or robots governed by one central intelligence."

Tharn was back and at once directed them to follow him to a disk that lay on the floor behind the cubed machine. He stepped onto the disk with Sam Fann directly behind him. Louise hesitated a moment, but stepped aboard when Sam took her hand. Instantly the platform rose into the air and sped up into the dizzying heights of the room, past girders and narrow walkways so close that they could have touched them. But at their speed, it would have been suicidal. A powerful alien force gripped them securely so they could not have fallen off, even had they tried deliberately. The disk slowed to a stop only thirty or forty feet from the ceiling, and level with an open door in the wall.

The force that had held them released and they stepped through into another room. This one was huge compared to ordinary rooms, but a mere nothing against the one they had just left. It was perhaps forty feet from floor to ceiling and two-hundred feet long and a bit narrower in its other dimension. The room was empty except for the calculator. It sat in the center of the room and made soft clucking noises to itself. A lavender skinned man, who, except for the orange cloak looked exactly like their guide, was busily doing things to a meter-and-switch covered control panel. The calculator was a twenty-foot cube of crackle-finished metal, completely blank and featureless on three sides, the fourth covered with indicators, knobs and pushbuttons.

Sam waited till the technician told him that the machine was ready, and then took his place in a comfortably upholstered chair placed directly in front of the control panel. It looked like a comfortably-upholstered electric chair might look. A series of

snaking cables stretched from the calculator to shiny metal clamps on the chair arms. Another set was attached to a bowl-shaped helmet. Sam sat in the chair and waited till the technician had locked his wrists in the arm clamps and then placed the helmet on his head, strapping it securely in place by a metal band under the chin. Then the operator punched a series of buttons on one of the lower panels.

The calculator discontinued its contented clucking and emitted a soft purring sound. This was replaced by a tiny high-pitched howl when the operator threw in another set of toggle switches. Sam Fann's face froze in an expression of blank idiocy. He stiffened and sat motionless and silent. Louise looked quickly at the red-cloaked guide, questioning fear in her eyes.

"Do not fear for him," the lavender man said, "He will be perfectly safe. It should take, perhaps, ten minutes."

He continued in explanation, "We would not harm our friend Fann. Years ago he saved the entire race of Tharn from certain death."

"It was while we still inhabited the 21st plane of existence--dimension, you would call it. The universe of the 21st plane is old---very old. The stars were burned out and the energy of life in that universe was nearly gone. Even the material of the very atoms and fabric of space itself was dead. Or nearly so. Then the Tharn did not know how to break the dimension barrier. We were trapped and doomed to die until Sam Fann came along and gave us the secret of distorting the barriers. We moved into this dimension---the 19th---and ever since we have been growing stronger. Now there is no danger of death for the Tharn."

Louise took this in without letting too much of her amazement show on her face. She asked, "How did you know we were waiting on the desert this morning?"

"We have detectors that tell us when any dimension barrier is broken. The detectors indicated that the barrier had been broken between this dimension and that of your own flat plane of existence---. We believe that Fann is the only man from your dimension who has the barrier distortion secret. So it was obvious that he had come. He never comes here unless he wishes to see the Tharn."

This explained, Louise said innocently, "But someone else has the secret. Whoever killed Boris Hatcher must have know; they twisted him into the 37th and back again."

Instantly the Tharn's eyes glowed, he stiffened momentarily. The calculator operator looked up from his work and stared at the girl. Something was definitely wrong. The operator returned his attention to the machine but the red-cloaked guide walked to a wall communicating device and spoke hurriedly in his native language of garbled tongue-clickings interspersed with an unmelodious, jerky tune. Then he was back at her side and waited impatiently for Sam to finish with the machine.

"It's the Hangans," Sam said quietly, iron-hard grey eyes looking directly into the redly-glowing ones of the Tharn. "They have broken out of the 37th. The machine says that they accidentally got a message through to an earth man. They told him how to build the distorter, and he worked it from outside."

"It's the only way they could have done it," Tharn commented. "The 37th can't be opened from inside." He whirled and went to the communicator again. This time he spoke only a few sharp words.

Almost at once the room and entire ship was filled with a low hum and they felt it lift free from the surface. They and the other ships headed into space.

Later, Sam and Louise sat in Tharn's cabin while the red cloaked man sat before the screen of an interstellar transmitter and told his leaders on the home world about the startling discovery. Sam explained to the puzzled girl:

"A million years ago the Tharn had a great war with another race, the Hangan. It was more destructive than anything we can imagine, as both races are very old and were advanced tremendously beyond us in science. They were bitter and traditional enemies. For ten thousand years the outcome was uncertain. Then Tharn got the upper hand and were about to exterminate the Hangan when a few of them managed to escape into the 37th dimension. Tharn could not follow because they didn't have the barrier secret at that time. Since then, the escaping Hangan have been trapped in the 37th because it is the one dimension in the entire dimensional spectrum that can't be broken out from. It can only be opened from the outside---from another plane.

"Imagine. A million years trapped. But brooding and planning revenge on their enemies---the Tharn. And now they've broken through. They're here right now, somewhere in this dimension; somewhere out there beyond the stars is a raiding force of Hangan ships out for revenge."

"How did the machine know?" Louise asked.

"The machine took all the necessary facts from my mind; the information about Boris' death and information of fandom, and by its tremendous deductive powers came up with that answer. It is obviously right. The machine always states any doubts it might have about its reasoning. This time it didn't doubt at all. It even knew the name of the man who had helped the Hangan."

"A fan?" Louise asked, waiting anxiously for the reply.

"A fan. Harry Talbot, Boris' old enemy. Talbot was willing to let the Hangan loose on the universe just to satisfy a personal ambition to destroy Boris."

"It's horrible. How could a man be so rotten?" Louise asked, a scowl of disgust spread over her features.

"You don't know Talbot," Sam said. "I've known him a long time. He'd do anything to anybody for any length of time, just to get revenge on fandom, and especially Boris. You see, he was drummed out of fandom years ago. Boris was one of the leading drummers."

"Oh," she said and they sat silently waiting for Tharn to finish with his communication to the home planet.

Finally, the red-cloaked man got up from the machine. He looked tired, his tentacles hung loosely at his sides. He sat down in another chair facing them and explained, "Of course, Tharn didn't realize the Hangan had broken through, since the barrier of the 37th doesn't send out a radiation. We didn't detect it so they've been at liberty to roam around here for nearly two days; it's lucky you came along and gave the calculator the necessary data."

"Have you located the raiding party yet?" Sam asked.

"No. Not yet, but we should have reports from the home world in a few hours. By the way, the small party is the only one to come

through so far. The Hangan are planning to smash us with a few quick lightning jabs and then to bring the others through when they have plenty of time."

"Small force, did you say? You can beat them easily, then?"

"Don't know. They've had a million years to work out new weapons and ships. We don't know what they might have done in that time. Of course, we've made progress too, but our two peoples' lines of development might have diverged considerably. They might have developed something entirely different from conventional designs."

"Well, nothing to do but wait... wait and hope," Sam sighed. He immediately sank deeper into the chair and closed his eyes. The Tharn did not seem to take offense at that; Louise decided that their customs didn't consider it wrong for your guest to go to sleep on you. She felt sleepy herself ... It was only two hours later when Tharn awoke them.

"The Hangan ships have been sighted. They're in the edge cluster about twenty light years from here."

Sam sat upright. Sleep fled. "How long?" he asked.

"We're already making full speed for the location. Should be therein less than two hours." Then Tharn left them, getting about the business of preparing the ship for the coming battle.

For the next hour and forty minutes, Sam and Louise were left to their own devices. They wandered about the huge ship, watching the preparations, hundreds of tall purple men scurried about on the narrow catwalks, others moved through air lock doors set in the outer rooms of the vessel. They were the gun crews ready to hurl the blasting beams of energy at the enemy. The calculator room was a beehive of activity. Mechanics had placed a forty foot square viewer screen at one end of the long room. A score of the comfortable electric chairs had appeared and the tangle of cables leading to each one made the floor a ropey mass of black insulated reptiles. In each chair was a Tharn, watching the screen intently. Now the screen showed only the blackness of space and directly in the center, a swarming cluster of stars, made tiny by the distance that still separated them.

"This is where the tactics of battle are worked out," Sam explained. "The machine takes information from all the men watching the screen and decides the best moves to make."

"Come on," Louise said. "Let's go to Tharn's room and watch the fight on his small viewer. There's nothing we can do here anyway, is there?"

Sam willingly left the calculator room. Shortly they were back in the comfortable quarters of the red-cloaked Tharn, and staring at the slowly expanding cluster of stars.

Sam switched the controls of the viewer. They could spot-view various parts of the ship and the furiously working men. Now they saw the phenomena that Sam had spoken of earlier. One moment the men were individuals, calling and talking to each other, directing the work of helpers; then, suddenly, there was a brief pause; from that point on, none spoke again. Every individual knew what the other was doing--what help he needed. Gun crews worked in silent efficiency, much faster now than before. Like gears and interlocking parts of some master machine, they moved precisely as the pre-calculated moves of a mechanical machine. Like demons from hell, they became faster and faster with their work until it was impossi-

ble for the two humans to see them clearly. Sam switched the viewer. Now the cluster of pinpoint lights had spread to cover the entire screen. Individual stars burned blue and white on the dark curtain of space.

The thin, wheel-shaped ships of the Handan showed dimly in the light of a small sun. There were twenty of them, speeding along through space, moving toward them; spoiling for a fight. The discs of dark metal seemed to pick up speed as they watched, whirling like a giant buzz saw as they cut through the nothingness of the void.

Just as contact was made, Sam spotted another flight of Tharn ships approaching at an angle. He felt reassured. They would need the extra power to overcome the Hangan, he thought.

The emptiness of space was filled with the light of tremendous energy blasts and the dimly phosphorescent glow of energy screens. The screen blanked out for a moment as a Hangan energy beam caught them full on. Then the picture returned slowly and they could see again the awful battle of titanic forces put into play by these two ancient races. They became aware of the high pitched screaming sound of air escaping into the vacuum of space. Their ship had been breached. The giant room in the center of the ship was losing its air and the purple men inside were dying. Sam flicked the view screen to the huge room. He had imagined wrong. The men operating the controls and gadgets were still all right. Apparently the air leak was small. A crew of repairmen were working furiously to patch the thin crack that showed in one wall. They would be successful in their efforts, Sam knew, and cut the viewer back to the outside scene of battle.

At once they saw the fantastic scene of a giant circular saw that was a Hangan ship slice through the short tube that joined the two sections of the unbalanced dumbbell of a Tharn ship. The smaller sphere broke free and tumbled through space until it was lost in darkness. Fragments of the wreckage, like huge grains of sawdust, shot through the wildly tumultuous scene of battle like juggernaut asteroids, clanging against the hulls of ships and then slithering on through the darkness.

The damaged Tharn ship floated helplessly in space; now divorced from its power supply in the smaller sphere and could do nothing now save wait for the end. The Hangan buzz saw circled like a huge vulture and returned to the helpless vessel. One flash from its energy guns gutted the big defenseless globe. Orange flame spouted from the ball of dark metal and then, as though in slow motion, the spherical shape distorted, flowed molten, and became a piece of drifting debris.

The Hangan ship that had just finished off its prey turned to attack another Tharn vessel when its own energy screens glowed redly, then blinked out. It became a volcano of blue flame and disappeared into a shower of sparks.

The twelve ships of the Tharn fleet had been reduced to eight. The Hangan had lost five of their own twenty ships when the Tharn reinforcements arrived. There were fourteen ships with fresh crews to push the fight. The first eight ships attacked from one side, and the new fleet attacked from the other. Shortly six more Hangan discs flowered into flaming ruin and vanished from the skies except in a rain of small metal pellets.

The result was inevitable. Sam watched as the outnumbered Hangan craft were destroyed, though they fought with a fury that couldn't have been matched except by another group equally as advanced in technology, and equally as set on revenging an age-old defeat.

Twelve hours later the Hangan force was fleeing across the empty spaceways trying to get time enough to break through the barrier and escape back into their own dimension. But the Tharn would not allow them that last hope. They were bitter racial enemies from the dawn ages. They were set on destroying the Hangan ships...All of them.

While in full flight a screen came through from one of the enemy vessels. Sam Fann and Louise Ainsworth were shocked when the screen suddenly went blank for a moment and when it cleared again, the picture of the fleeing ships had been replaced by that of a familiar face. It was Harry Talbot, former fan, excommunicated from fandom, and now aboard a Hangan ship.

Talbot spoke fast, the fear of extermination in his voice. "Fann? Fann, I know you are aboard the Tharn ship. Listen, the Hangan have agreed to let me out into space in a space suit. Will you pick me up and take me back to earth?"

Sam turned to Louise questioningly. "What about it?"

"We'd have to if he leaves the ship. We couldn't let him die out there."

Sam started to readjust the controls for a reply when the screen showed the flash of green light that meant the enemy ship had been hit. Instantly, the features of Talbot were gone and the scene of pursued ships took its place. One Hangan ship was tearing apart, the atomic flames of disintegrating metal lit the blackness of space weirdly.

Fann didn't bother to reply to Talbot. Talbot was nothing more than a collection of scattered atoms now.

At last the battle was over, the last of the Hangan ships were gone and the group of Tharn vessels made their way back across the void to the home world. Again the Tharn were individuals and no longer the parts of some strange machine, working like robots at their assigned tasks. The Tharn who had been their guide came into the room, glowing with happiness. He sat down and relaxed. "You know, I heard the man Talbot when he asked you to pick him up.

"It was a trick. The man was all bad. He planned to delay us and allow the Hangan to escape into the 37th plane. He planned to help them break through again."

"Why?" Sam asked. "There would be nothing else for him to gain. He'd already accomplished his purpose of murdering Hatcher."

Tharn laughed. "You are extremely naive people. Talbot had bigger plans. Why should he stop when he had merely accomplished his revenge on fandom and Boris Hatcher? He wanted to become dictator of your world. He knew he could do it with the help of the Hangan."

"And what about the rest of the Hangan in the 37th?"

"Someday we will go in after them and thus assure ourselves that they will never again have the opportunity to molest the other planes of existence. But that will be much later. For now we are content."

THE LAST VAMPIRE

BY MICHAEL WIGODSKY

This dearth of blood, lack of believing blood.
So long endured, has made him wish for life,
Even again mortality, the strife
And satisfactions of the human brood,
Or else for death---true death's desuetude
Of thought, of hunger; either to revive
To cleaner hopes, or somehow to contrive
To end both this and all; but so imbued
With hope for either, choosing not, that could
He once again drink in that fear which made
The peasant's blood his nourishment, the pain
Of thus extended search itself still would
Make him wish rather once more to be laid
To rest, but buried not---to rise again.

He hates the grave itself; for he did feign
Once, in a grave, that he had fully died---
That with him now and ever will abide,
As nothing has of how before a plain
But actual life he lived---the vivid pain
Remembered of his cell; nor can he hide
Delight, remembering also how there cried
A victim out and struggled, but in vain.
But pleasures have been almost lost in pain;
For all these things were centuries ago.
We cannot nourish him; the skeptic's blood
Is thin, and of the host of by him slain
And ill who now believe or even know?
And so he ends, so follows all his kind to sod.

We can move in three dimensions. That is optional. We do move in time, a fourth dimension. That is not optional. What if we could cultivate a power to make movement in the fourth dimension? Then we could sit still in time and have the rest of the world go on. What would that do to us? Might primitive creatures be able to move in only two dimensions? What if we could eliminate the fourth dimension? We would then be immortal. Or would we be dead? One could go at the speed of light. If that would eliminate the fourth dimension one could go at the speed of light and return to an older world none the older. We could form a sort of capsule and start it at the speed of light on a course that would return it to earth in, say, 10,000 years. Thus we could give people of the future samples of life of today. Wait a minute. We can stop the fourth dimension by freezing, at least temporarily.